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Socioanalysis: A Communicational Research Device for Social Intervention

*Eduardo Andrés Vizer & Helenice Carvalho**

Abstract: »Sozio-Analyse: Ein Kommunikationsbetontes Forschungsinstrument zur Untersuchung sozialer Intervention«. This paper presents a socio-communicative device for research, diagnosis and intervention in communities and organizations. It submits theoretical propositions and categories of analysis for ongoing research and diagnosis of organizational and community issues and problems, as well as the development of programs for intervention in institutions, community development, information programs, educational and health projects, conflict solving, governance and social participation, communications and promotion of social capital. We consider the indispensable realization of interdisciplinary research associating social practices to communication processes and vice versa. Communication processes are also the fundamental interaction devices through which human practices reproduce social relations, promoting and reorganizing the self-reproduction of a social system. In order to help collectives such as communities, institutions, social and economic organizations to build better environments, better working and living conditions, social research needs to integrate communication and information processes to the diagnosis and design of social programs.

Keywords: communication, socioanalysis, diagnosis device, intervention, self-reproduction, analytic dimensions, social collectives.

1. Work in Progress

In order to help communities to build better environments and living conditions, social research needs to integrate communication and information processes into the diagnose and the design of social programs (an idea that was proposed originally by the Communication and Development school of thought back in the sixties). Three fundamental hypotheses sustain our research program:

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- a) The building of knowledge and intervention over social processes becomes consolidated the more it associates to specific communication practices and propositions.
- b) A consequence of the latter implies that it becomes fruitful to construct analytic models, dimensions and categories of analysis that can be common and applicable both to social and communication processes.
- c) Communication constitutes a privileged instrument for research on social, political, technical and cultural practices, providing conceptual tools for diagnosis and social intervention.

Our theoretical and methodological questions are primarily oriented towards the exploration of practices and processes which allow the reproduction of a social collective structure, i.e. organization. We consider that understanding information and communication practices imbued in the reproduction of organizations is the key process that allows diagnosis and intervention over fundamental questions and problems in any kind of organization, i.e. communities, schools, hospitals, social programs, etc. We search for knowledge over the socio-communicational structure of organizational processes (Luhmann, 1990) as social ecologies, which implies assuming a broad and non-reductionist perspective of social collective processes. The scope of research topics in communication is amplified towards the interfaces and problems dealing with strategic social (re)production practices and devices that reinforce the permanent reconstruction of relations in collectives such as organizations and communities. We are replicating a theoretical framework of analysis that promotes the construction and refinement of propositions over the role and 'function' played by *distinct dimensions and categories of analysis*, which we associate to the process of transformation in social collectives. Our research device covers structured formal relations in organizations, as well as informal relations and primary emotional bonds in institutions such as family, social support networks for individuals in disadvantaged situations, etc. Distinctive dimensions for analysis of social collectives cover from productive practices (work), the construction of socially regulated times and spaces, mediation devices and processes (such as ICT's, information and communication technologies), and, last but not the least, research on cultural and symbolic processes which accompany *all interfaces* of social practices. Finally, according to a communicational perspective of analysis, these practices are considered in a double aspect: as technical/operational practices carried out by the *actions of individuals*, (including information processing of the environment and manipulation of machines) and as *symbolic semiotic (communication) processes* through which human subjects establish meaningful interrelations; these then are our primary focus of observation and research.

2. Communication: 'Cultivation' of Environments and Reconstruction of Life Worlds?

According to the first hypothesis, the field of communication will provide research insights into organizations and social practices including the cultural context, discourse, reflexivity and inter-subjectivity of social actors. Due to massive incorporation of technological devices into social practices – especially considering the effects of the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT's) in organizations – intervention practices can develop more solidly the more it associates social action to discourse and construction of meaning. We can assume the fertility of investigating problems that rise in the interphases between different disciplines or emerging from the diversity of the communications field. If this is so, and that is what we intend to demonstrate, the first hypothesis over the necessity of developing theoretical and methodological strategies of analysis that associate firmly the research of social processes jointly with communicational ones will be strongly corroborated.

We present a systemic and constructivist approach to social collectives, and a communication frame of analysis related to the theory of social construction of reality as a founding process. A phenomenological process through which human beings perceive, categorize experiences and construct *meanings and values* in their social life practices (Vizer 2006, 2011).

