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# The struggle between values and practices in radical open organizations

Margaux Langlois

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Margaux Langlois. The struggle between values and practices in radical open organizations. Business administration. Université Paris sciences et lettres, 2022. English. NNT : 2022UPSLD033 . tel-04055090

**HAL Id: tel-04055090**

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**THÈSE DE DOCTORAT**

**DE L'UNIVERSITÉ PSL**

Préparée à l'Université Paris-Dauphine

**The struggle between values and practices  
in radical open organizations**

Soutenue par

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Le 24 10 2022

Ecole doctorale n° ED 543

**Ecole doctorale SDOSE**

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*To Lorelei*



## **Abstract of the thesis:**

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This essays-based thesis enters the recently emerged field of open organizing to study openness as entangling in all the organizational processes of an organization. In this research, I suggest conceptualizing openness as a set of values based on participation, transparency, and individual freedom. By challenging the bureaucratic features of organizations, these open principles can be considered as anti-organizational, which raises key challenges to address for the actors engaged in open organizing. This thesis thus interrogates how openness, as values-based, acts in the organization and shapes action. To answer this research question, I draw upon three essays, a theoretical piece and two empirical investigations of extreme cases of radical openness, Managers du 21ème Siècle and Ouishare, through an ethnographic approach. In the first essay, I rely on an integrative literature review to highlight the competing assumptions behind the concept of openness, including both emancipatory ambitions and a performance target, which lead me to argue the need to repoliticize research on open organizing. The second study focuses on Managers du 21ème Siècle as a two-fold case of failed open organizing, by showing how an extreme conception of open values can lead to ideological forms of closure that threaten the organization's sustainability. Finally, in the third co-authored paper, we investigate openness through a sensemaking lens to understand how members of Ouishare have managed to enact radical open organizing over a decade-long period using intensive conversational practices and ongoing negotiations about the meaning of openness. Leaning on these three essays, this thesis offers two critical contributions to the open organizing literature. First, I highlight that openness is mobilized to re-enchant organizations by pinpointing how actors engaged in open organizing shift their focus from rationality and performance to value embodiment. Secondly, I explore the relationship between ideology and utopia embedded in radical open organizing.

**Keywords:** open organizing – critical management studies – ethnography – ideology – values – post-bureaucracy – participation – transparency – individual freedom – emancipation



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This document marks (not without pride and relief) the end of a five-year journey, representing a career shift with all the associated stakes. As it is the case for a lot of PhD students, it was a difficult exercise, both intellectually and emotionally, and especially tough to combine with maternity. How being able to cope with these two activities so demanding? If I experienced a burnout I also found help and kindness on my way, which allowed me to complete this thesis.

I would like to start by thanking Véronique Perret, my thesis supervisor. I am grateful for your precious advice that I sometimes had trouble hearing (that is the problem when being stubborn), the freedom you gave me in my work, your support, and your benevolence in more difficult moments.

I also would like to thank Lionel Garreau, for his significant role in my doctoral journey. You contributed to develop my taste for research in your courses and you recommended Véronique Perret as supervisor. I am glad you joined us as a co-author on the third essay of my thesis.

I am also very grateful to the other members of the examination board for having accepted to evaluate my thesis. Thank you, Steffen, for agreeing to receive me for a visiting in Exeter that was finally cancelled due to my pregnancy, and for your valuable feedback on my work when we met in Dauphine and Edinburgh. Thank you, Isabelle Bouty and Anthony Hussenot, for having participated on my pre-defence and for the numerous and so relevant suggestions you gave me that I carefully followed for this final version. And finally, thank you, Gazi Islam, for joining this board, we met at my very first research workshop in GEM and I am proud to show you how far I have come since then.

As well, I have a thought for my MOST colleagues, notably the (former) lecturers and professors, Pierre Labardin, Antoine Blanc, Céline Baud, Nicolas Berland, François-Xavier de Vaujany, Colette Depeyre, Guillaume Johnson, and Gwenaëlle Nogatchewsky for their feedback during MOST seminars; but also for invited professors, particularly Laurent Tasklin who helped me with my second thesis essay; and finally for the so efficient administrative team, namely Nathanaël Legendre, Véronique Tyrel de Poix, and Valérie Dylon-Jamin.

I would like to dedicate special thanks to the current PhD candidates, Juliette, Justine, Edwige, Kirsty, Alice, Marine, Paul, Nathan, Rémy, Clément, Louis... but also the former ones, Isabelle, Philippe, Michelle, Elodie, Samy... we laughed and grumbled together, and we supported each other back. Thank you for the caring atmosphere that you were able to instil in the team.



Obviously, the actors from my fields played a significant part in the completion of this thesis, this would not have been possible without you. In M21S, thank you to Pascal, Emilie and Adrien, my fellows from the research circle, and to Marjorie and Fabienne. In Ouishare, I think about Taouf and Jef for allowing me to join the community, Maiwenn and Jen who shared with me so valuable (and yet still secret) information about maternity and post-partum, Martin for our after-meeting debriefs and long discussions about parenthood, Isabelle with whom I was so glad to work on a mission and for her precious support during my burnout, Maud and Claudine, my summit organization fellows, and also Edwin, Clothilde, Johanna, Julie, Sckanda, Arthur, Solène, Mathieu, H  l  ne, and all the ones that I forgot mentioning (sorry!).

I especially want to share my gratitude with:

- Sarah Lasri, who become one of my best friends, for the 1001 adventures we have lived together during these 5 years, laughter, tears, intense reflections, and desires for future projects that I hope we will concretize in the future.
- Lucie Cortambert, for our precious discussions about the thesis experience and for having be my conference roommate, I will always remember our sleepovers.
- St  phane Jaumier, for your many advice, friendly reviews, interesting references and for your great kindness.
- Whelsy Bounou, for our weekly phone-calls and lunches to support each other in facing young scholars' challenges (in a capitalist world).
- The girls' nightstand feminist protests, which always helped boost my morale (tmtc).
- Alexei Mizura for your numerous reviews of my writings and presentations, and for helping me get more confident with English.

I also have a thought for B  atrice Parguel, H  l  ne Picard, Carine Chemin-Bouzir, G  raldine Paring, and my PSB colleagues, Ignasi, H  l  ne, Emmanuel, Nicolas... for your old-timer tips on the teaching and research profession!

Finally, a huge thanks to Christophe, who supported me on a daily basis during these five tumultuous years, to Lorele   for your love and innocence that often helped me forget my thesis-related worries, and to my family, my mum, Guillaume, my dad, my siblings, Alexis my brother of heart, and my friends, Camille, Aur  lie, Cl  mentine, Morgan, without whom I would not be here today.

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# **CHAPITRE 1 : INTRODUCTION**

Version française



## INTRODUCTION

### a) Contexte de la recherche : l'ouverture comme norme contemporaine

Cette thèse par essais propose d'étudier l'ouverture (*openness*) comme une norme institutionnalisée, ce sujet prenant une place de plus en plus importante dans les organisations et dans la recherche en gestion. En effet, depuis plus de vingt ans, nous voyons se multiplier les phénomènes organisationnels dit « ouverts ». Cette tendance a été popularisée par l'émergence des communautés open-source au début des années 2000, dans lesquelles la méthode de développement bureaucratique qui prévalait alors au sein de l'industrie du logiciel était remise en cause (Raymond, 1999). Depuis, de nombreux processus encadrés, à la fois spatialement et temporellement, comme l'innovation ouverte (Chesbrough, 2003) ou l'open strategy (Whittington, Caillaud, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011), ont été implémentés au sein de grandes entreprises telles que Siemens (voir Hutter, Nketia, & Füller, 2017), Starbucks<sup>1</sup> ou encore EDF (EDF, 2009). L'ouverture a également été mise en œuvre dans des actions publiques à travers l'open government (cf. le « *Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government* » du président Obama en 2009<sup>2</sup> par exemple) et l'open data (cf. le tableau de bord du suivi de l'épidémie de Covid-19 en France, disponible sur le site du gouvernement<sup>3</sup>). Certaines organisations ouvertes ont aussi décidé d'appliquer l'ouverture à l'ensemble de leurs processus organisationnels, c'est par exemple le cas de Wikipedia<sup>4</sup>, de la Mozilla Corporation, de Linux (voir O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007), de Red Hat (voir Whitehurst, 2011), ou encore de Premium Cola (voir Luedicke, Husemann, Furnari, & Ladstaetter, 2017).

Divers facteurs ont été associés à cette implémentation croissante de l'ouverture dans les organisations. Premièrement, l'ouverture est censée répondre aux demandes relatives à une plus grande transparence et à une participation accrue, qui émanent de diverses parties prenantes telles que les citoyens ou les consommateurs (Janssen, Charalabidis, & Zuiderwijk, 2012; Whittington & Yakis-Douglas, 2020). Deuxièmement, les initiatives ouvertes ont été motivées par de nombreuses promesses d'augmentation de la performance organisationnelle (cf. Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007 à propos de l'open innovation; Janssen et al., 2012 sur l'open government) et d'amélioration de l'efficacité (Raymond, 1999). Celles-ci sont permises

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<sup>1</sup> <https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2013/starbucks-celebrates-five-year-anniversary-of-my-starbucks-idea/>

<sup>2</sup> « *Mon administration s'est engagée à créer un niveau d'ouverture sans précédent au sein du gouvernement. Nous travaillerons ensemble pour garantir la confiance du public et établir un système de transparence, de participation publique et de collaboration. L'ouverture renforcera notre démocratie et favorisera l'efficacité du gouvernement.* » (ma traduction)

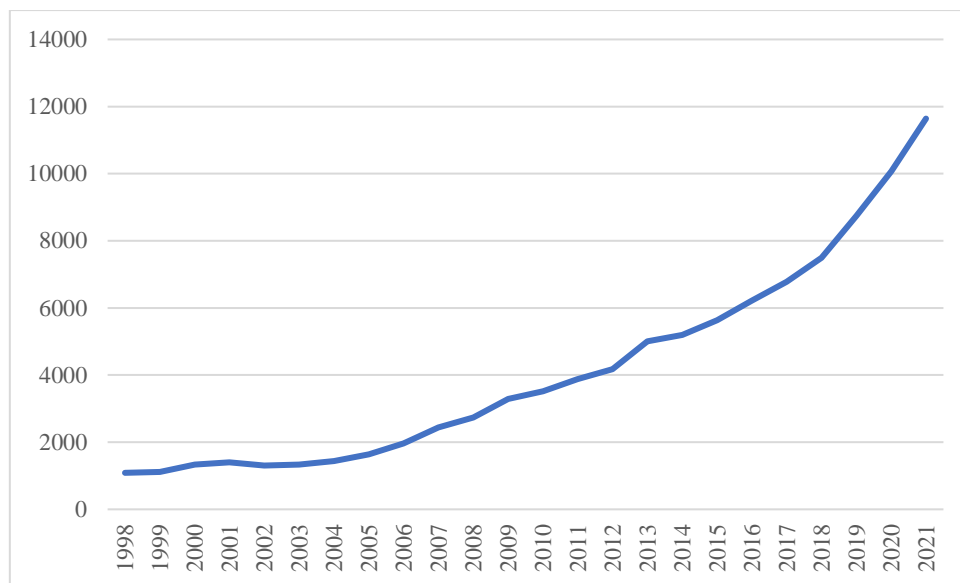
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/reuses/tableau-de-bord-de-suivi-de-lepidemie-de-coronavirus-en-france/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks/eng/jimmy\\_wales\\_on\\_the\\_birth\\_of\\_wikipedia.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/eng/jimmy_wales_on_the_birth_of_wikipedia.html)

par l'exploitation potentielle d'un plus grand nombre de ressources, notamment les informations, les idées créatives ou encore de compétences, ces dernières étant fournies par les contributeur.ice.s. Enfin, le développement des technologies de l'information et de la communication, notamment les médias sociaux (Seidl, von Krogh, & Whittington, 2019a), et de l'enseignement en management (Whittington et al., 2011) ont joué un rôle clé dans la croissance du nombre croissant d'activités ouvertes.

L'essor des initiatives ouvertes se reflète également par l'abondance des recherches portant sur l'ouverture. Un nombre croissant d'articles étudiant les phénomènes ouverts ont été publiés depuis l'adoption du terme « *open-source* » en 1998 (Raymond, 1998). Le graphique 1, ci-dessous, illustre ainsi les résultats d'une recherche menée sur Scopus avec les critères suivants : (i) le terme « open » dans les titres, les résumés et les mots-clés des articles (ii) parus dans des revues de sciences sociales et de « *business, management, and accounting* ». Un total de 99 446 papiers publiés entre 1998 et 2021 a été recensé.

