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Instructional Design in the Face of COVID-19: Learned Lessons and Pending Tasks

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Abstract

Faced with confinement due to COVID-19, educational institutions with face-to-face models had to continue their activities under conditions and with resources not used up to that moment. For this, the institutions formulated and put into operation continuity plans, which involved everything from remote education to hybrids between the latter and online education. Institutions that already had online or hybrid education programs were able to apply that experience to their face-to-face programs, allowing them to respond more quickly than those that did not. The stages of the teaching-learning process that were "adjusted" during this emergency in order to give continuity to educational activities were the last two, namely: the development of instructional material and teaching. In this work, an intervention is proposed in a previous stage of the process, that is, in the instructional design (ID), using the ASSURE model derived from the ADDIE model or approach. This intervention is based on the lessons learned during the pandemic, for the preparation or reformulation of study plans that consider information and communication technologies as a platform to enhance the effectiveness of learning, selecting them and establishing their use strategy from the stage in which the materials are designed, which may be useful considering that even if the students return to the classrooms, a virtual part will be preserved, that is, a hybrid model, in which the face-to-face-virtual ratio will be determined by the educational strategy of the institution.

Keywords: ADDIE, ASSURE, instructional design, teaching-learning process

1. Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS-COV-2, the activities carried out in all areas changed their form, their timing, the resources and methods used, among others, which has had both negative and positive consequences, mainly of the first type. However, although emergent measures had to be taken to continue with the activities, this need also forced to venture into methods not considered until then, given the face-to-face nature of work, education, health, etc.

In the case of education, confinement made it necessary to continue activities from home or on some occasions from the students' workplace. For this, it was used from remote education to hybrids in part remote and in part virtual, environments in which physical spaces were replaced by videoconference rooms.

In the first days of confinement, teachers had to integrate their virtual classrooms with the resources they had and knew about, but the institutions reacted by designing, building and operating programs to address the situation, which included not only communication platforms (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, among others), but also training for its use. Also, and depending on the topic taught by the teachers, many integrated complementary tools or platforms, such as mathematical software, simulation software, digital libraries, vlogs, LMS (learning management system), etc., to their portfolio of instructional instruments.

Thus, the emerging situation forced changes of the same nature in teaching. The changes occurred mainly in the instructional materials and in the presentation of the same with the students, that is, the last two stages of the teaching-learning process were fundamentally modified, considering the evaluation of the students in the last stage.

Although the aforementioned actions have many times satisfactorily resolved the restrictions imposed by confinement, there are also lessons learned that can be applied to earlier stages of the teaching-learning process, particularly from the instructional design, for the achievement of a more effective teaching.

2. The teaching-learning process and instructional design

Without becoming mechanistic, since there is a high degree of soft components involved in teaching-learning, a design, construction, test and operation of it can be carried out as a process, in which one of its stages is the instructional design , which in turn is also a process.

Teaching learning process

Teaching-learning is a process that consists of various interconnected stages, which feed the product of one as an input to the next, while each one takes additional inputs. As a process, all the concepts of systems and process optimization are applicable to it, in addition to the fact that it must be considered that the teaching-learning process is developed in a multidimensional operational framework integrated at least by labor,

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administrative, legal and budgetary aspects. All this means that the stages must be ideally coupled to each other and that each of them must have the same robustness, that is, they must be aligned and harmonized in order to achieve good performance.
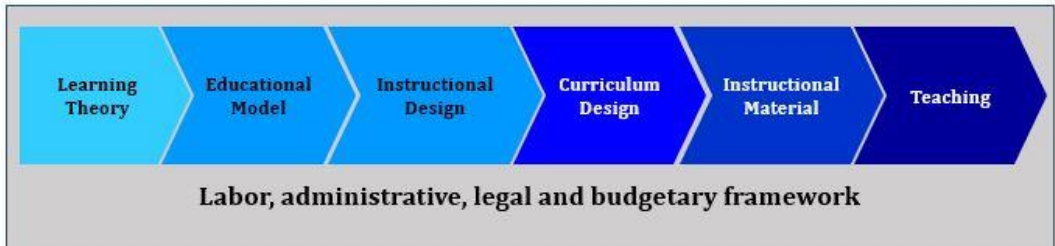
Figure 1. Teaching-Learning Process.

Source: self made

It is noteworthy that, as a system, it is very important that in order to achieve good performance, each of the stages themselves are evaluated (unit tests), their coupling between them (comprehensive tests) and the feedback of the results to the previous stages for this control circuit. Through these tests, the alignment between the stages, the harmonization of them, and the general performance of the process can be verified and adjusted.

(*) Arrows are tests
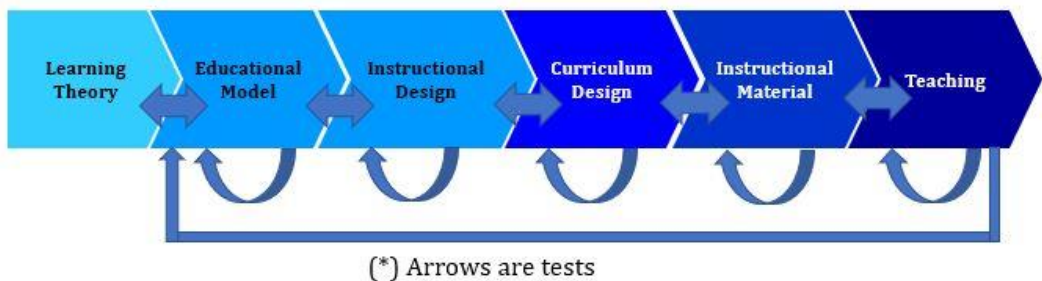
Figure 2. Tests in the Teaching-Learning Process.

Source: self made.

The subject of tests and evaluation deserves a separate treatment, at this point we will only point out that for the efficient performance of the process its review is necessary to ensure the correct coupling and flow between the stages, and to ensure that the achievement of the pedagogical objectives is built in a sustained manner in the different stages.

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Instructional design

According to the process, the instructional design is the way in which the educational model formulated by the institution is implemented, it is the materialization of the educational model, so its importance is capital within the process.

Instructional Design (DI) has been widely studied and conceptualized, among many the following concepts stand out, in alphabetical order:

Branch & Kopcha (2014) point out that "instructional design is intended to be an iterative process of planning results, selecting effective strategies for teaching and learning, choosing relevant technologies, identifying educational media, and measuring performance."

Dick, Carey and Carey (2015) consider that instructional design is an umbrella term to include all phases of the instructional systems development process, that is, the design, development, implementation and evaluation of instruction, and that all components they work together to achieve effective instruction.

Reiser & Dempsey (2007) say that "instructional design is a systematic procedure in which educational and training programs are developed and constructed with the intention of achieving a substantial improvement in learning".

For Smith and Ragan (2005), instructional design is "the systematic and reflective process of translating learning and instructional principles into plans for instructional materials, activities, information resources, and assessment".

The Applied Research Laboratory at Penn State University (University of Michigan, 2003) established a four-part concept for instructional design: as a process, as a discipline, as a science, and as a reality. From a process point of view, they define it as "instructional design is the systematic development of instructional specifications using learning and instructional theory to ensure the quality of instruction. Is the entire process of analysis of learning needs and goals and the development of a delivery system to meet those needs". This concept is important because it explicitly mentions the assurance of the quality of instruction, while other authors only leave it implicit in the effectiveness of learning, it also highlights that the use of learning theories and instructional theories in instructional design is emphasized , which implies the work of specialists in the exercise of ID.

Thus, all the authors agree that instructional design is a systematic process that aims to achieve the effectiveness of learning, making use of relevant and pertinent technologies and media, in accordance with the educational model that is being implemented. This stage is where the planning of the strategies and resources to be used in the subsequent stages of the process is most effective.

Many of the instructional design models are based on ADDIE, even if they do not mention it, since according to Robert Maribe Branch (2009), ADDIE is not a model but a product development paradigm, a concept for the development of instructional design and further notes that it is a guide for the development of educational products and other learning resources. In this way, ADDIE is both a generic model of instructional design for some or a guide to the stages of an instructional design process for others.

Table 1. Stages of the ADDIE Model.

Stage	Description
A (Analyze)	It consists fundamentally in identifying the target student, determining the instructional goals, determining the human and technological requirements, and creating the project management plan.
D (Design)	Based on the elements obtained in the design stage, the strategies for the other stages are determined, instructional objectives, performance objectives, test instruments and performance metrics are generated.
D (Develop)	Generate learning resources and validate their performance
I (Implement)	Prepare teachers, students, and in the case of electronic learning prepare electronic platforms to ensure their continuity and performance
E (Evaluate)	Qualify the quality and performance of the instructional products based on the criteria and metrics that have been established in the design stage

Source: self made.

Based on ADDIE, as a model or as a development paradigm, many models have been built that attend to the particularities of the various learning environments, whether face-to-face, virtual, hybrid, or special cases of them, such as the flipped classroom. The following models stand out among many:

Dick and Carey model. It is a systemic approach to instructional design (Dick, Carey & Carey, 2015) based on the assumption that there is a direct relationship between the stimulus and the response elicited in the student, the stimulus being the teaching materials and the response being the learning of these materials by the student, while the purpose of the stages is to create the conditions for that relationship to be established. The nine stages of this model are: identifying instructional goals; conduct instructional analysis; initial behaviors and characteristics of the students; performance objectives; elements of evidence contrasted against criteria; instructional strategy; instructional materials, design and development of formative assessment; and, design and development of the summative evaluation.

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The Gagné and Briggs 14-step model is instrumented by the well-known nine training events. This is a systemic model, organized with the structure of information processing (Gagné, Briggs, Wager, 1992). Relevant work because many other models take up Gagné's instructional events as a guide for the instructional stage.

Rapid Prototyping Model. In accordance with the agile methodologies so in force today, faster and more flexible instructional design models have been developed, but they also have disadvantages such as sometimes little depth or low focus on the aspects they deal with. One such case is the Rapid Prototyping Model by Tripp and Bichelmeyer (1990) which is based on the construction of individual lessons rather than the entire curriculum. The stages of this model are: perform a need analysis; construct a prototype; utilize the prototype to perform research; and, install the final system.

ASSURE model

In the context of this work, the ASSURE model, developed under the ADDIE approach by Heinich, Molenda, Rusell and Smaldino (1999) and formulated to ensure the effective use of instructional media, is particularly applicable due to the recommendation made to incorporate the resources of information and communication technologies from the instructional design stage of the teaching-learning process, even when it transitions to a hybrid or even face-to-face stage.

The acronyms are the acronym for Analyze learners; State objectives; Select methods, media and materials; Utilize technology media and materials; Require learner participation; Evalue and revise.

Table 2. Stages of the ASSURE Model

Stage	Description
A (Analyze the characteristics of the students)	It is the identification of the characteristics of the students to guide the development of the instructional material according to those characteristics.
S (Establish Standards and Goals)	It is the specification of what students should be able to do as a result of instruction.
S (Select strategies, technology, media and materials)	It is about the ideal selection of these elements to achieve the learning objectives.
U (Use technology, media and materials)	It is the planning and use of resources to hook the student with the material that is being delivered.
R (Require the student's response)	It consists of planning how to achieve the participation of the student and the group in the learning process, given all the previous stages.

E (Evaluation and Review)	The impact of teaching on students is evaluated, determining if the learning objectives were achieved. The results are used to make a review of all the elements put into play, strategies, technology, means and materials.

Source: self made.

ASSURE is based on ADDIE not as a model, but as a development paradigm because the stages do not correspond one by one, but they agree that they are a development methodology that goes from the analysis of the characteristics of the students, to the evaluation and review of the achievement of the learning objectives, with a progression of stages of strategies and plans of construction of materials and their use.

In this particular case, ASSURE is used because in the stages Select methods, media and materials and Utilize technology media and materials it is possible to determine from the instructional design the materials to be used later, as well as the means and the ways of using them (see figure 3).
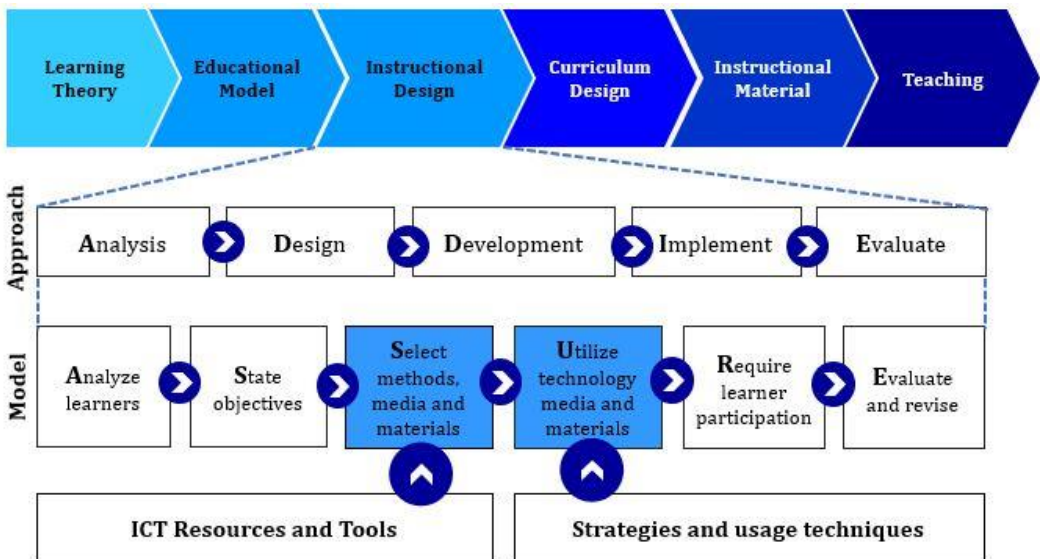
Figure 3. ADDIE-ASSURE and applicable ICT resources

Source: self made.

As with all resources used in education, the proper selection is as important as the correct use of them, but in the case of technological resources it is even more critical because at the same time they have to have the maximum impact on learning. Other aspects of economic, technical and use are also presented, such as, for example, the possibility of accessing them given their price, compatibility with other systems and

platforms of the institution, and mastery of their management. All this, coupled with the strategy and technique with which they are used.

3. Methodology

From the experience lived during the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors of this document revisited their previous works regarding the systemic approach to online education (Quiroz and Muñoz 2019) (Quiroz and Muñoz 2020), contrasting against those advances the actions that were have carried out during it. For this, the strategies and actions taken by various higher education institutions in Mexico, both public and private, were investigated and through interviews with professors and students their opinion was obtained about the dynamics used and the results obtained.

The findings of this research are the lessons learned that can be used to improve the performance of the teaching-learning process, even with a partial or total return to the face-to-face modality.

4. Analysis and development

Considering that the pandemic was an emergent situation for which no one was prepared, the institutions reacted according to the available resources and previous experience in hybrid and online modalities. For this, most of the institutions developed contingency plans for the continuity of teaching activities.

In the first days, the teachers communicated with their students to have sessions through the free videoconferencing services offered by various platforms (such as Zoom and Google) and later in a more organized and formal way once the emerging plans, such as the PEER (Programa Emergente de Enseñanza Remota) of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, which considered hiring collaboration platforms at the institutional level (such as Zoom, Microsoft Team for Education, Google Classroom with Google Suite, among the most popular), as well as an intense training program, not only on the use of computer tools, but also on their use in the context of the educational model of the institution.

It should be noted that given the teachers' preferences, some institutions hired more than one platform, for example, Microsoft Teams as primary and Zoom as secondary, in accordance with the institution's "computer culture", since some already had institutional contracts with companies such as Microsoft or Google. It is also worth mentioning that there were many barriers both of a technological and operational nature, some students have had to participate in class from their cell phones because they do not have a computer, communication problems on internet channels are frequent, the price of the plans data is high and the management of the applications has not been easy for everyone. A separate mention is the use of tools for the development of instructional material, while the use of electronic presenters (MS PowerPoint, Google Slides, etc.) is very broad, in this pandemic teachers and students have ventured into the use of other presentation tools, content creation, mathematical

software and simulation software, among others, which means that they have increased their knowledge and ability to use other technologies that they had not explored before, or were not sufficiently used.

With the aforementioned resources, plus some others already available, but not sufficiently exploited, the teachers created virtual classrooms that often resulted in remote teaching classrooms with online education elements (see figure 4).
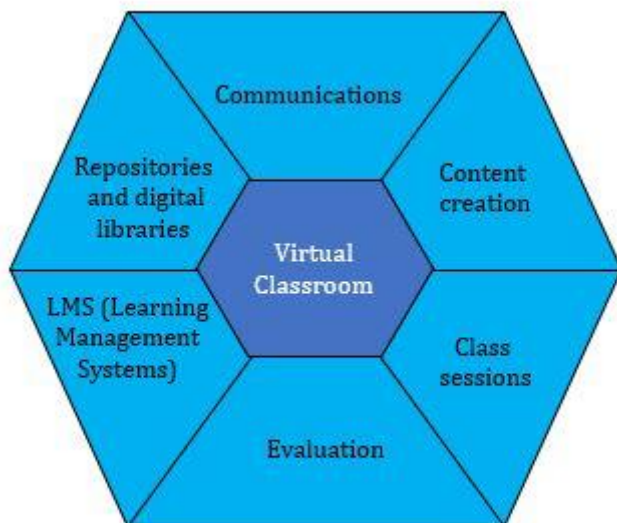
Figure 4. Virtual Classroom model during pandemic.

Source: self made.

Although this experience has been full of challenges to solve, there have also been achievements for all those involved in this process:

By teachers

- Knowledge and mastery of communication platforms

- Knowledge and mastery of authoring tools

- Knowledge and use of learning management systems (LMS, Learning Management System)

- Experience in new pedagogical strategies supported with ICT

For the students

- Knowledge of digital resources for their learning (libraries, repositories)

- Knowledge and use of learning management systems (LMS)

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• Skills to attend remote learning

By institutions

- • Knowledge of the areas of opportunity for the reinforcement, updating or learning of the digital skills of their community

- • Identification of the requirements of technological platforms to face the new reality

- • Concern to incorporate the appropriate use of ICT in their teaching-learning processes

In this regard, it stands out that knowledge and mastery of information and communication technologies applied to education will allow them to be selected, and their proper use indicated, from the stages prior to the development and delivery of instructional material, that is, from the instructional design (see figure 5), setting this in the corresponding instructional matrix.
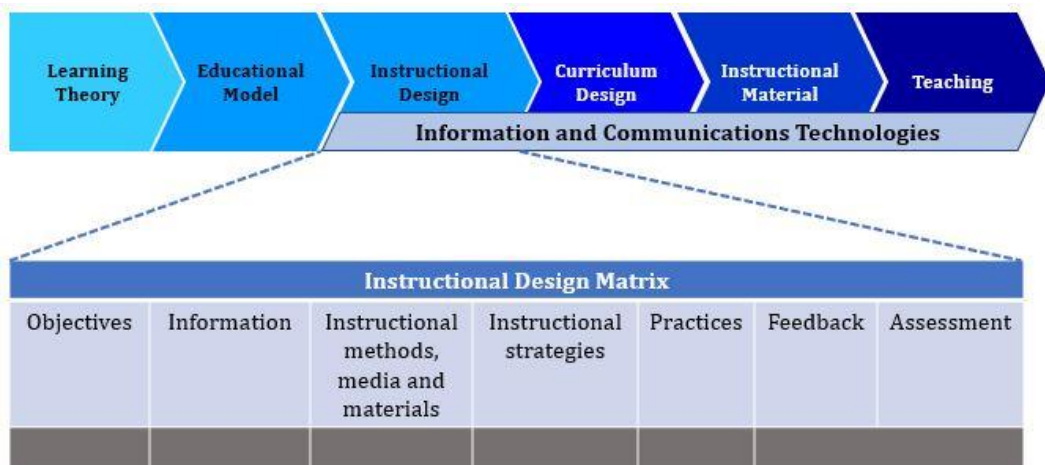
Figure 5. Determination and use of ICT from the ID.

Source: self made.

ICT for a successful incorporation into instructional design must meet the following goals:

a) Assist in the achievement of pedagogical objectives

b) Create effective and engaging learning experiences based on knowledge of how people learn

c) Contribute to educational quality

Educational quality is a subject of wide discussion, without definition and consensus, but in the case of e-learning, various protocols and methodologies agree that the

achievement of educational quality depends on four elements: equipment (teachers and technicians), design of learning, content and technology (see figure 6).
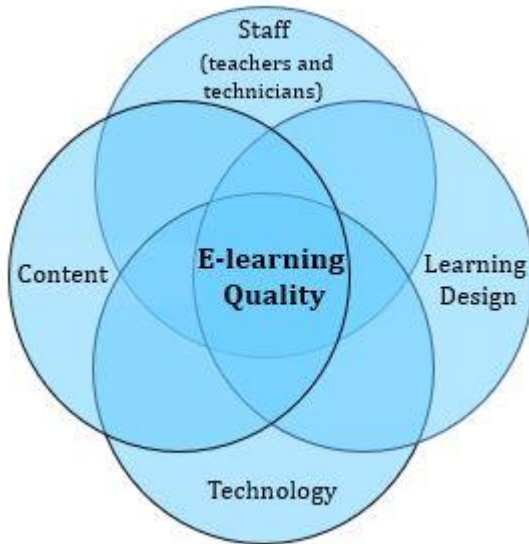
Figure 6. Quality of e-learning

Source: self made.

In the case of remote or virtual education during the pandemic, this model is also applicable for educational quality, since it has been seen that the favorable opinions of students have occurred when teachers have achieved the appropriate mix of these elements (Peñaloza and Hernández, coordinators, 2021), although it must be considered that the learning design does not begin with the preparation and delivery of the instructional material, but from the instructional design itself.

5. Conclusions

The design and construction of the instructional design process requires systematic, comprehensive and careful planning, because it is the forge from which the educational programs that represent the educational offer of an institution arise or the training programs that will affect the competitiveness and performance of an organization.

If instructional design models are compared with software development models, a great parallel will be found between them, so it is not surprising then that some are similar to the waterfall development model and its variants, and there are already based in agile methodologies, such as SCRUM. And that, consequently, when

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developing new systems development methodologies, these can serve as a reference for new models of instructional design.

The circumstances of confinement and the need to give continuity to the academic activities of educational institutions were the driving force behind the transformation in the teaching-learning process, but this transformation can be deepened by incorporating these new knowledge and experiences from the instructional design.

6. Final reflection

Although a good teacher is irreplaceable because he not only teaches, but also inspires and guides, his work can be supported by the lessons learned during confinement for the best use of time and the enrichment of teaching.

Based on what has been gained in the period of confinement, in particular in the domain of platforms, tools and strategies for effective instruction, either remotely or virtually, it can be recommended that this impact not only remain in the development stages of instructional material and teaching, but rather that in the constant updating of the revision of the study plans and programs, or even in the revision of the educational model, carried out by the institutions, information and communication technologies are integrated, to more effective instruction, impacting on the higher levels of the learning objectives (Bloom's Taxonomy revised from 2001) and on the most memorable activities of Edgar Dale's learning pyramid.

The proposed incorporation of what was learned during confinement in the instructional design of study plans and programs will require collegiate work for the formulation of proposals, which must take care, on the one hand, of their correct alignment with the current educational model, and on the other. professors' academic freedom. These proposals, whether of adaptation or modification, will go to the commissions of the collegiate bodies for their approval and wait for the appropriate moment to put them into operation. Thus, the path is not fast, nor is it easy, but it will be the way to take advantage of the knowledge and new skills developed in institutions, as well as in teachers and students, from the beginning.

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Hume on The Epistemological Status of Metaphysical Statements

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Abstract

My paper examines critically the widespread view that Hume confines meaningful propositions to those which are analytic (*a priori*), and those which are synthetic empirical, thereby rejecting synthetic *a priori* propositions as meaningful. What I show is that Hume does recognize certain metaphysical synthetic *a priori* propositions as meaningful, thereby dispelling the traditional view that Hume rejects all synthetic *a priori* as meaningful.[1]

Keywords: analytic *a priori*, synthetic empirical, synthetic *a priori*, meaning

Introduction

Hume on The Epistemological Status of Metaphysical Statements

During the past century, commentators, especially the logical positivists, have sought an understanding of the types of propositions Hume is willing to allow as genuine, in light of his emphasis on observation and experience, and the need for the employment of the Experimental Method in Philosophy. Two interpretations emerged in this discussion. Each begins with the view that, in addition to analytic (*a priori*) propositions, Hume recognizes as meaningful propositions which are synthetic and empirical.[2] Where they differ is that one side holds the more extreme position, that

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[1] Notes on the Contributor

Stanley Tweyman is University Professor, Humanities and Graduate Philosophy, at York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He has published 39 books, authored and/ or edited (some in their third edition), and more than 50 articles. The main focus of his research is the Philosophy of René Descartes and the Philosophy of David Hume; he has also published on George Berkeley and William Wollaston.

[2] All references to Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* are to the Tom L. Beauchamp edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 (T. followed by the page number(s)), and to the Selby-Bigge edition, *Enquiries Concerning The Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Second Edition, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1963 (S.B.E. followed by the page number(s)). References to Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* are to the edition edited by D.F. Norton and Mary Norton, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000 (T. followed by the page number(s)), and to the Selby-Bigge edition, revised by P.H Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978 (S.B.T. followed by the page

Hume holds that there are no synthetic *a priori* propositions,[1]whereas the other group insists that synthetic *a priori* propositions are misleading and meaningless, inasmuch as no means of verifying them is possible;[2] and consequently, they are pseudo-proposition. What these views have in common is that both maintain that Hume's critique of his opponents - especially the rationalists, when they are doing metaphysics - is carried out by rejecting any proposition which purports to be both synthetic and *a priori*. I will attempt to establish that both views are mistaken in that, on the basis of what he says, Hume must admit a class of metaphysical propositions which are synthetic and *a priori*, and meaningful. If the views of Macnabb and Ayer are mistaken, then a reinterpretation is in order of the last paragraph of Hume's *First Enquiry*, cited by A.J. Ayer in defence of his position on Hume, and which I set out in the third footnote in this article.

I will now show that both views mentioned above are fundamentally mistaken, inasmuch as on the basis of what he says, Hume must admit a class of metaphysical propositions which is synthetic and *a priori*, and meaningful.[3]

For the purposes of this paper, I will make the well - known assumption that all propositions can be divided into those which are analytic and those which are synthetic; and that every proposition is either *a priori*, or empirical or *a posteriori.* The meanings of these four classifications will also be offered along traditional lines. Accordingly, I hold that a proposition is empirical if, in order to verify it, some recourse to observation is required. If, on the other hand, no observation or series of observations can be employed to verify a proposition, solely because it would be impossible, even in principle, to verify it in this way, then the proposition in question is *a priori.* Therefore, to make out whether an *a priori* proposition is true or false, something other than recourse to observation is required.

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number(s)). The two passages most often cited to support this view are contained in the first two paragraphs of Section IV, Part I of the first *Enquiry*, and in the very last paragraph of the same book.

[1] For example, D.G.C. Macnabb in *David Hume—His Theory of Knowledge and Morality* (Blackwell, 1951) writes: "Hume's contention is that no *a priori* propositions are synthetic, all *a priori* are analytic, all synthetic propositions are empirical" (p.46).

[2] See, for example, A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic* (Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1946), pp. 31, 35, 53-54. On page 54, Ayer writes: "Of Hume, we may say not merely that he was not in practice a metaphysician, but that he explicitly rejected metaphysics. We find the strongest evidence of this in the passage with which he concludes his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. "If", he says, "we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school of metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, DOES IT CONTAIN ANY ABSTRACT REASONING CONCERNING QUANTITY OR NUMBER? No. DOES IT CONTAIN ANY EXPERIMENTAL REASONING CONCERNING MATTER OF FACT AND EXISTENCE? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion". (E.211; S.B.E.165) Ayer comments that this is but a rhetorical version of his own thesis that a sentence which does not express either a formally true proposition or an empirical hypothesis is devoid of literal significance? Ayer, therefore, regards Hume as holding the logical positivist position in regard to the meaning of sentences.

[3] This is not to say that Hume regards all metaphysical synthetic *a priori* propositions to be meaningful. More on this toward the end of this article.

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Further, a proposition is analytic if it can be made out to be true by apprehending the meanings of the terms involved, or if it has been deduced from other propositions which have been so verified. Since all analytic judgements are verified without recourse to experience, all analytic judgements must be *a priori.* If, even after one has apprehended the meaning of a proposition, further steps would be required to verify it, then the proposition is synthetic.

Having now delineated three major propositional categories - the possibility of analytic empirical propositions having been shown to be impossible - I now turn to Hume's writings to see where these three classifications can be employed.

In the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume restricts propositions concerning the relations of ideas to Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic, and "in short, [to] every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain." (E.108; S.B.E.25) Such propositions can be discovered by thought alone, "without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe", and as a result, "though there never were a circle or triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would forever retain their certainty and evidence". (E.108; S.B.E.25) An example of a proposition of this type which is intuitively certain is 'a triangle is not a square', and one which is demonstratively certain is 'the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides'. (E.209; S.B.E.163) To determine whether a proposition concerns the relations of ideas, we need only determine whether the contrary is contradictory. Now, it is this contention of Hume's which reveals that such propositions are analytic, since the criterion he has set out has application only in virtue of the meanings of the terms involved. Those propositions which are verified intuitively are immediately apprehended and gain our assent. However, others are not immediately seen by the mind, and, therefore, they require additional propositions (premises) before their truth is seen. And since the propositions to be demonstrated are analytically true, the premises employed in demonstrating their truth must be of the same nature.

Propositions concerning matters of fact are not verified in the same manner. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible, and "we should in vain, therefore, attempt to demonstrate its falsehood". (E.108; S.B.E.26) How, then, do we acquire knowledge of matters of fact? According to Hume, there are three possible means, depending on the type of problem with which we are concerned.

In certain cases, we can have recourse to the "present testimony of the senses" (E.108; S.B.E.26), and here, clearly, Hume is thinking of verifying propositions through direct observation, as, for example, that the sun is now shining, or that I am angry. That is, included in this category are matters of fact which are external to the observer or states of her/ his own consciousness, and the propositions concerning these can be confirmed or confuted by an immediate observation or observations. Now, it often happens that the propositions concerning matters of fact can no longer be verified by

direct observation. Nevertheless, Hume holds that such propositions may be verified, provided that we can recall an observation of what they are about.

Hume's main concern is with determining what evidence, if any, we have for apprehending the truth or falsity of propositions for which we do not have the direct evidence of the senses. To this question, he answers, first, that I can know a matter of fact which I myself have not observed if I know that it is connected by the relation of cause and effect with some matter of fact which I have observed. For example, if I observe footprints in the sand, then I can be said to know that some other human being was present here at some time in the past. In addition, Hume asserts that, if I am to know that two facts are connected by this relation, I can do so only through the aid of my own past experience. That is, the only legitimate evidence I can acquire for assenting to a causal proposition is to have found objects like the ones I now believe to be connected causally to have been constantly conjoined in the past. Therefore, for Hume, the only tribunal available to us for settling questions of fact is observation and experience. And as such, he holds that, in principle, the types of propositions we have been discussing can be known to be true or false. Further, from what was said earlier, it is clear that all the propositions concerning matters of fact discussed thus far must be classified as being both synthetic and empirical, since they cannot be verified by attending to the meanings of the terms involved, but only be having recourse to observation and experience.

It is to this point that philosophers such as D.G.C. Macnabb and A. J. Ayer maintain that Hume is willing to go in determining the range of meaningful propositions. To see that this cannot be Hume's position, we must now push our inquiry concerning the causal relation even further.

As we have seen, reasonings concerning matters of fact are founded on the relation of cause and effect, and the foundation of such reasonings is experience. But Hume now asks for the foundation of all conclusions from experience, and he warns that this question "may be of more difficult solution and explanation", and that "even after we have experience of the operations of cause and effect, our conclusions from that experience are *not* founded on reasoning, or any process of the understanding" (E.113; S.B.E.32).

We must first get clear on what it is that Hume is asking; and it is this. We know nothing of the powers or forces which may reside in objects. All that is ever present to us are the sensible qualities which objects possess. But even in the light of our ignorance, whenever we observe objects with sensible qualities resembling those of objects observed in the past, we assume that they also have similar secret powers "and expect that effects, similar to those which we have experienced, will follow from them" (E.114; S.B.E.33). In effect, the problem resolves itself into determining how we move from 'I have found that such an object has always been attended by such an effect' to 'I foresee, that the other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects' (E.114; S.B.E.34); although Hume also poses the

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problem by asking by what argument or faculty we arrive at the conclusion that the future will resemble the past (E.117; S.B.E.37), and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities (E.117; S.B.E.36).[1]

Concentrating initially on the first formulation of the problem, Hume points out that, since the validity of the inference between these two propositions can be doubted, the connection between these two propositions cannot be intuitive. Nor can there be any demonstration of the conclusion we draw, since "it implies no contradiction that the course of nature may change" (E.115; S.B.E.35). Since we are able to assert without contradiction that the course of nature may change, the proposition that the future will resemble the past cannot be a tautology. Hence, this proposition must be synthetic in nature.