The hypothesis on communications as social construction of reality tends to be accepted and repeated practically as an unquestioned dogma by communication scholars. But it has not been done enough to develop it in empirical research that could contribute knowledge to incredibly complex mechanisms implied in the socio symbolic processes of construction, or 'cultivation', of reality. What do we understand by construction? How do we define 'social' from a communicational approach? What do we understand by both 'communication' and 'reality'? How do their interrelations operate beyond the fact of both being linguistic constructs?

The need to explore specific associations between individual and collective *experiences* and the role of communication and discourse processes implied in them is evident. So are the relations between social, cultural, semiotic and even physical mechanisms and actions that participate and converge in the co-construction of a shared world of common experiences, allowing human beings to hear, interact and understand *the ways in which they construct and cultivate – consciously or not – shared social contexts and life worlds* (undertaking Berger and Luckmann (1986) propositions).

We present here an analytical device which is designed to elaborate a somewhat familiar relation to Interpretive Sociology (Tacussel 2002). We intend to develop the research categories of analysis we will present in this paper in the form of an observation and interpretation device (subsection 7

onwards). We present six categories (or dimensions) that define empirically what is meant by *construction of different 'topologies', which are implicit in social experience and the building of a shared social fabric*. In other words, we are proposing a *sociocultural classification* of human 'topologies'. We also consider that they were historically generated and imposed by occidental modernity as a cognitive organization and classification of different orders of reality. In some way, society has created underlying categories for the construction of meaningful environments and 'realities'. These cognitive, cultural and ideological categories have now become 'universal' and secure reference criteria for a rational and 'global' organization of *meaning for different orders of reality*: nature and technology, state organizations, space and time, human relations and bonding and symbolic culture. This process is permanently recreated and reinforced through communication, (language, media, arts, social institutions, religion, etc.) and by an underlying implicit and realistic 'common sense'. It is also reinforced by a pragmatic social adequacy over the *modes* in which we "should" perceive and understand our experiences of the 'real' world. If we accept that communication deals fundamentally with construction of meaning, we can also sustain that it studies the processes through which individuals, communities and cultures create and share meaningful action in their personal and collective experiences, reconstructing not only the underlying fabric of daily life, but its institutions as well.

For any society the existence and sharing of common categories or dimensions that serve to organize life and 'reality', are necessary for giving the sense of an epistemic and ontological existence to a 'substantialized' world. Most people take these sociocultural and symbolic constructs as unique; as granted, solid, objective and rational mode of existence of objects: beliefs towards nature and the physical world (as the social construction of space and time); attitudes towards the exercise of power and values of freedom, the cultivation of social relations and bonds; cultural and symbolic forms; personal and subjective worlds that people need to expose and share in public (for instance through virtual avatars of the ego created in the cyber world and the social networks), religious and transcendental rituals and beliefs, and many psychosocial and cultural experiences.

Accepting that some shared cognitive and emotional categories of attribution of meaning have been universalized and are being shared by different societies, these categories would allow us to find a strong foundation for developing communication studies associated with experiences over social practices, cultural processes, language, discourse and mass media, hence being able to build conceptual links to the theory of social construction of reality.

We intend to demonstrate that certain categories of attribution of meaning in different contexts will allow us to analyze both language and everyday life practices, as well as narratives in audiovisual media, art expressions in images and allegorical constructs of realities such as painting and photography, and –

obviously – in digital media. If the general hypothesis sustained at the beginning is exact – ‘that research over communication processes should be related to social ones’ – the propositions and categories of analysis should, at least in theory, be valid to deepen both social as well as communication studies. Language, as well as other symbolic systems should also manifest and express basic constructive dimensions of social experience that we will present in this paper. Semiolinguistic processes emerge from symbolic devices and generate discourse figures, allowing individuals to change their perception of reality through linguistic exchanges. This assures the creation of shared rules between social agents participating in the ‘co-construction and cultivation of realities’ through communication. Language and discourse have not only a referential function (as description of reality), but a performative power to transform reality as well.

3. A Communications and Social Cultivation Device for Analysis of Communities and Institutions

We propose a three dimensional model of social communication processes (Vizer 2011, 76).

- 1) A referential dimension, (construction and naming of “objects” through the communication process), whether linguistic discourse, imaged, informational technological devices, or else.
- 2) Interferential dimension through which human beings ‘refer and construct’ themselves as ‘equals’ to one another mutually, as agents in a shared context – differing from the positivistic concept of interaction.
- 3) Self-referential dimension. A ‘function’ or dimension of *social construction of the self*, the presentation of the self as a defined subject with individual *identity* marks; whether a group, a culture or organization, and characteristics that allow differentiation and individuation.