**Graphique 1. Nombre d'articles publiés sur les phénomènes ouverts entre 1998 et 2021**



La diversité des initiatives ouvertes se reflète dans le caractère fragmenté des recherches sur l'ouverture. Cette littérature est effectivement répartie entre plusieurs disciplines (principalement la gestion et les sciences de l'information et de la communication) et s'intéresse à une variété d'objets (à savoir les divers phénomènes ouverts, de l'API open-source aux processus de stratégie ouverte) sur lesquels les divers courants de recherche dits « *open* » ont été fondés. Diverses approches ontologiques ont également été mobilisées (Tavakoli, Schlagwein, & Schoder, 2017), ajoutant encore à la complexité de ce champ de l'ouverture.

b) L'open organizing, mon objet de recherche

Parmi cette littérature abondante et fragmentée, ma thèse s'inscrit dans le champ de « *l'open organizing* ». Ce dernier a commencé à se structurer grâce à des thèmes dédiés durant les conférences EGOS de 2019<sup>5</sup> et 2021<sup>6</sup>, et à un numéro spécial de la revue *Organization Studies*. Ce courant de recherche émergent vise à réunifier les contributions aujourd'hui disséminées sur l'ouverture organisationnelle. Cette nouvelle perspective semble prometteuse pour mieux comprendre ce qui se passe dans les organisations qui appliquent l'ouverture à tous leurs processus d'organisation, cas sur lesquels ma thèse se focalise particulièrement. Plus précisément, le champ de l'open organizing étudie « *la manière dont les organisations (tentent) d'échapper aux dysfonctionnements de la bureaucratie, de l'intimité culturelle, des frontières étroites et des procédures analogiques* » (Dobusch et al., 2019, p.1, ma traduction). Ma thèse s'inscrit dans ce courant de recherche et vise ainsi à appréhender comment l'ouverture, lorsqu'elle est appliquée à l'ensemble de l'organisation, fonctionne réellement.

Comme l'illustre la citation précédente de Dobusch et al. (2019), la tendance « open » s'inscrit dans un mouvement antibureaucratique plus global observé depuis les 40 dernières années. Intitulée « post-bureaucratie », cette transformation des organisations remet en cause la vision rationalisée des attributs, structures et objectifs de l'idéal-type bureaucratique (Weber, 1978, d'abord publiée en 1921). On retrouve d'ailleurs cette position antibureaucratique dans les écrits sur les phénomènes d'ouverture. En particulier, les discours post-bureaucratiques affirment que, de nos jours, les organisations évoluent « *des hiérarchies aux réseaux, des programmes formels et des règles de coordination aux interactions spontanées, des départements spécialisés et des unités de personnel aux processus improvisés et aux équipes projet temporaires, et des lignes de commandement verticales à une communication latérale à l'échelle de l'organisation* » (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010, p.1251). En s'appuyant sur plus de participation et de transparence (Schlagwein, Conboy, Feller, Leimeister, & Morgan, 2017), l'ouverture organisationnelle se présente comme une alternative plus radicale encore à la bureaucratie, car elle questionne davantage l'approche traditionnelle des frontières de l'organisation (c'est-à-dire ce qui définit

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1539047741567&subtheme\\_id=1511424479132](https://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1539047741567&subtheme_id=1511424479132)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1610525130808&subtheme\\_id=1573461256004](https://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1610525130808&subtheme_id=1573461256004)

l'extérieur de l'intérieur des organisations, y compris l'adhésion), des niveaux hiérarchiques, et de l'autorité.

Les promesses portées par l'attribut « ouvert » remettent en cause la conception traditionnelle de l'autorité. Certains auteur.ice.s ont ainsi suggéré de considérer les organisations post-bureaucratiques et ouvertes comme des formes hybrides mêlant principes bureaucratiques et démocratiques (par exemple dans Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Josserand, Teo, & Clegg, 2006; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). Cette combinaison de pratiques bureaucratiques et démocratiques pourrait être à l'origine des luttes de pouvoir observées lorsque les acteur.ice.s s'engagent dans des processus ouverts (voir Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017; Heracleous, Gößwein, Beaudette, & Wales, 2017; Smith, Callagher, Crewe-Brown, & Siedlok, 2018). En parallèle, les contributions critiques sur les post-bureaucraties ont mis en garde contre leurs déviances idéologiques et des risques de subordination, des dynamiques qui pourraient potentiellement émerger aussi dans des configurations organisationnelles ouvertes.

La distribution du pouvoir et les enjeux de domination sont donc des questions centrales à aborder dans l'organisation ouverte. D'une part, l'institutionnalisation des configurations post-bureaucratiques et ouvertes amène à reconsidérer ce qu'est une organisation. Comme évoqué, lorsqu'elle est appliquée à tous les processus d'organisation, l'ouverture semble offrir une alternative radicale à l'accent mis sur les structures formelles et les hiérarchies dans la bureaucratie. D'autre part, les formes organisationnelles ouvertes interrogent la façon de construire une organisation en utilisant des principes ouverts considérés, sur le plan théorique, comme anti-organisationnels. En résumé, les luttes de pouvoir et la nature anti-organisationnelle de l'ouverture sont les sujets phares de cette thèse.

## **I. L'OUVERTURE COMME ENSEMBLE DE VALEURS**

La littérature sur les phénomènes ouverts se caractérise par son abondance mais aussi par sa fragmentation, dès lors, définir ce que recouvre l'ouverture organisationnelle apparaît à la fois comme un premier défi et comme une nécessité afin de circonscrire mon objet de recherche. Jusqu'à aujourd'hui, la configuration des différents champs d'étude de l'ouverture a conduit les chercheur.euse.s à apporter une vision disparate de l'ouverture en se focalisant sur des processus ou des pratiques spécifiques (par exemple, l'open innovation, l'open government, l'open strategy...). Le champ émergent de l'open organizing, dans lequel ma thèse s'inscrit, soutient une approche holistique qui me permet de proposer une définition renouvelée de l'ouverture.

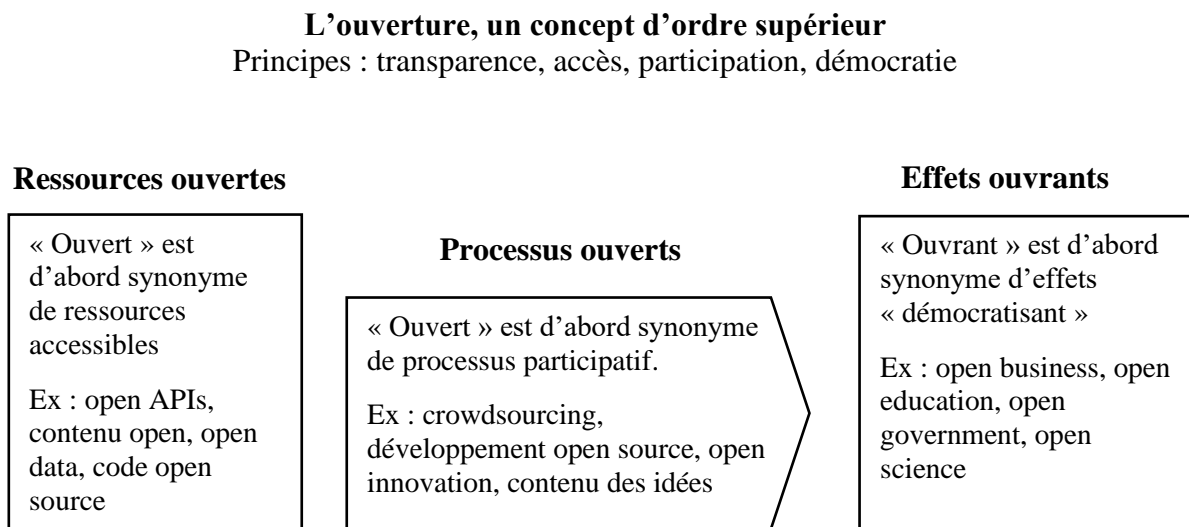
Plus particulièrement, dans la première sous-partie de ce chapitre, je spécifie la nature de l'ouverture et en propose une nouvelle conceptualisation en termes de valeurs. Ce changement conceptuel est justifié par des propositions théoriques qui restent, cependant, encore peu développées dans la littérature existante. Cette transition a aussi et surtout été observée dans divers contextes organisationnels « ouverts » et est donc motivée par une transformation instiguée par les acteur.ice.s elleux-mêmes. La deuxième sous-partie se concentre sur le contenu de l'ouverture, en caractérisant les principes sous-tendus par cet attribut. Sur la base d'une revue de la littérature pluridisciplinaire et de motivations empiriques, je suggère que l'ouverture implique trois valeurs principales, la participation et la transparence, qui sont généralement employées pour justifier l'utilisation du qualificatif « ouvert », ainsi que la liberté individuelle qui apparaît aujourd'hui comme une dimension négligée. Puis, dans la troisième sous-section, je m'appuie sur les contributions critiques à propos de la post-bureaucratie pour interroger le caractère idéologique de ce qui peut apparaître comme une solution miracle, l'ouverture étant fortement associée à l'amélioration des performances de l'organisation et à des hypothèses « *welfaristes* ».

#### a) Une nouvelle conception de l'ouverture

Comme je l'ai déjà mentionné, l'ouverture apparaît comme un concept polysémique puisqu'il a été utilisé pour caractériser différents composants organisationnels et objets. Cela soulève ainsi des questions sur la nature même de l'ouverture. Schlagwein et al. (2017) proposent un modèle (voir la figure 1 ci-dessous) pour identifier les diverses utilisations de l'attribut « ouvert » que l'on trouve dans les études portant sur l'ouverture.

Dans ce modèle, les auteurs font une distinction entre les "ressources ouvertes", les "processus ouverts" et les "effets ouvrant", chacun mettant l'accent sur un principe d'ouverture spécifique. Le quatrième objet ouvert, le concept d'ordre supérieur, implique de donner à quiconque le souhaite (c'est-à-dire aux participant.e.s internes et/ou externes) la possibilité et les conditions matérielles (c'est-à-dire les outils technologiques, les informations stratégiques, le code source, etc.) pour participer à un projet librement accessible aux contributeur.ice.s et aux utilisateur.ice.s.

**Figure 1. Un modèle de l'ouverture, par Schlagwein et al. (2017, p.299)**



Ce concept d'ordre supérieur se rapporte à l'idéal-type d'ouverture (Schlagwein et al., 2017). Conceptualisé par Max Weber (1965, publié pour la première fois en 1922), un idéal-type désigne une catégorisation archétypique et conceptuelle qui regroupe les éléments communs observés dans la plupart des cas d'un phénomène donné. Il s'appuie sur des idées ou des images mentales (*Gedankenbilder*) à utiliser pour mieux comprendre le chaos de la réalité sociale, à des fins de comparaison ou de catégorisation par exemple (Weber, 1965/1922). Considérer l'ouverture comme un idéal-type signifie que, sur le plan empirique, un phénomène ne doit pas nécessairement réunir tous les principes analytiques identifiés pour être qualifié d'ouvert. Par exemple, la licence Open Source offre la possibilité de réutiliser le code source d'un programme (ressource ouverte) pour le développement de logiciels propriétaires (effets fermant) (Kogut & Metiu, 2001). Cette conception en termes d'idéal-type rappelle l'approche de la littérature sur la stratégie ouverte (Whittington et al., 2011) caractérisant l'ouverture comme un continuum, c'est-à-dire comme une échelle tendant « *vers ou s'éloignant d'une plus grande ouverture* » (Hautz et al., 2017, p. 303, ma traduction).

Malgré son nom trompeur, l'idéal-type s'appuie sur des caractéristiques descriptives plutôt que sur un « idéal » au sens d'une quête de perfection, d'une utopie ou de valeurs (Weber, 1965/1922). La question de l'idéal ou des valeurs de l'ouverture se retrouve cependant dans le cadre de Schlagwein et al. (2017) à travers les « effets ouvrants ». Les auteurs écrivent en effet que ces derniers « *sous-tendent des valeurs sociales et politiques particulières orientées vers la démocratie, l'égalité et le libéralisme* » (ibid, p. 299, ma traduction). Alors que les effets ouvrants visent à porter les principes d'ouverture vers l'extérieur, en rendant la science ou

l'éducation accessibles au plus grand nombre par exemple, je suggère que les autres objets concernés par l'ouverture, c'est-à-dire les ressources et les processus, s'appuient sur un effet similaire, avec une signification politique et morale qui est, en revanche, plutôt orienté vers l'interne. Dans cette thèse, je propose donc de passer d'une conception de l'ouverture comme un idéal-type, basée sur des caractéristiques descriptives, à une caractérisation en termes de valeurs. Comme indiqué dans l'International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies, « *une valeur est une croyance discrète à propos de quelque chose ou de quelqu'un* » qui alimente « *la création de normes, qui sont des règles de bon et de mauvais comportement dans le système social* » (Boyatzis, Richard, 2008, p. 1607, ma traduction). Les valeurs sont considérées comme malléables, ainsi leur sens et leur compréhension peuvent varier en fonction de la situation ou de l'interlocuteur.ice qui les mobilise (Brindusa Albu, 2018). L'ambiguïté conceptuelle qui semble caractériser l'ouverture renforce également cette proposition. En plus de produire ce que sont les comportements appropriés dans un contexte donné, les valeurs affectent les objectifs et les processus organisationnels visés par les membres de l'organisation (Boyatzis, Richard, 2008; Brindusa Albu, 2018). En d'autres termes, les valeurs englobent une dimension morale ainsi qu'une dimension performative qui façonne les agences individuelles et collectives dans les organisations.