Perhaps, then, the inference between the two propositions in the first formulation is 'experimental'. But Hume shows that it is also not in this way that the inference is made. "To say it is experimental is begging the question. For all inferences from experience suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past, and that similar secret powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities - It is impossible, therefore, that any arguments from experience can prove this resemblance of the past to the future; since all these arguments are founded on the suppositions of the resemblance" (E.117; S.B.E.37-38).

Accordingly, we find in Hume's philosophy that the proposition that the future will resemble the past does not fit into the analytic - synthetic empirical mould which commentators such as Macnabb and Ayer hold is to be found there. In fact, the last passage quoted above makes our belief in the past as a standard for the future to be one which is requisite if we are to acquire empirical knowledge. That is, this belief that the future will resemble the past is ultimately seen to be a principle of the possibility of empirical knowledge - an expression anticipatory of Kant's philosophy.

Other passages offered by Hume lend further evidence to such an interpretation. For example, after concluding that we come to believe that the future will resemble the past through the influence of Custom, Hume adds:

Custom, then, is the great guide to human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to end, or to employ our

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[1] Hume is not always clear on the exact relationship between these formulations, and believes himself justified in selecting whichever formulation best suits his purpose. For our purposes here, the same method will be adopted.

natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end of all action, as well as of the chief part of speculation. (E.122-123; S.B.E.45)[1]

I stated earlier that in this article the assumption would be made that every proposition is either analytic or synthetic, and either *a priori* or empirical. Now, since experience has been ruled out as a means of verifying the proposition that the future will resemble the past, the proposition must be non-empirical, that is, it must be *a priori.* And since its being analytic or tautological has also been ruled out, it follows that it must also be synthetic. In short, we have come upon a synthetic *a priori* proposition in Hume's philosophy.

It may be objected here that the proposition that the future will resemble the past is not *a priori,* since the basis for our belief in this proposition is custom or habit which is acquired from repeated experience. But this objection can have no force here. Custom, for Hume, explains how certain propositions, and the belief which attends them, come to be generated. But Custom cannot explain the specific character of such propositions as synthetic and *a priori*, given that Custom has no role to play in the process of verification. In fact, the enigmatic aspect of the proposition that the future will resemble the past is that no means of verifying it is available to us. However, Hume's contention is that, precisely because of its character and the important role it plays in our lives, its veracity is something to which we must always consent: no speculative argument, nor any experience, can for long dissuade us of its truth. Unlike all synthetic empirical propositions, it is both, in practice and in principle, intrinsically unverifiable.[2]

Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever - and that principle (Custom) will preserve its influence as long as human nature remains the same. (E.120; S.B.E.41)

One matter remains to be dealt with here. As we have seen, the passage which is most often cited to support the contention that Hume holds that only analytic propositions and those pertaining to empirical matters of fact are genuine propositions is to be found in the last paragraph of the *First Enquiry*. Clearly, therefore, if the contention of this paper is correct, then a reinterpretation of this passage is required. The passage reads as follows:

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for

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[1] This custom or habit is the same one which Hume cites as leading us to believe that objects related as cause to effect are necessarily connected. (See, for example, E.144-145; S.B.E.75, T.92, 111; S.B.T.134, 165.)

[2] To see that this is so, one need only imagine the most extreme case of a lack of uniformity in the universe, namely chaos, and speculate on how we would react to it. It is clear that in such a universe we would merely expect further irregularities rather than question the veracity of our belief that the future will resemble the past. In fact, the expectation of further irregularities is itself dependent upon our belief in the conformity of the future to the past.

instance; let us ask, DOES IT CONTAIN ANY ABSTRACT REASONING CONCERNING QUANTITY OR NUMBER? No. DOES IT CONTAIN ANY EXPERIMENTAL REASONING CONCERNING MATTER OF FACT AND EXISTENCE? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. (E.211; S.B.E.165)

When dealing with this passage, commentators often lose sight of the context in which it is provided. For this paragraph sums up Hume's answer to the question raised two pages earlier, namely, "what are the proper subjects of science and enquiry?", that is, when is it appropriate to engage in reasoning? But it does not follow that, because our reasonings may be fruitfully employed solely with respect to quantity or number (relations of ideas) and matters of fact and existence, that these two realms provide the only genuine propositions. On the contrary, all that does follow is that it is only in these two realms that reasoning can serve a justificatory function. It is still possible that what we cannot justify or verify, namely, certain metaphysical propositions which are both synthetic and *a priori,* may be genuine and meaningful. And so it is with the proposition that the future will resemble the past: although we all do, and must, believe in it, we find that no process of reasoning ever can support our belief in it. Hence, what Hume wants committed to the flames are volumes which are concerned with attempting to reason about, or verify, propositions which are not the proper objects of science and inquiry. How could such volumes not but contain 'sophistry and illusion'? In short, the final paragraph is not concerned to outline the scope of genuine propositions, but rather is concerned with the types of propositions about which our reasonings can be concerned. Therefore, Hume has not ruled out the possibility that there are genuine propositions which are both synthetic and *a priori* in nature. And if the analysis presented here is correct, then Hume must accept certain synthetic *a priori* propositions as genuine propositions, in the sense that, without believing in them, empirical knowledge would, for us, be impossible.[1] Each of these beliefs is such that "Nature has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations". (T.125; S.B.T.187)

A metaphysical proposition which is endorsed by Nature Hume holds to be genuine and meaningful, even though the proposition is synthetic and *a priori*. Synthetic *a priori* propositions which are not so endorsed, Hume rejects as meaningless. But even these meaningless propositions Hume divides into two groups. The first of these consists of those which are necessary to satisfy, at least temporarily, the conflicting claims of reason and imagination. Such is the case with those asserting the existence of souls and substance. The act of the mind here is called 'feigning', and the object of belief is entitled a 'fiction'. The 'feigning' and resultant 'fiction' take place when we ascribe an identity to our successive perceptions, and suppose ourselves possessed of an invariable and uninterrupted existence through the whole course of our lives.

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[1] The other beliefs of this sort which Hume discusses are our belief in the Principle of Causality, our belief in the continued and independent existence of body, and our belief in a continuing self. Following Norman Kemp Smith, these beliefs are often referred to 'natural beliefs'.

Hume illustrates this with how we come to believe in the identity of plants and animals. He explains that we have a distinct idea of an object that remains invariable and uninterrupted through a period of time (identity or sameness), and we have a distinct idea of several different objects existing in succession and connected together by a close relation (diversity). He points out that in our common way of thinking, they are generally confounded with each other:

"[T]he relation facilitates the transition of the mind from one object to another, and renders its passage as smooth as if it contemplated one continuous object…In order to justify to ourselves this absurdity, we often feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together, and prevents their interruption or variation. Thus we feign the continued existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation. But we may farther observe, that where we do not give rise to such a fiction…we are apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious, connecting the parts, and this I take to be the case with regard to the identity we ascribe to plants and animals….Thus the controversy concerning identity is not merely a dispute of words. For when we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable or interrupted objects, our mistake is not confin'd to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions. (T. 166-167; S.B.T. 254-255)

The second group of such metaphysical propositions which are rejected as meaningless are propositions expressing beliefs in the existence of matters with respect to which one can never have an idea, nor even generate a fiction, and, therefore, they are propositions which can never have meaning for us. Such is the case, for example, with regard to the claim that causal powers exist in objects.

'Tis natural for men…to imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together…But philosophers, who abstract from the effects of custom and compare the ideas of objects; immediately perceive the falsehood of these vulgar sentiments, and discover that there is no known connexion among objects… For it being usual, after the frequent use of terms, which are really significant and intelligible, to omit the idea, which we would express by them, and to preserve only the custom, by which we recall the idea at pleasure; so it naturally happens, that after the frequent use of terms, which are wholly insignificant and unintelligible, we fancy them to be on the same footing with the precedent, and to have a secret meaning, which we might discover by reflection. The resemblance of their appearance deceives the mind…and makes us imagine a thorough resemblance and conformity. (T.147-148; S.B. 223-224)

 Much of the Humean enterprise in the First Book of the *Treatise* can, therefore, be seen as an attempt to sort out metaphysical synthetic judgements *a priori,* in order to

determine which are intelligible and which are not, and which are merely useful and which are not.

Hume's reliance on the Experimental Method does not commit him to the view that there are no synthetic propositions *a priori*, or that all such utterances are mere pseudo - propositions. The use of the Experimental Method is viewed by Hume as the technique for determining which propositions are meaningful and which are not, and how belief in such propositions arises.

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The Formulation and Validation of a Conceptual Framework for the Transition from E-government to M-government

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Abstract

The proliferation of mobile devices has spurred many nations across the globe to make the necessary transition from e-government to m-government to provide better services to their citizens more flexibly, transcending temporal and geographical barriers. However, making such transitions is fraught with numerous challenges that may impede a smooth transition of these services. To make matters worse, there is a lack of conceptual frameworks to which relevant stakeholders can refer. Against this backdrop, this study was carried out to formulate and validate a conceptual framework to guide the transition of services from e-government to m-government in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This study was based on qualitative approach involving a survey in which 15 academicians from reputable universities in the UAE were selected to seek their opinions on the conceptual framework of the study. The research instrument used in this study constituted a survey questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part sought to gather personal information of the participating experts, namely gender, age, educational level, working experience, and fields of expertise. The second part aimed to elicit their opinions regarding the appropriateness of five constructs and their components used for the formulation of the conceptual framework of the study, namely IT Infrastructure, IT Skills, Security and Privacy, Knowledge of Operating Standard and Protocols, and Operating Frameworks, each of which was rated along a spectrum of agreement based on 4-point Likert-type scales, ranging from '1' (Strongly Disagree) to '4' (Strongly Agree). This part consisted of 25 items, with each construct being rated by five items. The survey questionnaire was pilot-tested involving four experts in the field of mobile communication. The analysis of experts' opinions were analyzed based on the Fuzzy Delphi Method, showing that IT Infrastructure and Security and Privacy were deemed highly valid, closely followed by the

remaining constructs, namely IT skills, Operational Frameworks, and Knowledge of Standards and Protocols. Likewise, all of their components were also deemed highly valid. The above findings strongly suggest that all the five constructs as well as their components are crucial aspects that may have significant impacts on the transition of services from e-government to m-government in the UAE. From the practical standpoint, the validated conceptual framework help provide a greater insight into the understanding of potential challenges that relevant stakeholders have to face as they embark on making such an ambitious transition. However, more studies are required to examine the usability of the proposed conceptual framework for the transition of services from e-government to m-government from the perspective of practitioners working in the related fields.

Keywords: e-government, m-government framework

Introduction

Lately, organizations around the globe has been paying strong emphasis on the efficiency of business transactions, which has been spurred by the rapidly increasing advancements in a wide range of technologies. In particular, the advent of electronic government, also known as e-government, has drastically altered the business realm by employing information and communication technology (ICT) to improve the efficacy of government services of many nations to serve their citizens, employees, businesses, and agencies through web-based internet applications (OECD/International Telecommunication Union, 2011). Around the world, various federal, state, and local governments have applied various e-government initiatives to enable the purchase of goods and services, the delivery of information and forms, and submission of bids and proposals (GAO et al., 2001). These online services offer many benefits to both citizens and governments of many nations. From the public perspective, e-government is an efficient strategy of modernizing information acquisition, thereby reducing the cost of a business transaction. It is also an effective strategy of providing an array of information to citizens and private business ventures through the Internet. From the governmental standpoint, e-government plays a major role in information dissemination for the public, thereby facilitating the implementation of government services, transactions, policies, and resource distributions across agencies which results in agencies experiencing significant cost reductions and improved efficiency, with citizens receiving faster, more convenient services. In recent years, the public, including government employees working in various organizations, have witnessed the proliferation of mobile devices that expedited the transition from e-government to m-government, also known as (Mobile government), as more people are becoming more aware of the importance of m-government, which they can gain access to anytime, anywhere using their mobile devices (Pandey & Sekhar, 2013; Song, 2005).

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Mobile-Government

Essentially, m-government is an extension or evolution of e-government through the utilization of mobile technologies for public service delivery (Oui-Suk, 2010). M-government involves the utilization of different mobile devices, such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), handheld operated devices, smartphones, and cellular phones, to access governmental services. Essentially, M-government has several unique features that can significantly improve the delivery of governmental services, such as providing non-stop, fast, and reliable services throughout the year, adapting to changes quickly, and devising solutions to challenges, and facilitating people's lives.

However, the transition from e-government to m-government has several challenges (Song, 2005; Sharma & Gupta, 2004; Weerakkody et al., 2007), which encompasses both social and technical dimensions, such as people's awareness, the privacy of information, data security, trust, and technology training skills (Abu-Shanab, 2012; Al-Shboul et al., 2014; Qader & Kheder, 2016). In this respect, several researchers have outlined some of the challenges that include cultural, political, structural, legal, social and administrative aspects (Abu-Shanab, 2012; Al-Thunibat et al., 2010; Antovski & Gusev, 2005; El-Kiki & Lawrence, 2007; Fasanghari & Samimi, 2009; Kim et al., 2004; Mukherjee & Biswas, 2005). For example, in Jordan, Aloudat et al. (2014) investigated several challenges and barriers, such as trust information security and privacy concern, which were associated with the adoption and acceptance of m-government.

Like other aspiring nations, the United Arab Emirates has also been compelled to implement m-government to meet its citizens' need for services that are easily accessible anywhere, anytime. In 2015, the two-year deadline imposed by the UAE's government for m-government services to be implemented across all governmental organizations had passed, culminating in a remarkable milestone that witnessed the implementation of its m-government peaking at 96.3%, encompassing 337 important governmental services offered by 41 governmental entities. Admittedly, an implementation rate at 100% would be extremely difficult to achieve due to various challenges. A report published by Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) - UAE (November 24, 2015) indicated its governmental entities faced several key challenges in implementing m-government services, such as interoperability, integration efficiency, data privacy, security, user-friendly applications, and accessibility.

As highlighted in the above report, in rushing to meet the deadline (in May 2015) set by the UAE's government to transform services from websites to mobile applications, many of its government entities had to face several challenges in ensuring the quality of applications, the security of information as well as the effectiveness of the applications in terms of their usability, which were highly challenging to small entities that typically lacked essential infrastructures and technical skills. As such, an implementation rate at 100% was practically impossible to achieve given such

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challenges. The above problem evoked considerable interest that motivated the researchers, who was as a government employee with expertise in communication and computer engineering, to investigate the challenges and barriers faced by most of UAE's governmental entities that hindered a complete transition from e-government to m-government within the given time frame.

This study, therefore, focused on exploring these challenges as well as identifying ways to evaluate a framework for m-government standards, protocols, and opportunities for various business engagements.

Against the backdrop discussed above, three research questions were formulated to guide this research:

What are the challenges faced by various UAE'S governmental and private business organizations in making a smooth transition of services from e-government to m-government?

What will be the appropriate conceptual framework to facilitate the transition of services from e-government to m-government?

What will be the effective method to validate the proposed conceptual framework?

Correspondingly, three research objectives were formulated to address the above research questions:

To identify the challenges faced by UAE'S governmental and private business organizations in making a smooth transition of services from e-government to m-government.

To formulate a conceptual framework to facilitate the transition of services from e-government to m-government.

To validate the proposed conceptual framework for the transition of services from e-government to m-government using the Fuzzy Delphi Method.

Development of the Conceptual Framework of the Study

The study employed a systematic review of literature to identify the challenges and opportunities for the transition from e-government to m-government. Specifically, relevant articles published from 2012 to 2017 that were available from several leading electronic digital data bases, namely IEEE Xplore, Science Direct, Scopus, Springer Link, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. This process helped to facilitate the formulation of the conceptual framework of the study regarding the challenges in the transition from e-government to m-government, which led to the identification of five categories of challenges that constituted the study constructs (see Figure 2.3), namely IT Infrastructure (Ndou, 2004; Sharma & Gupta, 2004), IT Skills (Al-Shboul et al., 2014; Tair & Abu-Shanab, 2014), Security and Privacy, Knowledge of Operating Standard and Protocols (Akram & Malik, 2012; Al-Hujran, 2012; Alshehri et al., 2012;

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Hung et al., 2013; Shareef et al., 2014), and Operating Frameworks (Qader & Kheder, 2016).

The five categories formed the basis for the formulation of the conceptual framework to highlight the main constructs of the study, which were examined based on the opinions of employees of selected governmental and private organizations in Dubai in the UAE through a survey. Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual framework of the study consisting of five constructs with several components identified through the literature review.
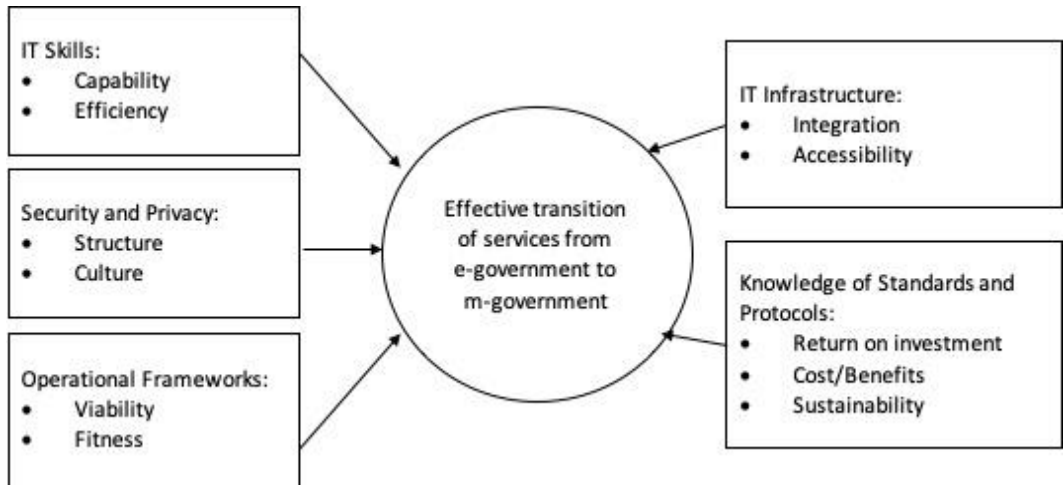
Figure 1: The proposed conceptual framework of the study

Methodology

Participants

A total of 15 academicians from several reputable universities in the UAE were selected as the experts, comprising six (6) senior lecturers, three (3) assistant professors, four (4) associate professors, and two (2) professors, whose opinions were sought through a survey to validate the conceptual framework of the study. As stressed by Turoff (2002), a panel consisting of experts from 10 to 50 is deemed suitable to ascertain expert opinions, depending on the available resources. In this study, the experts in the area of the study were scarce, thus the 15 experts selected were considered acceptable. Specifically, they were selected because of their strong knowledge and vast experiences in the mobile and wireless communication technology. Table 1 summarizes the background of the experts selected for the Fuzzy Delphi method.

Procedure

All the 15 experts were contacted at their respective institutions to elicit their feedback or opinions regarding the appropriateness of the five study constructs that

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constituted the conceptual framework of the proposed study. Survey questionnaires and relevant materials were sent to the experts by emails together with a cover letter, informing them the main purpose of the research, detailing the procedure that they were required to follow to answer the survey questions, and thanking them for the participation in the survey. They were given ample time to go through the questionnaires and reminded to submit the filled out questionnaires accordingly based on a given deadline

Instrument

The research instrument used in this study constituted a survey questionnaire consisting of two parts, which was used to gather experts' opinions regarding the framework constructs. The first part sought to gather personal information of the participating experts, namely gender, age, educational level, working experience, and fields of expertise. The second part aimed to elicit their opinions regarding the appropriateness of the five study constructs, namely IT Infrastructure, IT Skills, Security and Privacy, Knowledge of Operating Standard and Protocols, and Operating Frameworks, each of which was rated along a spectrum of agreement based on 4-point Likert-type scales, ranging from '1' (Strongly Disagree) to '4' (Strongly Agree). This part consisted of 25 items, with each construct being rated by five items. The survey questionnaire was pilot-tested involving four experts in the field of mobile communication.

Data Analysis and Results

This section provides a detailed account of the analysis of data undertaken in this study. This section highlights and summarizes the results of both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Table 1 summarizes the demographic backgrounds of the selected experts.

Table 1: The demographic backgrounds of the selected experts

Expert #	Job title	Years of experience	Field of expertise
Expert 1	S. Lecturer	5	Web Design
Expert 2	S. Lecturer	5	Web Design
Expert 3	S. Lecturer	7	App. Design and Development
Expert 4	Asst. Prof.	10	Information system
Expert 5	Asst. Prof.	10	Information system

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Expert 6	Asst. Prof.	10	Web Design
Expert 7	S. Lecturer	13	Web Design
Expert 8	Prof.	25	Information system
Expert 9	Prof.	22	Information system
Expert 10	S. Lecturer	6	App. Design and Development
Expert 11	S. Lecturer	6	App. Design and Development
Expert 12	Assoc. Prof.	10	Information Technology
Expert 13	Assoc. Prof.	10	Information Technology
Expert 14	Assoc. Prof.	11	App. Design and Development
Expert 15	Assoc. Prof.	12	Mobile Learning

Table 2 shows the results of the internal consistency reliability testing of questionnaire items regarding the five constructs of the study.

Table 2: Results of the internal consistency reliability testing

No	Construct	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha
1	IT Infrastructure	5	0.86
2	Security, Trust, and Privacy	5	0.77
3	IT skills	5	0.85
4	Knowledge of Operating Std. and Protocols	5	0.80
5	Operating Frameworks	5	0.79

Table 3 and Table 4 show the results of the Fuzzy Delphi method in terms of triangular fuzzy numbers and defuzzification values of experts' opinions of the five constructs

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and their components, respectively, for the transition of services from e-government to m-government in the UAE.

Table 3: Experts' opinions of the constructs of the conceptual framework

Construct	Triangular Fuzzy Numbers		Defuzzication Value	
	Mean threshold value (d)	Mean % of expert consensus	Mean fuzzy score (a)	Result
IT infrastructure	0.2	100%	0.680	Consented
IT skills	0.2	93%	0.680	Consented
Security and Privacy	02	100%	0.680	Consented
Operational frameworks	02	93%	0.680	Consented
Knowledge of Std and Protocols	01	93%	0.680	Consented

Table 4: Experts' opinions of the components of constructs of the conceptual framework

Construct	Triangular Fuzzy Numbers		Defuzzication Value	
	Mean threshold value (d)	Mean % of expert consensus	Mean fuzzy score (a)	Result
Integration	0.2	100%	0.680	Consented
Accessibility	0.2	100%	0.680	Consented

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Capability	0.2	100%	0.729	Consented
Efficiency	0.2	100%	0.729	Consented
Structure	0.2	100%	0.693	Consented
Culture	0.2	100%	0.693	Consented
Viability	0.2	100%	0.693	Consented
Fitness	0.2	100%	0.693	Consented
ROI	0.2	93%	0.693	Consented
Sustainability	0.2	93%	0.693	Consented

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

As shown in Table 1, the experts were made up of members of academia working in several public universities in the UAE, whose working experiences ranged from 5 to 25 years. In addition, they were vastly experienced in web design, applications design and development, information system, information technology, and mobile learning. These results highlight a strong diversity of the experts in related fields of technology, making their opinions of the study constructs highly reliable. As indicated in Table 2, the computed Cronbach's Alpha values of the questionnaire items ranged from 0.77 to 0.86, which exceeded the recommended value of 0.60, indicating high internal consistency of the scales of the research instrument in measuring the construct.

As indicated in Table 3, the mean percentages of experts' opinions of IT Infrastructure and Security and Privacy were both 100%. The remaining constructs, namely IT skills, Operational Frameworks, and Knowledge of Standards and Protocols attained mean percentages of experts' opinions of 93%. These results suggest that IT Infrastructure and Security and Privacy are extremely crucial to ensuring a successful transition of services from e-government to m-government in the UAE. Additionally, establishing proper infrastructures to handle the required services as well as employing the necessary techniques to safeguard the security and privacy of information are vital for an efficient transition from e-government to m-government (Miller, 2013).

As shown in Table 4, the experts' opinions on the components of IT infrastructure, namely Integration and Accessibility, attained a high level of consent at 100%, signifying that IT infrastructure must have the capacity to support high integration and accessibility to foster efficient maintenance and quality delivery of services to both governmental and private organizations. Likewise, the components of IT Skills,

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namely Capability and Efficiency, were deemed highly valid, with each attaining a mean percentage of experts' opinions of 100%. It can be reasonably argued that the availability of capable manpower is necessary for the efficient transition of services from e-government to m-government. In particular, such a transition entails highly capable, efficient professional with good knowledge and vast experiences in handling a wide spectrum of services in governmental and private organizations. Similarly, the components of Security and Privacy, namely Structure and Culture and efficiency, were also rated to be highly valid, as evidenced by their high mean percentages of experts' opinions of 100%. Specifically, this finding indicates that the structure of security measures for safeguarding data and maintaining the privacy of information is a vital component or aspect that needs to be seriously taken into account when making a transition of services from e-government to m-government.

Equally impressive, the components of Operational Framework, namely Viability and Fitness, were strongly accepted by the experts to be valid, with both equally attaining a mean percentage of experts' opinions of 100%. This finding signifies that a viable operational framework is important and crucial to handling the need of variable services. Hence, such an operational framework needs to be fitted with various dimensions of services. With such a framework, as implored by (Kushchu & Kuscu, 2003) governmental organizations can provide users with easy access to data using m-government in several alternative forms, such as voice, text messages, or video calls, to encourage the public to use the services that they offer. Meanwhile, the components of Knowledge of Standards and Protocols, namely Return of Investment and Sustainability, were deemed valid, with each component attaining a mean percentage of experts' opinions of 93%. Even though these components were not as highly rated as other components, there are, nevertheless, can be considered important too. This finding suggests that the return on investment and sustainability are important factors to the implementation of m-government, which can be prohibitively expensive for some nations. Surely, the former is paramount to justifying the cost of such an implementation and the latter to maintaining the operations of m-government on a long term. Thus, careful considerations of these two components must also be factored in making a transition from e-government to m-government.

As discussed, the findings of the validation of the conceptual framework based on the Fuzzy Delphi Method showed that the experts had reached a strong consensus regarding the validity of the five constructs of the study as well as their components, signifying that they are crucial aspects that may have significant impacts on the smooth transition of services from e-government to m-government in the UAE. From the practical standpoint, the validated conceptual framework help provide a greater insight into the understanding of potential challenges that relevant stakeholders have to face as they embark on making such an ambitious transition. Surely, such an understanding can help them become more prepared to deal with such challenges in implementing m-government (Alharmoodi & Lakulu, 2020). Arguably, more studies

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are required to examine the usability of the proposed conceptual framework for the transition of services from e-government to m-government from the perspective of practitioners working in the related fields.

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Mixed Methods in Business, Management and Accounting Research: an Experimental Design in the Entrepreneurship Domain

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Abstract

All research strategies suffer from some weaknesses. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches might offset some flaws. Recently a growing methodological trend arose from the acknowledgement that mixed methods may increase the value of several research projects. With this background, the paper analyses trends of mixed methods in the business, management and accounting area during the last twenty years. The analysis highlights domains where mixed methods are not frequently used, such as entrepreneurship, and presents ongoing research based on mixed methods on the Italian community enterprises, a set of collective entrepreneurial initiatives working for sustainable regeneration in their territories. These enterprises are elusive since they are neither easily identifiable nor extractable from databases. A fixed and sequential mixed method approach turns out to be effective for investigating these evolving enterprises. The work is relevant for novices to mixed methods research and provides meaningful insights to analyze a type of organisation that is very important in depleted contexts.

Keywords: Mixed methods, business management and accounting research, literature trends, entrepreneurship, community enterprise.

Introduction

Starting a scientific study implies several research decisions or design dilemmas to face. Indeed, there is not a set of choices that ensures maximum results, as there are goals that are difficult to match (for instance, the generalizability of results and realism of contexts). Therefore, it can be argued, as stated by McGrath (1981, p. 179), that "all research strategies and methods are seriously flawed". Nevertheless, the methodological triangulation may mitigate some limitations (Dezin, 2009; Turner *et al.*, 2017), as one method can compensate for the weaknesses of another (Jick, 1979), and support the growth of understanding of a phenomenon and the advance of the knowledge frontier.

However, it is worth saying that mixed methods are not a solution to all problems. Echoing the words of Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 17), it is important to remember that: "In some situations the qualitative approach will be more appropriate; in other situations, the quantitative approach will be more appropriate. In many situations, researchers can put together insights and procedures from both approaches to produce a superior product".

In other words, although some weaknesses cannot be completely overcome, when the combination of different methods in a study is performed effectively, new avenues for knowledge creation arise (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki *et al.*, 2006).

This is a reason why mixed methods have achieved a certain success in several fields, such as organisational science (Molina-Azorin *et al.*, 2017), to the extent that they have been recognised as "the third major research approach or research paradigm" (Johnson *et al.*, 2007, p. 112). However, there are still fields or areas of research where they are taking hold more slowly. In this perspective, the study addresses the following question: do mixed methods represent an emerging methodology in business, management and accounting research? In this vein, to promote their use, the paper illustrates the design of ongoing research concerning Italian community enterprises, which adopts the mixed methods approach to address some specific research complexities.

To this end, the paper is organised as follows. The next section offers background information on the mixed methods approach and a brief description of the community enterprise concept together with some elements characterizing Italian community enterprises. The following section depicts the methodology adopted to analyse the mixed methods research in the investigated areas. In addition, this section provides some information on the methodological features concerning the application case. Then, the paper describes the results of the analysis and presents how the mixed methods approach has been fruitfully used in the application case. Finally, the discussion section proposes some reflections on the literature trends, and the conclusions section illustrates some future issues and limitations of the work.

Mixed methods: literature backgrounds

For many years, researchers have integrated qualitative and quantitative methodologies, but until the 1980s there was no conceptualisation of this way of doing research (Bryman, 1988). Subsequently, mixed methods gained more recognition and were frequently adopted, at least in certain research areas, such as education, health science, sociology (Denscombe, 2008; Molina-Azorin *et al.*, 2017).

For those new to the subject, it is relevant to distinguish between multi-methods and mixed methods, since the former approach concerns the use of either multiple quantitative methods or multiple qualitative methods in the same study, while the latter involves – as indicated in the research methods map proposed by Sage

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Publications[1] - to mix that crosses the quantitative and qualitative boundary in inquiries by combining two or more methods within given research.

However, adopting mixed methods is not so easy and may present obstacles because, as Mason (2006) pointed out, it requires thinking outside the box. In practice, researchers may face perceptual and epistemological obstacles (Tunarosa and Glynn, 2017). As a result, as highlighted in Howe (1988), some authors endorse the compatibility thesis, while others (see for instance Smith, 1983; Smith and Heshusius, 1986) think that the compatibility between qualitative and quantitative methods is unlikely. Indeed, these methodological approaches have different goals and use different techniques. Theory testing is usually the primary objective of a quantitative study (Dezin and Lincoln, 2005) and, in this perspective, it analyses hypotheses deductively, operationalizes (independent and dependent) variables, gathers data by trying to reach a representative sample and demonstrates statistical significance. Whereas, theory building is typically the goal of a qualitative study. In this type of study, the adopted approach is inductive and the analysis is developed on archival data or data collected through interviews, case studies and other field research methods. In addition, there are divergences from an epistemological point of view, as quantitative studies tend to refer to the positivist paradigm, whereas qualitative studies embrace the interpretivist paradigm; therefore, these studies have discordant postures and this implies differences in the way of knowing and in research questions. These features represented obstacles to methods integration, even if many authors considered it positively (Cresweel *et al.*, 2003).

In the first attempts, the combination of two different types of methods resulted from a hierarchy of them, as authors considered one type of method as an extra part with a completing function. For example, several quantitative studies employed qualitative analyses to provide detailed information about the context of reference. This practice cannot be considered as an effective integration if anything a *collage* of methods, so much so that the subordination of the qualitative method to the quantitative method has met with some criticism (see, for instance, Jick, 1979).

As noted in the introduction, some situations and motivations suggest the adoption of mixed methods. Green *et al.* (1989) provided a non-exhaustive list of non-mutually exclusive cases aiming at the following purposes:

a) the identification of convergences and for confirmatory goals (triangulation),

b) the use of the results of one method for the description and interpretation of the results achieved through the other (complementarity),

c) the identification of contradictions to refine or even to reframe theory (initiation),

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[1] The map is available at the following link: https://methods.sagepub.com/methods-map.

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d) the use of the results of one method for the determination of the elements characterising the second (development),

e) the use of different methods to increase the level of detail and/or the breadth of the analysis (expansion) and,

f) the use of different methods to reveal the different aspects of a given phenomenon (diversity).