While the first refers to the *subject* or question of conversations, the second refers to *modes and styles* of social interaction, and the third dimension refers to the construction and recognition of *identities: who am I, who are they, who are these people, etc.*

We depart from a general proposition: it is strategic to study processes of meaning and communication as relations that are constructed by forms of symbolic appropriation of the world, as a “strategic cultivation” of social reality. Individuals, groups and institutions appropriate and cultivate their physical, their social and cultural ecologies through object identification, through language as a reference point, through mutual recognition as meaningful subjects (inter-referral points), and as individual selves with a differentiated identity. Our research on organizational questions can only be of help if we learn how

these processes are realized in the real life of everyday coexistence between the members of the organization.

Information and cultural processes are conceived as both communication devices and objects of meaning (language, images, symbols, social rules, etc). All of them as *resources* to which humans resort in order to construct and cultivate foreseeable relations and situations in different contexts and domains of reality, conceived as undoubtedly 'real' *topological ecologies*, which technology produces as man made environments. We can name: relations with the physical ecology, a world which are perceived holistically, mediated by the senses of our own body. We also live in a *social ecology* (the Other), a sense of belonging, and identification with social collectives such as culture, country, ethnicity, etc. We also live an *emotional ecology* (such as family, friends, community, religion, etc.). There is a *symbolic ecology* as well in the form of culture, and expressions like architecture, art, communicative codes, etc. Finally, we cannot forget the implications of exponential and intrusive applications of machines, as an expression of contemporary technologically created environments: from urban housing, industries and factories to completely artificial environments, such as the digital and virtual reality network ecologies of cyber culture (not to speak of experiments in artificial biotechnological organisms and the mysterious 'new worlds' created in laboratories).

Humans cultivate their close environments from the minimal personal space of home or a garden, a table in the office or a corner in a factory up to large public places (architecture and urbanism are examples). We can consider at least two kinds of *environmental control*.

- a) A technical and operational control over devices and machines that regulate natural and physical contexts of everyday life. The mechanisms and devices which regulate conditions for adaptation towards the environment, the search for resources necessary for reproduction of the organization. And we seek a second kind of control:
- b) symbolic control processes: such as reflexivity, acknowledgement, recognition, interpretation and construction of meaning and values over situations and realities. A real or imaginary symbolic *topos*, which ensures us that our feet and our minds are grounded in a shared 'principle of reality'.

Cultural objects and devices, such as language, images, art, can be considered 'informational resources'. Resources for information processing and its social appropriation. Communication as the 'setting in action' of the former, as expressive resources of the social actors, necessary for the meaningful reconstruction of their specific environments. The setting in action can be considered as the original source of learning of life experiences by human beings. Socialization is precisely the reflexive and dynamic fixation of these experiences of action and meaning in the memory, and a process of articulation between perception and the acknowledgment of the adequate responses according to ex-

pected interrelations with the material world, and the social and symbolic ethos of a culture. It is obvious that socialization can be considered as the construction of learning experiences about cultivation devices through which men and women intend to assure the control of – and some level of power over – their personal lifeworlds.

In brief: communication is the fundamental and concrete expression of a permanent process of reconstruction of the different *contexts of reality* people build and cultivate in everyday life. We ‘cultivate our individual realities’ as precious gardens, or as a workshop filled with the instruments we can use as resources for the reproduction of our lifeworlds, of our *physical, social, cultural and imaginary ecologies*. Communication as a symbolic and meaningful action through which society constructs ‘culturally’ its *social ecologies*, which today are increasingly mediated by the mass media and ICT’s. An environmental cultivation, a *milieu* which individuals and communities consciously or unconsciously generate through different forms of *learning* and *toil*, producing the necessary resources for the permanent reorganization of a social system. Social agents put themselves into action through the culturally learned devices that are permanently reproduced. This implies *work: transforming and structuring physical space and time; social, symbolic and even imaginary forms of toil*. Societies regenerate themselves constructing complex *devices for organized social practices*. These practices are institutionalized as *structures of a system in order to occupy and develop the multiple spaces and times which assure a ‘rational organization’ and access to the necessary resources for survival*: instrumental practices, norms, values, codes, formal and informal routines, styles of social association and bonding, spatial and temporal organization of different ‘*milieus and ambiances*’.