Cette approche en termes de valeurs a déjà été suggérée dans la recherche sur l'ouverture, les auteur.ice.s faisant référence à l'ouverture comme à un « paradigme » (Chesbrough, 2003), une « philosophie » (M. A. Peters & Britez, 2008), une « idéologie » (Gibbs, Rozaidi, & Eisenberg, 2013) ou une « valeur centrale » (Kornberger, Meyer, Brandtner, & Höllerer, 2017). Cependant, cette perspective de l'ouverture basée sur les valeurs n'a pas été réellement développée et seules quelques analyses la mobilisent (par exemple, Gibbs et al., 2013; Tkacz, 2012). Plus important encore, ce changement conceptuel suit le mouvement effectué par les acteur.ice.s engagé.e.s dans des organisations dans lesquelles l'ouverture a été appliquée à l'ensemble de l'organizing :

- Dans leur article sur l'élaboration de stratégies ouvertes au sein de la communauté wikipédienne, Dobusch, Dobusch, & Müller-Seitz (2019) ont étudié la manière dont les participant.e.s ont mis en œuvre « *un idéal d'ouverture sans restriction* », comme en témoigne la description de Wikipédia : « *l'encyclopédie libre que tout le monde peut modifier* » sur sa page principale " (p. 7 & voir également l'énoncé des principes de Wikipédia).
- Selon la page d'accueil du site web de Premium Kollektiv, une organisation qui a été étudiée par Luedicke et al. (2017), l'ouverture induit que « *toute personne impliquée est*

*invitée à s'exprimer [...] Peu importe que vous soyez un consommateur, un détaillant ou un embouteilleur : Chacun peut et doit exprimer son point de vue sur Premium et avoir son mot à dire dans le consensus démocratique »<sup>7</sup>.*

- Autre exemple, Ouishare, l'une des organisations étudiées dans ma thèse, déclare sur son site web que les principes ouverts font partie de son "ADN" : « *Nous ne recrutons pas nos membres - ils nous rejoignent en contribuant et en augmentant progressivement leur implication, s'il existe un sentiment mutuel d'alignement avec nos valeurs et nos méthodes de travail. Notre processus décisionnel est participatif, distribué et démocratique, ce qui nous permet de travailler en équipe, de manière flexible et avec un haut niveau d'autonomie.*<sup>8</sup> »

Comme le montrent ces citations, les acteur.ice.s de Wikipedia, Premium ou Ouishare affirment que l'ouverture est une valeur centrale de leurs organisations. Ces exemples empiriques démontrent que ces acteur.ice.s ont pris au sérieux l'ensemble des valeurs ouvertes et soulignent la nécessité pour les chercheur.euse.s de suivre la même voie dans leur compréhension conceptuelle de l'ouverture. Pour mieux saisir le fonctionnement des organisations ouvertes, il s'agit donc maintenant de clarifier plus précisément quelles sont les valeurs de l'ouverture organisationnelle.

#### b) Les principes fondamentaux de l'ouverture

Pour comprendre la façon dont l'ouverture façonne l'organisation, il s'agit de saisir quels sont les principes de l'ouverture. Comme indiqué précédemment, cela nécessite un développement analytique, l'ouverture étant critiquée pour souffrir d'une ambiguïté conceptuelle (Dahlander & Gann, 2010). En effet, en fonction de leurs contextes spécifiques, les multiples objets qualifiés d'« ouverts » (par exemple, innovation, science, données...) offrent de nombreuses définitions de l'ouverture (Schlagwein et al., 2017). Dans le concept d'ordre supérieur, Schlagwein et al. (2017) identifient quatre principes fondamentaux : l'accès, la participation, la transparence et la démocratie (voir la figure 1 susmentionnée). Toutefois, comme l'indiquent les auteurs, ce cadre rend compte de « *distinctions [qui] ne sont qu'analytiques : les ressources sont utilisées dans des processus qui produisent [in fine] des effets* » (ibid, p. 300). En d'autres termes, ces catégories analytiques fournissent une vision statique des principes d'ouverture qui ne reflètent

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<sup>7</sup> <https://premium-kollektiv.de/> translated from German

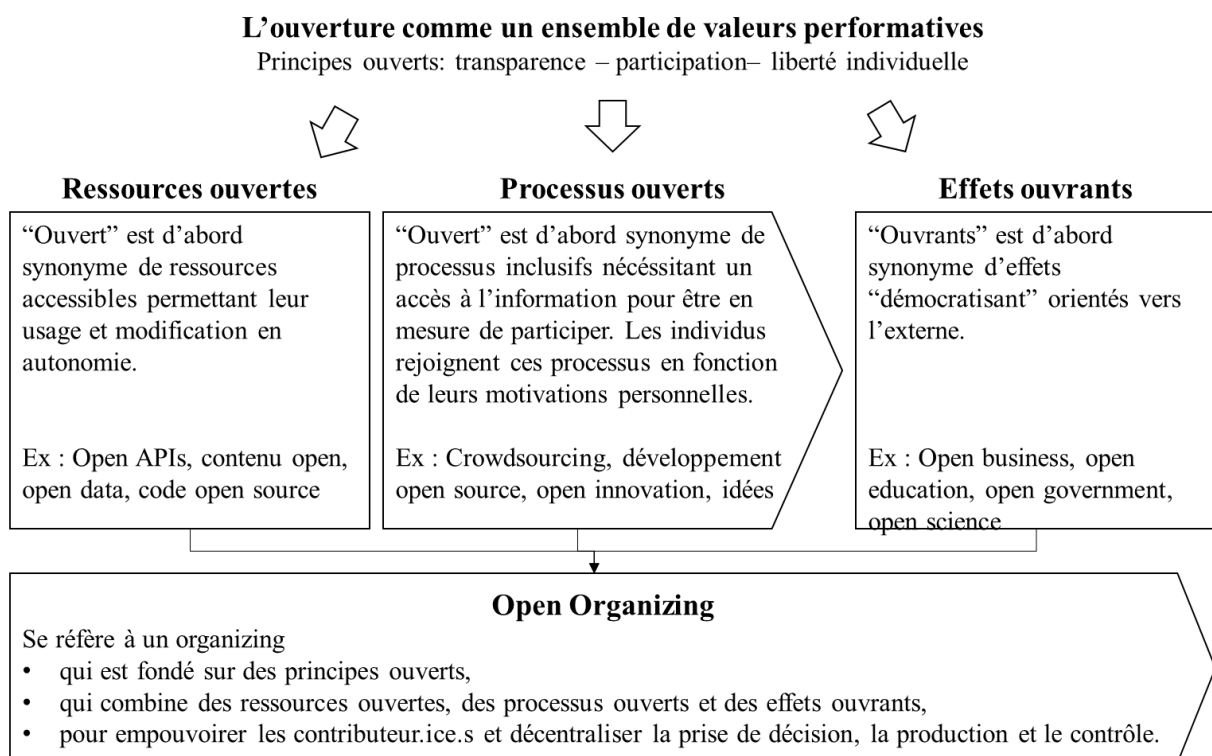
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ouishare.net/our-dna>



pas la façon dont ceux-ci sont réellement imbriqués, alors que cet enchevêtrement est particulièrement mis en valeur dans les cas d'organisation ouverte qui combinent des ressources ouvertes, des processus ouverts et des effets ouvrants.

Pour mieux considérer la manière dont les principes d'ouverture s'articulent, je propose de réviser les dimensions incluses dans le concept d'ordre supérieur (Schlagwein et al., 2017) à l'aide d'une revue de la littérature transverse sur l'ouverture organisationnelle et d'observations empiriques. Les propositions conceptuelles développées dans cette introduction sont synthétisées dans une version actualisée (figure 2) du modèle de l'ouverture de Schlagwein et al. (2017).

**Figure 2. Modèle actualisé de "l'ouverture" inspiré de Schlagwein et al. (2017, p.299)**



Premièrement, je mobilise la participation et la transparence, car ces éléments fondateurs se retrouvent dans presque tous les courants de recherche sur les phénomènes ouverts (par exemple Dahlander & Gann, 2010; Janssen et al., 2012; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003; Whittington et al., 2011). Deuxièmement, je suggère d'ajouter un nouveau principe, celui de liberté individuelle, basé sur la nature autonome des contributions. Bien qu'il ait été mis en évidence dans les communautés open-source (par exemple Von Krogh, Haefliger, Spaeth, & Wallin, 2012), ce principe reste négligé dans les recherches sur les stratégies ouvertes alors qu'il apparaît toujours comme une dimension importante à prendre en compte dans les pratiques

réelles d'ouverture (voir Smith et al., 2018; voir également les essais empiriques de cette thèse). Ensuite, je propose de supprimer l'accessibilité des principes d'ouverture car, comme indiqué ci-dessous, celle-ci est sous-tendue par les autres dimensions. J'ai également supprimé le terme « démocratie » puisque, comme noté dans la sous-partie précédente, je considère que la démocratisation interne est une finalité poursuivie par la mobilisation des valeurs de participation, de transparence et de liberté constituant l'ouverture. Bien que les effets externes souhaités de l'ouverture puissent varier selon l'initiative, une grande partie de la littérature souligne principalement les avantages de l'ouverture sur la performance (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Janssen et al., 2012) et l'efficacité (Raymond, 1999).

### **Participation**

La participation (également nommée collaboration ou inclusion) permet à une grande variété d'acteur.ice.s, provenant de l'intérieur et/ou de l'extérieur des frontières organisationnelles, d'accéder facilement aux ressources et/ou processus ouverts (Hautz, Hutter, Sutter, & Füller, 2019; Vaara, Rantakari, & Holstein, 2019). Ce principe inclut divers formes et degrés de participation (Hautz et al., 2019), comme la suggestion d'idées, la prise en charge de tâches de production ou la participation à des réunions par exemple, et englobe des pratiques à la fois collaboratives et concurrentielles (Schlagwein et al., 2017; Tkacz, 2012). Parmi les différentes formes d'inclusion, la participation aux processus décisionnels « *de la forme la plus forte de droits de décision "démocratiques" [...] à des formes faibles de participation telles que des consultations occasionnelles* » (Seidl et al., 2019b, p.11) apparaît comme fondamentale. De toute évidence, favoriser la participation nécessite d'accorder un droit d'accès aux ressources afin de les utiliser, par exemple les informations pour assurer la qualité de la prise de décision, ou de les modifier, comme le code source d'un programme pour pouvoir développer une nouvelle fonctionnalité. Lorsque l'ouverture est considérée comme un principe fondamental de l'organisation, la participation affecte également les règles d'adhésion. Plus précisément, participer en tant que contributeur.ice externe à un projet ouvert apparaît comme la première étape vers une adhésion officielle (Puranam, Alexy, & Reitzig, 2014). La participation remet donc en question la porosité des frontières organisationnelles car elle implique une forme d'adhésion plus fluide car pas nécessairement formelle (par exemple, Dahlander & Mahony, 2011). Ainsi, dans le collectif des Anonymous, être membre consiste à revendiquer son appartenance à la communauté (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015).

## **Transparence**

La transparence fait référence à une grande diffusion d'informations destinées aux participant.e.s à l'initiative ouverte. Le degré de transparence est évalué par la quantité et la sensibilité des informations partagées (Ohlson & Yakis-Douglas, 2019). Comme mentionné précédemment, un large accès à l'information est une condition préalable à la participation. La transparence est également associée à la participation car elle est reliée au caractère conversationnel (Turco, 2016) ou dialogique (Heracleous et al., 2017) de l'ouverture. En lien avec le principe de communication ouverte (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987), la transparence suppose la divulgation d'informations personnelles et professionnelles et ainsi une diminution des ambiguïtés (Gibbs et al., 2013). La communication ouverte implique également que les participant.e.s puissent exprimer librement leurs opinions, qu'elles soient positives ou négatives, sur tous les sujets concernant l'organisation (Turco, 2016). Enfin, un large partage d'informations est censé rendre les contributeur.ice.s plus responsables ou « *accountable* » (Heimstädt & Dobusch, 2020; Ohlson & Yakis-Douglas, 2019), ce qui met en évidence la fonction de contrôle associée à la transparence, dont la spécificité est d'être répartie entre les participant.e.s.