Figure 1 – The mixed-methods design matrix

Source: Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004)

Notes: qual=qualitative; quan=quantitative; +=concurrent use; →=sequential use; capital letters=dominant status; small letters= lower relevance

To maximize the potential benefits of mixed methods, suitable choices have to be made in the research design phase. In particular, they concern not only the selection of the type of technique employed (case study, survey, focus group, simulation, etc.) but also the weight assumed in the combination (qualitative dominant, equal status, quantitative dominant) (Johonson *et al.*, 2007) and the application order (concurrent or sequential). Consequently, those who opt for this type of methodological approach are called upon to construct a specific pathway to reduce complexity and facilitate the rearrangement of information. To systematize these choices, Figure 1 shows the mixed-methods design matrix presented in Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004).

However, although mixed methods have a large literature and their use is progressively increasing, there are areas where they are relatively nascent, as in the case of management studies (Harrison *et al.*, 2020), or not fully established, as in accounting (Grafton *et al.*, 2011). Concerning the latter, even if mixed methods are potentially relevant to different strands of research, they have only been used in some of them, like in management accounting studies (as they are more prone to qualitative

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methods). In this case, however, the degree of integration between the methods was sometimes low, as the qualitative methods served to complement contributions (Tucker and Hoque, 2017).

Community enterprises: peculiarities hindering analysis and gaps in the Italian case

Community enterprises are usually bottom-up collective entrepreneurial initiatives aiming to attain economic, social and environmental goals for the well-being of the community of reference (Johannisson, 1990; Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Somerville and McElwee, 2011). They usually grow in depleted contexts, namely in territories characterised by depopulation, low-income levels, lack of services and job opportunities, trying to counter and reverse these negative trends. For this reason, community enterprises are initiatives to be analysed carefully, not so much for the economic dimension they achieve, but for the regenerative capacity, they show in depleted contexts. In addition, if one considers that these enterprises also operate in urban areas (not necessarily marginalised areas), then their significance and the plurality of their implications become evident. As a consequence, several studies and reports have been published on this topic, but some gaps persist. For example, on the subject of entrepreneurship, very few studies have been conducted in recent years. Nevertheless, some meaningful pieces of evidence arose in the work of Buratti *et al.* (2022), which showed that these enterprises tend to have a humane entrepreneurial posture (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Parente *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, except for a few countries (where specific plans have been launched to promote and support this type of enterprise), there are not many analyses of the phenomenon on a national scale and almost no studies or comparisons on an international scale. Suffice it to say that even literature reviews are scarce, the last one was published about eight years ago (Pierre *et al.*, 2014). In light of this, the following application case is derived from an ongoing research project aiming to represent Italian community enterprises through the adoption of mixed methods.

In the Italian case, community enterprises mainly take the form of cooperatives (Buratti *et al.*, 2022) and in the various regions of Italy there are regulations governing community cooperatives (CCs), but at the national level, there is no law recognising them as a type of enterprise. Therefore, it can be argued that the label community (or cooperative) enterprise may represent status and not a recognised type of company (Alleanza delle Cooperative Italiane, 2018). This is relevant from the researcher point of view, because CCs are elusive organisations as they are difficult to detect in databases as community enterprises. Hence the unavailability of a national picture of the phenomenon and the need to design an analysis to face this gap. In the light of these difficulties, research based on a mixed-methods approach proved to be a cost-effective option. Therefore, the paper describes the application case both to show how a mixed-methods approach can address certain research complexities and to promote this method in fields where it has been little used.

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Methodology

To analyze mixed methods literature trends in the investigated domains, the work collected data from the Scopus database. To this end, following the Scopus classification, the analysis selected the subject areas of business, management and accounting (BMA) and, as a term of comparison, social sciences. Concerning these areas, the paper considered English-language articles published between 2002 and 2021 that had the term mixed methods in their title or keywords. To identify these documents, the search was carried out at the end of January 2022 through specific queries on the Scopus database. Then, to highlight (as far as possible) the most frequent subfields and the quality of journals that published the selected articles, the analysis gathered data from the Scimago database. In particular, based on the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) and journal categorization, the paper shows the quartile[1] in which the publication outlet was ranked in 2020 and the thematic categories of the BMA area with which the journal is linked.

The application case concerns the Italian context where, since it is difficult to identify CCs, there is no up-to-date national picture of this type of enterprise. Following Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), the application case adopted a fixed mixed-methods approach, as this choice was made at the research design stage and not afterwards. In addition, considering the mixed methods design matrix (Figure 1), the adopted approach can be placed in quadrant 2, as it places qualitative and quantitative methods on the same level and applies them sequentially. The order of application is in line with Morse's suggestion (1991) for research on topics that cannot be considered mature and/or where there is a need for more knowledge.

Mixed methods research in Business, Management and Accounting area

Figure 2 clearly shows how mixed methods have found wider application in the area of social sciences than in the area of BMA. Indeed, although in the early 2000s the number of articles was similar, already by the end of the first decade one can see an increased use of mixed methods in the social sciences. For example, in 2010, the number of mixed methods articles published in the area of BMA was only 16 (39 considering keywords), whereas almost 90 (119 considering keywords) articles were published in the area of social sciences. This gap has gradually widened to the present day, so that mixed methods articles in the area of BMA number less than 140, whereas those published in the area of social sciences exceed the threshold of 810.

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[1] The set of journals have been ranked according to their SJR and divided into four equal groups or quartiles.
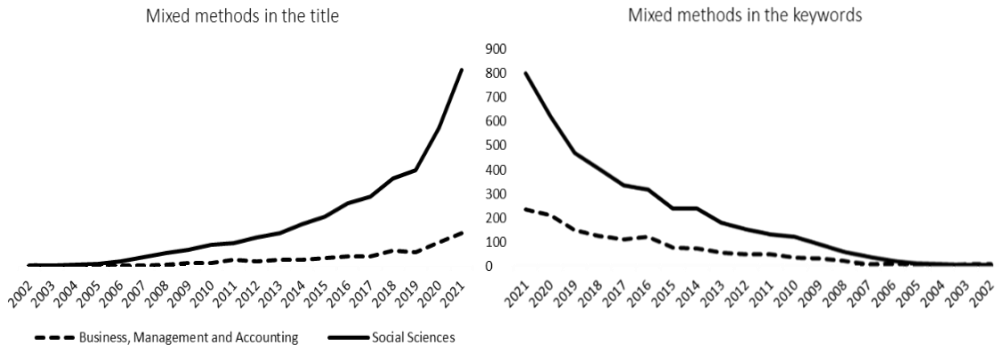
Figure 2 – Literature trends of mixed methods research in the selected areas

Source: direct elaboration on Scopus data

However, if one considers the articles that have the term mixed methods in their keywords, one notices that the gap is narrowing - although not by much - and this might suggest that researchers in the area of BMA are starting to use this methodology more.

BMA scholars have published their research in different journals. However, the journals that have given the most space to the mixed methods articles are (see Table 1): *International Journal of Production Research*, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *International Journal of Production Economics*, *Evaluation and Program Planning* and, *Journal of the Operational Research Society*.

Overall, the journals publishing mixed methods articles are of a good standard, as they are in the top two quartiles in most cases (see Table 1). In addition, to provide an overview of the research strands to which the selected articles can be linked, the thematic categorisation of the BMA area was considered. In this respect, there are few journals related to accounting; whereas journals related to the categories strategy and management, business and international management and marketing show a greater interest in mixed methods research. Again, a certain degree of openness emerges for the category related to management information systems.

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Table 1 – Main journals publishing mixed methods articles

	Journal ranking	N° of articles	Category in the subject area of Business, Management and Accounting	Ranking in the category according to SJR (quartile; 2020)
Mixed methods in the title	01) Evaluation and Program Planning	34	Business and International Management Strategy and Management	Q2 Q2
	02) Electronic Journal Of Business Research Methods	19	Business and International Management Strategy and Management	Q4 Q4
	03) Journal of Business Research	15	Marketing	Q1
	04) Tourism Management	12	Strategy and Management Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management	Q1 Q1
	05) Journal of Cleaner Production	10	Strategy and Management	Q1
	06) American Journal of Evaluation	6	Business and International Management	Q1
	07) Journal of Health Organization and Management	6	Business, Management and Accounting (miscellaneous)	Q2
	08) Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	6	Marketing	Q1
	09) Journal of Travel Research	6	Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management	Q1
	10) MIS Quarterly Management Information Systems	6	Management Information Systems	Q1
Mixed methods in the	01) International Journal of Production Research	126	Strategy and Management	Q1
	02) Journal of Cleaner Production	56	Strategy and Management	Q1
	03) International Journal of Production Economics	48	Business, Management and Accounting (miscellaneous)	Q1
	04) Evaluation and Program Planning	37	Business and International Management Strategy and Management	Q2 Q2

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05) Journal of the Operational Research Society	34	Management Information Systems Marketing Strategy and Management	Q1 Q2 Q2
06) Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods	25	Business and International Management Strategy and Management	Q4 Q4
07) International Transactions In Operational Research	22	Business and International Management Management of Technology and Innovation Strategy and Management	Q1 Q1 Q1
08) Journal of Advanced Transportation	22	Strategy and Management	Q2
09) Journal of Business Research	20	Marketing	Q1
10) Transportation Research Part E: Logistics And Transportation Review	17	Business and International Management	Q1

Source: direct elaboration on SCImago data

The selected articles deal with a variety of topics, among the most frequent ones are analyses concerning social interaction, innovation and environment, while papers concerning corporate social responsibility, intellectual capital, entrepreneurship or other meaningful topics are fewer in number. Given this, to promote the adoption of mixed methods in studies concerning entrepreneurship, this paper describes a pilot research project on community entrepreneurship in Italy.

Application case

The pilot research project was designed to answer several questions such as a) when did CCs originate and in which areas of Italy did they become more widespread? b) What are their distinctive features? c) What is the type of entrepreneurship that characterises them? d) What activities do they carry out? e) On average, how much wealth do they produce and how many employees do they have? Due to space constraints, it is not possible to present the results of an extensive research project in this contribution. Therefore, considering the aim of the work, the paper merely illustrates the adopted approach to answer the above-mentioned questions effectively and efficiently.

The research on Italian CCs started with the conduct of seven case studies selected considering different reference contexts (rural/urban) and life cycle phases. In particular, through face-to-face interviews, information was collected on different aspects, including the birth of the CC, its mission, strategy and business model,

governance, etc. This qualitative analysis allowed the researchers to detect the basic characteristics and typically distinctive features of an Italian CC. This represented a key result because it allowed the researchers to recognise just under 250 CCs in the Italian Register of Cooperatives, which gathers all active Italian cooperatives (at the beginning of 2022 their number will exceed 110,000). Subsequently, the email contacts of these CCs were searched and this task triggered the design and administration of a questionnaire. The second part of the research made it possible to depict the phenomenon on a national scale, both by using archival analysis on economic data of the sample, and by delving into various topics through the questionnaire, which included not only the themes of the face-to-face interviews but also new questions concerning, for example, the factors that triggered the entrepreneurial initiative, the obstacles met (for example, in terms of education and training), the relationships with the context of reference, the ways to communicate the results to the stakeholders, etc. The results obtained are more than satisfactory since, considering that a valid email contact was not available for all CCs, the number of responses exceeded 24% of the sample. Thanks to all the data collected, the research project is now completing the analysis of CCs in Italy and preparing the related report.

Discussion

The literature trends revealed some interesting elements, e.g. focusing on the articles in which mixed methods are considered as characterizing elements (namely those with the term in the title). In this perspective, if one compares the number of articles in the selected subject areas to the respective total production of English-language articles in the Scopus database, it emerges that:

A. mixed methods have a limited impact since in the years 2002, 2010 and 2021 they usually did not exceed 0.3% of the total scientific production;

B. considering these years, researchers from the social sciences area have contributed more to mixed methods research than BMA researchers. Indeed, although starting from a lower percentage of articles (in 2002, in the social sciences area it was 0.007% of the total scientific production, whereas in the BMA area it was 0.023%), in 2021 the percentage has increased since in the social sciences area it is close to 0.3% and in the BMA area, it is just over 0.166%.

As for the BMA area, it is clear from Table 1 that the contribution of accounting research to the diffusion of mixed methods is limited and this is in line with what Grafton *et al*. (2011) noted.

This might be influenced by branches of accounting, such as financial accounting, which are less predisposed to mixed methods, as they are traditionally linked to quantitative methods. In general, however, as Cameron (2011) pointed out, several barriers might have influenced the trends shown, those being philosophical (deriving

from incompatibility of paradigms), cultural (prejudices against mixed methods), psychological (more confidence in a specific methodological approach), practical (preference towards routines and methods already known). Some of these obstacles are also increasing in importance because of the pressure on researchers to be productive (publish or perish). This is not good. Indeed, as Marchi (2021) noted, hyper-specialisation and the tendency to avoid certain types of research (probably the least profitable) do not benefit the growth of the scholar.

To promote mixed methods, it might be useful if widely recognized journals showed more interest in mixed methods articles. Indeed, although the ranking of the journals in the various categories of the BMA area is appreciable (Table 1), it is evident that this type of research has not been widely published in elite or distinguished BMA journals (such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *The Accounting Review*, *Accounting Horizons*, *Contemporary Accounting Research*), nor in leading practitioner journals (such as *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*).

As for the application case, it was useful for the author to describe this pilot experience, not only to promote mixed methods in the domains where they were least used, but also to highlight the chance of achieving multiple purposes with this methodological approach. Indeed, since mixed methods can have non-mutually exclusive purposes, the presented experimental design is a good example of the way mixed methods can achieve different purposes. In particular, the research project described achieves the aims of:

- development, since the interviews supported the design and administration of the questionnaire;

- expansion, since the response rate and the diversity of the analyzed topics contribute to expanding the knowledge of CCs in Italy, and

- complementarity, as the results of qualitative and quantitative analyses and secondary data (archival analysis on economic data) were combined to produce a realistic picture of Italian CCs.

Conclusions

The paper presented the development of the literature on mixed methods in the last twenty years in social sciences and BMA areas. The analysis showed that in the latter area this methodological approach is not very widespread and proposed some determinants. However, these answers are not definitive, since it would be necessary to carry out a structured literature review. This represents a limitation of the work, but it should also be noticed that a structured literature review is a complex task, even if limited to a specific domain such as accounting, as noted by Grafton *et al.* (2011). This is certainly a future issue, but along with this, it is hoped that there will be an increase in the adoption of mixed methods in different research fields such as in

analyses concerning social enterprises, corporate social responsibility, intellectual capital, integrated reporting, business model or entrepreneurship. To promote research in this direction, the design of a research project adopting mixed methods was briefly presented. By effectively integrating the methods adopted, it benefited from the strengths of each method and filled a gap in the current state of knowledge of community entrepreneurship in Italy.

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The Elderly and Leisure Activities: A Case Study

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Abstract

Studies on the ageing population are increasing in number, aiming to find strategies that allow this life cycle's phase to be lived with quality. The practice and development of leisure activities is an important factor of life's quality, since it contributes to a better state of mind and, in the case of older people, it may be a strategy to mitigate the effects resulting from the ageing process. Despite, and according to some studies, the elderly do not give leisure a great importance in their lives, often due to their life history, which did not provide them with good conditions and opportunities to develop these activities. Even for elderly people who have no leisure time habits, the fact is that, when they reach a certain age, these activities can become a structural element of their daily lives. This study aims to ascertain what type – and with which intensity – of leisure and free-time occupation activities the elderly perform, as well as the impact of the pandemic on the performance of these activities. This descriptive research uses a questionnaire as a data collection tool, divided into four parts: the first part involves a set of sociodemographic data; the second part, based on the "Leisure Activities Index" by Rosa Martins (2016), includes a set of nine questions; the third part integrates a question to understand the elderly's perception of their leisure time use; and, finally, the fourth part includes a set of questions on the impact of the pandemic on the performance of leisure activities. The non-probability convenience sample included a set of 33 older people attending a Day Care Centre and a Home Support Service in central Portugal.

Keywords: Ageing; leisure and free time; pandemic and free time; healthy ageing
Introduction

Introduction

Currently, when we speak of quality of life in ageing, we are not only referring to the state of physical and psychological health, but also to social involvement and to the capacity and opportunity to develop activities to continue the process of personal cherishing.

The practice and development of leisure activities are of crucial importance, and, in the elderly's case, it may mitigate the effects arising from the aging process. Despite, studies show that, recurrently, the elderly do not attribute great importance to leisure.

Such feeling may arise from the lack of conditions, opportunities or the inexistence of leisure habits and practices throughout their lives. It needs to be held in mind that today's elderly people belong to a generation in which work was considered the core of their lives, and leisure was often seen as an unnecessary time off and it could even be despised. However, and in opposite senses, it was this generation that experienced the invention of free time and retirement. It is, therefore, a generation of transition, which often only experiences leisure and free time when it reaches an advanced age.

For Chen and Fu (2008, p. 872), leisure activities may have several positive effects, since "participating in social activities significantly increases life satisfaction, psychological well-being, happiness and physical functions" and, simultaneously "decreases mortality". Thus, we consider it essential to identify the type and intensity of leisure activities practiced by the elderly.

In this study, we focus on play and leisure activities as an important dimension for the well-being of individuals at later ages. These activities are moments in life where one can enjoy pleasure, tranquility and rest (Diaz, 2009). Professionals working in this area should be able to help older people use leisure time to contribute to their quality of life, supporting them to become more active and providing them with more potential for personal growth and empowerment.

Leisure and free-time activities in ageing

Many variables/factors influence older people's perception of quality of life. According to the research of Wilson and Cleary (1995), the authors Halvorsrud et al. (2010) identified a set of quality of life's dimensions regarded as important by older people: having energy, being happy, having senses that work well, and having no pain. In the same year, the studies of Molzahn et al. (2010) obtained similar results regarding the most valued dimensions by the elderly.

Nevertheless, it is known that the influence – and even the importance – given to each of these factors vary from one elderly person to another, and according to their social, cultural and, among others, economic context. Despite this variability and individuality, studies show that preventive measures and leisure activities developed

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during the aging process have a positive impact on aging, namely on improving the quality of life (Silva, 2009; Santos, 2003).

In his 2007 book, "Animação de idosos", Luís Jacob analysed a series of studies on the elderly's quality of life and concluded that it depends on a set of factors, among which he highlighted: autonomy to perform daily activities, the presence of regular family and/or social relationships, the existence of economic resources to meet their needs and, finally, the capacity to develop playful and recreational activities.

There are several forms of leisure, and according to Lee and Bhargava (2004), they can be grouped into passive, active and social activities. In turn, Dumazedier (2001) classifies them into physical, artistic, social, intellectual and practical.

João Teixeira Lopes (2000), in a study on urban cultural practices, presents a categorisation of leisure and free time activities, grouping them into: i) domestic space activities, where it integrates domestic and creative practices, domestic expressive practices, practices of interaction and sociability, domestic receptive practices, practices of consumption and/or fruition and, domestic practices of abandonment; ii) activities in the public space, where it incorporates public expressive practices, public participatory practices; iii) activities in the semi-public space, in which are found the semi-public expressive practices, the semi-public receptive practices and the semi-public routine practices; iv) activities in the associative space (organized semi-public), in which the author considers to belong the creative associative practices and the expressive associative practices; and v) the activities in the space of cultivated/overlegitimised culture, in which we find erudite creative practices and the receptive and informative practices of cultivated publics.

In a study carried out by Maria João Valente Rosa (1999) on Pensioners and Leisure Time in Portugal, the author found that 53% of the pensioners preferred to spend their leisure time at home, 17% outside home and 30% inside and outside home. In the case of at home activities, it is the women who assume, in this study, greater expressiveness. Concerning the leisure activities practiced, it was found that the majority of both men and women chose "watching television". Men replied that they also go to the café or tavern, listen to the radio, read newspapers or magazines, frequent plazas or gardens, and, with less expressiveness, they play cards and other games, go to religious events, to shopping centres or markets. Women, in addition to watching television, dedicate themselves to religious activities, listen to the radio, go to the market or to shopping centres and, with less expressiveness, they answered that they read newspapers or magazines.

Regardless of the type of leisure activity, it is generally agreed that its practice is "an important ingredient in the 'recipe' for achieving a successful old age. Initially formalised as 'Activity Theory', this perspective holds that high participation in an active lifestyle is an antidote to the loss of 'productive' roles that results from the transition to retirement" (Silverstein and Parker, 2002, p. 528).

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Leisure activities have numerous advantages for older people, namely in preventing and combating problems in the elderly, since these activities can compensate for deficits in other areas of their lives (Silverstein and Parker, 2002) and mitigate the impact of social, functional and cognitive declines. In addition, it combats sedentary lifestyle, which, as Dogra and Stathokostas (2012) warn us, may compromise the health of adults.

Methodology

This study aims to ascertain what type – and with which intensity – of leisure and free-time occupation activities the elderly perform, as well as the impact of the pandemic on the performance of these activities. It will also try to understand the possible relationship between the development of free time activities, social responses and gender.

This descriptive research uses a questionnaire as a data collection tool, divided into four parts: the first part involves a set of sociodemographic data; the second part, based on the "Leisure Activities Index" by Rosa Martins (2016), includes a set of nine questions, ranging from very little, a little, neither a lot nor little, quite a lot, and a lot; the third part integrates a question to understand the elderly's perception of the use of their free time; and, finally, the fourth part aggregates a set of three questions on the impact of the pandemic on the performance of free time and leisure activities.

Data was processed through a simple descriptive statistical analysis.

The non-probability convenience sample included a set of 33 older people, 19 of whom receive Home Support Services (HSS) and 14 attend a Day Care Centre (DCC), in a rural area of central Portugal. The requirement was to attend the above-mentioned social services, to be able to collaborate in the interview and to accept and sign the informed consent.

Presentation of results

The questionnaire was applied to 33 elderly people from a rural area in central Portugal, 19 of whom were using HSS and 14 attended the DCC.

The average age was 79, being that the youngest subject was 52 and the oldest 93, both from the HSS. The average age at the HSS was 77 and the average age at the DCC was 81.

The sample was composed of 19 women and 14 men. Although these data cannot be interpreted in a generalist way, our sample is in line with the national data: with a feminization of old age, explained by the differences in the physical and metabolic decline between men and women, which leads to a greater longevity of women, which has also been related to other risk factors, such as occupational accidents, smoking and alcohol use, as well as differences in the way of facing diseases and disabilities (Mazo; Lopes; Benedetti, 2009).

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With regard to gender by social response, we found that, in our sample, the DCC is mainly composed of women (10 out of 14 users, 71.4%), while in the HSS there is a balance with 9 women and 10 men. Although no data were collected to justify this difference, we can assume, based on the existing literature, that men have greater difficulty in participating in group activities (Ferreira, Izzo, Jacob, 2007).

In what concerns academic qualifications, our sample reflects the reality of the country, since compulsory education did not exist when they were young and the opportunity to attend school for several years was scarce, especially in rural areas, as is the case of the geographical context of our respondents. Thus, in the sample, we have as maximum school qualifications the 2nd cycle (corresponding to 6 years of schooling) with 3 elderly (2 female and 1 male); followed by the 1st cycle (of 4 years of schooling) with 13 elderly, 7 women and 6 men; the 1st cycle incomplete with 10 elderly, equally distributed between men and women; and, finally, 7 elderly (5 women and 2 men) never attended school and can neither read nor write.

The profession they exercised is related to the qualifications of the sample and to the rural context where they live. Thus, 11 elderly, of which 6 women and 5 men were farmers, 5 elderly (3 women and 2 men) were factory workers, 5 elderly worked in the hotel industry, of which 3 women and 2 men. These were followed by construction workers (3 men), domestic workers (3 women) and, with 1 elderly person each, office workers (1 man), cellar workers (1 woman), drivers (1 man), medical auxiliaries (1 woman), cleaners (1 woman) and fishmongers (1 woman).

Reading is an activity that, in our sample, is little valued, with 22 older people (66.8%) who read little, very little or not at all. Only 4 older people (12.1%) consider that they read quite a lot or a lot. These data are understandable if we take into account the low level of education of our sample.

When comparing the two social responses, we found similar reading habits, although with less intensity among the older people in the DCC. Of the 19 elderly people in the HSS, 57.9% (11) read little, very little or not at all, and only 10.5% (2) read a lot. In the DCC, 78.5% of the senior citizens (11) read little, very little or not at all and 2 elderly people read quite a lot or a lot (7.1%, 1 in each).

In the analysis of reading habits by gender, it was possible to verify that women are the ones who read the most, with 3 women stating that they read a lot quite a lot and only 1 man considering the same (15.8% of women against 7.1% of men). In contrast, women are also the ones who admit that they read little, very little or not at all, with 15 women against 7 men (78.9% of women and 50% of men).

Graph 1 - Reading Habits - HSS/DCC

Graph 2 - Reading Habits/Gender
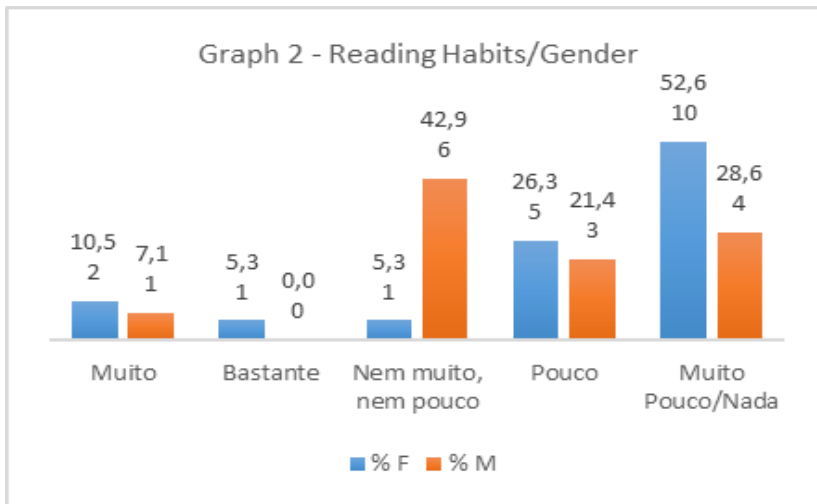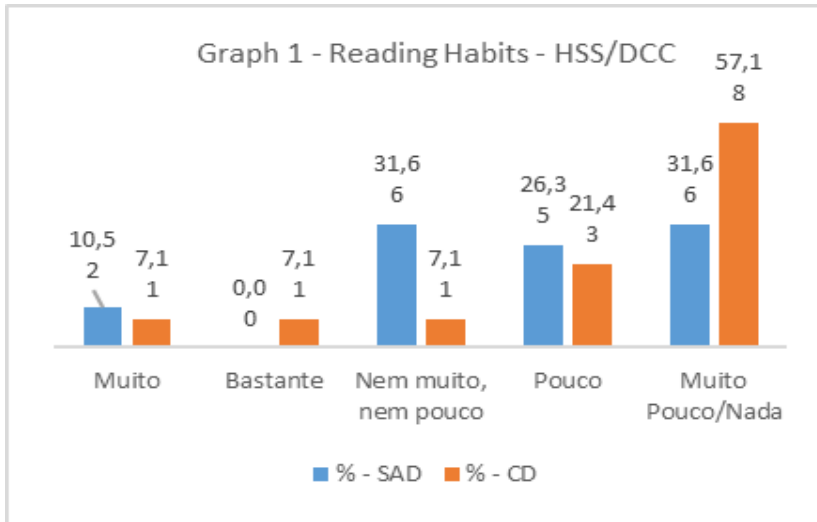
The habit of watching television is the most expressive in our sample, with 54.5% (18) of the elderly considering that they watch a lot (15, 45.4%) and quite a lot (3, 9.1%) of TV. On the other hand, 15.2%, corresponding to 5 older adults, consider that they watch neither a lot nor a little TV and 10 older adults (30.3%) consider that they watch little, very little or no TV (7, 21.2% little and 3, 9.1% very little or not at all). These data are in line with national studies, namely the study by Rosa (1999), which concluded that, in Portugal, the most expressive leisure and free time activity was "watching television".

The elderly who are at home and receiving HSS are the ones who watch TV the most. So, when compared, in the HSS 12 seniors (63.1% of the 19) consider that they watch a lot and quite a lot of TV whilst at DCC we found 6 elderly people (42.8% of the 14). At the other end of the spectrum, there are 4 seniors (21%) in the HSS who watch

little, very little or no TV, compared to 6 seniors (42.8%) in the DCC. This situation may be related to the time that these elderly people spend inside their homes, often isolated, having the TV as their daily companion.

In the TV watching habit, we found many similarities between genders. Comparing men and women, the tendency in the sample to watch a lot and quite a lot of TV is very similar.

Graph 3 - TV Watching Habit - HSS/CCD

Graph 4 - TV Watching Habit/Gender

Concerning the habit of listening to music, we found that it is not a highly valued activity. Only 9 older people (27.3%) listen to a lot of music, 5 older people (15.1%)

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listen neither a lot nor a little, and the majority, 19 older people, 57.6%, listen to little, very little or no music at all. When comparing the two social responses, we found that it is the older people with HSS who listen to music the most.

In our sample, men are the ones who usually listen more to music. Of the 19 women questioned only 5 (26.4%) listen to a lot of music and the majority, 11 (57.9%) rarely or never listen. This situation refers to the fact that men listen to radio more and, consequently, have the possibility of listening to music during the broadcasts, between news and other programmes.

Graph 5 - Habit of Listening to Music - HSS/DCC

Graph 6 - Habit of Listening to Music/Gender

Concerning the habit of listening to music, we found that it is not a highly valued activity. Only 9 older people (27.3%) listen to a lot of music, 5 older people (15.1%) listen neither a lot nor a little, and the majority, 19 older people, 57.6%, listen to little, very little or no music at all. When comparing the two social responses, we found that it is the older people with HSS who listen to music the most.

In our sample, men are the ones who usually listen more to music. Of the 19 women questioned only 5 (26.4%) listen to a lot of music and the majority, 11 (57.9%) rarely or never listen. This situation refers to the fact that men listen to radio more and, consequently, have the possibility of listening to music during the broadcasts, between news and other programmes.
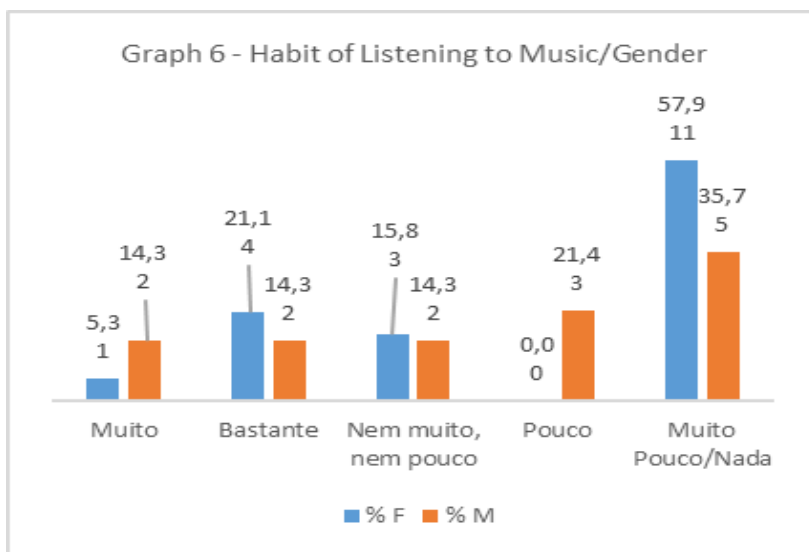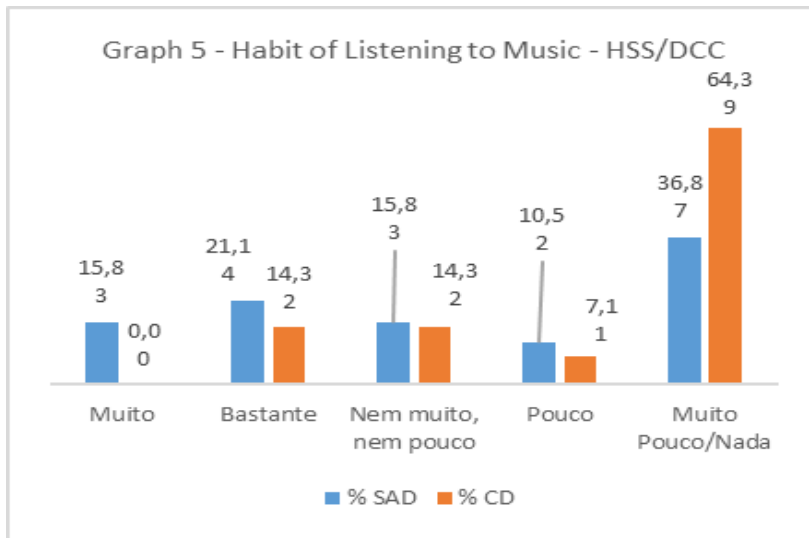
When questioned about whether they gardened, most of the elderly, 24 (72.7%), did little, very little or none, and only 5 (15.2%) did quite a lot or a lot. Although this is a population which is used to "working the land", their age may be a factor for this activity to have so little expressiveness.

Once again, the type of response that the elderly attend does not influence the habit of gardening, since we have similar numbers of elderly people who usually do it – 3 in HSS and 2 in DCC – and those who don't – 15 in HSS and 9 in DCC.