4. Categories and Dimensions of Analysis

As we said before, in relation to communication processes we can consider three different functions or dimensions: *referential, inter-referential and self-referential* (Vizer and Carvalho 2012). We expect to enlighten socio communicational research processes and problems by ‘crossing’ these dimensions with the social dimensions to be presented below, making clear that there is no possible ontological separation between both set of dimensions.

Six ‘social’ dimensions are being proposed. As said above, these dimensions can be considered as variables with specific indicators to be constructed in research; organizations and communities are studied as *holistic and structured units of analysis, described and interpreted through a socio analytic device*, (Vizer 2005; 2006; 2008). The social dimensions underlie a common ‘ground’ for communication and discursive processes that accompany them indissolubly. A strong hypothesis sustains that social dimensions are crossed, interphased,

and articulated by the three communication ones. Both of them structure the ontological conditions for the processes of *meaning formation*, at a language and discourse level between people, and in any communication process. The combination of categories or basic dimensions tend to organize different metaphorical orders of “*the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary*”¹ in social life and in the formation of “universes of meaning” in culture and society (beliefs and myths over nature, society, the individual, culture and technology).

The dimensions (or categories) of analysis refer to different *topological constructions* of meaningful life worlds: the physical *appropriation of social times and spaces*; the instituted and collective *power and control* organizations such as Law and the State; the technologies and devices created for realizing instrumental practices and beliefs; social self-affirmation *practices and actions* (i.e. empowerment practices); *emotional bonds and relations* in private intimate life; and to end with – last but not least –, culture and symbolic objects, artifacts and devices, *as resources for acknowledgement and (re)construction of environments by the social agents*.

5. Organizational Socioanalysis (Practices, Beliefs, Texts, Metaphors and Discursive Constructions of Reality).

In modern society, the different dimensions mentioned here can be considered phenomenological kinds of *topos*, or pre-categorical experiences. Every one of them corresponds to a kind of specific dimension or ‘topology of real life’. Different authors can suggest adding or subtracting dimensions, replacing or even rejecting them, but the main point is that we propose an *ecological and holistic* vision of social life, both from the perspective of objective empirical practices and as symbolic and semiotic meaningful/reflexive experiences. We believe it is a valid epistemological strategy to develop the understanding of meaningful social processes as being ‘constructed’ and cultivated by active and reflexive agents in relation to objects, to ‘Others’ and to their environments. History, for example, is more than an academic construct, it is mostly the social construction of memory, *a special kind of ‘topology’, crossing and merging time and identity and conditioning human reflexivity*. Humans ‘produce’ history because they *believe* they are a part of it, or that they are able to have some influence over it, and because they attribute a value and a purpose to their actions.

¹ Lacan's categorization of three orders of “reality” is useful to our propositions. The “function” of the imaginary would consist in ‘filling up’ with meaning the ‘empty spaces’ of the real and the symbolic (that which is ignored, or unconscious).

Objectively the categories can be described and analyzed through indicators and patterns in a double perspective corresponding approximately to the 'double hermeneutics' theory proposed by 'comprehensive' German sociology: as both social facts (collected as empirical data), and as subjective processes imbued in the construction of social life. Socioanalysis can be applied to institutions, social practices, discourses, and obviously in research on reception processes in media, as well as in many social uses and applications of ICT's. So-Social processes and audiovisual products such as films or any kind of TV programs are discourse constructs that make reference to shared dimensions underlying 'common sense' in everyday life situations.

- a) They all share instrumental 'technical' activities for material production and reproduction of life conditions.
- b) They all share the social pressure of some kind of authoritarian power and collective institutionalized organizations.
- c) They also share the 'resistance' to the former, and alternative ways of modifying and transforming the "status quo" through forms of resistance or open conflict.
- d) They all '*cultivate*' a need to appropriate a personal time and space, either public or private, in which the agents construct and organize physically and symbolically their own 'habitus' in a real world.
- e) They all recognize a constitutive social unity: as individuals, family, group, clan, urban tribe, etc. All societies recognize some form of physical, emotional and symbolic bondages in which *identity* arises.
- f) And last, 'real life' contexts (as well as any media program) can be interpreted only if cultural and symbolic signs are shared through some kind of language and semiotic dimension ('projected' into a film, a program, a theatrical scene).