## **Liberté individuelle**

Le troisième principe, particulièrement saillant lorsque l'ouverture est appliquée à tous les processus d'organizing, est la liberté individuelle. Je suggère de considérer cette nouvelle valeur comme l'une des fondations de l'open organizing en m'appuyant sur deux observations empiriques. Premièrement, les cas étudiés d'organisation ouverte montrent que les membres sont libres de choisir leur degré de participation (qui peut par conséquent être nul), ce dernier pouvant varier en fonction du processus (par exemple Luedicke et al., 2017; Turco, 2016). En d'autres termes, un.e contributeur.ice peut être engagé.e dans un processus décisionnel lié à un sujet organisationnel particulier et pas nécessairement dans un autre. Deuxièmement, les participant.e.s peuvent décider de manière autonome de la nature de leur contribution, ce qui s'appuie sur une répartition et une division des tâches entièrement décentralisées. Par exemple, dans le cadre d'un développement open-source, les développeur.euse.s peuvent choisir eux-mêmes les fonctionnalités de l'application qu'ils souhaitent améliorer en fonction de leurs intérêts et compétences personnels (Puranam et al., 2014; Von Krogh et al., 2012). Les mêmes conventions de motivation intrinsèque guident les contributions aux articles sur Wikipédia. Pour permettre cette auto-sélection des tâches et le travail parallèle, la structure des activités doit être transparente (Puranam et al., 2014). Enfin, cette grande autonomie est censée limiter

les formes centralisées de contrôle au profit d'une surveillance par les pairs basée sur la transparence et la participation (Raymond, 1999; Turco, 2016).

À première vue, les valeurs de l'ouverture apparaissent comme positivement connotées, tant sur le plan fonctionnel qu'idéologique. En permettant d'exploiter des ressources plus vastes telles que des informations, les idées créatives ou les capacités d'un grand nombre de contributeur.ice.s, ces principes sont associés à une amélioration de la création de valeur (voir Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Janssen et al., 2012). Lorsqu'elles sont combinées, la participation, la transparence et la liberté sont censées donner plus de pouvoir aux participant.e.s et décentraliser la prise de décision, la production et le contrôle. Par conséquent, dans l'industrie du logiciel, cette forme d'auto-organisation a été encouragée pour accroître l'efficacité (Raymond, 1999) et la qualité des produits finaux (Bonaccorsi & Rossi, 2003). Les principes d'ouverture suscitent également des attentes concernant la réduction des inégalités en termes de pouvoir (Clegg, van Rijmenam, & Schweitzer, 2019), certain.e.s auteur.ice.s ayant explicitement lié l'ouverture à un ordre plus démocratique dans les organisations (par exemple Dobusch et al., 2019; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007; Stieger, Matzler, Chatterjee, & Ladstaetter-Fussenegger, 2012). Si ces discours (trop) positifs renforcent ma suggestion de considérer l'open comme un ensemble de valeurs, cela interroge également le caractère idéologique de l'ouverture organisationnelle.

### c) Questionner le caractère trop positif de l'ouverture

Pour nuancer la vision idéaliste promulguée par les valeurs d'ouverture, je m'appuie sur la littérature étudiant la post-bureaucratie à laquelle les approches critiques ont largement contribué (par exemple Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Grey & Garsten, 2001; Josserand et al., 2006; Sewell et al., 1998). Comme évoqué au début de cette thèse, la tendance de l'ouverture organisationnelle s'inscrit dans la continuité d'une évolution globale vers des organisations dites post-bureaucratiques, par opposition à l'idéal-type de la bureaucratie (Weber, 1978, publié pour la première fois en 1921). Selon ce point de vue, les règles et les systèmes instrumentaux ont été introduits comme le meilleur moyen d'atteindre l'efficacité, car ils sont issus de la maîtrise du calcul (Weber, 1978/1921). Cependant, la bureaucratie a vu ses détracteur.ice.s lui reprocher deux défauts principaux, à savoir la déshumanisation et le manque de flexibilité.

En son temps, Weber considérait déjà que ce processus de rationalisation excessive avait conduit à la déshumanisation (Weber & Kalberg, 2013, 1905), une idée qu'il exprimait par la

métaphore de la cage de fer (*Stahlhartes Gehäuse*). Plus précisément, la déshumanisation repose sur « *l'élimination des affaires officielles, de l'amour, de la haine et de tous les éléments purement personnels, irrationnels et émotionnels qui échappent au calcul* » (Gerth & Wright Mills, 1948, p.216, ma traduction). Ceci reflète une forme d'utilitarisme sous couvert de rationalité, dans lequel les émotions, les individualités et la liberté des employé.e.s sont ainsi sacrifiées (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004 ; Gouldner, 1955). Une thèse similaire a été soutenue par Bauman (2000) dans son livre "Modernity and the Holocaust", dans lequel il affirme que le caractère instrumental de la bureaucratie a conduit les bureaucrates nazis à devenir incapables de tout jugement moral.

La promotion de la flexibilité a aussi remis en question l'idéal-type bureaucratique, car cette vision considérait les organisations comme stables et prévisibles (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010) et voyait donc le changement organisationnel comme « *accidentel, transitoire ou même dysfonctionnel* » (Chia, 2002, p. 581, ma traduction). Ces critiques ont particulièrement émergé dans le contexte social des années 1990, qui a été qualifié de « *liquide* » (Bauman, 2013). Toujours d'actualité, cette caractérisation souligne que le mouvement perpétuel apparaît comme la seule constante de notre société contemporaine. Cela a été particulièrement le cas dans l'économie où l'incertitude et les turbulences ont conduit les chercheur.euse.s et les praticien.ne.s à introduire la flexibilité organisationnelle comme une condition préalable à la survie des entreprises (Piore & Sabel, 1986).

Depuis les années 1990, les discours des partisan.ne.s de la post-bureaucratie et de l'ouverture dénigrent les organisations bureaucratiques pour leur manque d'efficacité, qu'ils attribuent leurs caractères déshumanisants et l'inflexibles (Du Gay, 2000; Raymond, 1999). Pour répondre à ces critiques, les gourous du management et les chercheur.euse.s ont adopté une position welfariste, ancrée dans la tradition de l'école des Relations Humaines, qui établit une corrélation entre le bien-être des employé.e.s et la performance. Pour développer la satisfaction au travail et par conséquent l'efficacité, les post-bureaucraties se sont appuyées sur l'hybridation des principes bureaucratiques et démocratiques (S. Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Josserand et al., 2006). Plus précisément, la dimension démocratique des post-bureaucraties est associée à l'autonomisation de leurs membres (par exemple dans Child & Mcgrath, 2001), à la décentralisation de l'autorité (par exemple dans Child & Mcgrath, 2001), à la collaboration des parties prenantes internes et externes (Josserand, Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2004) et à des moyens de contrôle supposés plus souples (par exemple Barker, 1993; Barley & Kunda, 1992; Sewell et al., 1998). Les principes d'ouverture rappellent donc ces caractéristiques

organisationnelles, mais leur mise en œuvre est promue d'une manière encore plus radicale à travers l'inclusion totale de quiconque souhaite participer ou avoir un accès complet aux ressources informationnelles par exemple.

Les discours encensant l'organisation post-bureaucratique et ouverte présentent ces formes organisationnelles comme des solutions gagnant-gagnant, synonymes de progrès, de lieu de travail plus démocratique, de bien-être pour les travailleur.euse.s et de performance pour les organisations. Dans ce cadre, pourquoi toutes les organisations ne se sont-elles pas engagées dans cette voie ? Offrant un contraste net avec la rhétorique trop positive de la recherche mainstream, les études critiques en management ont mis en lumière les difficultés et les questions fondamentales soulevées par la mise en œuvre de la post-bureaucratie. En particulier, les auteur.ice.s critiques ont mis en lumière *"le contenu idéologique derrière ces attaques [contre la bureaucratie] et l'évaluation des coûts impliqués lorsque la flexibilité et les réseaux prennent le relais des structures bureaucratiques"* (Cock & Böhm, 2007, p. 817, ma traduction). Ces contributions critiques pourraient apporter des éléments intéressants pour nuancer la vision trop optimiste promulguée à propos de l'open organizing.

Une première famille de critiques a révélé que la promotion d'un lieu de travail plus démocratique était en réalité un usage instrumental, puisque de façade, de ces valeurs. Les auteur.ice.s critiques ont notamment dénoncé les post-bureaucraties comme étant des émanations de l'esprit néolibéral du capitalisme (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999). Plus précisément, iels ont souligné la manière dont l'accent sur la flexibilité apparaît comme une réponse à notre contexte de modernité liquide (Bauman, 2013), dans lequel la société et les marchés sont confrontés à des changements constants. La promotion de l'autonomie et de l'auto-organisation poursuit ainsi un objectif utilitariste : que les individus s'adaptent aux évolutions permanentes du marché (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999; Cabanas & Illouz, 2019). En outre, les arguments et les hypothèses promulgués dans la littérature sur la post-bureaucratie ont ignoré les conséquences désastreuses de cette idéologie néolibérale sur les personnes, notamment la culpabilité, l'anxiété et l'épuisement professionnel (voir Picard & Islam, 2019). Dans un article théorique, Tkacz (2012) a soutenu que l'ouverture est porteuse de desseins néolibéraux similaires, ce qui est notamment illustré par l'accent mis sur l'efficacité et la productivité dans une grande partie de la recherche sur les phénomènes ouverts (par exemple Appleyard & Chesbrough, 2017; Hautz et al., 2017 avec le dilemme du processus; Hutter, Nketia, & Fuller, 2017; Kogut & Metiu, 2001). Cela m'amène à interroger l'éventuel utilitarisme derrière les organisations construites sur les valeurs ouvertes. Cela questionne également le fait que les

membres des organisations ouvertes puissent souffrir de la mise en œuvre des principes d'ouverture. Ces questions sont notamment abordées dans les essais empiriques de cette thèse.

Les auteur.ice.s critiques ont également révélé les mécanismes de subordination camouflés par les discours promouvant la participation, l'autonomie et l'auto-organisation (par exemple Sewell et al., 1998; Willmott, 1993). Plus précisément, les études critiques en management ont mis en lumière les nouvelles formes de contrôle, de surveillance et de domination investies par les structures post-bureaucratiques (par exemple Clegg & Baumeler, 2010; Courpasson, 2000; Knights & Willmott, 2002; Willmott, 1993). Ce déplacement dans les modes de contrôle illustre une forme de contrôle néo-normatif, visant « *à aider à exploiter les travailleurs [...] via l'endoctrinement de croyances, de normes et de valeurs communes à l'entreprise* » (Sturdy, Fleming, & Delbridge, 2010, p. 116, ma traduction). Certaines études menées dans des structures post-bureaucratiques ont démontré comment ce contrôle néo-normatif agit comme un mécanisme de domination pour fabriquer le consentement des travailleur.euse.s (par exemple Endrissat, Islam, & Noppeney, 2015; Islam & Sferrazzo, 2022; Picard & Islam, 2019). Ce type de contrôle basé sur les valeurs a également été observé dans l'organisation ouverte à travers l'émergence de normes visant à sanctionner la non-contribution et à privilégier les contributeur.ice.s très impliqué.e.s (Puranam et al., 2014). Caractériser l'ouverture comme un ensemble de valeurs soulève donc des questions sur la dérive potentielle des principes ouverts vers le totalitarisme, une question particulièrement cruciale à étudier puisque les membres des communautés ouvertes possèdent souvent le droit de rejeter les contributions et les revendications d'adhésion (Dahlander & Mahony, 2011; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). Dans cette lignée, Clegg, 1994 a montré qu'une idéologie autour de l'ouverture pouvait amener au développement d'une dynamique d'adhésion excluante.