This activity is more carried out by men: 21.4% (3) of men do it a lot or quite a lot, against 10.6% (2) of women. The number of those who rarely or never do it is similar between genders, with 73.7% of women (14) and 71.4% of men (10).

Graph 9 - Gardening Habit - HSS/DCC

Graph 10 - Gardening Habit/Gender
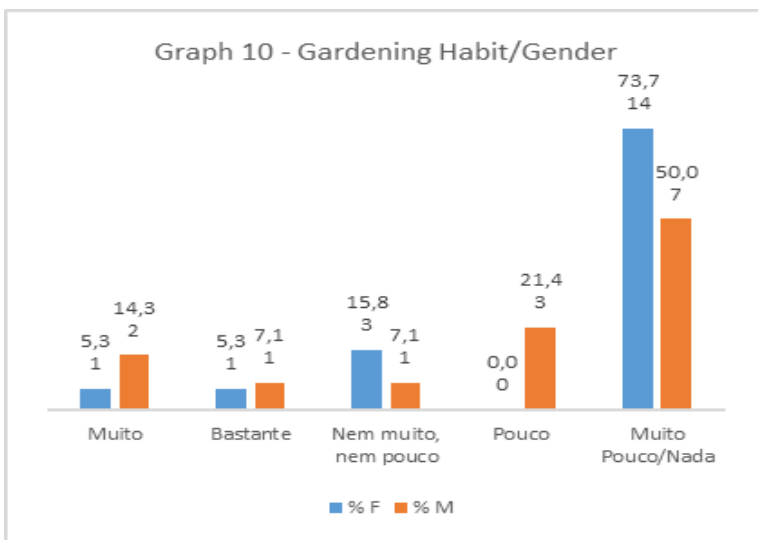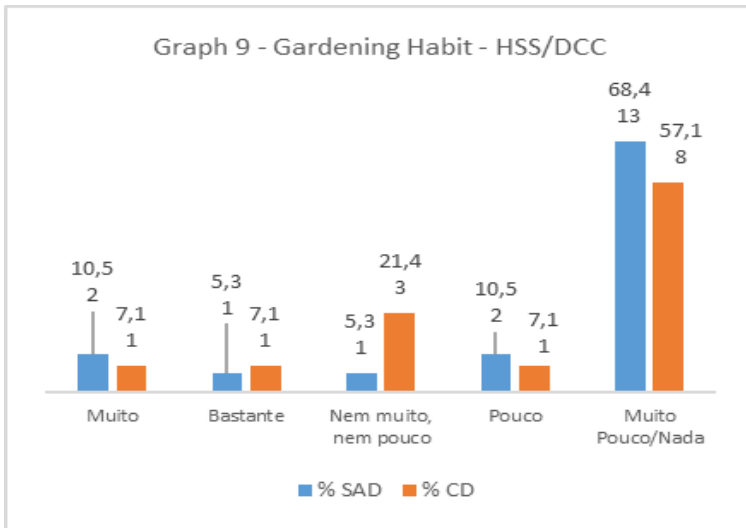
Horticulture is developed regularly by 12.1% (4) of the elderly and 72.7% (24) do it rarely or never. When distinguishing between the social responses, it is not possible to find significant differences, since the number of older people in HSS (3) and DCC (1) who engage in horticulture, as well as those who do not, is similar.

The difference in the practice of vegetable-growing by gender is not significant in the sample. With a regular practice we found 2 women (10.6%) and 1 man (7.7%) and with inexistence or infrequent practice we found 15 women (78.9%) and 9 men (96.2%).

Graph 11 - Horticulture Habit - HSS/DCC

Graph 12 - Horticulture Habit/Gender

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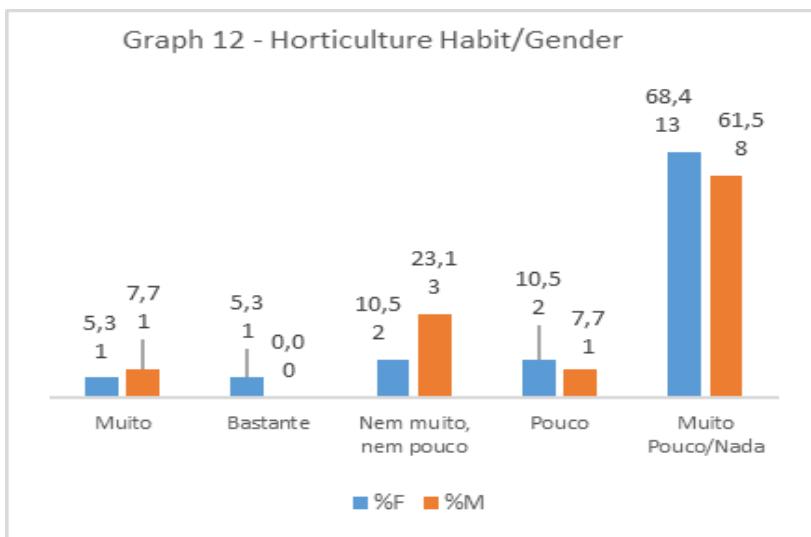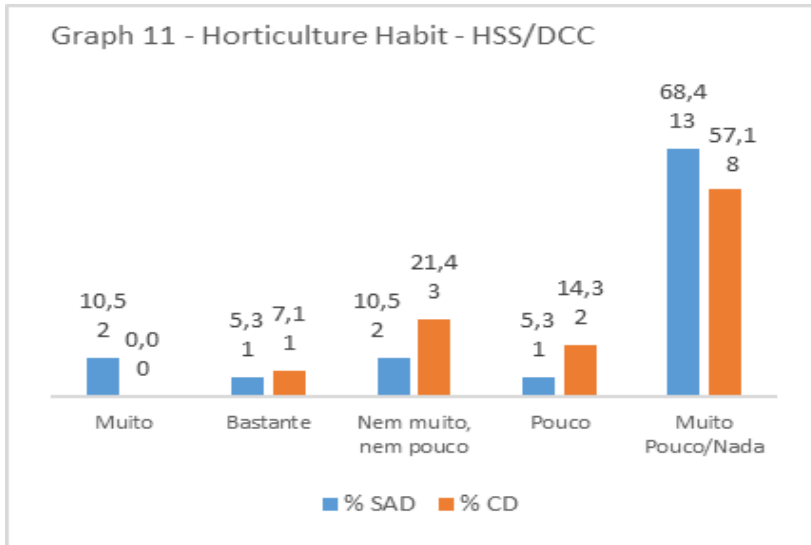
Although knitting is a practice very much associated with women, it is not very well represented in our sample. We found that it is an activity that no one does frequently and only 1 woman (3%) considers that she knits neither very much nor little. The overwhelming majority of 32 older people (97%) rarely or never knit. As can be seen in the following graph, the difference between the social responses is not significant.

Graph 13 - Knitting Habit - HSS/DCC

Graph 14 - Knitting Habit/Gender
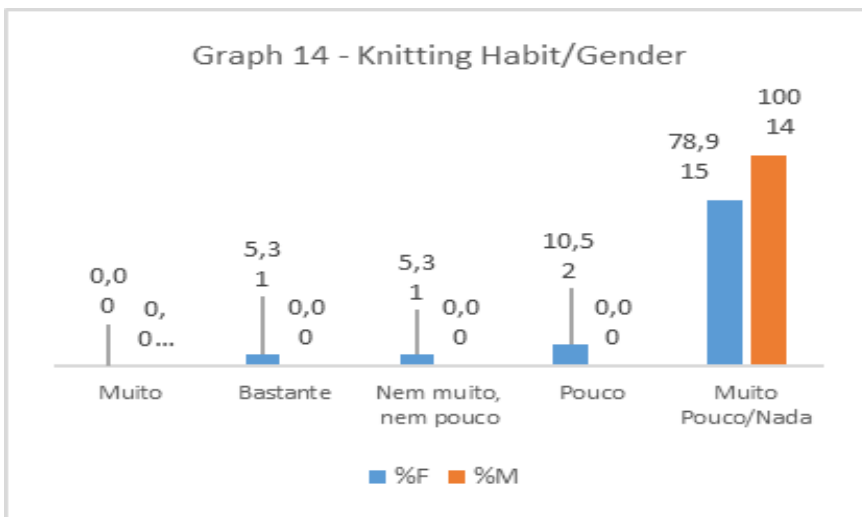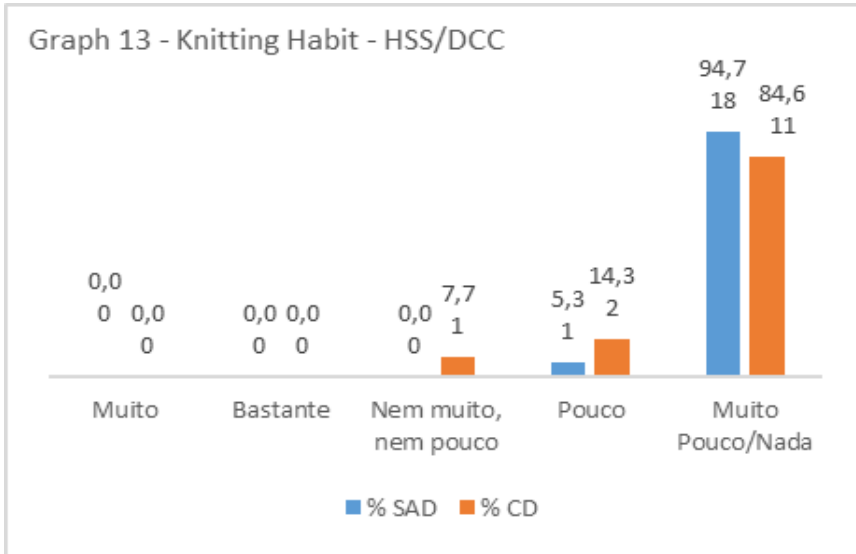
Playing cards is also an infrequent or not frequent practice (32 elderly people, 97%). Only one elderly person (3%), from HSS, considers that he plays neither a lot nor a little. All the women rarely or never play cards.

Graph 15 - Habit of playing cards - HSS/DCC

	Muito	Bastante	Nem muito, nem pouco	Pouco	Muito Pouco/Nada
%	0,0 / 0	0,0 / 0	5,3 / 1	5,3 / 1	89,5 / 17
%	0,0 / 0	0,0 / 0	0,0 / 0	7,1 / 1	92,9 / 13

Graph 16 - Habit of playing cards/Gender

	Muito	Bastante	Nem muito, nem pouco	Pouco	Muito Pouco/Nada
%F	0,0 / 0	0,0 / 0	0,0 / 0	0,0 / 0	100 / 19
%M	0,0 / 0	0,0 / 0	7,1 / 1	14,3 / 2	78,6 / 11
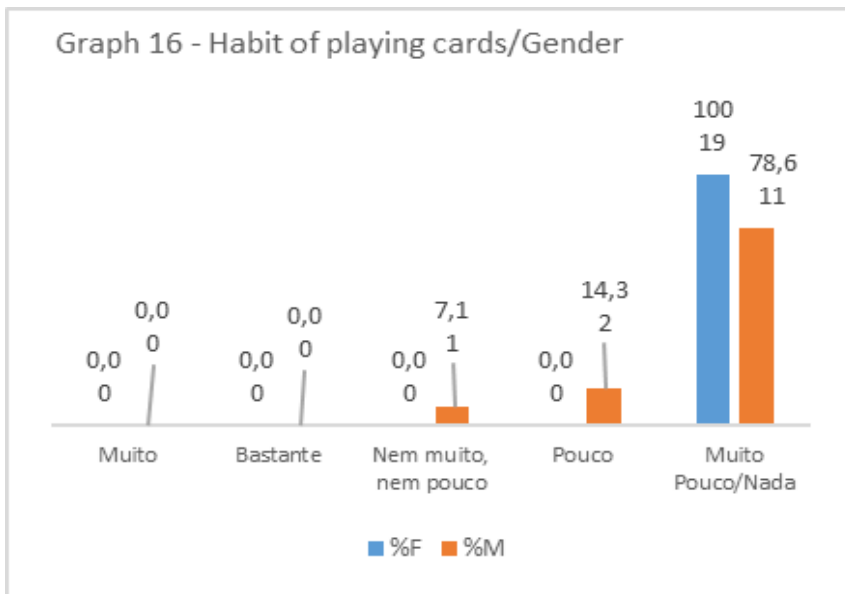
The habit of talking is the second most pointed out in the study: 6 elderly people (18.2%) consider that they talk a lot and 6 (18.2%) admit that they talk neither a lot nor a little. Of the remainder, 16 (48.5%) consider that they talk a little and 5 (15.1%) consider that they talk very little or not at all. Contrary to what one would expect, none of the seniors from the DCC consider that they speak a lot, and only 2 seniors consider that they speak quite a lot. Most of the seniors who consider that they speak very little or not at all frequented the DCC.

Women are the ones who talk the most, being the ones who consider, in 5 of the cases, that they talk a lot, against only 1 man.

Graph 17 - Talking Habits - HSS/DCC

Graph 18 - Talking Habits/Gender
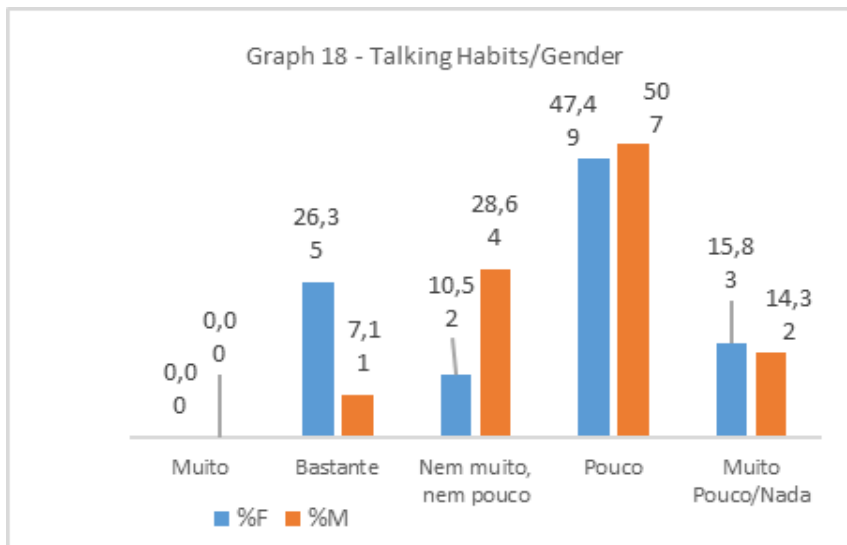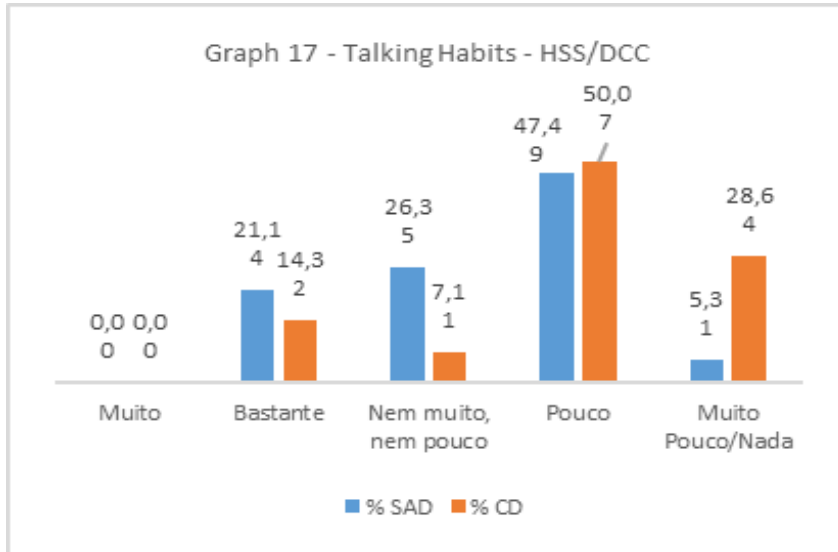
When questioned whether they felt that they used their free time for leisure activities and activities that give them pleasure, we found that most of the elderly (17, 51.5%) are satisfied, 5 older people (15.2%) consider that they are more or less satisfied and 11 (33.3%) consider that they do not make the best use of this time.

There is no significant difference in the answers given to this question by men and women, nor by social response.

Graph 19 - Free time - HSS/DCC

Graph 20 - HSS/DCC Free time/Gender
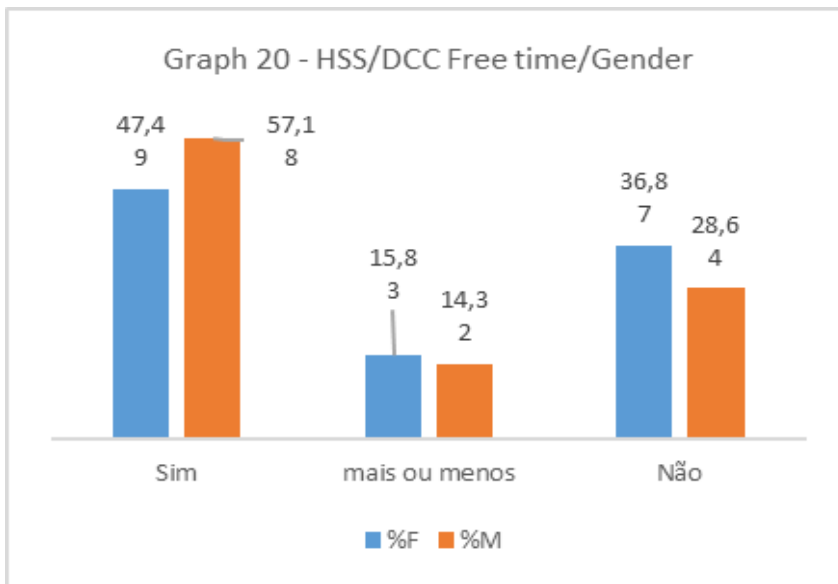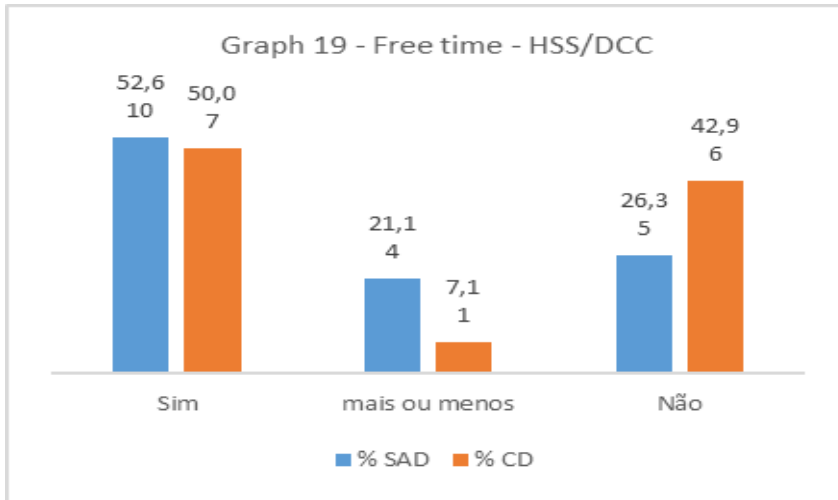
In the third part of the questionnaire we tried to understand the impact of the pandemic on leisure and free time. When questioned about whether the pandemic had changed the way in which they spent their leisure time, it was possible to verify that, for the majority, there was no change – 23 older adults (69.7%), 13 from HSS and 10 from DCC. Only 10 elderly people (30.3%) consider that their leisure time was affected by the pandemic, 6 from the HSS and 4 from the DCC.

These data were contrary to expectations, since, during the pandemic, the elderly in DCC had a long period when they could not attend the centre, so it would be expected that all considered that the pandemic changed the leisure activities they performed. However, only 5 reported this fact. This may be related to the lack of memory of the

activities they carried out before the pandemic or to the fact that, at that time, they were not involved in the activities that were developed in the DCC, where they could have watching TV as a priority action.

Of the 10 elderly who consider that there have been changes, we found that the activities that they no longer do are: going to the Day Care Centre (3 men from the DCC), going to the Senior University (1 woman from the HSS), going to the swimming pool (1 woman from the HSS), playing games (1 man from the HSS), going to church (1 man from the HSS), fishing (1 man from the HSS), going to the gym (1 man from the DCC) and socializing (1 woman from the DCC).

When questioned whether they started doing any new activity in the pandemic, only 2 women from DCC replied having started the activity of cutting and sewing and 1 woman from HSS started going to the library. The remaining 30 elderly people, 90.9%, did not start any activity. This shows that this is a population with few leisure habits and/or leisure opportunities.

Conclusions

The data presented allow us to understand that the elderly in the sample do not have leisure habits. The most expressive activity was "watching television", which is the way they occupy their free time. We highlight that this activity is more expressive among the elderly in HSS and is equally distributed between men and women. The second most representative activity is "talking", although the numbers are low for those who do it very regularly. Here, and contrary to what one might assume, it is the older people in HSS who talk the most. Taking into account that these elderly people remain at home, we supposed that they could have a greater sense of isolation when compared with the elderly people who attend the DCC, but this was not the case. Women are the ones who most value the act of talking.

The remaining activities presented show a low or even zero adherence by the elderly. The least developed are "knitting" and "playing cards", where almost all elderly rarely or never do it. This is followed by gardening and horticulture, where 24 elderly people (72.7%) do not do this activity or do it rarely. With a low level of practice, we also found "reading" and "listening to music"; of the few older people who developed these activities, the majority were from the HSS; and in the case of reading, women stood out, and in music, men.

Although our sample is integrated in the rural environment, with a life totally or partially linked to agriculture, the fact is that the number of older people who practice gardening and/or horticulture in their leisure time is residual. This situation may be related to the advanced age of the sample.

If we take into account Lee and Bhargava's (2004) division of leisure activities, we may conclude that most elderly develop a passive leisure activity. If the reference is the categorisation of Lopes (2000), we may verify that the majority of the sample

develops activities in domestic space, followed by activities in semi-public space – in which we find talking to acquaintances. Activities in public space, activities in associative space and activities in space of cultivated/overlegitimised culture were left out.

We cannot, however, separate leisure from the social context, since it is itself an expression of culture and depends on the lifestyle of each individual. We point out that the fact that the elderly present economic difficulties limits the possible participation in some leisure activities, since the reduction in income associated, in most cases, with a significant growth in health expenses, promotes the increase in dependence and limits life options.

Old age, most often associated with retirement and a substantial increase in free time, represents a break with professional life and, consequently, with social habits and practices. Thus, free and leisure time could be an excellent opportunity for the elderly to interrelate and develop practices they enjoy. Despite, in our sample it was clear that there is a reduced habit of developing leisure activities, and a satisfaction with their free time use – most of the sample is satisfied with the way they occupy their free time, both in men and women and in both social responses. It needs to be held in mind that today's elderly people belong to a generation in which work was considered the core of their lives, and leisure was often seen as an unnecessary time off and it could even be despised.

We point out in the results that the fact that the elderly were in DCC was not mirrored in leisure habits. Here, we may have as a limitation the fact that the elderly were questioned at the time of the pandemic and their answers were related to their immediate memory and not before. However, these same elderly, when questioned if the activities they performed in their leisure time had changed with the pandemic, considered that they had not. This situation makes us wonder if the responses developed in the DCC are those most appreciated by the elderly.

We highlight as limitations of this study the low number of older people surveyed, the fact that we used a predetermined set of activities – necessarily leaving out others – and, finally, the fact that the older people were surveyed during the pandemic period, which may have influenced the answers given.

Leisure and free time occupation may be considered as one of the components for a better quality of life in ageing and integrates various activities, which are willingly developed. Janke, Davey, and Kleiber (2006) consider that these activities influence the physical and psychological well-being of the elderly, since they promote active participation and the feeling of group belonging. In addition, the studies developed by Newall et al. (2013, p. 921) showed that leisure allows for the development of positive emotions and "will undo the negative effects of negative emotions", which may arise as a result of the changes at this stage of life. This perspective is also advocated by the studies of Santos et al. (2003) and Silverstein and Parker (2002) who concluded that

leisure and leisure activities help older people cope with negative life events/factors, namely loneliness and depression.

In this sense, this study demonstrated the urgent need to rethink the type of leisure activities proposed to the elderly and the need to find strategies to motivate and involve them in and for these activities. The classic model of gerontological care (based on the treatment of the consequences of ageing) is definitely exhausted given its limited nature in the way it views ageing. It is urgent to make the elderly active and participative players in a process of healthy and quality ageing.

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Recent Opportunities for Increasing Georgian Wine Export - Incentives or Obstacles to Improving Wine Quality

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Abstract

Along with the internationally recognized image of Georgian wine and the increase of wine exports, special attention is paid to maintaining and improving the quality of Georgian wine. Taking into account the requirements of the local and international wine markets and, consequently, promoting the development of a competitive market remains a challenge for Georgian law. The creation of favorable conditions for the export of wine at the local and international level implies, first of all, the existence of legal regulations. The aim of the Law of Georgia on Vine and Wine and its accompanying subordinate normative acts is to develop a competitive wine market in Georgia and to protect the interests of consumers, to maintain and grow the international reputation of the Georgian viticulture and winemaking sector. The law was substantially amended in 2017 and the aim of the reform was to adapt to the challenges in the wine sector and bring it closer to international standards. At the same time, the export of Georgian wine to different countries is regulated by a different legal framework. Therefore, it is in our interest to analyze these different legal regulations, which have a direct impact on the opportunities for wine exports from Georgia - the incentive or obstacle to improving the quality of Georgian wine. EU regulations apply to both wines produced in the EU and imported to the EU market, as well as to Georgia, as a third country that has signed the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU. Russia, Ukraine and the USA are important export markets for Georgia. Georgia has different international legal relations with each of them and, accordingly, the legal requirements for wine exports to these countries are different. The paper examines the current state of the modern Georgian wine market in the context of domestic and international norms regulating wine exports. It is analyzed whether local legislation and international agreements regulating wine exports contribute to the growth of Georgian wine exports and the improvement of wine quality.

Keywords: wine, wine export, wine quality, wine market, wine legislation, trade agreements

Introduction

Georgia has recently entered into new types of trade agreements with the EU and partner and neighboring countries, which provide for the gradual reduction of tariff barriers and the shift from traditional tariffs and quotas to non-tariff measures (mainly to quality assurance measures). Non-tariff measures are central to trade agreements and are often seen as a particular challenge for developing countries. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Georgia, signed in 2014, is a prime example of this. It is a new generation trade agreement that combines liberalization and regulation. The agreement gives Georgia access to the EU market with 500 million users but, at the same time, provides for complex legal and institutional harmonization (Kasradze, Tea, 2018).

Unfortunately, even seven years after the implementation of the DCFTA, the removal of tariff barriers has not had the expected positive impact on exports, including wine exports. Non-tariff measures related to quality are considered to be one of the main impediments to the growth of exports to the EU.

Due to the fact that bilateral agreements with partner and neighboring countries place less emphasis on the quality of export products, the growth of Georgian wine exports in these countries is noticeable.

Research methodology

The paper is a desk study of the impact of new generation trade agreements on Georgian wine export. It is based on trade agreements, national legislation governing Georgian wine export, scientific papers by Georgian and foreign researchers, and studies and reports by various local and international organizations. The data was retrieved from the Internet, official websites and various scientific databases. Relevant conclusions were made based on the processing and analysis of the information obtained.

Literature review

Economists agree that trading barriers, such as tariffs and quotas, harm trade because they distort the price and hinder the distribution of resources so that they prevent the comparative advantage of the country. It is easy to calculate the exact effect of tariffs as they are transparent and predictable. According to the OECD, if tariffs were removed entirely, it would reduce trade costs and carry welfare gains equal to 1.37 percent of GDP per year in developing countries and 0.37 percent in developed countries (Love & Lattimore, 2009).

Unlike tariffs, non-tariff barriers, which are an essential part of new trade agreements, are not easily measurable. The impact of non-tariff SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary) and TBT (Technical Barriers to Trade) measures is mainly negative on the agriculture and food sector (Li & Beghin, 2012). Some scholars have suggested that compliance with standards increases short-term production costs (Maskus, Wilson, & Otsuki,

2000). Some argue the opposite, that standards have a positive effect on exports because they indicate quality protection. (MANGELSDORF, PORTUGAL-PEREZ, & WILSON, 2012).

The goal of policymakers when pursuing a non-tariff policy is not to influence foreign trade flows. Unlike tariffs and quotas, which are discriminatory measures that lead to inefficient allocation of resources. However, non-tariff measures, like tariffs, can damage trade flows (Maskus, Wilson, & Otsuki, 2000). In addition, their evaluation is often more difficult because they are less transparent due to their qualitative and complex nature. Moreover, the diversity of regulations represents a significant international trade barrier as it generates transaction costs (Ederington & Ruta, 2016) Therefore, accurately quantifying the impact of non-tariff measures on foreign trade is a challenge for countries.

Numerous well-known scholars have advocated for free trade and argued in their own works against scholars with opposing views. Developing countries will develop faster if they are allowed to pursue their own policies, taking into account their own stage of development and other conditions. In the long run, this is beneficial for developed countries as well, as investment and trade opportunities expand, although, unfortunately, developed countries do not take advantage of this opportunity. (Chang & Gershman, 2003).

The paper "Economic Feasibility, General Economic Impact and Effects of the Free Trade Agreement between Georgia and the European Union" examines the economic benefits, feasibility and potential impacts of the Free Trade Agreement between Georgia and the European Union. The study emphasizes that in order for agro-companies which produce agriproducts to enter the EU market, this is especially true of Georgian wine, it is important to introduce modern production methods, raise the awareness of Georgian brands through proper marketing and for all agro-companies the starting point should be the implementation of EU regulations and compliance with modern quality standards. (Kudina, et al., 2008).

DCFTA allows Georgian products that meet non-tariff requirements to enter the EU market with zero customs tariffs. This fact pushes Georgian wine producers to improve the quality of products, to be able to diversify the types of products and, most importantly, to increase the export of products produced, thus contributing to the economic progress of the country. Norway, Canada, Japan and Switzerland are also on the list of export countries whose preferential systems can be used by Georgian producers. (Eisenbaum, 2007).

Georgian Wine Market Overview

Over the last decade, the wine industry in Georgia has experienced a strong growth in all key indicators, such as exports, turnover, employment and salary of employees. The financial situation of the sector during this period also looked quite impressive (Zarnadze & Kasradze, 2020).

In 2019, the average monthly salary of employees in the wine production sector amounted to 1046 GEL, and this figure increased by an average of 11.5% annually in 2011-2019. The average salary in the wine production sector has increased significantly compared to the average salary in Georgia - from 79% in 2014 to 93% in 2019 (Georgia Today, 2021).

In 2019, wine was the 3rd most exported commodity from Georgia (after copper ores and ferroalloys) and accounted for 8.2% of the country's total exports. The most significant increase in wine exports was recorded in 2017, when compared to 2016 it increased by 54.4%.

Export of Georgian wine (million bottles) and average price of 1 bottle (2011-2020)
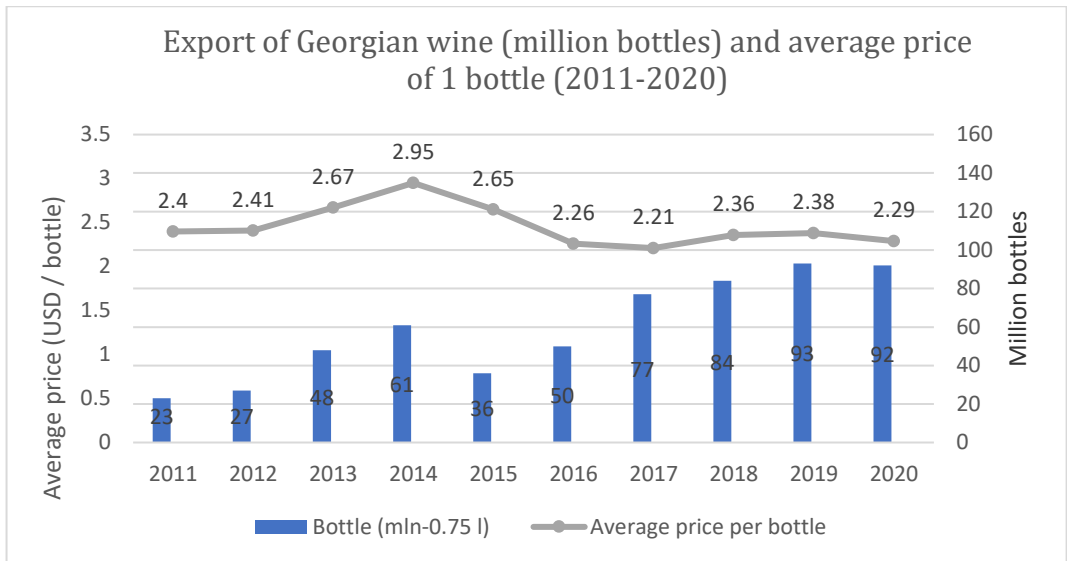
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

The average price of wine exported in 2011-2020 was $2.46 per bottle. From 2012 to 2014, the price increased significantly from $2.41 to $2.95, although in 2016 it dropped sharply to $2.26. In 2016-2020, the price stabilized from $2.2 to $2.4. For comparison, the world export price of wine in 2019 was $2.59, which is slightly higher than the average price of a bottle of wine exported from Georgia that year - $2.38. In 2011-2016, Georgian wine was more expensive than the average price in the world.