Images and representations conform a kind of 'symbolic ecology' in which imagination, meanings and values can function as resources through which people construct their own home place in the world, their meaningful experiences, beliefs and identities. The interpretation of arts, media messages and stories can be thought of as a phenomenological and '*unconscious projection*' of cognitive and emotional categories implicit in the processing of meanings we realize in everyday life in order to interpret, feel and reflect on the cultural and media products we 'consume'.²

As mentioned before, social agents constitute themselves (as well as their different roles) through a process of mutual reference to one another and an implicit self-reference to their personal identities. This process according to Giddens 'double structure' social theory develops through a double hermeneu-

² All marketing and propaganda *know how* and practices are based in the marketing and political engineering of symbols, imagination and desires carefully studied by neuroscience marketing.

tics of social practices. So to investigate social processes we must consider practices in a double perspective, as action and as the meaning of an action, which can be analyzed as a communication process (in daily life we do not only observe conducts, but try to interpret them). Practices manifest themselves as communication in the three dimensions already mentioned:

- a) As reference and signaling of objects of a real world (ontologically, a world designated and manifested through the existence of 'real' objects, whether physical, symbolic or imaginary.
- b) As mutual reference between humans (which we will name as inter-referentiation); and the construction of real, symbolic, imaginary or virtual contexts by social agents (not just empirical 'interaction' but comprehensive co-construction of contexts, situations, experiences, etc.)
- c) A third dimension which we name as self-referentiation (an implicit understanding of the self, and the construction of an identity), in which the subjects present themselves, consciously or not, by building representations of a social personality and external images of themselves in order to be recognized reflexively as individual identities.

6. Practical Uses and Approaches to the Action-Research Device

We apply the action research method to realize most of our diagnostic research in communities and organizations. The interpretation of the observations we realize on the field emerge from the combination of the different concepts and dimensions we present here. The purpose is to help the organization or community members to develop understanding and conscientious practices for collective negotiation, and in the search for alternative paths for resolving conflicts, promoting social improvement and application of social and community programs in education, health, cultural activities, etc.

The institution, community or organization is considered and approached as a whole, but avoiding a rigid 'closed systems' approach in the sense given by General Systems Theory. This is done in order not to leave out of the analysis' important aspects and interrelations between individuals, activities, their time-space distribution, the physical and cultural environments, leadership and use of power, styles of decision making, etc. We take into consideration the environment as a source of potential resources, messages, imagery and signs, communication and information practices (and 'texts') – all of these as sources of human capital in order to promote positive attitudes towards change and social consciousness. We also apply the SOCHM analysis of groups: Strengths, Obstacles, Challenges and Menaces.

The researchers observe, interview, organize meetings, record reactions, conversations and opinions about common shared situations and problems. These will be collectively worked out for the search of a shared diagnosis with the subjects. In a second stage, participatory research is also applied by analyzing and contextualizing problems and conflicts. Finally, reactions and responses are organized, classified and interpreted through the different dimensions in order to find a common focus/question/problem in which to concentrate interpretation of the different dimensions of analysis (including unexpected reactions and opinions of the subjects).

The researcher(s) usually classify observations in certain categories, as well as different perspectives and attitudes that subjects assume towards problems and questions which usually are not clear in the minds of the people. Observations and descriptions are classified as:

- a) Structural, environmental, i.e. the economic resources available and productive practices of the organization.
- b) A formal and power related frame such as found in politics, law, regulations, etc.
- c) Attitudes and motivations towards change and participation (possibilities of empowerment for less privileged, unrecognized minorities, demands for justice, etc.).
- d) Uses and distribution of space and time; appropriation of them by classes or groups through specific activities, and the social recognition of the right to occupy those places by the rest of the members.
- e) Emotional bonds and social contention institutions and actions: family care, protection of disabled, the old and very young, sick people, etc.
- f) Cultural dimensions, beliefs, religiosity, rituals and ceremonies, imagery, artistic expressions, etc.

6.1 Side Remarks

Communication can be considered an environmental ambience of our *physical, social, cultural and imaginary ecologies*. We consider social communication as the symbolic and meaningful action through which society constructs its social and cultural ecologies (Berger and Luckmann 1986). A 'cultivation' practice of the environment, a *milieu* which individuals and communities generate (consciously or unconsciously). These activities are present in different forms of learning and *toil*, producing the necessary resources for the social collective. Agents put themselves in action through the culturally learned devices that are permanently reproduced. This implies *work: structuring space and time; physical, social, symbolic and even imaginary forms of toil*. Societies regenerate their productive resources constructing complex devices for *self-organization of social practices*. These practices are institutionalized as *structures of a system in order to occupy and develop the multiple spaces and times which assure*

a 'rational' organization and access to the necessary resources for survival; instrumental practices, norms, values, codes, formal and informal routines, styles of social association and bonding, spatial and temporal organization of different 'milieus and ambiances'.

