

Analysis of Structural Theory in Economic and Social Tensions: Guatemala Country Case Study

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Abstract

One of the relevant issues in the field of studies into not-for-profit organizations is to understand the singular characteristics of this organizational phenomenon. In this work we have turned to the basis of the Structuration Theory for analyzing such organizations. We propose that its contribution to the advance of knowledge in this field is its use of the concept of structural processes, prepared from work originally done by British sociologist, Anthony Giddens. The conceptual framework identifies and analyses the ideas contained in the main theoretical perspectives found in academic works on Social Economics and not-for-profit organizations (NPO). This work makes a double contribution: by means of a case study, it offers empirical experience that takes a structuration analytical approach, and moves forward the discussion on singular characteristics of not-for-profit organizations as an organizational phenomenon, which increased during the last two decades of the XXth century. The concept of structuration processes allows for the analysis of organizational paradoxes and conflicts, taking the structure not as a static object that defines the restrictions to action or limits the scope of authority, but as an abstraction that reveals how the rules and resources of social system relate with each other in a process defined by Giddens as the duality of structure.

***Keywords:** Organizational Paradoxes, Organizational Structure, Structuration Theory, Not-For-Profit Organizations, Social Economics.*

A. INTRODUCTION

One of the relevant issues in studies on non-profit organizations is to understand the particularities of this organizational phenomenon. In this work, we resort to Structuration Theory as a conceptual framework to analyze it. In the end, we propose, as a contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field, the use of the concept of structuring processes, elaborated from the work originally developed by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984) (Govindan et al., 2021).

The research questions that guided us concerned the nature of work organization outside the realm of private commercial corporations and the public sector (Stubb, 2019). How is the organizational structure established where there is voluntary and salaried

work? How is the dynamic of the decision-making process? How are decision-making processes established in an environment in which rights and social inclusion are intended to be promoted? What is the relationship between the organizational structure and the involvement of partners in organizations whose ultimate goals are related to social issues, such as combating poverty, representing minorities or assisting those excluded from the labor market?

Structuration Theory constitutes a theoretical alternative for social analyzes outside the dualism between interpretivist and functionalist views (Kouhizadeh et al., 2020). Organizational studies have become a rich arena for discussions about the possibilities of using Giddens's theory for organizational phenomena (Daddi et al., 2019). However, few works clearly offer a structuralist framework of analysis such as those by Bouchiki (1993), Fombrum (1986) and Riley (1983), and there are many critics who point out the difficulties in carrying out research work using Structuring Theory (Tura et al., 2019).

In this way, this work presents a double contribution: it offers empirical experience with a framework of structuringist analysis and advances the discussion on the particularities of non-profit organizations as an organizational phenomenon that has increased in quantity and complexity since the last two years. decades of the twentieth century.

“Structure” is one of the most important and most allusive terms in the vocabulary of the Social Sciences, including the domain of Organizational Theory. Defining a concept with this word is central not only in important schools such as Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, but also in almost all other trends and theoretical strands. There is great difficulty in defining the term without using it in the definition itself or without the transitive verb “to structure”. Explaining the meaning of the noun “structure” often requires making reference to the action of “structuring something”.

As stated by McGillivray et al. (2022), there are three problems with the frequent use of the word in Social Sciences. The first refers to the fact that in general the term “structure” is associated with the notion of something static, conceiving it as the basis, the immutable skeleton of the social system. When using the term in this sense, the authors do not contemplate human action or the attitude of the social actor or agent.

In the second, Sewell states that the use of the term in general does not contemplate the possibility of change. The word “structure” evokes the idea of stability. The concept is embedded in discussions of how social life is defined or organized by consistent and regular patterns of behavior that last for a long time, and that do not address the way in which they change over time. In fact, it seems pertinent to us to state that the use of the term suggests a view of society that Griffiths & Savacool (2020) defined as typical of paradigms related to the sociology of regulation, that is, the concept of structure is particularly important for classifiable works. as belonging to the functionalist and interpretivist paradigms.

Finally, the third point presented by Sewel discusses the idea that the word “structure” is used in opposite and contradictory senses in different trends in the Social Sciences, such as sociology and anthropology. In sociology, the concept of structure is opposed to culture. In anthropology, the term structure appears in the sphere of culture.