Percentages of wine exports from Georgia by countries look like this:

Wine export from Georgia by countries in 2016-2020
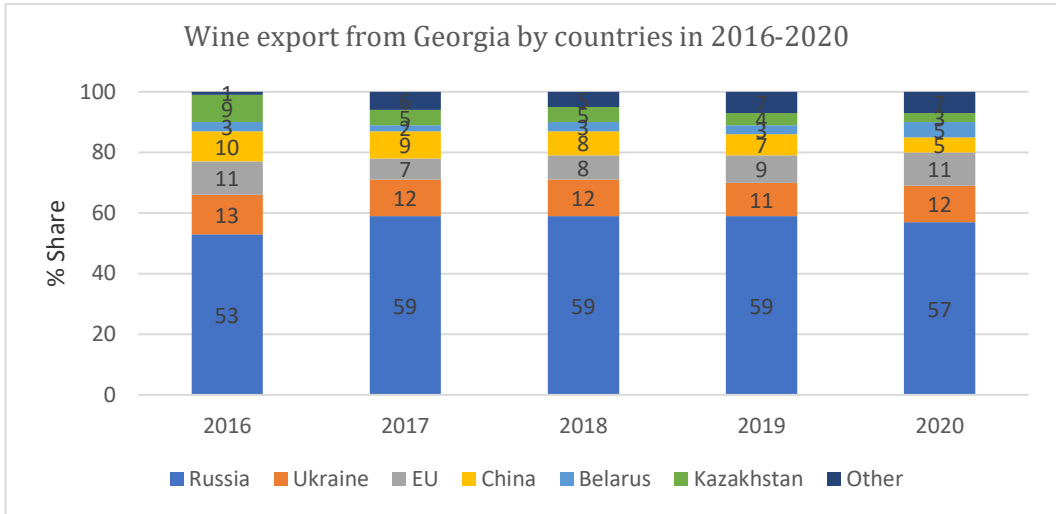
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

As the data shows, exports have been growing over the years, with only 2020 data showing a 5% decrease due to the pandemic compared to 2019 data, which is not really a large number considering other sectors of the economy. In 2020, compared to 2019, there is a 1% decrease in the amount of wine exported in bottles. In 2020, up to 92.4 million wines were exported outside the country. However, as the price of wine in the world market has fallen, wine exports in value terms have declined by 9% (National   Wine   Agency,   2020)

Export of Georgian wine to Russia, million USD

Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

The year 2021 was especially important for the Georgian wine industry: the largest number of wines was exported in the history of independent Georgia. Georgia exported 107 million bottles (0.75 l) of wine to 62 countries around the world, with revenues from exports reaching $250 million, which is also a record high (Placeholder2).

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Russia has been the main wine export destination since 2017, but there has been a significant increase in Europe as well.

Export of Georgian wine to EU countries, million USD
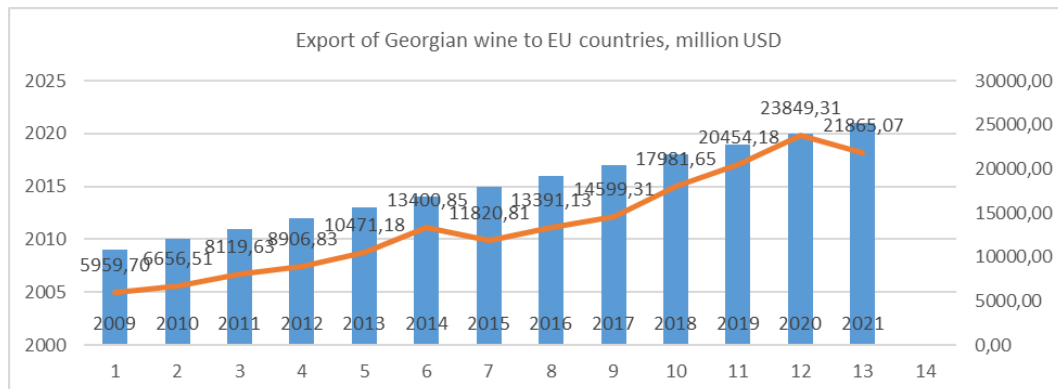
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

Export rates are growing every year in strategic European markets: Poland, UK, USA, Ukraine, France, etc. However, it should be noted that despite the bitter experience of the 2006 Russian embargo, unfortunately, the Russian market is still inalterable, especially for small and medium-sized wineries to export their wines. The main determining factor, however, is the difficulty of adhering to quality standards (Kasradze & Zarnadze, 2019). Small and medium-sized wineries do not have a large scale of production, they suffer from a lack of resources and qualifications, due to which their products do not meet the requirements of the EU market. It is easier to acquire the Russian market, because there are no such strict requirements for quality there. However, based on the past experience, such a high level of dependence on the Russian market poses a great risk to the country (Kasradze & Kapanadze, COVID-19 Pandemic - Challenges and Opportunities for Georgian Wine Industry, 2022).

Taking into account the requirements of local and international wine markets and, consequently, promoting the development of a competitive market remains a challenge for Georgian law. Creating favorable conditions for the export of wine locally and internationally, first of all, implies the existence of proper legal regulations.

Discussion of domestic and international norms regulating wine exports

In Georgia, wine production, processing, distribution and export are regulated by various legislative and sub-legislative normative acts in force in Georgia. There are requirements of normative acts for wine production in Georgia, such as registration of business operators, state control, internal system of traceability and threat control, labeling, standardization, metrology, hygienic certification, as well as obligations, rights and responsibilities of business operators.

Determining the designations of the origin of wine and including them in a strict legal framework is especially important for Georgia. It is a necessary precondition for the production of high-quality and valuable products in our country and to protect it from unfair competition.

In accordance with the ''Law of Georgia on Appellation of Origin and Geographical Indication of Goods'' - Appellation of origin is a modern or historical name of a geographical place, district, region, country, used to denote goods originating in that geographical location; Whose exceptional quality and properties are, in whole or in part, determined solely by the natural environment and the human factor of this geographical place; Whose production, raw material production and processing take place within the boundaries of this geographical place.

The place of origin can be the village, the city, the region and the country itself. Thus, in accordance with the legislation of Georgia, the concept of a geographical indication is more general and fully includes the concept of appellation of origin. Any designation of origin is also a geographical indication, but not vice versa. The registration of the appellation of origin and geographical indication of the goods is carried out by the LEPL National Intellectual Property Centre of Georgia - Sakpatenti.

Decree #88 of the President of Georgia of 28 February 2002 "On the Measures Related to the Enactment of the Law of Georgia on Appellation of Origin and Geographical Indication of Goods" defines the procedures for determining, registering, using and controlling the appellation of origin of the wine. This Ordinance provides a list of wines with appellations of origin and conditional boundaries of specific viticulture zones for wines with appellations of origin and wine brands.

The Law of Georgia "On Vines and Wine" regulates the promotion and development of viticulture and winemaking as a priority sector of the country's economy, and the production and marketing of competitive grapes, wines and other alcoholic beverages of grape origin, and the protection of the consumer market from falsified and poor-quality products.

According to the Law of Georgia "On Vines and Wine", activities in the field of viticulture and winemaking are regulated by a legal entity under public law (LEPL), the National Wine Agency, which is controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia. Certificates of Conformity and Origin are issued by the National Wine Agency in accordance with the rules established by the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia. The Law of Georgia "On Vines and Wine" regulates the general requirements for the certification of alcoholic beverages. According to this law, certification of wines with appellations of origin is mandatory.

Certification of the table and regional wines, as well as strong spirits, is voluntary. For certification, it is sufficient to submit a declaration of conformity drawn up by the manufacturer of alcoholic beverages, based on the test protocol of an accredited

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examination laboratory, which provides information on the manufacturer's requisites, product origin and quality.

Tasting is mandatory to issue a certificate of conformity of wines with the appellation of origin intended for export. In other cases, wine tasting is voluntary and is carried out by a standing tasting commission set up by the National Wine Agency on an order basis. According to the same law, the export of wines with the appellation of origin is allowed only in bottled form.

Order #2-221 of 2003 of Minister of Agriculture and Food of Georgia on "Certification System of Alcohol Drinks", "Rules for Certification of Alcohol Drinks", "Issuing Certificate of Origin for Alcohol Drinks", and "Rules for Writing off Wines" regulates the issues of certification of alcoholic beverages and spirits of grape origin. In order to make a decision on issuing a compliance certificate, three necessary conditions are considered: the results of the analytical examination; the results of organoleptic testing and the results of state control over the observance of the rules and regulations for the production of alcoholic beverages.

The state strictly controls the compliance of export wines and certificates of origin issued. In order to inspect the samples submitted by the exporter, the National Wine Agency and the LEPL National Food Agency are authorized to take samples from the relevant certified batch, submit them for laboratory testing and compare them to the samples submitted by the exporter no later than 3 working days after the prior notification of the business-operator by the National Wine Agency. It is not allowed to export the certified batch or place it on the market otherwise before the expiration of this period.

The Code of Administrative Offenses of Georgia (Art. 1794) provides for punitive sanctions, in particular: forgery of a wine laboratory test report by a testing laboratory, forgery of a wine certificate by a certification body is punishable by a fine of 5,000 GEL, in repeated cases 20,000 GEL; Placing or exporting non-compliant products specified in the wine certificate to the export party shall be punished by a fine of 10 000 GEL, in repeated cases - 20 000 GEL (Art. 1795).

It should be noted that the state requirements for the wine to be exported are different for the EU and CIS countries. Only the analysis of the forms of certificates of origin allows us to see clearly the difference between the legal regulations of the EU and the CIS countries when it comes to the quality control of exported wine.

Under the legislation of Georgia, which is consistently in line with EU regulations, if certified wine is intended for export to EU countries, it must be accompanied by a Form VI 1 Certificate of Compliance, which is fully compliant with EU regulations and legislation issued by the National Wine Agency.

In the case of wine export to Russia and Ukraine, the agency issues another type of certificate of origin - CT1 form. We want to note here that in this case too, the legal

regulations for the export of wine are conditioned by the bilateral agreements between Georgia and the Russian Federation and the state of Georgia and Ukraine.

We will briefly review the requirements for both deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with the EU, as well as the requirements for certificates of compliance to be issued under Georgian law in the context of the above-mentioned bilateral agreements on wine exports.

The Georgian-Russian Free Trade Agreement (Agreement, 1994) is used for trade with the Russian Federation and the Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Georgia and the Government of Ukraine (Agreement, 1995) is used for trade with the Ukraine. The terms of the agreements are identical for both countries. According to the first article, 1. "Sides to the agreement do not impose customs duties, taxes and charges having equivalent effect on export and import of commodity originated from the customs area of one of the Sides and designated for delivery to the customs area of another Side."

According to Article 2, "Sides will not impose local taxes or charges directly or indirectly on goods, covered by the present agreement, at the rate that exceeds the level of relevant taxes or charges imposed on analogous goods of the local production or those produced in third countries; Sides will not introduce special restrictions or demands towards export and/or import of goods, covered by the present agreement, that in similar cases are not used towards analogous goods of the local production or those produced in third countries;

However, the free trade regime with the Russian Federation, unlike other countries, provides for exceptions, in particular, the removal of certain goods from the free trade regime.

It should also be noted that under Article 1 of the Treaty the peculiarity of using the trade regime to agree on the nomenclature of goods between the two countries are formalized in annual protocols which is an integral part of this Agreement. Which allows the parties to revise these terms.

The contracts do not contain details about either the quality or the special requirements related to the labels.

We have a different reality in the case of wine exports to EU countries. Currently, under this agreement, 18 geographical names of Georgian wines are protected in the European Union. In addition to geographical indications and appellations of origin, the issue of labeling in relation to wine quality protection regulations within the framework of Georgia's Association Agreement with the European Union is noteworthy.

The Law of Georgia on Vines and Wine complies with EU standards and sets requirements for mandatory information on the label.

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According to the Law of Georgia on Vines and Wine, Art.31. The label of a product bottled for the market shall include the following necessary information:

a) Name of the product;

b) Nominal volume;

c) Actual alcohol content;

d) name of protected appellation of origin and geographical indication, as well as an indication "controlled appellation of origin" or "protected geographical indication" (should be sequential), which may be replaced by sign or abbreviation of controlled appellation of origin or protected geographical indication approved by the agency;

e) In the case of special wine – the name of the appropriate category; the name of the manufacturer country of the product;

f) Name and address of the manufacturer of the product, name and address of the bottler, if the manufacturer and bottler of the product are different persons, and in the case of wine or drinks imported to Georgia – name and address of the importer;

g) Lot number;

h) Noting "contains sulfites", if the content of sulfites in one liter of the product exceeds 10 milligrams.

In addition, the law permits placing the following information on the label (article 32):

a) Trademark;

b) Name of vine species if the product is produced at least 85% of grapes of the mentioned vine species;

c) Year of harvest if not less than 85% of the wine is produced from grapes harvested in that year; according to the production method: in case of Georgian wine – designation "Georgian wine";

d) In case of sparkling wine – designation "traditional method", if the sparkling wine is produced by the bottled method;

e) In case of wine – designation of fermentation and/or aging in a wooden barrel if the wine was fermented and/or aged in a wooden barrel.

Any information that does not mislead the customer regarding the quality, place of origin, year of harvest, manufacturer, type, style and/or other characteristics of the product is permissible. To include nutritional and/or health claims on a wine label is not obligatory, to include environmental claims on a wine label is not obligatory

Any information that does not mislead the customer regarding the quality, place of origin, year of harvest, manufacturer, type, style and/or other characteristics of the product is permissible.

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Conclusion

Recently, Georgia has signed new types of trade agreements with the European Union and various other countries, in which the emphasis has shifted from traditional tariffs and quotas to non-tariff quality assurance measures. These agreements, on the one hand, allowed Georgian products, including Georgian wine, to enter and establish themselves in new markets at competitive prices, and, on the other hand, the non-tariff measures provided for in these agreements became a special challenge for Georgian winemakers.

The practice has shown that the DCFTA has contributed mainly to the growth of exports of raw materials which are less affected by non-tariff measures, but have not had an economically significant positive impact on the growth of the agri-food and manufacturing sectors. Moreover, the SPS and TBT measures of the EU have a significant limiting impact on Georgia's export potential to the EU. On the other hand, there is a tendency to focus on the CIS and Asian markets, which have much lower requirements in terms of non-tariff measures.

Experts agree that the growing dependence of Georgia on the Russian market is alarming given the lessons of the recent past. The main challenge today is the quality of Georgian wine. It is possible to export relatively low-quality wine to Russia and that is why Georgia is actively cooperating with it. In order for Georgian wine to achieve serious success in Europe and other countries, producers must first improve its quality. Since the 2006 embargo, Georgia has diversified its wine markets, though insufficiently. Since 2013, Georgian wine exports to Russia continue to grow.

Although there was already a bilateral free trade agreement in 2006 that included dispute resolution mechanisms in line with international practice (Agreement on the establishment of a free trade zone, 1999), the Russian authorities, without any hesitation, unilaterally used the politically motivated decision on the embargo.

The Russian market is obviously highly attractive. However, at the same time, it is dangerous, unsustainable and creates many risks, especially of a political nature. Because there is a temptation for Georgian wine producers to return to the production of low-quality and falsified products, which they will sell freely in the Russian market (which again makes it possible for the embargo to be repeated multiple times due to political motives).

Given that Ukraine has also signed the Association Agreement with the EU and the DCFTA, in the near future this means the modernization of the Ukrainian market and rapid harmonization with EU standards, which in the future will lead to the revision of bilateral agreements and the establishment of EU standards.

The EU market is attractive, first and foremost, only to producers of high-quality products and services. Differentiation of products and services helps to diversify

markets for Georgian exporters. Moreover, this is the only way to develop our small open economy (Tea Kasradze, 2018).

If high-quality wine is ensured, in the presence of free trade agreements with different countries it will inevitably have an impact on the growth of wine exports. Quality, authentic Georgian wine has a great potential to acquire new strategic markets. To achieve this, companies need to consider the needs of local and international markets. It is especially necessary to harmonize the local regulations related to wine quality with the EU regulations and strictly adhere to them, which will help increase the international reputation of Georgian wine and increase its demand in foreign markets, improve the financial performance of the wine industry, there will be further increases in employment and salaries of employees in the industry (Kasradze & Kapanadze, COVID-19 Pandemic - Challenges and Opportunities for Georgian Wine Industry, 2022).

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The Shared Landscape. Strategies for Ethical and Democratic Living

Vereno Brugiatelli

Abstract

Living is placed within an environmental fabric consisting of infinite abiotic, biotic and cultural threads. Integrated living is required to be part of this fabric. Ethical living, characterised by knowledge, awareness and responsibility towards the landscape is the only way to protect the environment and enhance its biological and cultural wealth to effectively contribute to the fundamental quality of living and man's well-being. Ethical living needs active participation shared by the inhabitants in the processes of protection, transformation and management of the landscape. In turn, such participation requires fostering by the ethics of living. In this study, from a phenomenological and hermeneutic viewpoint, I intend to highlight some fundamental structures of living to demonstrate that democratic participation is a determining factor in contributing to the realisation of integrated living, which is indispensable for respect of the landscape to promote quality of life and man's well-being.

Keywords: Landscape, Ethical living, Democratic participation, Quality of life, Well-being.

Introduction

The history of the landscape is the history of its transformations produced by interacting abiotic and biotic processes, and it is the history of the changes produced by human habitation. Man lives a landscape that is partly the result of his modifications. A destructive living of the landscape fabric produces material, ethical and spiritual degradation in man, and has a negative impact on his quality of life. Ethical living is the only way to enhance and protect the biological and cultural richness of the landscape and thus make a decisive contribution to the quality of living and human wellbeing. Ethical living requires the active and shared participation of inhabitants in the processes of protection, transformation, and management of the landscape. This participation, in turn, needs to be fed by the ethics of living.

Through a phenomenological and hermeneutic pathway, I intend to highlight some fundamental structures of living and then to show that the active participation of the inhabitants, guided by the ethics of living, contributes to respecting the landscape,

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promoting the quality of living and improving human wellbeing. In the second part, I aim to point out the practical-operational methods suitable for achieving these goals. I will identify them in those forms of participatory democracy and planning capable of integrating individual and collective interests in order to achieve shared objectives.

Biological and cultural circularity between man and landscape

The landscape includes a multitude of territorial, environmental, biological, historical and cultural elements which are so closely interconnected to constitute a web of interrelations. Man is not outside this web but is included as part of an infinite network of chemical, biological and cultural processes. Man lives the natural and cultural landscape and, by doing so, modifies and transforms it while being changed by it at the same time. Thus, the landscape is not there simply to be contemplated by man. Westerners have separated themselves from the landscape limiting it to a picture subject to aesthetic judgement. In this gnoseological and practical setting man has forgotten the ontological dimension of belonging to the environment. Man's actions are interpreted as being external to nature and the landscape. This type of relationship has misrecognised the fact that man is also the result of the biological and cultural processes produced by the environment (Brugiatelli, 2020, pp 29-34).

The value of the landscape can not only be attributed to its visual and contemplative aspects or to what it offers from an aesthetic viewpoint. Originally, before being an object of contemplation, the landscape ties man to other living beings and material elements. Like man, all living creatures are involved in the landscape with each contributing to "making the landscape", modifying it and, in turn, being changed by the landscape which they have contributed to modifying. Like other living parts, man transforms the landscape but with the difference that he changes it more rapidly with lasting consequences, on a global scale.

Environmental transformations are frequently the result of cultural interventions on the landscape. Man is not only living an environment-territory, but he is also living his own cultural products with which he moulds the landscape. From this perspective, the landscape is also the result of long and complex cultural interventions (Bonesio, 2002, p. 80).

The ethos of living the landscape

Living is specified as relations, or complex interactions. Interaction, rather than relations, because the latter is positioned on a unidirectional level while interaction comprises both activity and passivity, giving and receiving according to circular paths and feedback. Living is circularity with the biological and cultural elements where its ethical sense is fundamental. Living ethically leads to the realisation of a connected living which is integrated with the territory, the environment and the natural landscape (including territory and environment). Such living is a complex living, or "tied" (*complexus*) fabric together with the landscape, being a natural and cultural part of it. Therefore, living cannot fail to be openness. It builds itself and refers to itself

but, at the same time, in its openness it builds itself with respect to a set of abiotic, biological and cultural elements. From this point of view, living does not contrast the landscape, but it constitutes a continuity. Living is the product of man's organisational activities, but such activity proves itself ethical if it is achieved openly and not separately from the abiotic, biotic and cultural context. Living acquires an ethical significance if established through complex interactions.

Originally Ethos also means dwelling, home. In a passage in *Brief über den "Humanismus"* (1976) Martin Heidegger speaks about ethos as living space, as a living place. In *Mille plateaux*, Gilles Deleuze and Piere-Félex Guattari observe that "ethos is both dwelling and manner, country and style" (Deleuze-Guattari, 1987, p. 464). Thus, on the one hand, ethos refers to customs, habits and behaviour while, on the other hand, to living, dwelling, the living relations with the world, with the landscape and place (Venturi Ferriolo, 2002). Living made up of complex interactions reminds man of himself and to search for a sense in his living-inhabiting (Brugiatelli, 2017, pp. 63-64). This meaning is born of care, concern, consideration and regard towards the environment and landscape.

Shared Living

On a biological level living is positioned in the processes of utilisation, consumption and waste of resources. Responsible living is characterised by mindful use, recycling, re-use and renewable energy sources. Over the last century, the market, an abstract yet omnipresent entity, has led to the loss of *status* as inhabitants by transforming people into consumers. According to this model, a good citizen consumes a lot and diversifies consumption, which is promoted as an indicator of well-being. It is time, however, to give people back their *status* as inhabitants and to allow their well-being to coincide with the quality of their living. It is necessary to claim that the good citizen is someone who lives well in the landscape and possesses an ecological conscience and thereby acts responsibly taking care of the landscape and reducing the impact of his actions on the environment.

Shared living of the landscape also means participating and taking part in the discussion of projects, choices, decisions relating to the protection and changes to the landscape. Living can be interpreted as a political action in the sense that it is seen as exercising shared democracy. The ethical goal of the good life needs, therefore, to be based on the doctrine of a shared and planned democracy which, according to Hannah Arendt should be achieved by people able to identify common interests and to collaborate to transform them into global actions (Arendt, 1977, pp. 103-108). This idea of democracy is related to Ezio Manzini's idea of *planned democracy* in *Politiche del quotidiano* (Manzini, 2018) in which he writes about the integration of individual and collective interests to achieve shared objectives.

The implementation of democratic practices through shared procedures and inclusive measures is doubtless fundamental for the protection of the distinctive and

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characteristic features of the landscape and for decisions on responsible construction with regard to the environment and its cultural identity. This practice is necessary in order to raise collective awareness of living the landscape.

Knowledge and awareness, gained by the inhabitants of their living the landscape, are essential for the development of a democratic movement to protect and promote the environmental and landscape patrimony. Through the principal procedures of a shared democracy the inhabitants can implement various forms of mediation with the institutions to establish constructive channels of dialogue. Alternatively, they can activate initiatives or evaluate State proposals. The collective defence of the landscape often contrasts economic interests making any form of dialogue difficult, if not impossible. Certainly, however, the confrontation between the opposing parts must not descend into any form of violence. When economic interests become the only criteria upon which a choice is made to realise certain works, awareness and conscience are not always sufficient to preserve, defend and enhance the landscape patrimony. Yet, neither is it possible to accept nor reject the construction of the necessary infrastructure for economic development. The defence of the landscape and economic interests should find agreement based on reasonable compromises which guarantee, on the one hand, the protection and enhancement of the landscape and, on the other, the possibility to realise works which are effectively useful to the community from an economic and social point of view and not advantageous for particular economic interests.

Planning and implementing integrated living through processes of democratic participation

The protection and enhancement of the landscape patrimony (nature and culture) does not exclude changes and innovations, such as the construction of infrastructure. Conservation for its own sake may endanger the enhancement of the landscape and the development of integrated living, which, as far as possible, respects the biological rhythms and ecosystems protecting the cultural patrimony. Innovating does not mean destroying when it clarifies the natural and cultural potential of a certain landscape.

Knowledge and awareness of one's landscape are fundamental to promote and realise works to trigger the potential of the landscape involving the institutions through means characteristic of an active democracy. If it is the institutions, public bodies or private firms that are promoting innovations, the inhabitants should be informed about the planned works and be made aware of the possible natural, social and economic effects. The risk analysis which certain works represent for the natural and cultural landscape, as well as the quality of life should be openly discussed. With constructive debate, the planned project could be modified in the light of observations put forward by a committee of local residents. Some large-scale building projects, which are perceived as a threat to their landscape and the quality of life often awaken the sense of belonging motivating the inhabitants to rediscover the natural and cultural richness of their territory.

A community can become the protagonist of a living integrated with the landscape through activities that enhance the resources, respect the biological cycles and ecosystems, promote and appreciate the natural and cultural patrimony (Capra, 1982). A shared democracy of the landscape possesses the potential to activate a network of strengths, competencies, knowledge and capabilities able to regenerate the territory, the environment and the landscape. This can be done by planning economic activities which can generate both material and spiritual wealth with limited environmental impact.

Final considerations

The safeguard and protection of the landscape patrimony does not mean scarce economic development. To the contrary. Economic activities, such as organic agriculture, produce quality products because they optimise the resources of the territory and have a low environmental impact. Organic farming bonds with many other economic activities such as eco-tourism, commerce, handicrafts and small industry. Such low environmental impact activities can be supported by a transport system fuelled by renewable energy sources. In this way a network of interacting activities is established forming an integral part of the landscape. Therefore, the landscape is no longer considered a commodity.

Alberto Magnaghi defines this network of activities integrated with the territory and landscape as "multi-faceted" made up of: new-farmers, new-artisans (traditional, innovative, digital), environmental and cultural associations, movements focusing on local and global issues (against climate change, for democracy and human rights), youth groups, inhabitants in the peripheries promoting self-governing living experiences, ethnic movements, mutual help associations, cooperatives with ethical, fair, environmental and social aims, groups promoting self-sufficient consumers, critical consumption and fair purchase, fair trade etc. (Magnaghi, 2020, p. 217). Such activities, through common and shared planning channels, gradually enable communities to reclaim their territory, landscape, knowledge and practices.

Besides, they promote and enhance the environmental and landscape resources to such an extent as to positively influence the quality of living which fosters complex relationships with the landscape. In order to boost such processes, forms of shared and planned democracy, which can integrate individual and collective interests to realise shared objectives, are needed. These shared objectives are attainable by means of choices, actions, and activities based on knowledge, awareness and shared responsibility translated into practices through democratic channels. Therefore, it is a matter of promoting ethical and integrated living characterised by: 1. an *ethos* which differentiates it from other types of living; 2. actions dictated by care, concern, involvement and responsibility with regard to the landscape (Mortari, 2020, pp. 145-150); 3. an open and welcoming structure towards diverse cultures that is capable of recognising the cultural identities to which it contributes to producing; 4. enhancing the landscape together with the growth of man's well-being.

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Hostile Takeovers: Desirable or Dangerous? A Survey Study into the Circumstances Under Which Hostile Takeovers in the Netherlands Are (Un)Permissible

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Abstract

A number of recent hostile takeover attempts in The Netherlands have triggered the discussion in the Netherlands on the circumstances under which protection of the target company against a hostile takeover should be justified or not be justified. To answer this question, 21 experts involved in mergers and acquisitions from various angels on the highest (management) level, were selected to participate in a survey investigation combining open questions and giving scores for submitted factors. The outcomes show that the participants advocate non-protection in case of relatively high performance of the bidding company, new value creating opportunities a non-responsive board of the Target with personal interest of the board, and cash payment for the target. They are in favor of protection in case of takeover attempts that incur personal board benefits of bidder or target, intended debt push down financing, and in case of considerable societal risks and consequences.

Keywords: shareholder value, long term value creation, stakeholders, corporate governance, hostile takeover, protection

1. Introduction

Hostile takeover bids attract considerable attention such as two takeover attempts in the Netherlands in 2017: the takeover bid for AKZO Nobel by PPG and the takeover bid for Unilever by Heinz Kraft. Both hostile bids were opposed by the management of the target company because the bids would not be in the interest of the company or the long-term value of the company. This is in line with a prior case in which an attempt of telecom giant America Movil to acquire the shares of telecom company

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KPN was halted. Two obstacles that hampered the acquisition process at the time were the national security and public interests of the vital telecom infrastructure that KPN manages. Other companies might incite a similar protective stance arguing that takeover attempts by foreign companies controlled by national governments are aimed at taking over unique knowledge or research and development that are in danger of disappearing from the Netherlands. Opposite noises are also heard. For example, the financing theory states that hostile takeover bids have a disciplining effect on malfunctioning management of the target company. Poorly managed companies will perform less well, resulting in a falling share price, making these companies attractive acquisition candidates. According to this theory, it is in the interest of the shareholders of the target company and ultimately of all stakeholders that a (hostile) takeover emerges in such cases. The three recent acquisition attempts in The Netherlands have triggered the discussion in the Netherlands on the circumstances under which a hostile takeover is desirable or not. On the one hand, the well-functioning of capital markets and the disciplining effect of the market of corporate control are of importance. At the same time, issues such as corporate interests, national security, and preservation of intellectual capital may play a role. It is questioned to what extent short term shareholder value outweighs long term value at the company level and societal level. Based on these evolvements, in this paper the following research question is examined.

What circumstances make a hostile takeover permissible?

To answer this question, 21 participants/respondents were selected to participate in a survey. All participants were involved in mergers and acquisitions from various angles and play important roles in hostile takeover decisions. First, using open questions, they were asked to provide the characteristics of a hostile takeover as well as to indicate when protection against a hostile takeover attempt is justified and when not. Subsequently, a number of factors were presented to the participants. For each of these factors, they indicated whether it justifies protection against a hostile takeover attempt or not. The selected factors were derived from previous research of Dutch case law evolution on mergers and acquisitions, literature review, and previous in-depth interviews with stakeholders from practice. Besides, these factors were submitted in advance to a panel of experts.

This research contributes to our understanding of how a hostile takeover is perceived in the professional field. It provides insight into the factors that influence the permissibility of a hostile takeover and the protection against it. The research is unique in its kind in that it is not limited to the outcomes of a theoretical discussion, but it also tests these theoretical outcomes in practice. As far as we know, such an investigation has never been conducted; it may contribute to new directions and insights regarding corporate governance and hostile takeovers.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, to provide insight into the Dutch company law perspective, elements of Dutch case law regarding corporate interests and the

purpose of the company in a takeover context are discussed (2). Then, the state of the art of literature on the circumstances under which a hostile takeover is permissible will be discussed. From this, the hypotheses are formulated (3). Thereafter, the methodology and the model of the research will be discussed (4). Then, the results will be presented (5). The paper ends with a conclusion (6).

2. Evolution of elements in Dutch case law

The notion that a company is a legal person with a definable purpose is accompanied with the acknowledgment that the company could be seen as an actor with its own interest, to be distinguished from those involved in or who have a stake in the company and its activities. The view that company interest could exist, distinct from the interests of the stakeholders of the company, applies best in the situation when a company maintains a firm. In a series of judgments in the takeover context,[1] the Dutch Supreme Court explicitly acknowledged the distinction between the 'company's interest' and the interests of 'others involved in the company'. The Supreme Court has consistently rendered its decisions based on the directors' obligation to act in the interest of the company and its affiliated firm (article 2:129/239(5) DCC, as codified in 2013), in conjunction with the standards of reasonableness and fairness to take due care of the interests of those involved in the company (article 2:8 DCC).