En conclusion, cette thèse propose d'étudier le rôle performatif des principes de l'ouverture, participation, transparence et liberté individuelle. En tant qu'ensemble de valeurs, l'ouverture contribue à façonner les processus organisationnels ainsi que le comportement des acteur.ice.s. À première vue, on s'attend à une répartition plus équitable du pouvoir et à un déclin des mécanismes de domination, mais ces promesses sont remises en question par les enseignements critiques sur la post-bureaucratie. Cette thèse vise notamment à examiner de plus près ces enjeux politiques à travers ses essais empiriques. Ce décalage entre les principes affichés et les pratiques réelles rappelle également les tensions, les conflits (Cooren, Matte, Benoit-Barné, & Brummans, 2013), l'aliénation (Chaput, Brummans, & Cooren, 2011) et les erreurs d'identification observés dans la littérature étudiant la performativité des valeurs (Thornborrow

& Brown, 2009). Dans un chapitre d'ouvrage, la fratrie Dobusch (2019) nous amène à interroger la performativité même des principes ouverts en raison de leur malléabilité conceptuelle :

*« L'articulation de l'ouverture comme un objectif pour l'organisation ou la description des pratiques d'organisation comme déjà "ouvertes" peut être une manière non intentionnelle de conserver le statu quo et de compliquer en réalité les efforts d'"ouverture" » (p.327, ma traduction).*

Ainsi, pour mieux comprendre comment l'ouverture, appliquée à l'ensemble de l'organisation, fonctionne, il faut examiner le caractère performatif des valeurs ouvertes en répondant à la question suivante : que se passe-t-il lorsque les acteur.ice.s veulent prendre au sérieux les valeurs de l'ouverture ?

## **II. L'OUVERTURE COMME PRINCIPE ANTI-ORGANISATIONNEL**

Prendre les valeurs de l'ouverture au sérieux implique d'étudier comment les principes de participation, de transparence et de liberté individuelle se manifestent dans l'organisation. Il s'agit d'une question particulièrement importante à aborder puisque l'ensemble des valeurs constituant l'ouverture remet en question la définition traditionnelle de l'organisation telle qu'héritée de l'idéal-type bureaucratique (Weber, 1978/1921). Comme indiqué précédemment, l'organisation ouverte s'inscrit dans le prolongement de la tendance post-bureaucratique, basée sur les discours antibureaucratiques et portant ainsi une conception des organisations s'appuyant sur des caractéristiques opposées à la bureaucratie. Dans une première sous-partie, je continue à m'appuyer sur le champ de la post-bureaucratie et mobilise également les recherches sur les collectifs sociaux sans liens formels comme formes radicales d'organisation ouverte pour démontrer le caractère anti-organisationnel des principes d'ouverture. La deuxième sous-section se concentre sur l'énumération des questions et défis spécifiques soulevés lorsque les acteur.ice.s veulent faire organisation à partir de ces principes anti-organisationnels.

### a) L'ouverture remet en cause ce que sont les organisations

Cette sous-partie vise à démontrer le caractère anti-organisationnel des principes de l'ouverture. Pour commencer, la conception classique de l'organisation est héritée de l'idéal-type



bureaucratique (Weber, 1978/1921). Selon cette perspective, les organisations sont fondées sur des structures et des modèles rationalisés et formalisés afin de faciliter leur reproduction, ce qui justifie le recours à la bureaucratie, puisqu'il s'agit du meilleur moyen d'atteindre efficacement les objectifs planifiés. Cet accent mis sur la stabilité a encouragé certains gourous du management à établir une corrélation entre l'inefficacité des organisations bureaucratiques et leur aversion pour le changement (par exemple Peters, 1992; Raymond, 1999), mais aussi de l'associer au risque de dépendance au sentier qui pourrait nuire à la capacité d'adaptation d'une organisation (Farjoun, 2010; Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010). En outre, l'imperméabilité des frontières organisationnelles, définissant « *l'appartenance et [...] les règles d'entrée et de sortie dans l'organisation* » (Puranam et al., 2014, p. 163, ma traduction) a également été critiquée car elle défavoriserait l'alignement entre les entreprises et leurs environnements (Du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2016). En effet, la bureaucratie était considérée comme un système fermé qui « *exclut le public* » (Weber, 1972/1921, cité dans Kornberger et al., 2017, p. 180, ma traduction), ce qui signifie qu'elle favorise le secret et l'exclusion. Ces arguments ont ouvert la voie à plus de participation, de transparence et d'autonomie pour contraster avec les caractéristiques bureaucratiques traditionnelles.

A partir des années 1960, la théorie de la contingence et en particulier l'organisation organique de Burns et Stalker (1961) ont mis l'accent sur l'utilisation de modèles organisationnels s'écartant des structures formelles pour faciliter le changement dans des environnements en mouvement. Dans son livre "*Images of organizations*", Morgan (1986) a montré que la métaphore organique avait déjà été utilisée par l'école des Relations Humaines. Selon cette optique, une organisation est reliée à son environnement qui, par conséquent, façonne ses dimensions techniques et humaines. La question de l'organisation ayant une structure organisationnelle minimale a resurgi dans les années 1990 avec l'étude de nouvelles configurations qualifiées de « *post bureaucratie* » (Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006), « *fluide* » (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010), « *sans frontières* » (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr, 2015), de « *plateforme* » (Ciborra, 1996), ou plus récemment d'open organizing (Dobusch et al., 2019). En particulier, tout ce qui fonde traditionnellement une organisation, c'est-à-dire les frontières organisationnelles, les hiérarchies, les attributs, les procédures et les routines, est remis en cause. Les principes d'ouverture révolutionnent donc « *l'ordre au sein des organisations et entre elles, ce qui a des conséquences sur les niveaux hiérarchiques et les frontières organisationnelles, les étendues de contrôle et de flexibilité, et l'autonomisation des employé.e.s* » (Dobusch et al., 2019, p. 1, ma traduction).

Ces nouvelles formes d'organisation mettent l'accent sur le principe d' « *organisation sans organisation* » (Shirky, 2008, ma traduction). Plus précisément, dans les configurations hautement flexibles, Schreyögg & Sydow (2010) soulignent que « *les processus [...] ne s'installent jamais ; ils sont en flux constant* » (p.1252, ma traduction). En d'autres termes, les cognitions, les méthodes de travail et les objectifs organisationnels doivent constamment évoluer en réponse aux contingences externes. Au début des années 2000, des débats ontologiques ont également interrogé la capacité des organisations à stabiliser leurs caractéristiques internes (par exemple Chia, 2002; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Plus particulièrement, une ontologie de l' « être » (*being*), fondée sur des attributs statiques et des événements linéaires, s'est opposée à une ontologie du « devenir » (*becoming*) reposant sur une réalité en évolution permanente. Ce tournant processuel invite les chercheur.euse.s à considérer l'organisation comme un ensemble de processus (c'est-à-dire l'organizing) plutôt que comme un objet statique (Whittington, 2003). Cela implique de considérer l'organisation dans le temps (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014; Hernes, 2014; A. Langley & Tsoukas, 2011) en analysant comment les choses « deviennent ».

Comme le recommandent certains développements théoriques influents tels que les capacités dynamiques (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), pour rester compétitives, les organisations doivent améliorer leur rapidité, leur adaptabilité et proposer des solutions ad hoc afin d'être en mesure de (re)créer continuellement de nouvelles combinaisons de ressources et compétences. En particulier, ces configurations fluides sont censées stimuler l'apprentissage organisationnel, l'innovation et la créativité (Ravasi & Verona, 2001). En outre, la création de valeur à l'ère numérique, comme le montrent les exemples de YouTube ou de Wikipedia, ne repose pas seulement sur le travail des membres de l'organisation mais aussi sur des réseaux externes de contributeur.ice.s (Endrissat & Islam, 2021; Heracleous et al., 2017). Cependant, certain.e.s auteur.ice.s critiques ont dénoncé le caractère idéologique des discours mettant l'accent sur la fluidité (par exemple Böhm, 2006). Cette idéologie du changement tend notamment à normaliser la précarité tant des organisations que des travailleur.euse.s (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019). Elle laisse également de côté et minimise le rôle des mécanismes sociaux tels que la mémoire collective (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001) ou l'identité organisationnelle (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010), qui restent pourtant cruciaux pour toutes formes d'action collective.

En lien avec l'ouverture, le concept récent d'organisationnalité (*organizationality*) (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) semble utile pour saisir le caractère flexible et ad hoc de l'organisation ouverte puisqu'il désigne la manière dont l'organizing peut émerger au-delà et en dehors des

organisations formelles (par exemple Endrissat & Islam, 2021; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015). Plus précisément, cette notion permet de passer d'une conception binaire de l'organisation ou de la non-organisation « *à une différenciation plus graduelle* » (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015, p. 1006, ma traduction). Les études sur l'organisationnalité décrivent ainsi la manière dont les collectifs sociaux fluides, qui sont considérés comme des cas extrêmes d'organisation ouverte, tels que les Anonymous (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) ou les communautés de motards (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015), parviennent à « devenir organisationnels », c'est-à-dire « *chaque fois que des acteurs (humains ou non humains) se rassemblent pour co-orienter leurs actions et agir au nom d'un autre collectif* » (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019, p.487, ma traduction). L'identité collective joue donc un rôle clé dans la délimitation de l'actorat organisationnel (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010). Cette identité collective est particulièrement activée par les revendications informant de ce que l'entité *est* ou *fait*. Elle se rapporte notamment à la forme particulière d'autorité observée dans l'organisation ouverte qui repose sur l'acceptation ou le rejet des contributions ainsi que les allégations d'appartenance (Dahlander & Mahony, 2011; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). En outre, les affects, c'est-à-dire « *les forces viscérales sous, à côté, ou généralement autres que le savoir conscient, les forces vitales insistant au-delà de l'émotion* » (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p.1, cité dans Endrissat & Islam, 2021, ma traduction), apparaissent comme un autre déclencheur crucial de l'organisationnalité (Endrissat & Islam, 2021).

#### b) Principaux défis et problèmes organisationnels soulevés par les principes ouverts

Atteindre l'organisationnalité est théoriquement très facile puisque rassembler des personnes partageant des affects et revendiquant des actions au nom d'une entité collective semble suffisant. Cependant, comme l'illustrent les observations empiriques des Anonymous (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) ou des hackathons (Endrissat & Islam, 2021), cet actorat organisationnel apparaît comme temporaire et particulièrement fluide. Cela pose la question de savoir comment des cas tels que Wikipedia, les communautés Linux, ou Ouishare qui est étudié dans cette thèse, peuvent maintenir une (anti)organisation ouverte pendant des années. En particulier, les valeurs d'ouverture ébranlent la manière dont les caractéristiques organisationnelles fonctionnent à la fois dans les relations internes et externes de l'organisation. Cela soulève des défis et des questions clés que les acteur.ice.s doivent aborder et qui sont particulièrement liés au dépassement des dilemmes organisationnels, à la définition d'accords de fermeture légitimes et enfin à l'émergence de nouvelles formes d'autorité.

## **Émergence de dilemmes organisationnels**

Les études sur l'ouverture font état de dilemmes et de paradoxes organisationnels auxquels les acteur.ice.s doivent faire face lorsqu'ils s'engagent dans des processus ouverts. Ces tensions semblent être plus perceptibles dans le cas de communautés régulièrement impliquées que dans celui de grandes foules contribuant à un processus ponctuel (Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017). Certains dilemmes sont liés à la hiérarchisation des objectifs poursuivis, notamment à travers la visée de buts contradictoires, bien que présentés comme les avantages de l'ouverture, à savoir efficacité et démocratisation (voir Adobor, 2020; Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2017), ainsi que la question des intérêts à défendre (par exemple, individuel VS collectif dans Smith et al., 2018 & Turco, 2016). L'identification des (bons) processus organisationnels à mettre en œuvre fait également émerger divers paradoxes avec lesquels il s'agit de composer, notamment la transparence et l'opacité, la centralisation et la décentralisation, la flexibilité et la stabilité, (par exemple Husted & Plesner, 2017; Raviola, 2017; Smith et al., 2018). Une dernière famille de dilemmes est associée aux attentes des acteur.ice.s. Par exemple, l'ouverture s'appuie sur des mécanismes de reconnaissance sociale et de motivation intrinsèque pour stimuler la participation, mais lorsque les contributions sont jugées insuffisamment récompensées, les participant.e.s peuvent se désengager (Hautz et al., 2017). De nombreux auteur.ice.s s'accordent sur le caractère inhérent de ces tensions (voir Dobusch et al., 2019; Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2017) puisque celles-ci apparaissent comme communes à de nombreuses expériences d'auto-organisation. Néanmoins, le caractère anti-organisationnel de l'ouverture rend ces paradoxes particulièrement saillants car ils sont traditionnellement contenus et traités par des procédures, des hiérarchies et des attributs formels. De plus, faire face à tensions apparaît comme central parce que ces dernières pourraient mettre en danger la contribution et finalement l'action collective dans l'organisation ouverte, comme cela est souligné dans le deuxième essai de ma thèse.