In Organizational Theory, the expression “organizational structure” is treated by different theoretical approaches (Anguelovski et al., 2019). When using it, the authors are especially interested in the relationships between people, their positions and the organizational units to which they are linked (Freeman et al., 2020). Organizational structure can be defined as the formal configuration of individual roles and procedures, that is, as a certain scheme (framework) of the organization (Chodkowska-Miszczuk, 2019). This scheme is treated, predominantly, in two theoretical strands linked to functionalism: the Theory of Bureaucracy as a Weberian ideal organizational type, and the Theory of Contingency, derived from the Theory of Systems (baker & Phillips, 2019). There are also alternative approaches to functionalism, associated, for example, with the interpretivist paradigm (Ciplet & Harrison, 2019). In them, the organizational structure is conceived as something that is born from the socio-cognitive dynamics of interpretation that each individual produces about himself and his environment. Within this second paradigm, the concept is identified based on patterns of regularity in the processes of interaction between people, based on their mental constructions and interpretations of the world and themselves.

Since the 1970s, several authors began to seek a representation of the organization as a place of encounter and confrontation between actors with multiple rationales. Consequently, the concept of organizational structure received new interpretations, considering ontological, epistemological and methodological issues associated with each author and research work. It has become frequent to consider that organizational analysis demands multidimensional and multiparadigm approaches. The decrease in interest in Contingency Theory was offset by the emergence of new theoretical approaches, such as Institutional Theory (Oxford, 2021), Structuring Theory (Rasul et al., 2021) and the postmodern approaches (Krantz, 2022). Even so, works that consider the concept of organizational structure according to functionalism are still frequent and noteworthy, such as the organizational configurations proposed by Meisner (2021).

Chart 1 presents, succinctly, the variety of theoretical approaches within Organization Theory, the main authors, the general conception of the concept of organizational structure and some critics for each approach. The objective is only to illustrate the breadth of definitions and offer a brief elucidation of their propositions to understand the concept. Anthony Giddens undertook the greatest theoretical efforts to reformulate the concept of structure of social systems. Since the mid-1970s, the author has postulated that the structure of social systems is dual. In order to provide an understanding of the Theory of Structuration, it is necessary to know the principles that characterize it, which are briefly exposed below.

The first principle is the issue of the dual relationship between action and structure, or the dualism of structure. We know that the relationship between agency and structure is one of the most complex issues in social theory. How are the everyday actions of individuals structured? How do such actions take place considering the characteristics of each society? When acting, how does each individual guide their choices and decide what to do? How do these actions happen to be repeated until they become institutionalized? The Structuring Theory suggests, as an operational principle, that there should be an emphasis on understanding and analyzing the way in which the constitution and reconstitution of social practices or actions occur. The rules and resources that guide the choices of individuals when acting are called “structure”, which is what gives form and existence to social actions. It exists only in human actions that are, at the same time, created and recreated by the structures themselves. Giddens refers to agency not as people's intentions in doing things, but as patterns or ongoing modes of behavior by individuals. Action is something that evokes the idea of routine, pattern, custom, but it can only be understood as conditioned by cultural structures, in a process that creates and recreates actions (Oskam et al., 2021). Structures happen through social practices that, in turn, are defined or occur according to patterns of regularity or reciprocal expectations between social actors (Jorgensen et al., 2022).

The second principle refers to the context in which action and structure take place, that is, the space and time that surround them. Giddens (1989) emphasizes that every form of social research necessarily has cultural dimensions that cannot be neglected. Therefore, to understand structuring processes, it is necessary to understand how individuals think about the time and space in which they are involved and how they articulate this conception with their actions, acting according to the cultural context in which they are inserted.

Finally, the third principle consists of taking as a premise that those involved in the action, or social actors, are aware of and knowledgeable about their practices, even if they result in unexpected or unplanned consequences (knowledgeable human agents). In research operational terms, the researcher must assume that the structure does not exist outside or independently of the agents' knowledge of their day-to-day activities (Quang et al., 2022; Frolova et al., 2019).

Once the three principles of Structuring Theory have been presented, we propose to study non-profit organizations with such a theoretical framework. We chose to analyze organizational structures through Structuring Theory. Consequently, we take them both as the rules or knowledge that ponder human actions, and as the resources that each actor has to act. In other words, individuals fight for authority, roles and possibilities to influence decisions within organizations, while creating the rules or practices that will allow them to experience or not these roles and struggles within them. Organizational structures provide the rules and resources (frameworks) that individuals use to interact within a context of meanings, defined in a space-time binomial. At the same time, the

interaction of these same individuals according to such rules and resources only occurs as they consent to do so, that is, they construct meanings from this (RILEY, 1983). Structures of social systems have no independent reality outside the social practices they constitute (Adami, 2021). They can be understood as a web of formal and informal relationships that represent the way in which the rules are defined and what are the resources that each actor has to act in the daily life of organizations that create, reinforce and reproduce relationships between individuals.