The growing body of case law in the Netherlands indicates that – although recognizing the open ended nature of the purposes companies may have – in the typical situation where a firm is connected to a company, the purpose of the company is to promote the interests of the firm. Yet, it was not until the *Cancun* judgment in 2014, that the Dutch Supreme Court explicitly assigned legal significance to the interest of the firm by interpreting the scope of the company's interest: 'if a firm is connected to a company, the company's interest is, as a general rule, mainly determined by promoting the sustainable success of this firm'.[1]

After *Cancun*, the amended Dutch Corporate Governance Code 2016 (DCGC 2016) acknowledged that the purpose of the company was *'to create long-term value'*.[2] It is important to note that before the amendments to the Code, from 2003 onwards, the view of the Corporate Governance Monitoring Committee was that '*a company endeavours to create **long-term shareholder value** [emphasize added]'*.[3] Moreover, in the recent high profile takeover contest between Akzo Nobel and PPG, the Dutch Enterprise Court applied the *Cancun* formula and decided that company boards are

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[1] Dutch Supreme Court, 2014 NJ 2014/286 (Cancun), paragraph 4.2.1.
[2] See the preamble of de DCGC 2016 and article 1.1.1 (strategy for long-term value creation) of the Code.
[3] See the preamble of the DCGC 2003, under paragraph 3.

obliged to direct their actions towards *'the **long-term value creation** of the company and its affiliated firm'* [emphasize added].[1]

The legal translation could be argued as follows: that the company's interest to create value is regarded as a legal norm which is addressed to the company, to the constituents of the company such as the board of directors, the supervisory board and the general meeting of shareholders, and any other stakeholder involved in the company and its affiliated firm. Accordingly, acknowledging the company's interest as a legally enforceable norm is not without consequence, nor does it leave the corporate governance debate unaffected. [2]

The following three principles regarding the dichotomy between shareholders and stakeholders are of importance in the Dutch corporate governance code:

1. The interest of the company in the sustainable success of its affiliated firm transcends any stakeholder and shareholder interests;
2. Executive directors, under the supervision of supervisory directors, have an obligation towards the company to make business decisions (including strategic decisions) to further pursue the sustainable success of the interest of the company and its affiliated firm[3] and when making these business decisions have an obligation towards the company's stakeholders, including shareholders, to take due care and not cause unnecessary or disproportionate harm;[4]
3. The company's shareholders, when acting collectively in the general shareholders meeting in the pursuit of their (collective) interests, are bound via the standards of reasonableness and fairness, to not disproportionately harm the company's interest, under the penalty of deterioration of the shareholders' resolution. A situation where individual shareholders are confronted with a bid and are incentivized to put their private interests first, may legitimately face frustration of the bid by the target board.

3. Substantiation of the factors from theory

According to Pitelis and Teece (2009) the essence of the firm is that the future value creation consequences of corporate actions and decisions cannot be foreseen. Value creation cannot be proven in advance. In the same way: it cannot be proven (in advance) that mergers create (shareholder) value. This means that the arguments exchanged during the hostile takeover process are partly rhetorical – it is a discourse (Négre et al., 2018). Therefore, multi perspectives and research methods are taken

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[1] Dutch Enterprise Court 29 May 2017 ECLI:NL:GHAMS:2017:1965, paragraph 3.34 (Akzo/Nobel), JOR 2017/261 with annotation from C.D.J. Bulten.

[2] For an analysis of Dutch case law from 1971 to 2017, see Pham et al., 2018).

[3] Accordingly, exercising their legal task (article 2:129/239 DCC).

[4] Accordingly, to abide by the standards of reasonableness and fairness (art. 2:8 DCC).

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into account to distill the relevant factors that the stakeholders could take into account in determining their position in the hostile takeover discourse.

Empirical research shows that mergers on average do not create value. Some studies show that on average 7 out of 10 mergers do not live up their promises (Epstein, 2005); mergers are a mixed blessing; average returns to bidding companies' shareholders are at best slightly positive, and significantly negative in some studies (Morck et al., 1990). King et al. (2004) conclude that M&A activity has a modest negative effect on long-term financial performance of acquiring firms. It is thus extremely important that hostile takeovers are scrutinized thoroughly.

Discussion of research with different perspectives brings different factors into sight which are the basis for the factors surveyed. Research about discriminating factors – explaining success or failures of mergers and acquisitions – show mixed results. Morck et al. (1990) conducted a research into three characteristics of mergers explaining failure: relatedness, buying growth, and past performance of acquirer management. They conclude that these types of acquisitions have systematically lower and predominantly negative announcement period returns to bidding firms. Furthermore, they find out that managerial objectives drive bad acquisitions. King et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of post-acquisition performance. They conclude that the most commonly studied conditions studied in prior M&A research – conglomerate acquisition, related acquisition, method of payment, and prior acquisition performance – do not impact post acquisition performance. "What impacts the financial performance of firms engaging in M&A remains largely unexplained. This problem could be resolved by taking notice of other kinds of research, such as case studies and surveys.

Epstein (2005) asserts that success and failure of M&A has been studied in terms of narrow and uninformative measures – such as profit and or short-term stock price fluctuations. "Research on M&A desperately needs a new perspective and a new framework for analysis". He conducts a field research on the success of a merger and deduces the following six determinants: 1. Strategic vision and fit, 2. Deal structure, 3. Due diligence, 4. Premerger planning, 5. Postmerger integration and 6. External factors. Brouthers et al. (1998) also note that there is a gap between the theoretical communis opinion that mergers are at best break-even situations – and practice where managers use mergers as a major strategic option – and perceive them as successful. This gap may be caused by managers pursuing other goals, or being overly optimistic. Another reason may be that empirical research uses inaccurate data. A better measure of merger success or failure could be the degree to which the mergers achieve these predetermined objectives. Brouthers et al. (1998) conducted a survey among CFO's of Dutch firms who made an acquisition to find out the managerial

motives of mergers. They used the following 17 motives used in previous merger studies[1]:

Economic motives	*Personal motives*
Marketing economies of scale	Increase sales
Increase profitability	Managerial challenge
Risk-spreading	Acquisition of inefficient management
Cost reduction	Enhance managerial prestige
Technical economies of scale	
Different valuation of target	*Strategic motives*
Defense mechanism	Pursuit or market power
Respond to market failures	Acquisition of competitor
Create shareholder value	Acquisition of raw materials
	Creation of barriers to entry

Each motive could be rated between not important (1) and extremely important (7). Economic motives had the highest score (2.889), followed by strategic motives (2.754) and personal motives (2.154). This suggests that multiple motives exist. From these factors 5 were rated above average: 1. pursuing market power (5.242), 2. Increase profitability (5.065), 3. Achieving economies of scale (4.395), 4. Create shareholder value (4.371) and 5. Increase sales (4.303). They also measured the key success factors of the acquisition; it seems that the key success factors correspond to the key motives. It is thus no coincidence that CFO's labeled these acquisitions as successful.

Another perspective in finding relevant 'merger-judgment-factors is a more process related perspective. "Hostile takeover bids are unique events in the life of a company – they naturally attract much attention – both form the media and the general public. Hostile takeover bids can be perceived as interorganizational events that threaten organizational identity and integrity." (Négre, 2018, 803, 808). As previously mentioned, statements about future value creation cannot be proven. Usually the arguments exchanged by the Target and The Bidder contain a rhetoric element. "Mergers and acquisitions can be seen to incorporate multiple realities, the potential for multiple, complex and contradictory interpretations." (Vaara and Tienari, 2002)

The disclosures made by both parties constitute a dynamic and mutual influence process. (Nègre, 2018). In fact a discourse arises: in which mergers are justified, legitimated and naturalized (Vaara and Tienari, 2002). The campaign thus has the character of constructing a reality in order to reach a practical and concrete objective: "in communicating reality, you construct reality." (Nègre et al. 2018, 808)[2]. The hostile takeover process - and the arguments exchanged - is thus important and can shed a

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[1] These factors can overlap, substitute or complement each other. Besides, they could sometimes be classified in a different way. "Increase of sale" could be classified within all three rubrics.
[2] A social constructivist view, referring to "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences".

new perspective on the relevant factors to assess it. Vaara and Tienari (2002) distinguish four discourse types: rationalistic, cultural, societal and individualistic. Societal consequences are the potential consequences and risks for society and the different stakeholders. According to Vaara and Tanieri (2002) the rationalistic discourse usually becomes the dominant discourse; if broader societal concerns are given specific attention they are usually labelled "unfortunate but unavoidable".

As previously mentioned, the factors questioned are based on theory, expert meeting, and interviews (Pham et al., 2018). From the above mentioned studies we distilled the following clusters of relevant factors in assessing if a target firm should (not) be protected in a hostile takeover situation: (1) performance of bidder and (2) target, (3) strategic fit, (4) takeover process, (5) method of payment – deal structure, (6) characteristics of CEO's of bidder and (7) target, and the (8) (societal) risks and (9) consequences of a hostile takeover. These can be traced to the following research findings.

Usually (under)performance of the target is considered to be an important argument of a hostile takeover to replace inefficient management. (Brouther et al., 1998). This is the essence of the disciplining force of the market for corporate control (Jensen and Ruback, 1983, 47)[1]. To this a symmetrical aspect can be added: the performance of the bidder. Underperformance could be a sign of weak management that makes detrimental acquisition decisions. Besides it could be considered that the bidder is merely buying profit instead of creating it by itself (Morck et al., 1990). The level and shape of the strategic fit of acquirer and target– expressed by variables such as relatedness, conglomerate formation, competitors, complementarity, and synergies - is a frequent used discriminant in M&A research (Brouther et al., 1998, Morck et al., 1990, Epstein, 2005, King et al., 2004). The takeover process contains elements such as negotiations, agreements, disclosures, and due diligence that could influence the merger outcome because of more detailed research into the possible benefits and risks of a merger and a reduction of the conflicts with other stakeholders (Epstein, 2005, Pham et al., 2018). Furthermore, the method of payment could be a discriminating factor: an acquiring firm could use cash instead of shares if CEO's think that the shares are undervalued and do not reflect post-acquisition performance (King et al, 2004). Personal motives of both the bidder and target CEO's – instead of strategic and/or economic reasons – could influence merger performance. The hubris hypothesis states that CEO's of bidding corporations may be overconfident about their own abilities (Roll, 1984). However, this could also be viewed from a different angle: The Target's CEO's could entrench themselves by not considering new opportunities because of fears of losing control and power. Frustrating and blocking a hostile takeover attempt could thus be driven by personal reasons too. We therefore added characteristics of Target's CEO's. Societal risks and consequences are not

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[1] They also concluded that "knowledge of the source of takeover gains still eludes us" (Jensen and Ruback, 1983, 47). It seems that this remark still applies.

frequently taken into account in research into mergers and acquisitions and hostile takeovers. The only exception is in public media research: the justification and legitimization of a hostile takeover in trying to influence public opinion. This could thus be a relevant factor in assessing a hostile takeover especially considering the Dutch stakeholder view of corporate governance – and the therein stated purpose of long term value creation - as is previously shown.

From this the following hypothesis are derived: these will be questioned by the mentioned clusters containing a number of collected explanatory variables (factors):

H.1 The judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the performance of the Target as well as the performance of the Bidder. (see cluster of factors 1 and 2)

H.2 The judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the extent and shape of the strategic fit between the Target and Bidder (see cluster of factors 3)

H.3 The judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the hostile takeover process and the agreed contractual conditions. (see cluster of factors 4)

H.4 The judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the personal motivation/interest of CEO's of the Target and the Bidder. (see cluster of factors 5 and 6)

H.5 The judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the deal structure. (see cluster of factors 7)

H.6 The judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the (societal) risk and consequences. (see cluster of factors 8 and 9)

4. Research Method

In the above section, a number of factors and related hypotheses are introduced that may affect the attitude regarding (non) protecting a Target from a hostile takeover attempt by the Bidder. The selected factors are derived from previous research of Dutch case law evolution on mergers and acquisitions, and literature review. Moreover, this paper builds on previous research by the authors in which in-depth interviews were conducted concerning some major takeover conflicts, international developments in corporate governance, recent court decisions, and the adoption of long-term value creation of the company and its connecting firm in the Dutch corporate governance system (Pham et al., 2018).

To carry out empirical testing of the selected factors and their determinants, a survey study is being conducted. Before this survey is conducted among the participants, the questionnaire as well as the factors have first been submitted to a panel, consisting of experts from practice, business law and science. In a round table discussion, the panel

has tested the factors and the survey questions regarding clarity and substantive consistency.

21 experts were selected to participate in the survey from the following angles:

Partcicpants

Participants	%	Number
Judicial officer	23.81	5
Director, executive, exco member	19.05	4
Statutory auditor, non-executive	28.57	6
External supervisor	14.29	3
Institutional investor	14.29	3
Total	100	21

First, using open questions, the participants are asked to provide the characteristics of a hostile takeover as well as to indicate when protection against a hostile takeover attempt is justified and when not. Subsequently, the previously mentioned factors that may affect the preference for (not) protecting the bidder against a hostile takeover from the Target, are presented to the participants. For each of these factors, the participants indicated whether it justifies (non) protection against a hostile takeover attempt.

5. Results of the study

5.1. Open questions

5.1.1. What is meant by a hostile takeover?

Respondents were asked to give a description of hostile takeover. In literature two aspect are frequently mentioned: 1. If the target managers reject the initial bid by the bidding company, and 2. The nature and intensity of target resistance (Nègre, et al., 2018, 803)[1]. The answers were coded to discover a pattern in the perceptions of a hostile takeover situation. We depicted 6 different elements in the descriptions of the participants:

Elements: *Number[2]*

*A bid or intention that is considered undesirable by the board
and/or supervisory board.*   *9*

There is no agreement about the intention to bid
        6

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[1] The motives behind target resistance have been subject to some controversy and are diverse in nature: financial, personal, strategic and social (Nègre et al., 2018, 804).

[2] Numbers add to more than 21 because some participants mentioned more than one element.

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If a target has not requested a takeover proposal
        4

There was no prior consultation about the bid or intention to bid
        3

An attempt to acquire controlling interest in the company
        3

If the target board considers the acquisition to be in conflict
with the interest of the target company   *1*

Remarkable, resistance is not explicitly mentioned and considered a crucial element. Besides being undesirable, important elements are disturbed negotiations, transparency and an open dialog. A hostile takeover could be considered as a new option or opportunity, that should be considered rational, but usually emotional, nationalistic, and psychological elements are very important. Judging and assessing this new option with many dimensions is rather complex. As previous is indicated statements and arguments about value creation are partly rhetoric, because they cannot be proven. The term has the connotation that the bidder is to blame, but frequently, the bidder in an earlier stage has tried to open negotiations. In many cases a hostile takeover does not fall from the sky. It looks like it is sudden and unexpected but it is also possible that the Bidder has tried to start the negotiations earlier[1]. The question is therefore who is to blame for the hostility. The Target has obligations too in creating an equal level playing field and generate the relevant information to make a proper assessment.

5.1.2. When is protection against a hostile takeover not justified?

Participants were asked to give a description of the case that protection against a hostile takeover is not justified. The answers are coded to discover a pattern in the responses about the unfairness of protecting a Target against a hostile takeover bid. We distinguished 11 elements in the descriptions:

Elements   *Number*

When one of the stakeholders, including the board, primarily serves his own interests.
        6

When it appears that only one person involved has been served in the protection and
thus there has been no pluralistic consideration of interests by the board
from the stakeholders' viewpoint.
5

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[1] The Target company can easily frustrate the negotiations by simply refusing to talk and/or to not allow the potential bidder to execute a due diligence.

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In the event of underperformance of the business of the target
    4

In case of protection for an indefinite period
    2

When protection is not in the interest of shareholders.
    2

In case of asserted nationalistic, economic interests
    1

When there is a reasonable offer with opportunities to create value.
    1

The higher the price offered for the shares in relation to the last market price prior to the bid, the more difficult it is to defend protection.
    1

Board refuses reasonable consultation.   *1*

If the board cannot explain why a stand-alone scenario is better for those involved with the company.   *1*

If the protection measure is not in accordance with the interests of the target company
    1

The general impression is that respondents prefer an open balanced judgment/decision that takes into account the interests of all the stakeholders of the company. There is no primary stakeholder (the shareholder and/or the Board) – this reflects the stakeholder approach of the Netherlands. However, a more classic shareholder view can also be distracted from a number of descriptions: shareholders are the only stakeholders explicitly mentioned, and underperformance and a higher price offered in relation to the share price means that respondents are less averse against a hostile takeover. A hostile takeover opens an unexpected and unforeseen opportunity in which the continuity of the (partly) immobile and the embedded business are questioned. Participants prefer an open dialogue in which the diverse options are examined and compared with an open mind were protection is only temporary – only needed to not disturb this balanced process because of a hectic, uncontrollable process under severe time pressure, fears, and rumors. This temporary protection preference also shows up in the next question. Frustrating this takeover process - both from the Bidder and the Target - is not appreciated.

5.1.3. When is protection against a hostile takeover justified?

Participants were also asked in which case they would support protection against a hostile takeover. We distinguished the following 13 elements:

Elements	Number
When protection is in the interest of the target company, it is greater than shareholder value (such as maintaining employment).	9
If the bid is too low in relation to the interests of stakeholders and/or the present value of the company.	4
When a strategy change is envisaged.	3
If the protection is only temporary.	3
If it concerns national security interests and/or companies that are essential for the Netherlands, such as Banks, Insurers and/or companies that are critical for the infrastructure and data structure.	3
When the authority of the board to determine the strategy is crossed.	1
When constructive consultation becomes possible with the protection measure.	1
When there is no long-term underperformance.	1
If there is a negative track record of the bidder in previous acquisitions.	1
When the independency of the group is potentially lost.	1
When innovation is compromised.	1
In case all stakeholders are unanimous against the takeover.	1
None, the protection structures existing in the Netherlands are neither necessary or useful	1

The list is more diffuse and diverse compared with the "against protection" question. The most frequently mentioned answers represent the importance of the stakeholder view: shareholder value is not the sole yardstick for assessing the bid, the interests of the stakeholders have to be taken into account. There is also some resistance to change and undermining the autonomy of the board. But it is also stressed that protection is acceptable if it is temporary and used for constructive consultation, and there is no long-term underperformance. Also, society is recognized as a stakeholder in case of critical (data) infrastructure.

5.2. The Hypothesis questioned with the factors surveyed

We asked the respondents to rank the level of their preference of protecting a Target company from a hostile takeover on the following scale:

Strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) neutral (3), agree (4), strongly agree (4) to protect. A lower than average score of 3 indicates that the prominent participants (n=21)

prefer less protection (thus are in favor of a hostile takeover) , a score above 3 – the point of indifference – indicates a preference to protect the Bidder (thus are against a hostile takeover).

5.2.1. Performance of the Bidder:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Bidder's profitability is better than the benchmark	2.10	5	9	7	0	0
Bidder's profitability lags behind the benchmark	3.00	2	3	10	5	1
Development of Bidder's share price on the stock market is better than the benchmark	2.24	3	10	8	0	0
Development of Bidder's share price on the stock market is lagging behind the benchmark	3.10	1	4	9	6	1
Development of Bidder's sustainability indicators is better than the benchmark	2.10	6	8	6	1	0
Development of Bidder's sustainability indicators lags behind the benchmark	3.10	2	3	8	7	1

In case of better performance – in terms of profitability, share price and sustainability – of the Bidder, participants are less averse to a hostile takeover and have a slight preference for non-protection.

5.2.2 Performance of the Target:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Target's profitability is better than the benchmark	2.86	3	4	7	7	0
Target's profitability lags behind the benchmark	2.48	2	9	8	2	0
Development of Target's share price on the stock market is better than the benchmark	2.67	3	4	11	3	0
Development of Target's share price on the stock market is lagging behind the benchmark	2.71	2	6	10	2	1

The results show that the opinion of the participants on the influence of the performance of the target company on the justification of protection against the hostile takeover is not decisive: there is no clear link between the performance of the target and the preference of the participants of protection against the takeover.

The positions of the participants are a bit asymmetrical: better performance of the Bidder is more rewarded than bad performance of the Target is punished. Poor performance ot the Target in terms of share price (a measure of underperformance)

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does not influence the preference for protetction. This is not in line with the market for corporate control hypothesis. The (combined) results indicate that hypothesis 1, stating that the judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the performance of the Target as well as the performance of the Bidder, seem only partly to be endorsed: in case of relatively high performance of the Bidder, participants are less averse to a hostile takeover and have a slight preference for non-protection. The opinion of the participants on the influence of the performance of the target company on the justification of protection against the hostile takeover is not decisive.

5.2.3. Strategic Fit:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Target can offer new opportunities for Bidder	1.90	5	13	3	0	0
Business activities of Bidder and Target are complementary	1.86	6	12	3	0	0
Business activities of Bidder and Target are a substitute	2.52	5	6	5	4	1
Business activities of Bidder and Target are not related	3.00	4	3	4	9	1
Bidder can offer new opportunities for Target	1.90	5	13	3	0	0
The synergies envisaged by Bidder are credible and well substantiated	1.86	6	12	3	0	0
The synergies envisaged by Bidder are mainly in efficiency benefits (scale)	2.57	3	8	6	3	1
The synergies envisaged by Bidder are mainly in the complementarity of the Bidder and Target activities (scope)	2.29	3	10	7	1	0
The synergy envisaged by Bidder with the acquisition is realized by restructuring of Target	2.81	3	6	5	6	1
Bidder and Target are direct competitors	2.81	3	6	5	6	1

Participants are less against a hostile takeover in case of new value creating opportunities for the Bidder as well as for the Target, complementary activities, and credible and well substantiated synergies envisaged by the Bidder. In all other cases, e.g. of non-relatedness, focus on efficiency, and reduction of competition, participants have no explicit opinion.

It follows that hypothesis 2, stating that the judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the extent and shape of the strategic fit between the Target and Bidder, is recognized by the participants.

5.2.4. Hostile takeover process:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Target maintains the status quo	2.52	2	8	9	2	0

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Bidder guarantees the independence of Target for a set term	2.24	2	12	7	0	0
Bidder wants to make changes to the Target board	2.57	2	9	7	2	1
There is no consultation between Target and Bidder	3.62	1	3	5	6	6
Target does not allow a due diligence by the Bidder	2.38	2	10	8	1	0
Bidder offers a favorable social plan	2.43	3	8	8	2	0

The results indicate that participants prefer an open dialog for investigating the new opportunity: if there is no consultation between Target and Bidder during the hostile takeover process, most participants consider protection against the acquisition admissible. Furthermore, a majority of the participants agrees that a guarantee by the Bidder of the Target's independence does not justify protection against the acquisition. In case of emphasizing the continuity – in terms of CEO's, target's independence, status quo and a social plan – participants are less inclined to protect the Bidder.

It turns out that hypothesis 3, stating that the judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the hostile takeover process and the agreed contractual conditions is only endorsed by the participants in case of the absence of an open dialogue.

5.2.5. Board of Target:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Target's board is strongly connected to the workplace	2.67	3	7	6	4	1
Target's board is strongly connected locally	2.57	3	8	5	5	0
Target's board would rather take over than be taken over	2.43	8	10	3	0	0
Target's board has an interest to resist the takeover	1.76	8	10	3	0	0
Target's management does not respond to the pressure from the capital market	2.19	5	9	5	2	0
Target's board does not respond to public opinion	2.10	6	8	6	1	0

Participants are less inclined to protect a Target in case the Board is non responsive to the capital market and the public. If perceived personal interest of the board – e.g. prestige, power, reputation – prevails, participants are strongly in favor of non-protection.

5.2.6. Board of Bidder:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Bidder's board is strongly connected to the workplace	2.30	3	8	10	0	0

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Bidder's board is strongly connected locally	2.50	3	6	11	1	0
Bidder's board would rather take over than be taken over	2.70	3	6	8	3	1
Bidder's board has an interest in the takeover	3.40	3	2	4	7	5
Bidder's management does not respond to the pressure from the capital market	3.00	2	4	7	8	0
Bidder's board does not respond to public opinion	3.10	2	4	7	6	2

Participants are somewhat opposed to hostile takeovers incurring Target's personal board benefits. A remarkable outcome is that they do not seem to punish the non-responsiveness of the Bidder's Board to public and/or capital market pressure. This neutral position is different from their opinion to non-responsiveness of the Target's Board.

The results show that Hypothesis 4, stating that the judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the personal motivation/interest of CEO's of the Target and the Bidder is partly endorsed by the participants. They are opposed to protection against a hostile takeover in case of a non-responsive Target Board. Furthermore, they are opposed to facilitate personal interests of the both the Bidder's and Target's Board. Non responsive Target's CEO's are punished more severely than Bidder's non-responsiveness.

5.2.7. Deal structure:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Bidder mainly wants to finance the takeover bid through a "share-for-share offer"	2.76	2	6	8	5	0
Bidder mainly wants to finance the takeover bid with debts that Target itself will bear (debt push down)	3.76	2	1	4	7	7
Bidder mainly wants to finance the takeover bid through a cash payment	2.29	3	10	7	1	0
Bidder mainly wants to finance the takeover bid by issuing bonds itself	2.52	2	8	9	2	0

Participants oppose to a hostile takeover – thus have a preference for protection – in case of a debt push down – increasing the financial risk of the Target. A cash payment seems to be slightly favored to a share payment. This is in line with the earlier hypothesis that a cash offer signals Bidder's management belief that the shares are undervalued because this value does not reflect post-acquisition performance (King et al., 2004).

The outcomes subscribe hypothesis 5, stating that the judgement of participants of (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the deal structure. They are opposed to debt push downs and are slightly in favor of acquisitions that are financed in cash.

5.2.8. Societal Risks:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Substantial uncertainty about decisions by the Authority of consumers and markets	3.71	1	1	4	12	3
Considerable uncertainty about approval by (central) works council	3.05	1	5	9	4	2
Substantial risk of a loss of investments by Target in its sustainability policy	3.57	1	2	5	10	3
Significant risk of compromising investments by Target in R&D	3.57	1	3	4	9	4
Considerable risk of breaching agreements with suppliers and/or strategic partners of Target	3.57	1	2	3	14	1
Considerable integration costs	2.95	1	6	8	5	1
Significant difference in culture between Target and Bidder	3.67	1	3	3	9	5
Considerable risk of reputation damage and loss of customers of Target	3.71	1	2	3	11	4
Substantial breakup fee in the event of a failure of the hostile takeover	2.71	2	8	6	4	1

This table contains different kind of risks and the corresponding attitude of participants towards (non) protection. Participants are open to new opportunities (see H. 2 above) and take the associated costs and resistance for granted - both aspects show that participants take a neutral position in protecting the corporation. However participants fear the risks involved in questioning the position the corporation performs in the value chain and or society. The corporation is embedded in a business ecology (Moore, 1993, Iansiti and Levien, 2004) – it has created a (sustainable competitive advantage) position by making (partly) irreversible

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investments. This evolved position is questioned – creating (new) uncertainties. It could also be argued that they resist change themselves.

5.2.9. Societal Consequences:	av.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Considerable loss of high-quality knowledge	3.62	1	2	5	9	4
Substantial reduction in employment	3.48	1	2	5	12	1
Substantial loss of training facilities	3.33	1	3	7	8	2
Discontinuity of the independent Target company	2.67	2	9	5	4	1
Loss of iconic company	2.67	3	6	7	5	0
Loss of critical resources, information, products or services that are of national importance	3.90	1	1	3	10	6

This is an extension of the previous factors. Again, participants don't hesitate to give up protection if the hostile takeover is a valuable opportunity, even if this means the loss and discontinuity of an (iconic) company. However, they fear the societal consequences of transferring knowledge and employment abroad – a kind of brain drain. This reflects the feeling that corporations have a kind of hub function in a national economy. Participants strongly resist a hostile takeover in case of loss of control over critical national resources.

Hypothesis 6, stating that the judgement of participants regarding (not) protecting the Target company is influenced by the (societal) risk and consequences, is recognized by the participants. The outcome of the survey implies that in case of general unfavorable societal risks and consequences participants are more inclined to protect the Bidder.

6. Concluding remarks: Overall view and Limitations

There are three limitations of this study/survey. First: the factors are presented separately. In practice however the factors are weighed against each other. Second: some factors are presented as fact, others as opinion. Participants have to consider the reliability of the statements. Three: during the hostile takeover process the critical factors can shift; the importance could depend on the stage in the hostile takeover process.

This research examines the circumstances that justify protection of the target company against a merger or acquisition. From Dutch case law evolution on mergers and acquisitions, literature review, and previous research by the authors, several factors were derived that may be determining for justification or non-justification of

protection against a hostile takeover attempt. These factors were clustered in the following nine main themes: (1) performance of bidder and (2) target, (3) strategic fit, (4) takeover process, (5) method of payment – deal structure, (6) characteristics of CEO's of bidder and (7) target, and the (8) societal risks and (9) societal consequences of the hostile takeover, culminating in 6 hypothesis. The factors are included in a survey investigation that is submitted to 21 experts. The outcomes show that the participants advocate non-protection in case of relatively high performance of the bidding company, new value creating opportunities for the Bidder as well as for the Target, a non-responsive board of the Target with personal interest of the board, and cash payment for the target. They are in favor of protection in case of takeover attempts that incur personal board benefits of Bidder or Target, intended debt push down financing, and in case of takeover attempts that incur considerable social risks and consequences. Participants apply a balanced stakeholder view and they implicitly use a kind of SWOT analysis, sometimes use a checklist (Pham et al., 2018). The results from the survey confirm the assumption that long-term value, and societal considerations are important arguments for the decisions to protect or not protect a target against a hostile takeover. More research into the position, function, and purpose of listed corporations is urgently required.

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Resilience: A "Psychosocial" Competency and Its Role in the Pathways of University Students in Intercultural Research (Pre and Post-COVID19)

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Abstract

Rapid changes to the workplace, even more so after the pandemic, demand education in competencies different from strictly disciplinary competencies, competencies which allow the individual to deal with emergencies and which imply a renewal of professional and institutional identity, favoring restructuring, employability and professionalization focused on future needs. In this paper, the focus is on what the author describes as a "psychosocial competency" in light of her theory, or Resilience. Like resilience, this theory, the Three Dimensional Spiral of Sense, involves three interacting and self-sustained levels: micro (individual), meso (organizational) and macro (national). We present two studies in which the impact of Resilience was observed: a) on academic achievement for delayed students, associated with institutions that do little to promote resilience and b) its importance in the shared representations of university students with respect to the competencies necessary for facing new challenges in the workplace. This group was taking part in a bilateral exchange program in France. COVID-19 suddenly placed them in an emergency situation, which demanded flexibility and the ability to adapt (stranded, without financial or health resources and lacking psychosocial support). Both research studies refer to the Quality of university education as regards Achievement, Professionalization, Identity and Employability. Both reveal deficiencies in the education system in terms of coping with crises. The methodologies, respectively, were quantitative (bivariate and multivariate level) and qualitative (techniques: interview and hierarchical evocation). The results of both studies show: a) the relevant role of Resilience with respect to Achievement; b) the lack of development in this regard. Finally, with a view towards transfer and intervention, a proposal is made to create and/or improve resilience and other psychosocial competencies by means of agreed-upon psychosocial support programs. [1]

Keywords: university**,** internationalization, identities, professionalization, employability, resilience

1. Introduction

Our own research, beginning in the 1990s, addresses factors linked with University Quality as it relates to the productive and scientific context. Currently, Quality and Evaluation of Quality have become the focus of the political-educational agenda. Interest was given to the analysis of factors that impact (both positively and negatively) the Achievement of university students (graduates, delayed students and dropouts) as well as, indirectly, the Quality of educational institutions and national innovation. Studies covered more than 20 incoming classes in 18 study programs at two national universities (Argentina). They were carried out from a *sui generis* systemic perspective that involves several psychosocial micro-theories and three levels – micro, meso and macro – observed self-sustainably (Aparicio 2005; 2012; 2015 a and b). The models included base variables as well as pedagogical-institutional, psychosocial, organizational and structural variables. We also worked with other populations (government workers, healthcare workers, teachers, students at various levels, judges, scientists, etc.)[1].

This research had already demonstrated the importance of competencies – which two decades ago I called "social" and "collective" – both for Achievement and for coping with adversity. Socializing instances were deemed essential and socializing education required as these competencies are not innate, the context influences their "co-construction" together with the individual, feeding each other. The interactive perspective came together in a theory which I have called, in its latest version, The Three Dimensional Spiral of Sense (2015a, b). Twenty-five years have passed and in the last three years, the OECD has shown the impact of these competencies for the ten highest ranked countries as regards learning (OECD, 2017a and b; 2018 a, b, c, d; Agacisti, 2018). Nevertheless, the findings of a first study with *delayed* university students and a recent study with students participating in international exchanges continue to show that some of these competencies, which I now call "psychosocial" competencies, were not sufficiently developed; or at least students were not made aware of their importance for dealing with adversity. COVID-19 has suddenly presented us a difficult scenario: these competencies are developed at the middle and long term, yet emergencies do not wait. The results invite us to reflect upon and rethink the "new normal". On the one hand, this will force us to reinvent ourselves, turning to creativity, entrepreneurship and critical thinking, and to rethink our life

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[1] The findings were presented in more than 200 publications and paved the way to a second doctorate at the Sorbonne (France) and to two opportunities to direct research in the European Union (HDR, field of Education and Organizational and Workplace Psychology).

projects. On the other hand, it will teach us to resist and to face adversity with flexibility and without losing our balance, even when we live in "pathogenic" contexts.