## **Faire face à la fermeture**

Dans les études sur la post-bureaucratie, les auteur.ice.s ont observé des « *dialectiques ambiguës entre la démocratie et de la bureaucratie* » (Josserand et al., 2006, p. 56, ma traduction) qui ont également été observées dans des cas de phénomènes ouverts (par exemple, O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007 sur la gouvernance des communautés open-source). Dans l'organisation ouverte, cela a surtout donné lieu à la tension mentionnée dans le paragraphe précédent sur la structure/stabilité contre la flexibilité, ou l'autonomisation contre l'autorité centralisée (par exemple voir Adobor, 2020; Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2017). En

particulier, l'attribut ouvert est associé à l'empouvoirement des contributeur.ice.s et suscite par conséquent des attentes concernant la réduction des inégalités dans la distribution du pouvoir (Clegg et al., 2019). Cependant, l'adoption de principes ouverts semble conduire à reproduire des asymétries sur les dimensions de participation et de transparence (Luedicke et al., 2017), notamment à travers des accords conduits « en coulisses » (Heimstädt, 2017). Les études critiques sur les pratiques de transparence radicale ont également démontré l'impossibilité d'atteindre l'objectif utopique de divulgation complète de l'information car les acteur.ice.s semblent recréer de nouvelles formes de secret (par exemple Gibbs et al., 2013; Ringel, 2019). Ces exemples illustrent la relation constitutive et inhérente entre ouverture et fermeture, c'est-à-dire comme « *inextricablement liées et interagissant l'une avec l'autre* » (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019, p. 328, ma traduction). En d'autres termes, l'ouverture requiert l'implémentation de formes de fermeture ou d'exclusion, volontaire ou inconscientes, qui, lorsqu'elles ne sont pas perçues comme légitimes par les acteurs, peuvent conduire à des conflits internes (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019). L'ouverture organisationnelle implique par conséquent pour les acteurs de faire face aux contradictions entre les attentes, façonnées par les principes et pratiques d'ouverture (par exemple, Heracleous et al., 2017), et la création de nouveaux types de fermeture (par exemple, Hautz et al., 2017). La question de la fermeture n'est pas sans rappeler les études libérales sur l'organisation, dans lesquelles les chercheur.euse.s défendaient la nécessité d'organiser la souveraineté démocratique à l'aide d'institutions bureaucratiques pour préserver la pluralité, la liberté et ainsi la démocratie elle-même (Armbrüster, 2003, cité dans de Cock & Böhm, 2007). Plus précisément, les auteur.ice.s ont suggéré deux recommandations reprises par les chercheurs libéraux pour sécuriser les qualités ouvertes de l'organisation en utilisant des processus prédéfinis (par exemple Husted & Plesner, 2017), ou la formalisation de procédures convenues (par exemple, Adobor, 2020 ; Dobusch et al., 2019).

### **Fluidité organisationnelle et nouvelles formes d'autorité**

Bien qu'elles puissent sembler opposées aux valeurs de l'ouverture, la fermeture et l'exclusion mettent en exergue que les relations de pouvoir et l'autorité restent des dimensions inhérentes à l'organisation ouverte. L'autorité fait référence aux exercices légitimes du pouvoir sur les acteur.ice.s organisationnel.le.s (Casey, 2008). Selon la conception classique de la bureaucratie, l'autorité est fondée sur la légitimité rationnelle-légale (Weber, 1978/1921), car elle est « *formellement supposée être rationnellement basée sur l'expertise du titulaire de la fonction dans laquelle l'autorité est investie* » (Casey, 2008, p. 88, ma traduction). Néanmoins, comme nous l'avons souligné dans la sous-section précédente ([Chapitre 1, IIa](#)), l'ensemble des valeurs

ouvertes vient remettre en question ces caractéristiques organisationnelles formalisées. En particulier, le caractère fluide (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010) ou liquide de l'ouverture (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) rend l'organisation particulièrement malléable et, par conséquent, les tentatives de formalisation rapidement obsolètes. En outre, les principes de l'ouverture contribuent à brouiller les frontières organisationnelles et l'adhésion en faisant entrer des acteur.ice.s externes. De plus, la méthode de développement open-source remet en question les intérêts de la hiérarchie et la distribution des tâches en s'appuyant sur les solutions émergentes et ad hoc issues de réseaux de pairs (Demil & Lecocq, 2006; Raymond, 1999). Dans l'organisation ouverte, on s'attend particulièrement à ce que l'autorité soit distribuée entre les participant.e.s et exprimée principalement par l'acceptation ou le rejet des contributions et des revendications d'adhésion (Dahlander & Mahony, 2011 ; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). En somme, l'autorité en tant que pouvoir légitime sur les autres apparaît comme une caractéristique clé que les acteur.ice.s doivent reconfigurer lorsqu'ils sont engagé.e.s dans l'ouverture organisationnelle, et qui questionne les degrés appropriés de contrôle et d'autonomie pour maintenir l'action collective tout en préservant les valeurs d'ouverture.

### c) Questions de recherche et structure de la thèse

Cette thèse par essais examine la norme institutionnalisée de l'ouverture, dont la présence croissante dans les organisations questionne. En particulier, je me concentre sur des cas dit d'ouverture radicale dans lesquels l'ouverture a été appliquée à l'ensemble de l'organisation, y compris les processus et les ressources, et qui visent des effets ouvrant à travers leurs activités (Schlagwein et al., 2017). Dans ces organisations ouvertes radicales, comme Wikipedia, Linux, Red Hat, ou Ouishare, les acteur.ice.s ont considéré l'ouverture comme basée sur un ensemble de valeurs qui ont donc fondé les spécificités de leurs organizing. Je propose ainsi de m'engager davantage dans ce mouvement conceptuel initié par les acteur.ice.s du terrain en passant d'une approche de l'ouverture comme un idéal-type (Schlagwein et al., 2017; Tavakoli et al., 2017) à une conception basée sur les valeurs. Cette perspective n'est pas complètement nouvelle (par exemple, Dobusch et al., 2019 ; Eisenberg & Witten, 1987 ; Kornberger et al., 2017 ; Schlagwein et al., 2017) mais reste peu développée dans la littérature existante sur les phénomènes ouverts. Cette perspective originale, en termes de valeurs, souligne surtout que l'ouverture inclut une dimension à la fois morale et performative affectant les comportements des membres, les objectifs organisationnels et les divers processus organisant.

Afin de fournir une vision holistique de l'ouverture organisationnelle, il me semble nécessaire de mieux considérer la manière dont les principes ouverts sont intriqués. En particulier, je mets en évidence trois principes englobés par l'ouverture : la participation, la transparence et la liberté individuelle. Ces principes ouverts s'inscrivent dans l'évolution des normes organisationnelles vers la post-bureaucratie, en tant qu'hybride bureaucratique-démocratique, qui a été observée au cours des 40 dernières années. Si cette tendance a remis en question la conception traditionnelle des organisations héritée des principes bureaucratiques, l'organisation ouverte semble offrir une alternative encore plus radicale aux structures formelles et aux hiérarchies. En remettant en cause les principes d'organisation prédominants, l'ouverture interroge également la conception classique de l'autorité et, par conséquent, ébranle l'ordre interne de l'organisation, en particulier les degrés de contrôle et de liberté accordés aux contributeur.ice.s. Cependant, malgré ces ambitions démocratiques, les approches critiques des post-bureaucraties ont mis en garde contre leurs déviations idéologiques et leurs risques de subordination, qui pourraient également apparaître au sein des organisations ouvertes.

Cette thèse de doctorat vise à étendre les approches critiques de l'ouverture organisationnelle. À l'aide de trois essais, portant chacun sur un angle spécifique, je me propose de répondre à la question de recherche suivante :

<p><b>comment l'ouverture, en tant qu'ensemble de valeurs, façonne-t-elle l'action et agit-elle dans l'organisation ?</b></p>
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Plus précisément, le façonnement des principes d'ouverture interroge leur rôle performatif, c'est-à-dire la manière dont ces valeurs affectent réellement les agences individuelles et collectives. Ensuite, la deuxième partie de cette question de recherche « *agit-elle dans l'organisation* » amène à examiner comment les acteur.ice.s activent l'organisationnalité et surmontent les tensions alors que les valeurs d'ouverture semblent par essence anti-organisationnelles. Pour répondre à cette question de recherche, ma thèse est structurée autour de trois essais comme indiqué dans la figure 3 ci-dessous.

**Figure 3. Structure de la thèse**

Comment l'ouverture, en tant qu'ensemble de valeurs, façonne-t-elle l'action et agit-elle dans l'organisation ?			
<b>Titre</b>	<u>Essai 1</u> : For (re)politicizing openness	<u>Essai 2</u> : Organizational necrosis autopsy: how extremist openness can threaten the sustainability of open organizing	<u>Essai 3</u> : How to last as open organizing: explicitly making sense of three anchorings
<b>Question de recherche</b>	Quelles sont les assomptions politiques qui sous-tendent le concept d'ouverture ?	Comment une organisation ouverte peut-elle échouer à adresser les tensions de l'ouverture ?	Comment les acteur.ice.s enactent l'ouverture à travers le temps ?
<b>Approche analytique</b>	Revue de littérature problématisée (Mats Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020) des recherches fragmentées et pluridisciplinaires sur l'ouverture	Utilisation du modèle interaction-domaine des métaphores à travers la conception de la nécrose organisationnelle (Cornelissen, 2005)	Approche sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005)
<b>Cas étudié</b>	NA	Managers du 21ème siècle	Ouishare
<b>Contributions</b>	<p>Premièrement, je dévoile les assomptions politiques concurrentes portées par le concept d'ouverture, ce qui met en évidence le rôle clé joué par le management dans sa dépolitisation.</p> <p>Dans un deuxième temps, je suggère d'utiliser l'ontologie du devenir pour remettre en lumière les relations de pouvoir dans les études sur l'organisation ouverte.</p>	<p>Comme première contribution, je montre comment une vision extrémiste de l'ouverture façonne une fermeture idéologique qui réduit le champ d'action des membres.</p> <p>Je mets ensuite en évidence la manière dont cette conception extrémiste peut aller jusqu'à menacer la pérennité de l'organisation.</p>	<p>Nous commençons par souligner la manière dont des discussions intensives permettent aux acteur.ice.s de mettre en œuvre des processus explicites de création de sens qui activent de manière performative des arrangements organisationnels ouverts.</p> <p>Enfin, nous soulignons la capacité des membres à articuler les trois ancrages, identitaire, organisationnel et téléologique, afin qu'ils se compensent mutuellement.</p>

Le chapitre 2 présente la méthodologie mobilisée pour répondre à la question de recherche générale de ma thèse. Il vise à fournir une description fidèle de la manière dont ma réflexion a évolué tout au long du doctorat, ce qui me semble particulièrement important au regard de



l'approche inductive utilisée. La méthodologie s'est plus spécifiquement appuyée sur une étude ethnographique menée au sein de deux organisations, Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle et Ouishare, pendant près de deux ans :

- Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle est une association française qui promeut les nouvelles formes d'organisation et les innovations managériales basées sur l'autonomie, la participation et la transparence, des valeurs qui font écho aux principes ouverts. Plus important encore, ses membres se sont engagé.e.s à appliquer ces valeurs à leur propres processus d'organizing.
- Ouishare est une communauté internationale et une association de freelances qui travaillent ensemble sur des projets d'innovation sociale visant à voir advenir un monde plus juste. Depuis sa création en 2012, cette organisation est fondée sur des principes ouverts de participation, de transparence et d'autonomie.

Le chapitre méthodologique est divisé en trois parties décrivant les étapes suivies chronologiquement, c'est-à-dire avant, pendant et après le travail de terrain. Il commence par détailler le processus de sélection et d'accès aux cas. Ensuite, je me concentre sur le travail de terrain et évoque comment les approches ethnographiques et critiques développées dans cette thèse ont émergé inductivement. La dernière section revient sur l'émergence des questions de recherche qui sont posées dans les trois essais composant ma thèse. L'adoption d'un regard critique m'a amené à construire ce chapitre comme un retour réflexif sur mon travail de thèse, je propose ainsi une analyse des difficultés rencontrées tout au long de ce parcours et de la manière dont ma posture a pu affecter ma recherche.

Les chapitres 3 à 5 sont basés sur trois essais apportant des éléments de réponse à ma question de recherche, à savoir comment les valeurs ouvertes façonnent l'action et ouvrent la voie à une forme d'organisation basée sur des principes anti-organisationnels. Au début de chacun de ces chapitres, un premier encadré présente la vie de l'essai et un second souligne la manière dont il répond à la question de recherche générale de la thèse. Résumons maintenant les trois essais sur lesquels cette thèse a été construite.