B. METHOD

The research method used in this study consists of several stages including: Literature Review: Conducting a literature review involves analyzing existing scholarly articles, books, and other publications related to the topic of interest. This approach allows researchers to identify gaps in the current research and to build on the work of previous researchers. Case Studies: A case study involves analyzing a specific situation, organization, or individual in depth. This approach can provide rich and detailed information about a particular phenomenon, which can be useful for understanding the political or economic factors that influence it.

Experiments: Experiments involve manipulating one or more variables in order to observe the effect on another variable. This approach can be used to test hypotheses related to political or economic phenomena and can help to establish cause-and-effect relationships, and Statistical Analysis: Statistical analysis involves using quantitative data to test hypotheses and draw conclusions. This approach can be used to analyze data from surveys, experiments, or other sources.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

La Maison Verte (LMV) is an eco-products cooperative located in an English-speaking neighborhood in Montreal, Canada called Notre Dame de Grace. The cooperative strives to find viable and eco-friendly alternatives for personal and household products, offering a wide range of goods, from cosmetics to cleaning products, books, recycled material and children's products. In addition, it offers the opportunity to support organic farmers, as members can invest in any venture that interests them. This type of service favors credit to producers, facilitates consumer access and disseminates the philosophy of healthy eating with responsible production.

The cooperative has a formal structure, defined by statute, which brings together consumers, workers (from La Maison Verte itself) and suppliers. There is a store, located on the main avenue in the neighborhood, whose purpose is to promote ecological awareness in the community. At the ideological level, it is understood that the cooperative members work for alternatives to exaggerated consumerism and materialism, observed in contemporary societies. For this reason, the cooperative offers a

space for the sale of organic products, originating from small enterprises of local and family production.

LMV's founding members were people involved in community activities, who created the cooperative with the intention of sensitizing a greater number of people to the urgency of adopting conscientious consumption practices and environmental preservation. The community and the development of a local economy, based on healthy production for the environment, have always been values that have marked LMV.

Celebrate overcoming the break-even point between income and expenses. This fact, however, was not considered a reason for celebration by all members; some of them, including the founding members, interpreted the feat as a distortion of the purposes of creating and managing the cooperative enterprise, arguing that the organization was increasingly directed towards commercial activities and put aside the purposes of mobilizing people. for environmental awareness.

Faced with these tensions, we set out to observe the dynamics of the members' relations with the cooperative and identify the structuring processes that fueled the crisis. Throughout the studies, we considered that the positive evolution of commercial performance had become the central point of an identity crisis among the members, that is, it threatened the relationships of solidarity and cooperation that were the basis for the creation of the cooperative enterprise. What is the relationship between the events, the identity crisis and the reality of the members' relationships with the cooperative ideal and with the LMV in particular? The formal structure and procedures foreseen for interaction between the members enabled us to understand the conflict in more detail. By following assemblies and meetings, it was possible to suggest that the basis of the conflict lay in a growing distinction about the meaning of the cooperative's mission for each member, even though everyone agreed with the promotion of ecological awareness and environmental education. The Structuring Theory and the process theory method allowed us to define some points for reflection.

Structuring Processes

Based on Eraly's (2003) concept of structuring processes, we identified in this Case Study a set of processes that allowed us to understand the origins of the conflicts that were established in the LMV during the period in which we followed its activities. Taking human action as inseparable from the structure of the social system, we study the evolution of events, as well as the formal characteristics of the cooperative structure. Action and structure, recursively implicated, led us to interpret the conflicts, in a structurationist perspective.

The formal structure in a cooperative organization aims to promote solidarity and cooperation among members. As seen, the legal statute intends to moderate the tensions between social and economic objectives, typical of cooperative organizations. It is these tensions that condition and facilitate the construction of relationships between members

and the cooperative. Analyzing the members-cooperative relationship and exploring the construction of the meaning that each one gave to it would be an interesting way to reach an understanding of what was behind the conflict situation, that is, to identify which structural processes ration that shaped the members' relations with the cooperative and that generated conflicts between them.

We started identifying the structuring processes by understanding the rules that define the formal organizational structure of the cooperative, that is, the analysis of the bylaws. In it, we highlight some normative points that govern the life of the cooperative: a) the operation of the cooperative is democratic, based on the active and deliberate participation of the members. These must always take into account the aspirations and potential of individuals in the organization of work. Work gives rise to just compensation, whether monetary or otherwise; b) the cooperative's decisions and activities are taken and carried out with respect for the planet and all its forms of life.