Communication sciences have been considered a paradigmatic example of interdisciplinary studies. For some authors they have benefited – and for others they have suffered – from a hopeless undefined epistemological ambiguity of its object of study, ranging from the omnipotent consideration that 'everything is communication', down to its disqualification as a scientific field. To overcome this impasse and fragmentation of the field, we considered that construction of a socio communicative theoretical framework would enable sharing of problems and conceptual categories over interdependence between fundamental social practices and their semiotic counterparts, developing a very fruitful enrichment of both fields. We intend to offer some theoretical strategies open to the construction of *general propositions and hypotheses* that could enable us to orient research on different interdisciplinary lines of research.

7. The Socio-Analytic Device

As in a hologram (Morin 1996) all the variables and dimensions are present in different scales and domains of everyday life, in every kind of social practices, in the uses of technologies, in collective, institutional or small group scales. Research indicators and dimensions can be crossed in between in order to elaborate 'soft hypothesis' for analysis and interpretation: between micro and macro levels of analysis; from both objective and subjective indicators and data; interrelations between physical, cultural or cognitive (abstract) processes; and crossings in between action, language and meaning construction.

The notion of *cultivation* serves as a metaphor for human activity in the construction of physical space and places to realize 'instrumental and technical practices', as well as to understand the principles underlying and guiding the construction of *niches*, whether they be ecologic, economic, political, socio emotional (or even virtual?). Cultivation can be seen as a systematic and self-organizing appropriation of human environments. Technologies, information and knowledge that is developed through communications serve as the fundamental intermediating resources for the control of different environments and the transformation of a community; its physical, social, and cultural-symbolic ambiances 'organized' through human work: whether physical, intellectual or cognitive, all mediated by a certain kind of specific technical and communication device.

Table 1: Field Observation Guidelines for Researchers

	Objective descriptions of the organization or community	Latent Interpretation
	Data registers of the organization. Ground observation and formal description. Mission/vision.	Perceptions, beliefs and representations. Interpretation and hypothesis over cultural and symbolic processes.
1	Formal data provided by the organization or community.	Analysis and interpretation of formal data.
2	Organization chart. Hierarchies, sectors. Specificities of the institution. Declared objectives.	Relations, attitudes and beliefs of groups toward the organization. Informal leadership. Stories and beliefs about the organization and its origins. Informal groups, Types of leadership.
3	Texts, written information. a) History, organizational memory, writings, etc. b) Vision/ mission/ objectives. What 'is' and what 'was' the organization. c) Activities and 'production'. Declared activities (what is 'said' and what is effectively realized). Observed congruencies and incongruities. d) Registers, statistics, documents, surveys, etc.	The implicit and non written rules, values, rituals, etc. a) Foundational myths; historical contexts; beliefs, attitudes, values and imaginaries. b) Feeling of accomplishment of objectives in relation to declared practices. c) Participant observation in everyday life. Participatory action-research (PAR). d) Commentaries, anecdotes, individual and collective values and attitudes
4	Spatial and temporal conditions and contexts (description of uses of different spaces and time in relation to activities). Disposition of time/space for specific activities: recreation, meetings, workplace, etc. Uses of space by sectors or groups. Organizational complexity.	Level of conformity of the members with their tasks. Levels of interest and participation in different social activities of the community/organization. Valorization of common activities
5	Channels and production of information. Contents: Intranet, radio, print, videos, webs, etc. Signalectics: internal information channels.	Content analysis of messages produced by the institution or community (publications, web, community radio). Representations of identity in relation to 'others' (self reference).
6	Formal internal channels established for circulation of information: meetings, briefings, etc	Spontaneous or informal channels of information circulation: informal conversation, rumors, informal meeting places.
7	Typology of predominant conversations: assertive (truth) directive (orders), expressive (emotions) committing promises: declarative (markers of power of the speaker). Kinetics and proxemics (gestures, body language, etc.).	The organization has a more authoritarian or participative and democratic style of leadership ('vertical or horizontal?'). More fragmented or integrated, more open or 'close', more inclusive or exclusive, more institutionalized or open to change?
8	Material resources: physical infrastructure, financial, human, political relations, etc	Potential human resources: social and human capital in relation to motivation, education, synergy, social nets, common knowledge.