Le premier essai (chapitre 3), intitulé « *For (re)politicising openness* » (pour une (re)politisation de l'ouverture), propose une revue problématisée (Mats Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020) des écrits disparates sur l'ouverture organisationnelle au sein de différentes disciplines, dont la gestion. Dans notre domaine, l'ouverture est particulièrement mise en avant pour ses effets positifs sur la création de valeur et la performance, mettant ainsi évidence la vision apolitique promulguée par les chercheur.euse.s en gestion. Cependant, il semble crucial de

reconsidérer les questions de pouvoir dans l'organisation ouverte, et ce afin de mieux saisir le caractère inhérent des tensions empiriques, les défis clés soulevés par l'ouverture de l'organisation, et d'adresser l'ambiguïté conceptuelle constatée à propos de la notion d'ouverture. Ce qui semble particulièrement surprenant est que les principes d'ouverture, la participation, la transparence et la liberté individuelle, sont liés au pouvoir et notamment aux attentes des participant.e.s pour davantage d'égalité dans l'organisation. De plus, l'ouverture a d'abord été pensée comme une notion politique. Partant de ces éléments, je suggère que la réappropriation de l'ouverture par le management a joué un rôle clé dans sa dépolitisation. Dans cet essai, je réponds donc à la question de recherche suivante : quels sont les assomptions politiques portées par le concept d'ouverture organisationnelle ? Mes résultats mettent en évidence deux perspectives conceptuelles concurrentes promues dans les écrits sur l'ouverture, (I) un projet politique émancipateur contre l'autoritarisme, et (II) une technique managériale en opposition à la bureaucratie. Les contributions de cet essai sont de deux ordres. Premièrement, les assomptions conceptuelles divergentes portées par l'ouverture fournissent une nouvelle interprétation des tensions empiriques comme résultant de ces divergences. Cela met également en évidence le fait que les acteur.ice.s ne sont pas entièrement convaincu.e.s ni soumis.es à l'approche managériale puisqu'ils continuent à défendre la vision émancipatrice de l'ouverture. Deuxièmement, je suggère une nouvelle clé de lecture, l'ontologie du devenir, qui permettrait de repolitiser l'ouverture car elle possède le potentiel pour mettre en lumière les luttes de pouvoir dans l'organisation ouverte.

« *Organizational necrosis autopsy: how extremist openness can threaten the sustainability of open organizing* » (se traduisant par autopsie de la nécrose organisationnelle : comment l'ouverture extrémiste peut menacer la durabilité de l'organisation ouverte) est le titre du deuxième essai (chapitre 4) dans lequel j'étudie un double cas d'échec de l'ouverture. Comme indiqué dans l'introduction de cette thèse, les tensions empiriques constituent un axe de recherche majeur de la littérature sur l'open organizing, néanmoins certaines interrogations demeurent. En particulier, les organisations et processus ouverts mobilisés dans les études existantes dépeignent une gestion réussie de ces contradictions. Nous ne savons donc pas ce qui se passe lorsque les acteur.ice.s ne parviennent pas à faire face à ces tensions, ce qui interroge les mécanismes pouvant conduire une organisation ouverte à l'échec. Je m'appuie sur l'étude ethnographique de Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle, une organisation à but non lucratif qui présente la particularité de promouvoir et de s'appliquer elle-même les principes de l'ouverture. Comme autre particularité, cette organisation est confrontée à une escalade de crises qui menace sa

propre survie. Mes résultats s'appuient sur la métaphore de la nécrose organisationnelle pour mettre en lumière la façon dont une conception extrémiste de l'ouverture peut alimenter deux mécanismes, la dépersonnification et la déresponsabilisation, qui réduisent drastiquement le champ d'action des acteur.ice.s. Cet essai offre ainsi deux contributions critiques à la littérature sur l'open organizing. Premièrement, il dépeint comment une conception extrémiste des valeurs ouvertes peut conduire à une forme d'auto-déclin de l'ouverture à travers des exemples de fermeture idéologique. Deuxièmement, il montre comment cet extrémisme peut devenir une menace pour la durabilité de l'organisation.

Le troisième et dernier essai (chapitre 5), « *How to last as open organizing : explicitly making sense of three anchorings* », co-écrit avec Véronique Perret et Lionel Garreau, se concentre sur le défi auquel font face les organisations ouvertes : réussir à s'organiser en mobilisant des principes anti-organisationnels. Cette recherche part d'un constat, celui de la précarité de l'ouverture organisationnelle, qui est illustré dans les enquêtes sur les tensions empiriques de l'organisation ouverte à travers les exemples de dérives vers la fermeture à long terme, et dans les recherches sur l'organisationnalité (*organizationality*). Cette observation est cependant questionnée par l'existence de certaines communautés ouvertes radicales créées il y a plus de quinze ans, l'une des plus célèbres étant Wikipedia. Cela revient donc à interroger l'un des sujets d'étude majeurs sur les organisations : la pérennité. En utilisant une approche sensemaking, nous examinons ainsi comment les membres de l'organisation mettent en œuvre une forme d'organisation radicalement ouverte au fil du temps. Nous nous appuyons sur l'étude ethnographique de Ouishare qui a réussi à rester ouverte de façon radicale depuis plus de dix ans. Nous constatons que les acteurs donnent du sens et mettent en œuvre une ouverture radicale par le biais de pratiques conversationnelles intensives dans lesquelles trois ancrages sont mobilisés : un ancrage identitaire (c'est-à-dire définir leur identité collective), un ancrage organisationnel (c'est-à-dire les processus d'organisation) et un ancrage téléologique (c'est-à-dire une finalité). Nous contribuons ainsi à la recherche sur l'open organizing en révélant deux phénomènes qui permettent aux acteur.ice.s de mettre en œuvre une forme durable d'ouverture radicale. D'abord, nous mettons en lumière le sensemaking explicite, un processus qui s'appuie sur la discussion pour activer des arrangements organisationnels ouverts. Ensuite, nous montrons comment les membres mobilisent et articulent les ancrages de manière à ce qu'ils se compensent mutuellement afin de résoudre provisoirement les problèmes et les tensions auxquels ils sont confronté.e.s.

Le sixième et dernier chapitre de cette thèse vise à répondre à la question de recherche générale : comment les valeurs ouvertes façonnent l'action et agissent dans l'organisation. Pour ce faire, ce chapitre propose une discussion basée sur les contributions des trois essais. Je confronte ainsi leurs apports pour approfondir mes analyses en mobilisant deux nouveaux cadres théoriques, (i) la littérature sur le (dés)enchèvement inspirée des travaux de Max Weber et (ii) les recherches sur les idéologies et les utopies et notamment l'approche Ricoeurienne. Dans la première section, je propose de considérer l'ouverture comme un récit d'organisation enchanteur. Plus précisément, je démontre que les acteur.ice.s engagé.e.s dans des initiatives ouvertes prennent des décisions fondées sur la rationalité axiologique, alors que la littérature existante a plutôt présenté l'ouverture comme un processus fondé sur le calcul. Ensuite, je mobilise les développements sur l'émancipation et l'aliénation issus des réflexions sur l'enchèvement pour discuter de ces phénomènes dans l'organisation ouverte. Cela me permet de mettre en lumière la relation dialogique qui existe entre idéologie et utopie dans les organisations radicalement ouvertes, dont un examen plus approfondi pourrait contribuer à une meilleure compréhension de la dimension politique de l'ouverture. Dans la deuxième section, je montre les limites de l'approche dichotomique de l'idéologie et de l'utopie que l'on constate dans les recherches sur l'ouverture. Pour surmonter ce dualisme, je m'appuie sur les écrits de Ricoeur (1984a, 1986) et sur l'ouvrage en 3 volumes 'Time and Narrative' (1984b, 1985, 1988), dans lesquels il propose de concevoir l'idéologie et l'utopie comme complémentaires. L'approche ricoeurienne me permet de comprendre les mécanismes alimentant des relations saines et malsaines entre idéologie et utopie dans l'ouverture radicale, ces relations apparaissent d'ailleurs comme particulièrement critiques pour faire face aux tensions dans les organisations ouvertes. Enfin, dans ma conclusion, je souligne trois conditions requises et limites de mon travail de thèse, à savoir : (i) l'étude de cas extrêmes, (ii) le statut et la position sociale privilégiée des acteur.ice.s de terrain, et (iii) la façon dont une focalisation plus poussée sur la sociomatérialité aurait pu enrichir mes analyses. A partir de ces réflexions, je propose plusieurs pistes pour de futures recherches.



# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## INTRODUCTION

### a) Research context: openness as a contemporary norm

This essays-based thesis focalizes on openness as an institutionalized norm, a topic given weight by its increasing presence in both organizations and in management research. For more than two decades, we have been witnessing the multiplication of organizational phenomena labelled 'open'. This trend has been popularized by the emergence of open-source communities in the 2000's, challenging the bureaucratic development method that prevailed in the software industry at that time (Raymond, 1999). Since then, specific processes framed in terms of scope and duration, like open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003) or open strategizing (Whittington et al., 2011), have been implemented in big firms such as Siemens (see Hutter, Nketia, & Füller, 2017), Starbucks<sup>9</sup>, or EDF (EDF, 2009). Openness has also been applied on public actions through open government (see President Obama's "Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government" in 2009 for instance)<sup>10</sup> and open data (see the dashboard monitoring of the coronavirus epidemic in France available on the government website<sup>11</sup>). Finally, some 'open organizations' have decided to apply openness to all of their organizing processes, this is for instance the case of Wikipedia<sup>12</sup>, the Mozilla Corporation<sup>13</sup>, Linux (see O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007), Red Hat (see Whitehurst, 2011) or Premium Cola (see Luedicke, Husemann, Furnari, & Ladstaetter, 2017).

A variety of drivers has been related to this growing implementation of openness in organizations. First, openness should respond to social demands for greater transparency and participation emanating from various stakeholders, such as citizens and consumers (Janssen et al., 2012; Whittington & Yakis-Douglas, 2020). Secondly, open initiatives have been motivated by the promises of organizational performance (e.g., Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007 in open innovation; Janssen et al., 2012 in open government) and efficacy improvement (Raymond, 1999), which are enabled by the opportunity to tap into broader resources such as information, creative ideas, or abilities provided by the crowd. Finally, the development of information and communication technology, notably social media (Seidl, von Krogh, & Whittington, 2019a),

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<sup>9</sup> <https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2013/starbucks-celebrates-five-year-anniversary-of-my-starbucks-idea/>

<sup>10</sup> 'My administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.'

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/reuses/tableau-de-bord-de-suivi-de-lepidemie-de-coronavirus-en-france/>

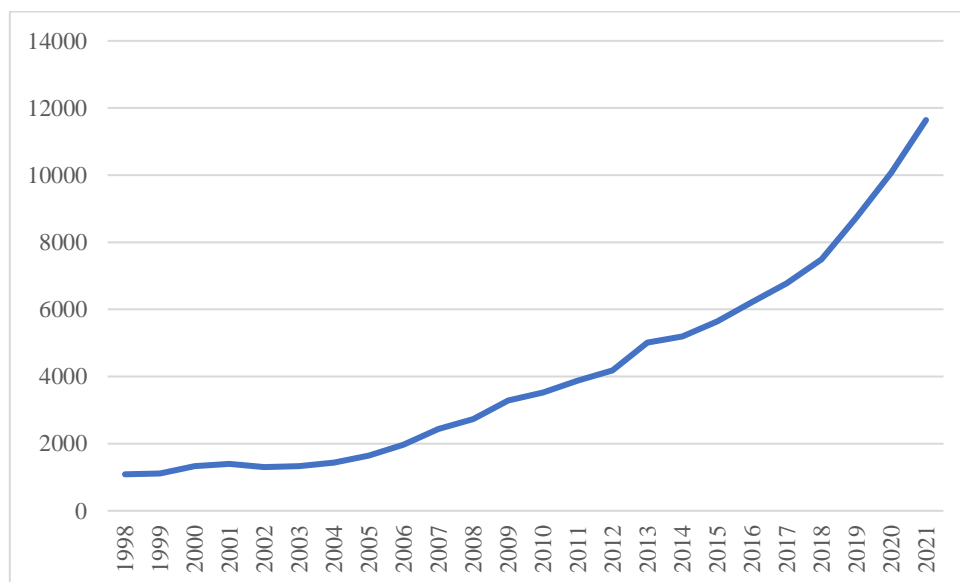
<sup>12</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks//eng/jimmy\\_wales\\_on\\_the\\_birth\\_of\\_wikipedia.html](http://www.ted.com/talks//eng/jimmy_wales_on_the_birth_of_wikipedia.html)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mozilla.org/fr/about/manifesto/>

and the expansion of business education (Whittington et al., 2011) have played a significant role in the growing number of open areas.