Unlike other cooperatives, LMV established itself as a solidarity cooperative, that is, its Board of Directors must be made up of equal parts of consumers, suppliers and workers. This format gives legitimacy to the proposal of shared power and democratic decision, which is included in its bylaws and materializes in a tripartite Board of Directors.

Then, we studied the governance structure of the LMV, with a view to understanding how the decision-making process was formally organized, considering the cooperative ideal. To better understand the LMV's governance structure, we turned to Vienney (1994), who uses the concept of entrepreneur, and Malo (2000; 2001), who uses the concept of collective entrepreneur. The collective entrepreneur leads the strategic process in social economy organizations. The process is conducted not by a single individual, but by a set of actors disposed by statute (according to the law and internal rules) and who are organized, in general, as follows: a) General Assembly: made up of all members of the cooperative, all of whom have the right to vote and elect, by direct vote, the members of the Board of Directors; b) Board of Directors: has the highest authority on strategic issues and appoints the members of the board; and c) Board of Executive Officers: responds to the Board of Directors for its actions, and may be dismissed if so voted at the General Meeting or Board of Directors.

For Malo (2001), this governance structure allows cooperatives to address two issues that manifest themselves as tensions in the cooperative ideal. First, to achieve a strategic orientation that deals with the double character of social economy organizations: on the one hand, association of people moved by a common objective that translates into a socioeconomic activity; on the other hand, a cooperative is also a company, inserted in the market economy, which needs to find a competitive position in this market. Second, to promote the involvement of members in strategic decision-making processes, since they are, at the same time, co-responsible for the administration and co-owners of the company.

We saw, therefore, that at the formal level, the action of the members should be focused on promoting the cooperative ideal, since both the organizational structure and the governance structure converged towards this. However, the conflicts settled on the level of interpretation or meaning that each member gave to their bond with the cooperative. Being in favor of the cooperative ideal implied different ways of interacting with the cooperative; hence the conflicts.

We then proceeded to direct the investigation to understand the meaning that the members constructed about their relationship with the cooperative. All members openly expressed their commitment to the ideal of sustainable development present in the cooperative's mission. Interestingly, their daily social actions aimed at this were different and, consequently, the meanings they gave to the organization's mission were also different. Having a positive commercial performance represented, for some, the success of the cooperative as an organization, as more people consumed products and services aimed at conscientious consumption and the promotion of sustainable business. For others, including the founding members, the smooth running of business was not accompanied by more dedication from the members to the cause; these argued against the emphasis on good financial performance, concerned with the fact that there were fewer and fewer members willing to carry out voluntary activities, dedicating hours of work to the operation and management of the cooperative or participating in campaigns and events.

Faced with these different ways of interpreting the meaning of affiliation (or membership), we identified three structuring processes, that is, of activities or actions and interactions, in a given space-time, which constituted the relations of members with the community cooperative, formally and ideologically, as a relationship of engagement with the cause.

Economic and Social Tensions in Guatemala

Guatemala is a country in Central America that has faced a variety of economic and social tensions in recent years. Here are some of the key issues:

1. **Poverty and inequality:** Guatemala is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with nearly 60% of the population living below the poverty line. The country also has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world, with the wealthiest 10% of the population earning nearly half of the country's total income.
2. **Land rights:** Many of Guatemala's rural communities are indigenous, and they have long struggled to secure their land rights. Large landowners, including foreign corporations, have often used violence and intimidation to displace indigenous communities and seize their land.
3. **Corruption:** Corruption is a pervasive problem in Guatemala, with politicians, businesspeople, and law enforcement officials all implicated in bribery and other

corrupt activities. This has led to a lack of trust in government institutions and a sense that the wealthy and powerful can act with impunity.

4. Violence and crime: Guatemala has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, and violent crime is a major concern for many citizens. Gangs and drug trafficking organizations are particularly active in the country, and the police and judicial systems are often seen as ineffective in addressing these problems.
5. Migration: Many Guatemalans have been forced to flee their homes due to violence, poverty, and other factors. This has led to a significant increase in migration to the United States and other countries, often undertaken in dangerous and difficult conditions.
6. Education: Guatemala has one of the lowest literacy rates in Latin America, with only about half of the population being able to read and write. This is partly due to a lack of investment in education, particularly in rural areas where many children do not have access to schools or are forced to drop out early.
7. Health: Health care is another area where Guatemala lags behind other countries in the region. Many Guatemalans lack access to basic medical services, and the country has some of the highest rates of malnutrition and infant mortality in Latin America.
8. Discrimination: Discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation is a major issue in Guatemala. Indigenous communities, in particular, face high levels of discrimination and marginalization, which can limit their access to education, healthcare, and other essential services.
9. Political instability: Guatemala has a long history of political instability, with frequent coups and violent conflicts. This has made it difficult for the country to build strong and stable institutions, which has contributed to ongoing economic and social challenges.
10. Environmental degradation: Guatemala is also facing environmental challenges, including deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution. These issues are often linked to economic activities such as mining and agriculture, which can have negative impacts on local ecosystems and communities.