Table 1 continued...

9	Territory where it is established. Characteristics of the space in which activities are realized.	Relations between the members and their immediate contexts and external environment.
10	Characteristics of the population. Characterization and definition of the necessities and issues raised by the members of the organization or community.	Participation of the prospective beneficiaries of our intervention in the life of the org. and in the tasks which are realized regarding the exterior of the org.
11	Formal interagency relations and bonds with the 'outside': networks, agreements. External subsidies: from the state, private or social sectors: NGO's, etc.	Expectations and liaisons towards macro social contexts, agencies, actors: the government, local or national political parties, the media. Expectations of cooperation with other institutions.
12	Expectations and considerations of the members regarding the task or job the researcher(s) is expected to realize.	Recording of how the researcher(s) are received, perceived (if possible) and treated by different members or sectors of the community. How is the task of the researcher(s) appreciated.
13	Manifested and declared demands (previously known or made explicit to the researcher(s) along the intervention process).	'Latent' perceived demands (usually expressed indirectly) associated to necessities of the people or the members of the organization

The observation guidelines (or 'what *has* to be observed') are only for general orientation to the researcher(s) and will accommodate to singular organizations: different in an urban or a rural school, a community center inside a poor villa (a ghetto), a middleclass neighborhood, a sector in a factory or a whole community. Obviously, the observation guide and the device we will present now is applicable to any public or private organization (as in factories, and companies where it has showed valid and interesting results for improving internal and external human relations and policies). The guideline helps to determine observation patterns, practices, attitudes, discourses and styles of communication: contexts inside broader contexts, foci of observation, definition and expression of questions/problems; conflictive areas and topics; potential resources; threats and menaces as well as *internal* potential strengths.

The first column represents categories or conceptual dimensions and variables. The second column presents empiric indicators that serve to guide our observations on the fieldwork. The third column corresponds to final interpretations and diagnostic descriptions realized by the researchers (usually including members and specific subjects that are relevant for the diagnosis and elaboration of an institutional program or project). The capacity for self diagnosis of the organization or community – and by the group of researchers – is a fundamental tool for implementing intervention proposals and activities.

Table 2: Model of analyzing device, diagnosis and social intervention. Six categories – or dimensions – for organizational diagnosis. (Applied to public or private organizations. Rural and urban communities)

	Categories	Conceptual Synthesis.	Diagnostic Description	Intervention Proposals
1	<p>Technical and instrumental actions and devices carried out by the collective.</p> <p><i>(Production and social reproduction practices)</i></p>	<p>Production activities (economy, technologies, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Labor - Technical relations - Declared goals and Objectives. - Material conditions - Working Conditions - Technical devices 	<p>Instrumental practices. Distribution of work</p> <p>Specific characteristics in the use and inclusion of technologies.</p>	<p>(For ex. description and critical analysis of practices, uses and applications of new technical devices). Possibilities for the use of innovative technologies (including media and ICT's, access to information).</p>
2	<p>Power and 'political dimension'.</p> <p><i>Decision making (How and who decides)</i></p> <p><i>Social control devices and practices in the organization</i></p>	<p>The "instituted" formal rules and values</p> <p>Hierarchies</p> <p>Spatial distribution. Organogram</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mission and vision. - Power structure (practices and decision making). - Forms of representation and delegation of power - Power symbols and styles. - Regulation/control mechanisms - Norms and values. 	<p>What are the policies and regulations associated to social and organizational control in the institution or community?</p> <p>Is there an association with external powers and hierarchies (authoritarian or democratic attitudes)?</p> <p>Exaggerated top to bottom control.</p> <p>Leadership characteristics (are they democratic or authoritarian)?</p>	<p>Changes in regulation and control activities and rules (maintenance or change of status quo?).</p> <p>Introduction of 'bottom top' channels of information.</p> <p>Proposing channels of participation.</p>

Table 2 continued...