Additionally, at the academic/professional level, this new world for which we are not prepared will have an impact on dropout rates[1], particularly for the most vulnerable groups. These rates were already high in Argentina and Latin America (Aparicio, 1995; 2014)[2]. It is predicted that dropout rates will influence equity and equality of opportunities (Aparicio, 1973/1983) and quality of global life. Both students and professors alike will be affected by the elimination of jobs and demands for new professional profiles due to the abrupt advance of digitalization. This will be added to already high rates of dissatisfaction and burnout (Freudenberger, 1974; Aparicio offers synthesis based on empirical research: 2009 a and b; 2015 a, b and c). Faced with a structural crisis, the global stage will require new competencies co-constructed by individuals, the organizations of which they are a part and public policy.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 The notion of Resilience and its evolution: from a static concept to a dynamic and procedural concept

Resilience may be defined as the individual's capacity to react to and cope with adversities due to an adaptation process and in spite of risks and the adversities themselves. As we see it, all of these elements are essential as regards success and failure. We should clearly state that the ability to deal with pressure and lead a healthy life in an unhealthy environment *implies social and intrapsychic processes in which institutions and primary socializing instances play a fundamental role* (Puerta de Klinkert, 2002, Cirulnik, 2001, 2002, 2004). Resilience is, then, a personal and institutional construction, it is not innate. It is formed within a context. For this reason, it was included in our theoretical model and analyzed from our *sui generis* systemic approach. It is the *context* in which the *individual is inserted,* the factors that enhance or diminish the possibility of overcoming obstacles. In view of the "relative" failure of students who are delayed in their studies, two questions arise: Is a low level of resilience involved? Does the university community, with its dominant system of beliefs and values, influence the probability of being successful? Without understanding the situation based on empirical data, it is quite difficult to make changes at the level of intervention.

The concept of resilience is not new. It was first used in metallurgy and engineering to describe the ability that certain materials have of restoring themselves to their

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[1] In Argentina, dropout rates are around 70%; in other countries of the region, the average dropout rate is close to 55%: Guatemala (82%), Uruguay (72%), Bolivia (73%), Brazil (59%), Chile (54%), Costa Rica (54%) and Mexico (53%). In countries like Spain, the US and Austria, the dropout rate is between 30 and 50%.

[2] A synthesis of English and Spanish literature on dropout can be found in Aparicio, 2020 (in press in Germany). Another synthesis can be found in UNESCO/IESALC (Higher Education Institute for Latin America and the Caribbean) (2020, post COVID-19) and Webinaire F. Pedró, June 2, 2020

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original shape after being subjected to distorting pressure (Royal Spanish Academy, Salvat Encyclopedia of Science and Technology, 1964). Dyer et al. (1996) define as it the flexible or elastic quality of a substance.

In positive psychology, the notion of resilience appears in the 1960s, and even more so in the 1970s and 1980s[1]. At the beginning, in early psychiatric literature, Anthony (1974) made no distinction between Resilience and Resistance, confusing "invulnerable" and "invincible" with resilient. Later, the longitudinal studies of Werner & Smith (1982), carried out with multiracial groups (exposed to risks in Hawaii), were decisive for establishing the differences between the two concepts[2].

Briefly, the concepts of invulnerability and invincibility – referring to "fixed" or "static" qualities – lost ground in favor of resilience, which is a dynamic notion that implies a process. Moreover, the authors discover protecting factors: self-esteem, Independence, connections, initiative and critical thinking – factors considered pillars of resilience. They highlight the difference between physics and psychology. In physics, resilience refers to the ability to return to a state prior to changes applied by extreme forces. In psychology, on the other hand, the concept is broader as it does not involve returning to a previous state. It implies reconstruction of the psychic apparatus, with more efficient organization which is capable of facing the future after the impact of trauma (Lorenzo, 2010).

The dynamic perspective has as its "founding father" Michael Rutter (1985, 1991 and 1992; Rutter, MacDonald, Le Couteur, Harrington, Bolton & Bailey, 1991). From a psychological perspective, the author conceives of protecting factors not as being opposite of risk factors but rather the two form a dynamic that allows strengthening of the individual when faced with situations of adversity, respecting at all times personal characteristics.

Kotliarenco, Cáceres & Fontecilla (1997) describe the evolution of the concept of resilience in three stages. The first implies acceptance of a "positive adaptation" that "invulnerable" or "resistant" individuals have, that is, those who are capable of "resisting" adversity (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). As such, invulnerability is the first notion. It refers to people who seem to be strong and who do not yield to the pressures of stress and adversity.

Later, however, this concept was considered incorrect due to the fact that resistance to stress is relative. It is not stable over time, varying according to an individual's stage

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[1] In Spanish, the concept is introduced later, between 2001 and 2005 (Aparicio, 2007 a; 2009 b; Grotberg, 2008).

[2] Dyer & Minton McGuinness explain the longitudinal study of Werner & Smith (1982), carried out with a group of 698 children born in 1955 in Hawaii. Several families lived in poverty and their members had different mental and physical abilities. Researchers combined biological, social and psychological factors considered predicative of vulnerability and invulnerability when faced with serious problems. They observed that the "invulnerable" youth that had suffered shorter separations from their mothers during their first year of life were active and socially receptive and reached development milestones.

of development and with circumstances. Moreover, the roots of resilience come both from the environment and the individual's own constitution (Rutter, 1985; Klotiarenco et al. 1997).

For her part, Edith Grotberg (2003) defines Resilience as the interaction of factors at three levels: social support (I have), abilities (I can) and internal strength (Here I am and I have). The important element *is interaction*, with people always playing an active role in events and contexts. Barnard (1999) and Manciaux (2003) share the same perspective: resilience is a dynamic process.

The second stage consists of replacing the concept of invulnerability with that of resilience. The difference resides in the fact that resilience can be formed/consolidated while invulnerability is considered an intrinsic characteristic (Rutter, 1991).

2.2 Resilience as a "psychosocial" competency from a systemic perspective or a "sustained" co-construction between individuals and contexts

Aparicio offers another vision in light of her theory. She analyzes resilience as a "psychosocial competency" within sustained macro-meso-micro-macro interplay. In its conception, we may not understand an individual outside of his immediate and mediate contexts, gaining feedback from a particular dialectic that implies spiral movement, with effects that may be both positive and negative (2005; 2007 a and b; 2009 a and b, 2015 a and b). This is very different from the hyperfunctionalist and deterministic spiral, as "each situation" deserves to be analyzed in its own time, in its own space and according to its own circumstances in dynamic interplay or self-sustained giving and taking of "individuals and their contexts". From this notion comes the name of the author's theory (cit. *supra*, 2005, 2012, 2015a and b). Her approach breaks with the genetic determinism of an individual, which presupposes an epistemological focus on the human being, influenced but not determined by his cultural context. It recognizes the potential individuals have for development. Nevertheless, this development may or may not be achieved, depending on the existence or lack of responsibility on the part of socializing instances (family, peers, school, university), on the influence that the social and cultural contexts have and, fundamentally, on the richness of connections. Such influences, interacting with an individual's strengths, will allow him to adapt to adversity and successfully overcomes risks and adversity.

2.3 Other concepts related to resilience

  – **Ability**: defined as social ability or success in one activity (Becoña, 2006). This competency implies effectiveness of action (execution in the field). Masten

(1999; 2001) argues that "competency" and "resilience" are two closely related constructions that form part of a more general adaptive construction.[1]

– **Positive adaptation**: Adapting means adjusting, that is to say it implies internal changes and changes in types of relationships (Lorenzo, 2010). But there is only resilient accommodation when there is positive accommodation.
– **Strength**: There is a difference between strength and resilience. Resilience takes into account adaptive and constructive behavior in the struggle to be successful in a given situation. Therefore, an individual who commits no social crime could be considered strong but not resilient (Novella, 2002).
– **Coping**: Lazarus & Folkman (1980) define coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to improve specific external and internal demands that are evaluated beyond an individual's resources[2].

The aspects which make Resilience stand out are: i) resilience always requires adaptive behavior from all sectors; ii) to have resilience, there must be an adverse or stressful situation. With coping, on the other hand, responses may or may not be adapted to daily events; iii) resilience requires effective adjustment strategies, that is efforts to maintain internal or external balance through activities related to thought and action. Individuals must adapt to stressful events and to do so must assess situations through the use of adjustment strategies (Manciaux et al, 2003).

As regards the topic at hand, and particularly as it relates to the **Research 2** group, which is currently facing the COVID-19 emergency and will later face the post-pandemic era, we can see that successful adjustment will require adaptive behavior in the realm of education, "organizations that learn", the health sector and social development in the face of enormous increases of poverty. It will be necessary to adapt to the structural changes that are already beginning to be seen (millions of jobs lost, among other aspects).

In this regard, we believe it is important to analyze the value given to resilience by university students and the degree to which it is present in their social representations as a competency to be reinforced for overcoming adversity. This is essential because these representations, which must be reviewed collectively, are followed by new models of action, concrete practice and action (Moscovici, 1961; Argyris, 1982). In other words, if resilience is not sufficiently valued, both at the individual level and at the institutional level, it will be more difficult to deal with the

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[1] Luthar (1993) highlights the fact that there is a difference between the two concepts: competency does not imply risk. Nevertheless, Perrenoud (2000) defines competency as the ability to mobilize a set of cognitive resources (knowledge, abilities, information, etc.) to face a family of situations pertinently and effectively. It means being able to transfer what was learned, to have autonomy in one's learning and to resolve problems. These personal/professional situations may imply risks.
[2] Establishing the differences goes beyond our objective here. In Research 1, both variables were measured with different techniques.

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consequences of COVID-19. The findings that link Resilience to Achievement point in this direction (at the international level and from my own research).

3. Contributions of resilience at the university level

Traditionally, educational institutions have been concerned with detecting errors instead of identifying strengths. From our perspective, it is most important to concentrate on acquiring and developing abilities, skills and strengths, as opposed to focusing on weaknesses. And it is here that resilience can make enormous contributions. Findings from research carried out in countries at the top of the educational rankings prove this (Rutter, 1987; PISA / OECD, ops. cits).

Briefly, education plays a central role in developing resilience in children, adolescents and academics, helping them to deal with both academic and workplace difficulties (Melillo, Suarez & Rodríguez, 2004 and Coronado-Hijón, 2017). Pulgar Suaso (2010) affirms that a resilient student is committed and responsible, has more self-confidence and greater control over his future, tends to feel included and participates more in social networks. These characteristics impact success. Likewise, Goleman (1996) warns that emphasis placed on cognitive-technological models, as opposed to social skills in higher education, leads to the emergence of fear, insecurities, instability and lack of self-control. On the other hand, an institutional context which promotes resilience *among its students and ad intra* (among its teaching and administrative staff) acts to prevent crises. Multiple findings support this idea. However, Henderson & Milstein (2003), who have worked in formal educational environments, maintain that this has not been well-studied at educational institutions, and much less in higher education.

In the same vein, it is important both for individuals and for institutions themselves to incorporate programs that promote leadership, motivation, study habits, participation and responsibility. These were precisely the factors which were addressed in our research. Finally, the Delors Report (UNESCO, 1996) identified four pillars of education policy for quality: knowledge, know-how, good manners and learning to be. The first two correspond to traditional models, attempting to measure to justify results. The latter two, within which programs to consolidate resilience are inscribed, are becoming more and more important in contexts of globalization and emergency as they seek to promote social integration and the construction of citizenship.

4. Objectives and questions/hypotheses of our research

4.1. Objectives

4.1.1 General Objectives:

Research 1 (DELAY): to understand he factors (core, psychosocial, structural, pedagogical and institutional) associated with success at university and in particular the importance of resilience.

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Research 2 (IAM - INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY)**:** to observe the importance university students participating in academic exchanges give to resilience, both for their integration into a new culture and for facing the demands of a new working world.

4.1.2 Specific Objectives:

Research 1 (DELAY): a) to determine the sociocultural and psychosocial factors which significantly influence delay in studies; b) to Identify the at-risk population and; c) to provide elements to the authorities of each institution with which to implement changes which will in turn contribute to achievement.

Research 2 (IAM): To observe the role that this group attributes to Resilience as it relates to the demands of the working world, with the rapid adaptation that it requires and the degree of adjustment to these demands/competencies that educational institutions must take into account.

4.2 Hypotheses

Research 1 (DELAY): Higher degrees of Resilience (RESIL) have a positive impact on University Achievement (UP) and on the chances of labor insertion.

Research 2 (IAM): in the social representations of students and/or professionals who participate in international academic exchanges, Resilience will be an important factor for adaptation: a) at the moment of entering into a different macro and organizational context and; b) when facing the future world of work and its demands.

3. Methodology

We used both quantitative and qualitative methodology.

3.1. Guiding questions

* DELAY and IAM Group

1- Are there differences in representations of resilience between university students studying in Argentina and those who have chosen to participate in exchange programs in Europe? These exchanges would allow us to think that the IAM group has a certain ability to adapt.

2- What strength does Resilience have as a factor associated with academic and professional achievement in both groups? These questions seem naïve but the answers given have left us perplexed.

* IAM Group Only:

3- What role do university students interviewed in Paris give to Resilience as it relates to the demands of the new **world of work**?

4- Do their social representations (evident in their responses) show the importance that Resilience will have when they are faced with the changes and innovation that

the new world of work will demand post-COVID-19? (Gaglio, 2011; Alter, 1999; Alkrich, Latour & Callon, 2006)

5- Do they value being prepared for adjustments that will mean, more than ever, supporting and strengthening connections or, on the contrary, does its role appear diluted, revealing little awareness of the need for such preparedness?

We must point out that in this paper (IAM Group), we will not go into an analysis of all of the questions proposed in Research 2.

Keeping in mind our objective, to observe the importance Resilience has as regards the current demands of the world of work in addition to the essential aspects which define it, we have attempted to respond to the above questions.

The findings are presented in two instances, result of the application of the hierarchical evocation technique. Firstly, we observe what importance the IAM group gives to Resilience. Secondly, we observe the importance given to five aspects related to this competency: i) connections; ii) the ability to adapt to change; iii) its role as regards rapid adjustments; iv) problem-solving abilities and; v) flexibility.

Briefly, their responses reveal the awareness they have of the importance of this variable, an importance which will only increase due to the effects of the pandemic and the need to overcome adversity in the world of work. Likewise, their responses allow us to observe which competencies they believe must be strengthened (among professors and students) in light of abrupt changes and the need to quickly adjust.

Lastly, it is important to point out that we will analyze both the responses as well as the "silences", as "silences" as such do not exist. They speak for themselves of a lack of awareness, deficiency, lack of involvement and disinterest.

3.2. Sample groups

Research 1 (DELAY):

The sample group consisted of individuals at six Schools, including Philosophy and Literature (Educational Sciences), Economic Science (Accounting and Management), Political Science (Social Communication), Law, Medicine and Engineering (Civil, Industrial and Petroleum Engineering), at the National University of Cuyo (1985 – 2004). They were interviewed at home. These individuals had enrolled at the university starting in 1985 and reenrolled in 2004 but are not currently attending courses; they are ghost students. Out of 1880 individuals identified in institutional listings, the number of students interviewed (students we were able to locate) was N=229.

Research 2 (IAM):

The sample group consisted of university students participating in academic or business exchange programs starting in 2018 in Paris (Cité internationale). We worked with several classes of students (2002-2003, 2013-2014 and 2018-2019)

(descriptive/percentage quantitative level) and at the qualitative level (2018-2019) we worked face to face with volunteers (20% of the total). This paper will deal with the qualitative level.

3.3. Techniques

Research 1 (DELAY):

-We used a semi-structured interview and specific tests to measure the different psychosocial variables related to achievement (UP): Strategies to "overcome" difficulties (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1996), Attributional Styles (Seligman, 1991) and *Resilience* (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). In this work, we deal with the importance of Resilience for overcoming difficulties within university institutions.

-As regards Resilience, Henderson and Milstein's questionnaire consists of three scales: Student (RESIALUM), Staff (RESIPERS), both the administration and teachers, and Institutional (RESIFACU); its six sub-scales can be regrouped into two sub-dimensions. The aspects evaluated include: I. *Reducing risk*: 1. Enhancing pro-social bonds; 2. Defining clear and firm limits (Creating and implementing coherent school policies and procedures and explaining expectations in terms of behavior. Stating written rules and transmitting them clearly; 3. Teaching competences for life (cooperation, critical thinking, communication competencies, problem solving skills, healthy stress management); and II. *Constructing Resilience*: 1. Providing affection and support; 2. Defining and transmitting high and realistic expectations (avoiding the notion of development *plafond*); 3. Providing opportunities for significant participation (granting both students and those in charge of making decisions the chance to determine goals with the help of others).

As regards University Achievement (UP), in a broad sense, it comprises the following categories: a) Achievement: finishing studies (obtaining the degree); b) Delay: finishing studies in a longer period of time than the officially pre-determined one; and c) Failure: dropout.

Strictly speaking, performance was understood considering the following indicators (UNCuyo Statistics Department):

- Number of years studying (2005 – COHORT)
- Number of years needed for the study program (ANIPLAN)
- Subjects failed (MATPLAN-REUSSI)
- Total number of subjects in the curriculum (MATPLAN)
- Number of failures (APLAZOS)
- Subjects passed (MATPLAN)

$$UP = \left\{ \frac{1}{\left\{ \left[\frac{(2005 - COHORT)}{ANIPLAN} \right] + \left[\frac{MATNOAPR}{MATPLAN} \right] + \left[\frac{APLAZOS}{APROBADA} \right] \right\}} \right\}$$

Research 2 (IAM):

Interviews were conducted, as well as a semi-structured interview.

Here we have decided to approach the matter in two instances and only as it relates to the variable/dimension "**World of Work".**

Instance 1:

The hierarchical evocation technique was used (Abric, 2001). The objective was to understand how the **"World of Work"** appeared in their shared representations (central or peripheral), as well as the predominance of positive or negative aspects.

Four categories resulted from the combination of the frequency with which words were used and the importance given to them: 1) Educational Dimension; 2) Organizational, Sociopolitical and Structural Dimension; 3) Economic Dimension; and 4) Relational/Motivational Dimension (Resilience located here). According to the aforementioned combinations, these four categories are located in different quadrants: P2, P3, P4 and P1.

In the P2 quadrant (nucleus of the representation) are the most frequent and most important categories; in the P3 quadrant, those most frequent but least important; in the P4 quadrant, those which are overall the least important; and finally, in the P1 quadrant (low frequency and high importance), appear the so-called elements of contrast or innovators that show group differences. Through the use of this technique, we were able to understand the most notable convergences and divergences.

Figure 1. Quadrants (Hierarchical evocation technique)[1].

P1 (-+)	P2 (++)
P4 (- -)	P3 (+-)

*Instance 2***:**

Taking into account our focus here, **Resilience**, we sought to observe what relevance this variable was given in the face of rapid adaptation which the workplace is

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[1] Note: Frequency of word appearance is located on the x-axis, while Importance given the word is located on the y-axis.

currently demanding. We therefore proceeded to count how many times the word Resilience and four related words were mentioned.

Lastly, we must also point out that the following qualitative dimensions were observed as they relate to the issue at hand, though they are not the object of our analysis here. They are included in Figure 2.

1- Which competencies do companies value according to students of the hard sciences?
2- Which competencies do companies value according to students of the soft sciences?
3- Which competencies do universities value according to students of the hard sciences?
4- Which competencies do universities value according to students of the soft sciences?
5- What should be a priority to change in the development of competencies for professors?
6- What should be a priority to change in students' education in the place of workplace transformations?

These students' representations are of particular interest as this group theoretically received superior education and passed selection processes to continue their studies in Europe.

4. Results (IV)

Research 1 (DELAY)

Results show the role of Resilience in the Extension of Studies (UP).

The Resilience factor, as previously stated, was measured using three scales: Student (RESIALUM), Staff (RESIPERS), both administrative and teaching, and Institutional (RESIFACU). For all three scales, the average is focused on category three, which indicates that Resilience training is at the "initial" stage. This means that, in general terms, in all Schools, institutional evaluation as a means of modeling Resilience in students, in staff and in the institution as an organization is quite low. On the other hand, each institution has its own profile, since some appear as to encourage Resilience among students, staff and/or the institution itself (Aparicio, 2009ª, Vol. 1).

There should be *resilience resource areas* (see Schools/Courses in Study I of our research) favoring this competency, that is, instances favoring: a) the creation of supportive social networks; b) the consolidation of a transcendental meaning of life; c) the development of skills to build solid, respectful and rewarding relationships in order to obey rules and accept limits in a conscientious manner; d) the ability to solve problems through analysis and reflection; and e) the development of self-esteem based on a realistic viewpoint of one's own potential and limitations.

Below is analysis of results showing the variables which influence achievement.

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Bivariate Analysis: As regards factors for "overcoming obstacles" in our *Resilience and Coping* model, the results show that the most significant Resilience Scales are the Pro-social Bond (RESIVINC), Clear Limits (RESILI) and High Expectations (RESIEXPE). More precisely, when the *Pro-social Bond* increases, University Performance (UP) decreases. On the contrary, when there are *Clear Limits* and *High Expectations*, UP increases.

We stress, then, the positive effect of expectations in relation to learning limits, something that is lacking nowadays. On the other hand, there is the very high pro-social bond, which leads to dropout. At the level of demands, experience in different Schools shows that as demands increase, so does performance (lower rate of delay in studies).

Multivariate Analysis: Let us focus for a moment on the University Achievement (UP) model and analyze which variables can predict achievement. Among the *Psychosocial* Variables, Resilience is precisely the most influential. Two sub-scales are associated with UP: bonds and opportunities offered to individuals (RESIVINC and RESIOPOR). The former contributes negatively; that is, the more students are devoted to social life, the more their levels of achievement drop. The latter contributes positively. In other words, the more opportunities for progress, the higher the UP.

RESIVINC: Probability is lower than 5% (0.0328). Coefficient is -0.003520, which reveals a negative relationship with UP. In other words, when these bonds are exaggerated and sociability is considerable, studying becomes less important and studies become delayed.

RESIOPOR: Probability is lower than 5% (0.00057), which indicates a higher association in the multivariate model than RESIVINC. Coefficient is 0.004104; that is, there exists a positive relationship with UP. When there are opportunities for development, academic performance improves and delaying studies decreases.

Research 2 (IAM)

Instance 1: Analysis of central and peripheral categories of the "World of Work" dimension

The "Motivational – Relational" Dimension is located in the nucleus or heart of the representation (P2). It is, therefore, the most important as the majority of responses are concentrated here: F = 43.5%; I= 44%. In other words, almost 50% of the responses are found in this category.

Practically all of the rest are located in the "Organizational/Sociopolitical/Structural" category: F =28.3%; I = 28%[1].

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[1] Values are given for the four constructed categories: 1) Education (F=3.3%; I= 3%); 2) Organizational/Sociopolitical/Structural (F=28.3%; I=28%; Economic: (F=11%; I= 1%); 4) Relational/Motivational (F= 43.5%; I= 44%).

What stands out is that in the first category, where Resilience should be located, the word did not appear even once[1]. This goes against our hypothesis.

Table 1: Category «Item 38.1 World of Work» (IAM)

Subjects		23	
Sub-categories		4	
Frecuency	Maximun	92	100%
	Hight	23,00	25%
Importance	Maximun	230	100%
	Hight	45	19%

Importance	<<Education>>	<<Organizational-Socio-polítical and Estructural>>	<<Economic>>	<<Relational-Motivational>>
1	0,0%	6,5%	0,0%	13,0%
2	1,1%	6,5%	1,1%	9,8%
3	1,1%	10,9%	0,0%	8,7%
4	1,1%	5,4%	0,0%	12,0%
Frecuency	3	27	1	40
	3,3%	29,3%	1,1%	43,5%
	Low	Hight	Low	Hight
Importance	6	67	3	102
	3%	29%	1%	44%
	Low	Hight	Low	Hight

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[1] The Table and Graph (qualitative) are referred to in Aparicio, 2017-2020. PICTO.

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Graph 1a. Categories « Item 38.1. World of Work » (IAM)
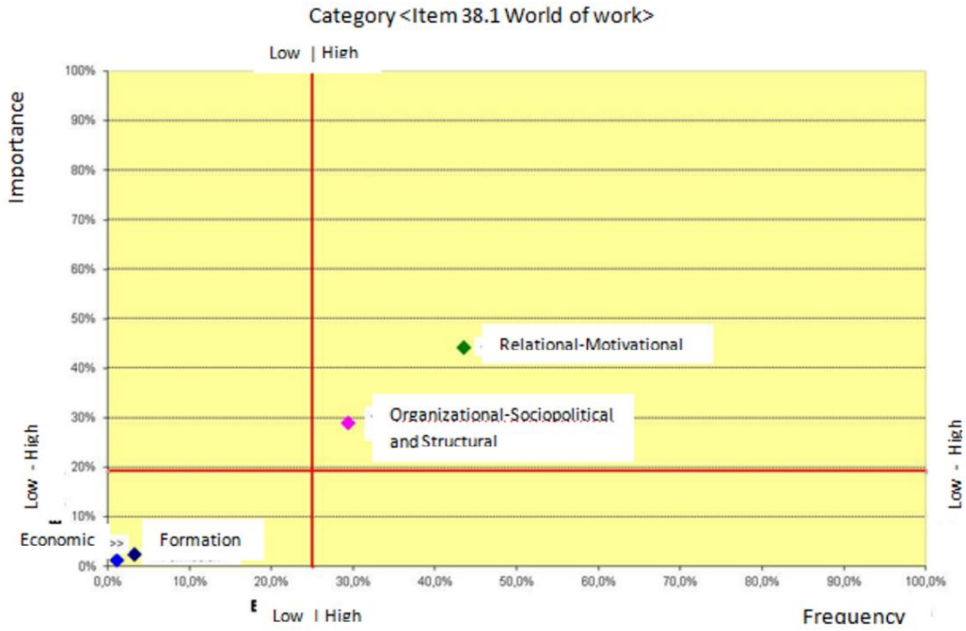
Graph 1b. Categories « Item 38.1. World of Work » (IAM)
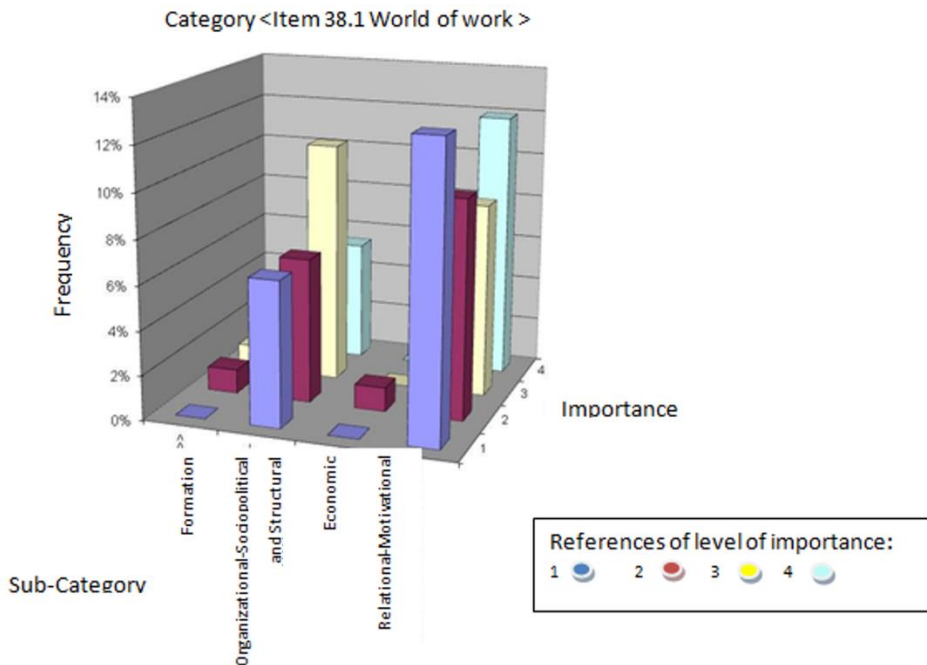
In the "**Motivational – Relational**" category, we observe that the majority of the responses see the world of work as something positive. Respondents describe it as: "factor of fulfillment" and "identity" (these were the most-used words), but also as: "interesting", "dynamic", "visibility factor", "satisfaction", "socialization", "a place to apply what you've learned", "essential", "construction", "challenge", "something that gives personal and social value", "respect for others", "a reason for happiness", etc.

On the other hand, in the "Organizational-SocioPolitical-Structural" category, the majority of words evoked were negative: "negative", "imposed", "exploiter" (repeated frequently), "destructive", "unequal", "precarious", "cage", "slavery", "racist", "ungrateful", "little respect for minorities", "meritocracy", "bad compensation for another's work", "unjust" (repeated frequently), "with shortcomings in evaluation and in work conditions" ("many hours daily", "little time for rest", "little vacation time", "unequal treatment"), "competitive", "closed", "leading to low quality of life", etc. This reflects certain nonconformity with the functioning of workplace organizations and of macro policies adopted in the field.

Two respondents finally pointed out that it presents "many changes" which would imply that it will require adjustment, the ability to adapt and, indirectly, Resilience.

Focusing on the issue at hand, the word **"resilience"** was **never** mentioned as an ability nor, according to the author's conception, as a **"psychosocial competency"** important to carrying out one's work daily **under current conditions**, conditions which have already had negative effects at the level of health, such as increases in burnout, low levels of satisfaction, decreases in wellbeing and falling expectations, among others.

Instance 2: Number of times words referring to Resilience appeared

These words included: Adjustment/Change, Adaptation, Resolve, Connections and Flexibility[1].

Once again, the word Resilience never appeared. In the "**World of Work"** Dimension, only 2% of respondents mentioned the word adjustment/change. The other words listed are not the focus of this analysis, however, the percentages of mentions of words that could refer to Resilience are extremely low[2].

Table 2: Frequency of appearance of words related to Resilience

Competencies valued	Words Analyzed

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[1] It is important to note that after studying what was said by each respondent, we observed something which has not been mentioned by other authors applying the technique and which we have observed repeatedly. In effect, tendencies in individuals' responses (words mentioned) are observed. That is, those who have negative representations tend to make this evident through the majority of their words and the same happens with those having positive representations.

[2] The item number from the semi-structured interview is maintained.

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	Resilience	Adjust/ Change	Adaptation	Resolve	Connection	Flexibility	% Total
37.a. Competencies valued by companies – Hard Sciences	0	0	1	0	0	0	
%	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
37.b. Competencies valued by companies – Soft Sciences	0	0	4	0	0	2	
%	0	0	4	0	0	2	7
37.c. Competencies valued by the university – Hard Sciences	0	0	1	0	0	0	
%	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
37.d. Competencies valued by the university – Soft Sciences	0	0	3	0	0	0	
%	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
38.1 World of work	0	2	0	0	0	0	
%	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
500.d. Competencies to be developed in educators	0	0	0	1	0	0	
%	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
500.e. Competencies to be developed in students	0	1	1	0	0	1	
%	0	1	1	0	0	1	3
Total responses = 100%	92	92	92	92	92	92	

4. Discussion (Research 1 and Research 2)

These results show the need for developing means and sources of resilience within organizations. Resilience always leads to success for individuals, as well as for the organizations they belong to (Aparicio, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Rutter, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1982; Rutter et al, 1991; 1992; Barnard, 1994; de Konink, 2011;Cirulnik, 2001, 2002; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Grotberg, 2006; Kokliatenko et al, 1998; Agacisti, 2018; Mo, 2018; Chernyshenko, Kankaraš and Drasgow, 2018; OECD, 2017 a and b;2018 a, b, c and d, among others).

On the one hand, our findings align with those of important researchers.

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On the other hand, the global findings show the significance of other core variables of achievement micro-theories (clear goals, realistic expectations, effort, *coping*, etc.). All of this refers us to the N-achievement theory (McClelland, 1961); to the Expectancy/Valence theory (Feather & Davenport, 1981); to the Optimistic theory (Seligman, 1991), to Self-Efficacy (Bandura, 1987); to reflective practice and learning organizations (Argirys, 1982; Shon; 1992); to theories related to Coping (Lazarus & Folfman, 1980) and to Coping Styles and Strategies (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1996) and its counterpart: Burnout (Freudenberger, 1974).

Finally, in **Research 1**, the influence of context is made evident. Some Schools generate and consolidate Resilience, while there are others in which this "social competency" is weak: (Dubar, 2000 a, b; Aparicio, 2015 a, b; Silva & Aparicio, 2015). This situation reveals that the University is in need of professionalization in order to favor the development of competencies beyond disciplinary areas. As regards students, it demands the consolidation of goals, limits and stamina to overcome obstacles, expectations which are presently lacking due to the devaluation of degrees.

Conclusion

In **Research 1**, results demonstrate that *low* levels of Resilience developed both in individuals and in the University (in different Schools) are related to *negative* Achievement (that is, delayed studies).

In **Research 2** (IAM group), on the one hand, there is little awareness of the role of Resilience in the current World of Work, a world which demands strong connections, great flexibility and the ability to adjust. Likewise, respondents value this "psychosocial competency" very little as it relates to **Professional and Personal Achievement**, despite what has been shown by numerous studies. On the other hand, knowing that resilience is not innate and that it must be "constructed" through interaction with a context (family, university, etc.), the findings show a debt on the part of educational institutions in terms of the formation of social, collective and psychosocial competencies, as they have focused solely on disciplinary learning.