Overall, these economic and social tensions are interconnected and contribute to a complex and challenging situation in Guatemala. Addressing these issues will require a multifaceted approach, including investments in education and healthcare, efforts to address corruption and discrimination, and sustainable economic development that takes into account environmental concerns and the needs of marginalized communities.

These economic and social tensions have contributed to a sense of unrest and instability in Guatemala. While there have been efforts to address these issues, progress has been slow, and many of these challenges remain deeply entrenched.

The social and economic interests in Guatemala are complex and often conflicting. On the one hand, there are powerful economic interests, including large landowners,

multinational corporations, and wealthy elites, who are primarily focused on maximizing their profits and maintaining their power and influence. These groups often benefit from policies that favor deregulation, privatization, and foreign investment, which can result in economic growth but also exacerbate inequality and undermine the rights of marginalized communities.

On the other hand, there are also social interests that prioritize the well-being of ordinary citizens, particularly those who have been historically marginalized and excluded from economic and political power. These groups include indigenous communities, labor unions, human rights organizations, and other civil society groups, who are often working to promote social justice, environmental sustainability, and the protection of human rights.

There are also many intersecting social and economic interests in Guatemala, which can sometimes create tensions and conflicts. For example, the country's agricultural sector is a major contributor to the economy, but it is also responsible for many of the land rights violations that have displaced indigenous communities and contributed to environmental degradation. Similarly, the extractive industries, including mining and oil drilling, generate significant revenue for the government, but they often do so at the expense of local communities and the environment.

The social and economic interests in Guatemala are deeply intertwined, and addressing the country's challenges will require a careful balancing of these competing priorities. This will likely require the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, including government officials, business leaders, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens, who can work together to promote a more inclusive and sustainable future for all Guatemalans. In addition to the interests mentioned earlier, there are several other factors that play a role in shaping the country's economic and social landscape. One of these is the role of foreign aid and development assistance, which can be a significant source of funding for social programs and infrastructure projects. However, aid can also come with conditions and requirements that may not always align with the priorities and needs of local communities.

Another important factor is the role of organized crime and drug trafficking, which can have significant economic and social impacts in the country. Criminal organizations often operate with impunity and can exert significant influence over local governments and businesses, which can further exacerbate corruption and inequality. The country's political system is also a key factor in shaping social and economic interests. Guatemala has a history of political instability, with frequent coups, corruption scandals, and challenges to the rule of law. This has created a climate of uncertainty that can discourage investment and hinder economic growth, while also limiting the ability of citizens to hold their leaders accountable and advocate for their rights.

Finally, it is worth noting that social and economic interests are often intertwined with cultural and historical factors in Guatemala. The country has a rich and diverse

cultural heritage, with indigenous languages and traditions playing a significant role in shaping social norms and values. However, these traditions have often been suppressed and marginalized by colonialism and political violence, which can contribute to ongoing tensions and conflicts in the country. Overall, the social and economic interests in Guatemala are shaped by a complex array of factors, including economic policies, social movements, foreign aid, organized crime, political instability, and cultural traditions. Understanding these dynamics is essential for promoting sustainable development and building a more inclusive and equitable future for all Guatemalans.

D. CONCLUSION

The study of academic production in the field of non-profit organizations revealed that the concept of organizational structure appears to be static and independent of the actions of individuals. This observation serves the two main theoretical strands of studies on non-profit organizations. In the social economy, the organizational structure is the entity that defines the form of participation of the members in the dynamics of the organization's life. Analogously, the English-speaking production, which works with NPOs, refers to the structure as positions or departments, with the tonic of efficiency and adaptation to the turbulences of the external environment.

Using Structuring Theory, we study the evolution dynamics of the organizational structure of a cooperative from a new perspective. We ventured to analyze not the organizational structure, but the structuring processes. This option was due to the belief that the organizational structure is more than a frame or skeleton of composition of relationships. We believe that, by studying the structure, organizational paradoxes and conflicts can be investigated, making them a source of learning about organizational identity.

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