3	<p>"Reconstructive" dynamic of the collective.</p> <p><i>Social participation, demands and protests. Capacities for social innovation.</i></p> <p><i>Potential for change.</i></p> <p><i>Alternative values and visions</i></p> <p><i>Promotion of 'social capital'.</i></p>	<p>"Constituent" power of the collective for change.</p> <p>Informal relations and organizational styles.</p> <p>Live everyday attitudes and values for participation and communicating</p> <p>Dynamics of the organization.</p> <p>Discontinuities.</p> <p>Exteriorization of problems and conflicts.</p> <p>Motivation for change.</p> <p>Social temporalities.</p>	<p>Informal information and meeting activities. Description of different uses of information devices and common communication practices.</p> <p>What are the activities and attitudes for developing empowerment and individual realization?</p> <p>Is there an association to social movements and uses of ICT's and public spaces?</p>	<p>"Emancipatory" uses of media artifacts, and actions.</p> <p>Promoting participation and informal practices.</p> <p>Promotion of collective, participatory and democratic activities.</p> <p>Social representation channels.</p>
4	<p>Spatial and temporal dimensions.</p> <p><i>"Cultivation" of physical and social environments.</i></p>	<p>Physical, social and symbolic appropriation and construction of space and time activities inside the organization or community.</p> <p>Use and distribution of activities in time and space. Implications for the distribution of practices regarding social and physical objects</p> <p>"What, how, and where" activities are realized. Power and disciplinary actions regarding use of time and space.</p>	<p>What are the uses of space and time?</p> <p>How is the distribution of activities realized in the org.? (work, leisure, facilities, etc.)</p> <p>Implications for different practices regarding the introduction of technologies, machines and new activities in the organization.</p> <p>Changes in social and cultural temporalities?</p> <p>Adequate social control and decisions regarding distribution of space and time.</p>	<p>Analyzing different/alternative uses of space (common or private)</p> <p>Changes in the distribution of activities in time.</p> <p>Introduction of media or ICT's in the organization.</p> <p>Media as a developer for social appropriation (and creation) of space and time.</p>

Table 2 continued...

<p>Bonding relations.</p> <p>'Cultivation' of primary bonds (including formal social relations).</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Institutions and networks for "social containment".</p> <p>Emotional contention through social networks and institutional services: family, social attention for the sick, the old, children, unemployed, etc..</p> <p>Groups, collective activities in clubs, cultural centers, sports, etc.</p> <p>Values, attitudes, representations. Symbolic "semiosphere". Myths and beliefs.</p> <p>Culture, rituals</p> <p>Foundational and origin stories of the organization.</p> <p>Religious beliefs and institutions</p> <p>Ceremonies.</p> <p>Identities.</p> <p>Perceptions over the external world.</p>	<p>How and what is the 'emotional' state of mind of the members of the organization?</p> <p>Dealing with fears and apprehensions.</p> <p>Are there health, education and welfare institutions available and accessible for the members?</p>	<p>Creating channels for the promotion and generation of social ties.</p> <p>Promoting financial and institutional 'social security' programs</p> <p>Network building for specific social programs and services.</p> <p>Proposing social and participative practices.</p>
<p>Symbolic dimensions.</p> <p>Culture, social and imaginary representations.</p> <p>6</p>	<p>Values, attitudes, representations. Symbolic "semiosphere". Myths and beliefs.</p> <p>Culture, rituals</p> <p>Foundational and origin stories of the organization.</p> <p>Religious beliefs and institutions</p> <p>Ceremonies.</p> <p>Identities.</p> <p>Perceptions over the external world.</p>	<p>What kind of languages, cultural values and codes are being used in everyday life?</p> <p>Analyzing specific social representations.</p> <p>Rituals and ceremonies.</p> <p>What are the expectations towards the future?</p>	<p>Popular participation in cultural activities can be promoted (such as festivals, meetings, sports, etc.)</p> <p>Promoting the use of public spaces</p>

Actions, texts, conversations, styles of communication (directive, dialogic, emotional?) and their relations to specific contexts are to be registered in relation to problems and situations. Observations of the researchers are registered and the fundamental source of information to be associated with actions, situations, other contexts and conversations that are realized in specific situations. In this presentation the last column presents examples of recommendations to the organization. The intervention proposals are completed as a result of the diagnosis that is carried out, and will be filled with the specific actions and activities that are going to be implemented in each situation and case, according to the diagnosis that has been realized.

This methodology has been developed in the University of Buenos Aires and applied since the nineties in communities, factories, urban neighborhoods, NGO's, public and private organizations such as schools, hospitals and municipalities in Argentina and Brazil.

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