In other words, when it is addressed from the valuation of individuals, Resilience is an undeveloped "absent competency", whereas it is well-developed in the ten countries that lead educational rankings (Aparicio, 2011a; OECD, ops. cit.). This allows us to predict that it will have high impact on levels of achievement, much more so in the post-COVID-19 world.

Faced with this "absence of education" and looking to overcome the emergency generated by COVID-19, we invite universities to act to create new protocols of action, guides of best practice and programs for psychosocial support of different actors (including resilience consolidation programs). Finally, we invite everyone to join together in a RESIL-COVID-19Network.

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When Meteors Vanish in Political Philosophies - Thinking with Michel Serres in Times of New Climate Regime

Siavash Bakhtiar

Abstract

In memoriam of Michel Serres, this essay aims to offer a brief account of the necessity of reading his works in times of political and ecological crisis. Since his opus magnum *The Natural Contract,* Serres had developed in the last three decades a theory that investigates and rethink the relation of the moderns, since Galileo and Descartes, with what they call "nature" in order to offer a third way to the division between (post-)modern philosophers and dogmatic scientists: the first have been systematically deconstructing all the grand narratives and, the latter have often excluded from their theoretical work any type of moral reflection on the modes of production of scientific practices, and their consequences for humans and non-humans. The path initiated by Serres influenced many contemporary philosophers who have continued and enriched his investigation of the origins and consequences of a new tendency of *not* doing politics in the epoch of the Anthropocene, of a new escapism that refuses to face the ecological challenges *hic et nunc.*

Keywords: Michel Serres, natural contract, political ecology, divide of the moderns

Introduction

What I first remember when mentioning the name of Michel Serres is a voice. A warm and broken voice cadenced by his meridional accent easily identifiable by his followers. Second, comes his gaze: for those who have seen him on television or in a conference, his mischievous gaze that was full of a certain naivety, and at the same time teasing his interlocutors; but foremost, his gaze on current state of affairs that strives to understand and explain the conditions in which humans not only give meaning to the world, but also *inhabit it*, *compose it and are composed by it.*

It is about *humans*: that is to say that Serres' work and philosophical life was dedicated to share his perception of the different modes of existence humans and non-humans have been capable of displaying in front of him. I put an emphasis on his gaze, because he reminds me of a painter who in an ecstatic vision brushes in complex lines and deep colours the different plis (folds) that world offers to him. Therefore, the reader should not be surprise if I use a painting to introduce this paper. It is Jan Breughel the Elder's *The Earthly Paradise* (see appendix). It was painted in 1621, but strangely it

goes against the flow of its epoch: the era of Descartes, Hobbes and Galileo where the human individual were put at the centre, and the rest of beings and objects were outcasted at the borders of what we, moderns, call existence, society or even the world. Serres refers to this painting in *Yeux* – one of his most fascinating books where through an assemblage of texts and images, he questions the capacity of the eyes, and more specifically the eyes of the painters – and highlights that Breughel's tour de force, in times of the emergence of modernity, is to offer a representation of paradise where human figures are relegated to the back of the scenery in favour of a bestiary that forces the viewer to "forget the [dominant] anthropocentrism: the world is back, fauna and flora before humans" (2014b: 146).

The world is back, but which world? Or said differently, does the world had a meaning before the humans? Or maybe, by the world, one has to understand the planet earth or what ecologists call "nature." The world, the planet, nature, the globe: the ambiguity and interchangeability of these terms on condition of universalism – or globalization – is what is at stake in the geopolitical decision of human societies for the next generations. In times of incertitude, where the stability of national and international institutions is dramatical shaken by unpredictable events. It seems that it is time for political thinkers and activists, before even criticizing, to revise their conceptual toolboxes in order to have a better grasp of the bond humans have *with nature,* or rather with the entities that compose it, and are composed by it – humans included.

More than a vision of a remote past, one could see in Breughel's painting a tragic omen; one could perceive in the disturbed sky of the painting that "a storm is blowing from Paradise," to quote Benjamin, "[which] it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel [of history] can no longer close them" (1969: 257-258). One can almost perceive in the piling clouds of the painting a near future where the world could be composed by singled animals that presage no possibilities of a livable future beyond this last generation;[1] except maybe for a little cohort of humans that would be outcasted to the most remote – and colourless – knot of the fabric of the world, on the verge of extinction. This reversal, or should I say interruption, of the current situation, which is deluded by the promises of the myth of progress and emancipation of the grand narratives of the 18th and 19th century, is what is at the heart of Serres' work: "the importance of an event for him is not related to the noise it makes, but to the length of the historical period that it ends" (Legros, Ortoli 2014: 10). With the current social and climate crisis, who would deny that our generation is facing one of the greatest challenges in the history of humanity? The new climate regime not only

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[1] If there was still any doubt, the reader should by now realise that Breughel's representation is far from any biblical image of Noah's Arch.

concerns our material survival as a species, but also our symbolic survival, our *modes* of existence.[1]

Concerning the Storm that is blowing over the Ruins of the Modern Constitution

I have started this essay with a painting representing what Breughel the Elder saw as paradise on Earth, but the real object should be *war*. From the first pages of *The Natural Contract,* Serres warns us that "war and violence" is what is waiting for humans if there is not a significant change in our relationship with the world.[2] Far from Breughel's enchanted vision, Serres refers here to a gloomy representation that is about to come:

"The global change now underway not only brings history to the world but also makes the power of the world precarious, infinitely fragile. Once victorious, the Earth is now a victim. *What painter will depict the deserts vitrified by our war games*? What visionary poet will lament vile, bloody-fingered dawn? But people are dying of hunger in the deserts just as they are suffocating in the slimy quicksand or drowning in the rising rivers. Conquered, the world is finally conquering us. Its weakness forces strength to exhaust itself and thus our own strength to become gentler" (1995: 11-12)

But war against whom, or rather against *what*? Well, Serres first reminds us that war has always been an important part of the foundation of modern human societies: there should be an emphasis on the qualifying adjective modern because we are not dealing with the pre-moderns, for whom human (society) was still only a small part of absolute φύσις;[3] here, the question of war and society falls on those, from Hobbes to Rousseau and beyond, who consider that "[t]he social contract that gave birth to us is perhaps born with war, which presupposes a prior agreement that merges with the social contract" (1995: 13). The acceptance of the premise that war can be channeled but cannot be totally avoided. It can only be restricted and framed with some rules through a contract. Serres however argues that today we are facing something utterly

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[1] Modes is written in plural to make clear that humans have through history offered different world visions, but again, the term is in itself ambiguous, since it is comes with a deep connotation that refers to a long European philosophical tradition that goes from Spinoza to Deleuze, Souriau and Latour. See Delchambre, Marquis 2013; Le Bot 2014.

[2] Serres is certainly one of the first philosophers that has put forward idea that the situation we are facing in the near future is a state of general war. He has been followed by other thinkers such as James Lovelock and Bruno Latour. See Lovelock 2006 and Latour 2017.

[3] There is no space in this essay to explain further the pre-modern world vision, but the reader can find a beautiful image of this perceptive in what Serres calls "peasant philosophy": "Immersed in being-in-the-world, indissolubly bound with-one-another, their ploughing tools at hand, their feet plunged unto death into the immemorial soil, below the horizon, they-are-there, piously hearkening to the language of being and time, when the angel passes, the hourly bearer of the word. There's nothing more or less in our peasant or forest philosophies than in nostalgic and conventional paintings. A frail bent reed, man thinks, knowing that he will die of this universe that, for its part, does not know that it is slaying him; he is more noble, therefore, more dignified than his conqueror because he understands this" (1995: 17).

new in the battle situation, which is not restricted to humans anymore, but has to accept the presence of a third belligerent. From now on, nature acts as a rebellious agent which holds humanity countable for its destructive behaviour:

"We so-called developed nations are no longer fighting among ourselves; together we are all turning against the world. Literally a world war, and doubly so, since the whole world, meaning all men, imposes losses on the world, meaning things. *We shall thus seek to conclude a peace treaty*" (1995: 32)

A peace treaty, really? I can imagine the reader smiling at this proposition, and thinking to herself: "wait a minute, are we talking about trees, tornados, rivers, grasshoppers and bacteria taking a pen and signing an official document?" No, of course not. This treaty is a symbolic gesture, a recognition that we humans are not the only important beings in the world. Just as Rousseau's social contract opened a transcendental condition to the co-existence of different categories of humans, Serres seems to extend this right to exist to potential non-human social actants, and while thinking of it, he reminds his most skeptical readers, whenever he has the opportunity, that *no one has never materially signed Rousseau's contract* (see 2008: 5, 2014a: 236).

The *natural contract* Serres is calling for has to be understood as metaphysical agreement to control our "mastery" over other things and beings, "[b]ecause, unregulated, exceeding its purpose, counterproductive, pure mastery is turning back on itself"; but also as a recognition of their right to exist: "[o]nce again, we must rule in the case of the losers, by drafting the rights of beings who have none." (ibid: 34,35).

The natural contract is about finding a balance between humans (and their activities) and natural entities, which we are used to call objects, that are already more and more acting like powerful social agents:

"Objects themselves are legal subjects and no longer mere material for appropriation, even collective appropriation. Law tries to limit abusive parasitism among men but does not speak of this same action on things. If objects themselves become legal subjects, then all scales will tend toward an *equilibrium*" (ibid: 37).

An equilibrium that comes to compensate the excess of *our* selfish – Serres uses the term "parasitic" – hegemonic behaviour and culture for the almost four hundred years.[1] When I say, I should certainly be more specific by saying: *we, Europeans!* – or rather, *we, Moderns!* Without getting into an exhaustive historical study, it would be difficult to argue that Western nations – with their share of colonial and industrial domination and cultural hegemony – have a bigger material and moral responsibility in the current state of affairs than for instance the Guaraní people.

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[1] On the concept of the "parasite," see Serres eponymous book, *The Parasite* (1982). See also Burton, Tam 2015.

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The contract is about recreating a tacit bond between the object and the subject, the natural and the cultural, the world and the city; a bond that has been severely damaged by what social anthropologist Philippe Descola call "the Great Divide" in the 17th century:

"What now came into existence was a notion of *Nature* as an autonomous ontological domain, a field of inquiry and scientific experimentation, an object to be exploited and improved; and very few thought to question this. (…) [And] the notion of *culture*, by which it defines the proper field of its inquiries and by which it concisely expresses all that which, in humans and their achievements, is distinct from nature and imposes meaning upon it" (2013: 69, 72)

The origins of this division goes as far as the emergence of Western thought, in the times of Zeno d'Elea, Anaxagoras and Socrates,[1] but has taken a decisive turn with the increasing influence of thinkers such as Hobbes and Galileo – to mention only the best known examples – which coincides with the trial of the latter and the debate that is still going on between scientists and social theorists:

 "The contemporary debate that opposes, sometimes violently, these two authorities – science and law, rational reason and prudent judgment – has deeply moved our flesh and our word since the beginning of our history. The history of our knowledge follows the temporal trajectory set in motion by this trial, still vigorous today, an originary source and a perpetual motor" (Serres 1995: 61)

In Galileo's time the law was represented by the Church, but once it will be liberated from the religious doxa – thanks to the noteworthy influence of the Enlightenment thinkers – it will be fully endorsed by the moral guarantors of the modern society: jurists, politics and philosophers.[2] Now, as Serres points out, if there is a certain practical logic for the two first categories to hold a moral position within the paradigm of modern societies, the acting of philosophers as moralists is not as obvious as it looks:

"How few philosophers, indeed, in the last half-century, haven't seized and enjoyed the role of state's attorney, prosecutor, accuser; they've denounced abuses, crimes, errors, hypocrisies, as if they were journalists: this is their rightful place. No, our

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[1] On the Greek origins of the division between nature and culture, Bruno Latour offers an extensive argument about the allegory of the Cave in *Politics of Nature*, see 2004: 10-49.

[2] As a philosopher of science, Serres writes extensively about the crucial role of Galileo's trial in the division between scientists and philosophers but does not dwell on Hobbes and the evolution of modern political philosophy. However, one can find an extensive and original study of the role Hobbes played in the division between science and (political) philosophy in Bruno Latour's work, especially *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993). It is worth noting that Serres is not a systemic thinker and does not have any followers, but one can consider Bruno Latour as one of the few "compagnons de route" that have been influenced by Serres, offering exegesis of his work, trying genuinely to *think with him.* I have mentioned the relationship between Latour and Serres' respective theories in a previous paper, see Bakhtiar 2018.

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philosophy shouldn't be called that of suspicion, but that of denunciation. But by what right does it give itself this job?" (ibid.: 69).

This new role, this *modern* role for the thinker is the result of a tacit agreement between scientists and (political) theorists. This argument, called the "modern Constitution" by Bruno Latour, implies that: "the representation of nonhumans belongs to science, but science is not allowed to appeal to politics; the representation of citizens belongs to politics, but politics is not allowed to have any relation to the nonhumans produced and mobilized by science and technology" (1993: 28). However, this does not mean that there would not be any intrusion: as I have said, a contract implies a confrontation of viewpoints, a situation of *ideological war* between two powerful corpuses of knowledge, looking at each other scornfully from their respective "artificial" general headquarters:

"Freed from religious bondage, the [modern scientists] could criticize the obscurantism of the old powers by revealing the material causality that those powers dissimulated - even as they invented those very phenomena in the *artificial enclosure of the laboratory*. (…) But the modern critique did not simply turn to Nature in order to destroy human prejudices. *It soon began to move in the other direction*, turning to the newly founded social sciences in order to destroy the excesses of naturalization. This was the second Enlightenment, that of the nineteenth century (ibid.: 35).

The confrontation between two camps: on the one side, the religious and secular texts for the philosophers, and other other, the scientists' private and autonomous property: the laboratories, those "places outside law, without politics or kings" (Serres 1995: 67). In a nutshell, it is this modern division – acknowledged by scientists and philosophers – that Serres' natural contract is trying to fix. Both factions have lived in relatively good terms, putting aside a few skirmishes, for three hundred years, but the events – from Hiroshima to the ecological crisis – of the last seventy years have made a huge impression on the minds, and the bodies.

Science has lost its innocence;[1] and the direct consequence is that philosophers have assumed with even more fervour their self-assigned role of moralists with an *esprit de sérieux* that was incarnated to perfection by the constant folding and unfolding that compose contemporary Western thought, from the defenders of the modern grand narratives to their critical heirs: the so-called post-moderns of the next generation.[2]

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[1] Serres repeated in different occasions that it is the use of the atomic bomb on civilians – and the implication of world class scientists in its making – that pushed him to leave the study of sciences for humanities: "Since the atomic bomb, it had become urgent to rethink scientific optimism. l ask my readers to hear the explosion of this problem in every page of my books. Hiroshima remains the sole object of my philosophy" (Serres, Latour 1995: 15). see also Serres 2014a: 36.

[2] Latour describes Serres' philosophy as fundamentally "acritical": "[his] ignorance introduces us to what I see as one of the first important feature of Michel Serres' philosophy. He is not part of the 'Critique' philosophical movement. He does not see philosophy as the discipline in charge of founding knowledge, debunking beliefs, adjacating territories, ruling opinions. (…) The Critique work is that of a reduction of the world into two packs, a little one that is sure and certain, the immense rest which is

About these two sides of the same coin – call it "critique" or "philosophies of suspicion" – Serres says that they are engaged into a strange game of playing policemen and robbers:

"As a result, philosophy becomes like a police state; in fact, every police force requires another police force to police it. When a policing body is looking over a person's shoulder, assessing his heart and innermost workings, are we to suppose that this policing body has neither a shoulder of its own, nor heart, nor innermost workings? This launches us into a *'detective' logic*. And the best detective is the one who is never interrogated, who places himself in a position beyond suspicion" (Serres, Latour 1995: 133)

The aim then is to be beyond suspicion, as detectives that look for the best trench-coat to disguise themselves, the critique philosopher proceeds with their faces masked by putting (constructing) or taking off (deconstructing) layers of texts in a game of light and shadow that eventually tends to forget, as Latour points out, a fundamental truth, even more today than yesterday: "*necessity decamps from the objective world and moves toward people*" (ibid: 176).

This is what makes Breughel's *Paradise* look like hell on earth. "L'enfer, c'est les autres," writes Sartre,[1]a catchphrases that represents magnificent example of the "philosophy of suspicion" that shines by its quality to become a police of the "others" the common people's behaviour and thought, which are never good enough for the philosopher erected as a model of virtue:

 "Sartre demanded conformity to the political so as to seem a philosopher. In the age of my fathers and their successors, the sages had taken (and still hold) the place of public prosecutor, demanding condemnation in the name of the city's dominant forces" (Serres 1995: 67).

What a selfish an anti-democratic act. Unlike the politicians and the judges, no one gave them the right to act as moralists of the city.[2] The (post-)modern philosophers have taken the Cartesian injunction to "become masters and possessors of nature" too seriously:

"Mastery and possession: these are the master words launched by Descartes at the dawn of the scientific and technological age, when our Western reason went off to conquer the universe. We dominate and appropriate it: such is the shared philosophy underlying industrial enterprise as well as so-called disinterested science, which are indistinguishable in this respect. Cartesian mastery brings science's objective

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simply believed and in dire need of being criticized, founded, re-educated, straightened up (…) Do we really need a Critique to survive? Is the Critique the only vocation of philosophy? His answer is no. There exist many other ways, many less sterile vocations for philosophers" (1988: 85).

[1] "Hell is other people."

[2] In *Politics of Nature*, Bruno Latour names this self-qualified moral expertise an "epistemological police," see Latour 2004: 17.

violence into line, making it a well-controlled strategy. Our fundamental relationship with objects comes down to war and property" (Serres 1995: 32).

It might be time to rethink this role for the modern thinker, given the paradoxical and disastrous relation humans have with nature: despite what the moderns have thought since Descartes, we are far from understanding and mastering the full effect of our actions on nature, and its response. By keeping doing critique over critique and by keeping believing the promethean myth of mastery over non-human things and beings, modern philosophy has end up being just another patronizing voice – perhaps, a more sophisticated one – among the *tintamarre* (hullabaloo) of commercials, blogs and social media that makes us hear the voices of all, everywhere and all the time (Serres 2012b: 58). Perhaps, it is time to stop the moralising rhetoric for a moment, and to listen to the sound and fury of the world is in response to the *noise* we are making. According to Serres, if we could understand them, if we could rationalise those noises into words, we could hear a huge cry for help from beings on the verge of a war – here is maybe when the term "World War" takes on its full meaning – between humans and nature.

Appropriation through Filth and Noise

In *The Natural Contrat,* Serres advocates for the necessity for humans of an agreement with nature in order to avoid the eventual consequence of a war with it: the risk of being totally excluded from it. The countless tornadoes, forest fires and floods of the last three decades have proven that nature can strike back hard and take possession of the territories humans foolishly thought they were possessors of through what Serres calls in *Le mal propre,*[1] "hard" and "soft" pollution, or said different: dirt and noise. In this manner, he argues that the question of ecology is closely linked with the question of property; and that humans are not very different from animals; appropriation is not a conventional right, but a natural one: *all beings mark their territory*, from humans to tigers, and even the smallest unicellular organisms (see Serres 2012a: 21; Serres 2014a: 250).

Talking about "hard" pollution, I can already hear the attentive reader arguing that this is a very simplistic understanding of the behaviour of animals and humans. Indeed, one could bring into the debate the question of the different methods, usually more sophisticated, that humans use in their way of appropriation. But as a philosopher, Serres makes it quite clear that he is not interested in the manner, but *the reason of this material pollution*:

"[the questions about the environment], thanks to 'hard' sciences, as they call it, in addition of economics, they are concerned about the question *how.* I ask: *why?* Do these disasters actually happen naturally, without no one's intention? We question

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[1] There is now an English translation of this book: *Malfeasance: Appropriation Through Pollution* (2010), but all the quotes in this article are taken from the French version and are translated by myself.

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our responsibility only regarding to the physical quantities. Question: what do we want, *upstream* [en amont], when we get the world dirty?" (Serres 2012a: 57).

Most living beings do it because they do not have the choice: taking possession of a territory – land, flesh or any other kind of surface – because it is a matter of survival for them. But the reasons of the humans – and therefore, their responsibility – are much more complex and numerous. Here is where the second type of pollution – the "soft" one – steps in. Serres highlights that animals mark also symbolically their territory, mainly through sounds and noise: they bark, they roar, they spread ultra-sounds…but, for humans, modernity was built on symbolic and technological inventions. From the archetypical and most powerful sign – money – that have been polluting people's mind since it's invention sometime in the 5th c. B.C. to evolution and proliferation, to the "neutral" laboratories of the Galileos of the last three hundred centuries, we have been surrounded by what Serres calls "world-objects":

"Let's give the name world-object to artifacts that have at least one global-scale dimension (such as time, space, speed, or energy): among the world-objects we know how to build, we distinguish the military ones from other purely economic or technical ones, although they produce similar results, in circumstances as rare and frequent as wars and accidents" (1995: 16-17).

These world-objects are powerful technologies – the Internet, the Atomic fusion, satellites…– that have made homo sapiens the most dominant being globally: "globalized, the current pollution is the result of the struggle to possess space in its totality" (Serres 2012a: 94). Non-human beings have a physiological need of local appropriation; humans, *they went global and even beyond*.

The modern delusion of grandeur has pushed us so far into the myth of progress and domination promoted by the grand narratives of the last two centuries that we have forgotten the true the contingent and material condition of our existence: we do not master nature, nature masters us since we need air to breath, water and earth to feed ourselves. We, moderns, have forgotten about this truth since the modern division between "nature" and "culture," presenting humans as the central and superior being, superior to all other natural beings thanks its consciousness, its intellect, its *culture:*

"By separating nature and cultures, have we made an error in judgment that lead to a lethal crime against ourselves and the living and non-living world? Indeed, we lonely know to deal with pollution in physical, quantitative terms; in other words, through hard sciences. Well, it is mainly about our intentions, our decisions, our conventions. In short, it is about our cultures" (ibid.: 85-86).

We are now paying the consequence of this misjudgment. From Descartes to Sartre, and beyond, modern philosophers with their self-assigned role as moral keeper, have been too busy with the critique of everyone in the πόλις, and have forgotten about the world. This intellectual irresponsibility results in the apocalyptic vision represented in Breughel's painting, which might soon become a reality.

High in the ivory towers, living on a global scale, many moderns – especially Europeans – have forgotten the disastrous condition of the rest of the people: those who have to face the tornados, the floods, the wars…these are the direct consequences of the misjudgment the moderns, divided into "neutral" scientists and "moral" philosophers, between objective and subjective sciences, each of them camping in their own field – scientists with nature, philosophers with the social – without any hope for a dialogue. The result of this *laissez-faire* type of management is that, each side blames the other, while a *natura furiosa* strikes back harder everyday:

"[O]bjectivity in the legal sense, as in the scientific sense, emanated from a space without man, which did not depend on us and on which we depended de jure and de facto. Yet henceforth it depends so much on us that it is shaking and that we too are worried by this deviation from expected equilibria. *We are disturbing the Earth and making it quake! Now it has a subject once again.* (…) Science won all the rights three centuries ago now, by appealing to the Earth, which responded by moving. So the prophet became king. *In our turn, we are appealing to an absent authority*, when we cry, like Galileo, but before the court of his successors, former prophets turned kings: 'the Earth is moved.' The immemorial, fixed Earth, which provided the conditions and foundations of our lives, is moving, *the fundamental Earth is trembling*" (Serres 1993: 86).

Modern philosophers have left the study of nature to "apolitical" scientists,[1] and now they are desperate by the material pollution, and even more desperate by the symbolic one: especially the populist leaders who respond to the crisis in a very "malfeasant" way, to use the Serrian terminology.

Towards a "Down to Earth" Politics

I am always amazed by academics that are surprised to see the rise of radical politics in times of crisis. The historical events of the 20th century have shown us that the combination of technology, deregulated capitalism and passive governments brings emancipation only to a small few, and despair for the rest. People, pushed to the extreme, respond with violence to the symbolic and material oppressions they suffer;

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[1] This misunderstanding between scientists and philosophers has led to what has been called the "Science Wars." This was a series of exchanges that took place in the 1990s (mainly in the US) between postmodern thinkers and scientists: on the one side, the first are saying that science is a "theory" like any other narrative, it is a social construct (see Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,1962). On the other side, the scientists argue that postmodernists have rejected scientific objectivity, and therefore are not only incomprehensible, but also anti-intellectual and dangerous for academia (and society) (see Levitt and Gross's *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*,1994). The conflict peaked with the famous "Sokal affair." Several thinkers, especially Isabelle Stengers, tried to bring the two sides to peace, by highlighting that the point is not to argue that scientific objects are "socially constructed" rather than "objectively true," but precisely to get away from this binarism. See Stengers 1997, 2000.

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in regimes based on representative democracy, they support for the option that incarnated their anger and frustration.

But the moderns keep criticising, moralizing, mocking the populist leaders like Trump, and by extension, the people who voted for them. Some intellectuals, in a desperate nostalgic effort, want to cancel the Brexit or find a way to impeach the current president of the United States. One could not only highlight the anti-democratic nature of such demands – who are they to say to millions of citizens that their vote does not count? Besides, this kind of behaviour does not solve the crisis; on the contrary, it is at the origin of the disastrous socio-climatic situation we are in. Most of journalists, intellectuals and social theorists are now obsessed by figures like Trump and Boris Johnson, as if getting rid of them would solve all the problems; but this is just reproducing a "philosophy of suspicion" that focus on mocking, attacking or fearing those individuals. However, the time they spend on these individuals, they do show in the background, like in Breughel's painting, the misery and the menacing clouds that are about to send a deluge over our heads.

Therefore, the first step is to understand, to do a genealogical investigation of the cause of the crisis. as Arendt's writes in the prologue to *The Human Condition:*

"The purpose of the historical analysis (…) is to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins, in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of society as it had developed and presented itself at the very moment when it was overcome by the advent of a new and yet unknown age" (1998: 6).

But what is new to the current crisis? One cannot help noting that ecological movements and political parties have been present for the last forty year. How come that they have been inaudible for such a long time?

Serres gives part of the answer by saying that there has been a conceptual misunderstanding with the notion of *environment* which has been – and still is – used by ecologists. He states that this concept is convey still an anthropocentric perspective:

"[F]orget the word *environment*, commonly used in this context. It assumes that we humans are at the center of a system of nature. This idea recalls a bygone era, when the Earth (how can one imagine that it used to represent us?), placed in the center of the world, reflected our narcissism, the humanism that makes of us the exact midpoint or excellent culmination of all things. No. The Earth existed without our unimaginable ancestors, could well exist today without us, will exist tomorrow or later still, without any of our possible descendants, whereas we cannot exist without it. Thus *we must indeed place things in the center and us at the periphery*, or better still, things all around and us within them like parasites." (1995: 33).

Indeed, nature is at the centre, and humans at the periphery. As mentioned earlier, this is the material condition of our existence: we need more nature, than it needs us. However, this truth has been hidden or forgotten by philosophers since Descartes and the great divide of the moderns. Said differently, the concept of "environment" is like the tail of a comet, one of the last traces of a humanistic rhetoric for emancipation that is losing its political credibility a bit more every day.

Serres is also skeptical about the "Gaïa hypothesis" – the new conceptual weapon of ecological movement. He acknowledges the effort to bring some symmetry between humans and natural entities by giving a subjectivity, or rather an agency, to nature.[1] However, again, it is based on an anthropomorphic reference, but this time, a positive figure: the goddess Gaïa (2014a: 248).

Serres ambition, with his "natural contract" and "malfeasance," is to present non-idealised concepts that refer to nature. As Latour points out, Serre's philosophy is not about the substitution of the object for the subject, of the non-human for the human, of nature for culture – or vice versa; "[i]nstead of choosing camps and reinforcing one side of the divide, of the crisis, of the critique-all these words are one and the same – Serres sits on the fence" (Latour 1988: 93).

Thinking from the Serrian "fence" offers a symmetrical perspective of beings and things; which does not mean that humans, animals and artifacts are identical, but rather that they are capable, depending the circumstances, of acting in a similar way. As Serres argues, humans and animals use the same strategies in their appropriation of territories. His philosophy *is not a philosophy of being, but rather of capacity, of possibility.*[2]

Looking back at Breughel's painting, the question is then what are the possibilities today? What are the alternatives to the crisis? According to Serres, the exclusive political ecology route – in its political party format – seems to be barren: the day political militants enter a political party, they become part of a complex political system; as Europeans, we all know how difficult it is to change from inside the mechanics of our institution, well-oiled by the free market. As Latour writes in *Politics of Nature,* where he differentiates practices of ecology and *Naturpolitik* or political ecology, "[the latter] claims to be increasing in power and to embody the political power of the future, but it is reduced everywhere to a tiny portion of electoral strap-

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[1] Also known as the Gaïa theory, this principle was mainly developed by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. It defends the conception of the earth as a self-regulating system, which in times of major crisis, finds its way to equilibrium. See Lovelock, Margulis 1974.

[2] Serres is mainly know in the fields of STS (Science and Technology Studies) and social anthropology for the creation of the concept of "quasi-objets": "a quasi-object, which traces or makes visible the relations that constitute the group through which it passes, like the token in a children's game. A quasi object that nonetheless remains a useful technical object, even a high-tech one, directed toward the physical world. It often happens that the most sophisticated tools play their main role socially but without losing their objective purpose" (Serres, Latour 1995: 161). See also Serres 1982: 227-228.

hangers. Even in countries where it is a little more powerful, it contributes only a supporting force" (21). Consequently, the European institutions have been dealing with the latest major social challenges – in chronological order, the Subprime crisis, the Greek government-debt crisis, and the European migrant crisis – it is more than clear that the effort for viable alternatives will not come from Politics, in the institutional definition of the term. European liberal democrats look at leaders like Trump very scornfully, mocking and moralising them, making clear that *liberalism* is different from *populism*, when they actually play in the same elitist playground, leaving the rest of us dealing with the garbage they throw over the fence. As Bruno Latour points out in his last opus, *Down to Earth:*

"From the I980s on, the ruling classes stopped purporting to lead and *began instead to shelter themselves from the world*. We are experiencing all the consequences of this flight, of which Donald Trump is merely a symbol, one among others. The absence of a common world we can share is driving us crazy" (2018: 1-2)

Of course, there are significant difference in theory and practice between liberal and ultra-conservative regime, but what Latour – and before him Serres – want to make clear is that with the truth that both liberals and conservatives deny, the material condition of *our* existence is changing: "*the very notion of soil is changing*. The soil of globalization's dreams is beginning to slip away" (ibid.: 4). First for the *poorest of us*, who have a first-hand experience of hell on earth, force to move from their home and country in search for territory just to survive; for the educated middle-class – no to call it the bourgeois – who more or less know that it is next, and finally the elite, who live in their relative safe – often protected by guards, fences and barbed wire – "paradise on earth." I say relatively safe, because it is just a matter of time, for their paradise to become hell too.

Serres expresses this "intellectual amnesia" in beautiful way when he writes: "we [modern thinkers] we keep forgetting about meteors; we're always attributing human causality to thousands of events that are actually determined by climate. (…) *Meteors vanish in political philosophies*" (1995: 73). Reading this sentence reminds us that it is the occultation, the negation of this fact, of this material truth that we should call "post-truth" or "alternative reality" contra the classic use of this notion by liberal intellectuals and media to discredit what they call the *masses* and their political choice:

"When journalists talk about "post-truth" politics, they do so very lightly. They do not stress the reason why some have decided to keep on engaging in politics while voluntarily abandoning the link to the truth that (rightly!) terrified them. Nor do they stress the reason why ordinary people have decided – and rightly so, in their case too - not to believe in anything any longer" (ibid.: 24).

Consequently, this notion should be used to qualify those who have decided deliberately *to turn a blind eye on what is so obvious* since four hundred years: even

Brueghel knew the foolishness of the idea that mankind can master nature! *Mundus res nullius![1]*

Therefore, if the sole political (ecology) route is not enough, what should be done? Well, as mentioned previously the "natural contract" implies different clauses, or layer, if you prefer: one of them is to get political thinkers and scientists to get on the same table and think together.

In conclusion, the alternative is not to be found in institutional *politics*, but in activities that built up a common world, considering the implication of our actions for the common good. I want to add my voice to the call for the assemblage of such activities, which are *political by essence*, that we can label "down to earth" politics – in reference to Latour's book. These actions imply making bonds, recreating connections and "contract" with other entities. On my small level, as an academic, I believe that one way to "land", is to be more interested in what other researchers, both in humanities and sciences, are doing and promote interdisciplinary projects. Therefore, thinking with Serres and Latour, I want to conclude this article by saying as a new injunction for us, theorists and philosophers: "*when meteors vanish in political philosophies, it is about time to bring those philosophies down to heart.*"

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[1] "The world is nobody's thing"; in the sense, that it is no one's property.

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Appendix

Jan Breughel the Elder, *The Earthly Paradise*, 1621, The Louvre Museum.