The rise of open initiatives is also reflected in the abundance of openness scholarship. An increasing number of papers studying open phenomena have been published since the adoption of the term ‘open-source’ in 1998<sup>14</sup> (Raymond, 1998). The graphic 1 below illustrates the results of a research conducted on Scopus (i) using the term ‘open’ in titles, abstracts and keywords in (ii) papers published in ‘social science’ and in ‘business, management, and accounting’ journals. A total of 99,446 released articles between 1998 and 2021 were counted.

**Graphic 1. Number of published articles studying 'open' phenomena between 1998 and 2021**



The diversity of initiatives labelled open is reflected in the fragmentation of openness scholarship. This literature is spread across different disciplines (mostly management research and information and communication sciences) and a variety of objects of study (i.e., the various open phenomena, from open-source API to open strategy processes) on which the diverse streams of research labelled open have been founded. To add to the complexity of this literature, diverse ontological approaches have been mobilized within these disparate bodies of work (Tavakoli et al., 2017).

<sup>14</sup> I chose this time marker because open-source has been the first organizational phenomena labelled open.



b) Open organizing as my research object

Within this abundant and fragmented literature, my thesis especially enters the field of open organizing, which has begun to structure itself through dedicated subthemes at EGOS conferences in 2019<sup>15</sup> and 2021<sup>16</sup>, and a special issue in Organization Studies. This emerging stream of research particularly aims to reunite the disseminated contributions on organizational openness. This new perspective appears as promising to better understand what happens in organizations that implement openness in all their organizing processes, cases which my thesis is particularly interested in. Specifically, open organizing focuses on investigating ‘*how organizations (try to) escape the dysfunctions of bureaucracy, cultural intimacy, tight boundaries and analogue procedures.*’ (Dobusch et al., 2019, p.1). In line with this research program, my thesis aims to unpack how openness, when applied to the whole organizing, really works.

As illustrated in the preceding quote from Dobusch et al. (2019), the open movement is inscribed in a more global shift against bureaucracy observed in organizations over the past 40 years. Entitled ‘post-bureaucracy’, this transformation of organizations has been challenging the rationalized attributes, structures, and goals from the bureaucratic ideal-type (Weber, 1978, first published in 1921), an anti-bureaucratic stance also found in writings on open phenomena. More particularly, post-bureaucratic discourses claim that organizations are moving ‘*from hierarchies to networks, from formal programs and coordination rules to spontaneous interaction, from specialized departments and staff units to improvised processes and temporary project teams, and from vertical lines of command to lateral organization-wide communication*’ (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010, p.1251). By drawing on greater participation and transparency (Schlagwein et al., 2017), organizational openness proposes an even more radical alternative to bureaucracy by further challenging our classical approach to organizational boundaries (i.e., defining the outside from the inside of organizations, including membership), layers and authority.

Questioning the traditional conceptualization of authority is linked to the promises carried by the open attribute. More particularly, some authors suggested to consider post-bureaucratic and open organizations as organizational hybrids blending bureaucratic and democratic principles

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1539047741567&subtheme\\_id=1511424479132](https://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1539047741567&subtheme_id=1511424479132)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1610525130808&subtheme\\_id=1573461256004](https://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1610525130808&subtheme_id=1573461256004)

(e.g., Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Josserand, Teo, & Clegg, 2006; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). This combination of bureaucratic and democratic practices might be the origin of power struggles observed when actors have been engaged in open processes (e.g., Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017; Heracleous, Gößwein, Beaudette, & Wales, 2017; Smith, Callagher, Crewe-Brown, & Siedlok, 2018). In parallel, critical approaches studying post-bureaucracies have warned of their ideological deviations and subordination risks, liabilities that might also emerge in open organizational configurations.

To sum up, power distribution and domination stakes are core issues to address in open organizing. In addition, the institutionalization of post-bureaucratic and open configurations brings forth a reconsideration of what an organization is. As mentioned, when applied to all the processes of organizing, openness seems to offer a radical alternative to the bureaucratic emphasis on formal structures and hierarchies. Thus, open organizational forms question how to build organizations using theoretically anti-organizational principles. To conclude, power struggles and the anti-organizational nature of openness are the subjects examined in this essays-based thesis.

## **I. OPENNESS AS A SET OF VALUES**

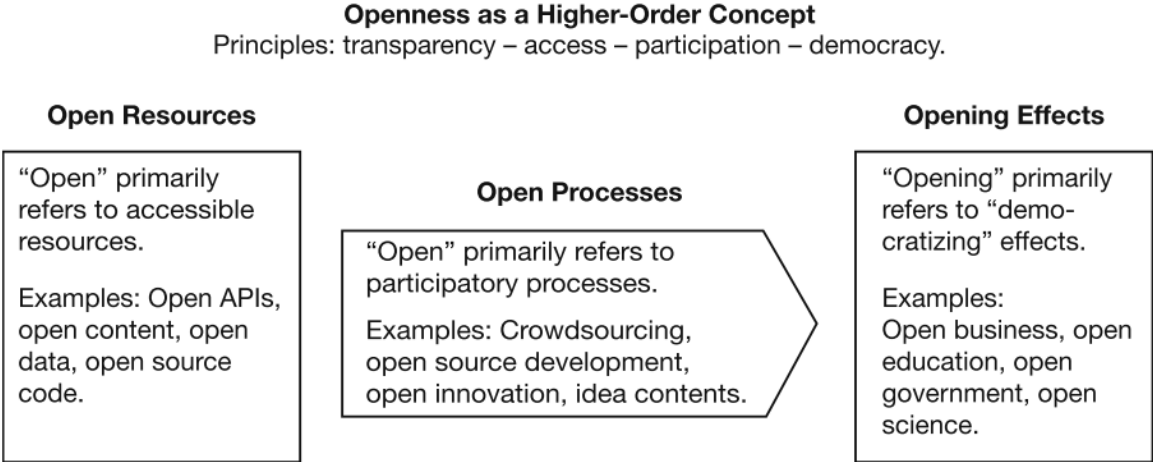
As mentioned, the literature on open phenomena is particularly abundant but disparate, hence defining what organizational openness covers appears both as a challenge and a necessity to circumscribe my research object. Until today, the configuration of the various fields studying the open has led researchers to bring a fragmented vision of openness by focusing on specific processes or practices (e.g., open innovation, open government, open strategizing...). The emerging field of open organizing, to which my thesis adheres, supports a holistic approach to openness that allowed me to provide a renewed description of the open label. More particularly, in the first subsection, I characterize what the nature of openness is and propose a new conceptualization in terms of values. This conceptual shift is justified by theoretical developments that, however, remain underdeveloped in the existing literature. This transition has especially been observed in various open organizational settings; thus, this values-based approach is motivated by a transformation instigated by the organizational actors themselves. The second subsection focuses on the content of openness by unpacking the principles encompassed in the open attribute. Based on a cross-fields literature review and empirical motivations, I suggest that openness involves three main principles, inclusion and transparency,

which are generally employed to justify the use of the open attribute, as well as the overlooked dimension of individual freedom. Then, in the third subsection, I draw on critical contributions from post-bureaucracy scholarship to question the ideological character of what can appear as a miracle solution, openness being associated with performance improvement and welfarist assumptions.

a) Proposing a new conception of openness

As already mentioned, openness appears as a polysemic concept used to characterize different aspects and associated with diverse objects. This raises questions over the nature of openness itself. Schlagwein et al. (2017) provide a framework (see figure 4 below) to identify the different uses of the open terminology found in openness scholarship.

**Figure 4. A framework for ‘openness’ from Schlagwein et al. (2017, p.299)**



More precisely, the authors distinguish between ‘open resources’, ‘open processes’, ‘opening effects’, each one emphasizing a specific principle of openness. The fourth open object, the higher-order concept, is based on affording anyone who wants (i.e., internal and/or external participants) the possibility and material conditions (i.e., technological tools, strategic information, source code, etc.) to take part in a project that is freely accessible to both contributors and users.

This higher-order concept relates to the ideal-type of openness (Schlagwein et al., 2017). Conceptualized by Max Weber (1965, first published in 1922), an ideal-type refers to an archetypical and conceptual categorization that highlights the common elements observed in most of the cases of a given phenomenon. It draws on ideas or mental images (*Gedankenbilder*)

that should be used to better understand the chaos of social reality, for comparison and categorization for instance (Weber, 1965/1922). Considering openness as an ideal-type means an empirical open phenomenon does not necessarily have to match with all the analytical principles to be qualified as open. For example, the Open-Source Licence affords the possibility to reuse the source code of a program (open resource) for proprietary software development (closing effects) (Kogut & Metiu, 2001). This ideal-type conception is thus reminiscent of the approach considering openness as a continuum from the open strategy literature (Whittington et al., 2011), that is as a matter of degree “*towards or away from greater openness*” (Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017, p.303).

Despite its misleading name, the ideal-type relies on descriptive characteristics rather than on an ‘ideal’ in the sense of a quest for perfection, utopia or in terms of values (Weber, 1965/1922). The question of the ideal or values of openness, however, is reflected in the framework from Schlagwein et al. (2017) through the ‘opening effects’. On the opening effect, the authors indeed write that it ‘*implies particular social and political values oriented towards democracy, equality and liberalism*’ (Schlagwein et al., 2017, p.299). While opening effects aim to carry the open principles towards the outside world, by making science or education accessible to as many people as possible for instance, I suggest the other objects concerned by openness, meaning resources and processes, draw upon a similar opening effect, politically and morally charged, which is rather internally oriented. In this thesis, I especially propose to switch from the conception of openness as an ideal-type, based on defining characteristics, to a characterization in terms of values. As informed in the ‘International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies’, ‘*a value is a discrete belief about something or someone [that fuels] the creation of norms, which are rules for good and bad behavior in the social system*’ (Boyatzis, Richard, 2008, p.1607). Values are considered as malleable, therefore meaning and understanding may vary depending on the situation or interlocutor who mobilizes them (Brindusa Albu, 2018), the conceptual ambiguity of the open label can thus strengthen this renewed perspective on openness. In addition to producing what the appropriate behaviours in a given setting are, values affect the goals and related organizing that are targeted by organizational members (Boyatzis, Richard, 2008; Brindusa Albu, 2018). In other words, values encompass a moral as well as a performative dimension that shapes individual and collective agencies in organizations.

This approach in terms of values has already been suggested in openness scholarship, authors variously referring to openness as a ‘*paradigm*’ (Chesbrough, 2003), a ‘*philosophy*’ (Peters &

Britez, 2008), an ‘*ideology*’ (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Gibbs et al., 2013), or a ‘*central value*’ (Kornberger et al., 2017). However, if it has been suggested in several publications as informed in the previous quotes, this values-based perspective of openness remains underdeveloped and only few theoretical analyses mobilize it (e.g., Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Tkacz, 2012). More importantly, this conceptual move follows the one carried out by the actors engaged in organizations in which openness has been applied to the whole organizing.

- In their paper on open strategizing in the Wikipedian community, Dobusch et al. (2019) studied how the participants enacted ‘*an ideal of “unrestricted openness”*’ as evidenced by describing Wikipedia as ‘*the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit*’ on its main page’ (p.7 & see also [the statement of Wikipedia’s principles](#)).
- According to the homepage of Premium Kollektiv’s website, which has been examined by Luedicke et al. (2017), openness implies that ‘*everyone involved is invited to have a say [...] It doesn’t matter whether you are a consumer, retailer or bottler: Everyone can and should express their view of premium and have a say in the democratic consensus*’<sup>17</sup>.
- As another instance, Ouishare, one of the organizations studied in my thesis, states on its website that open principles are part of its ‘DNA’: ‘*We don’t recruit our members - they join by contributing and gradually increasing their involvement, if there is a mutual feeling of alignment with our values and ways of working. Our decision-making is participatory, distributed and do-ocratic, which enables us to work in teams that are flexible and have a high level of autonomy.*’<sup>18</sup>

As depicted in the preceding quotes, the actors of Wikipedia, Premium or Ouishare claim that openness is a core organizing value of their communities. These empirical examples demonstrate that these actors took the open set of values seriously and emphasize the need for researchers to follow the same path in their conceptual understanding of openness. To grasp how open organizations work it thus implies the need to more precisely clarify more what the values of organizational openness are.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://premium-kollektiv.de/> translated from German

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ouishare.net/our-dna>

## b) Unpacking the core principles of openness

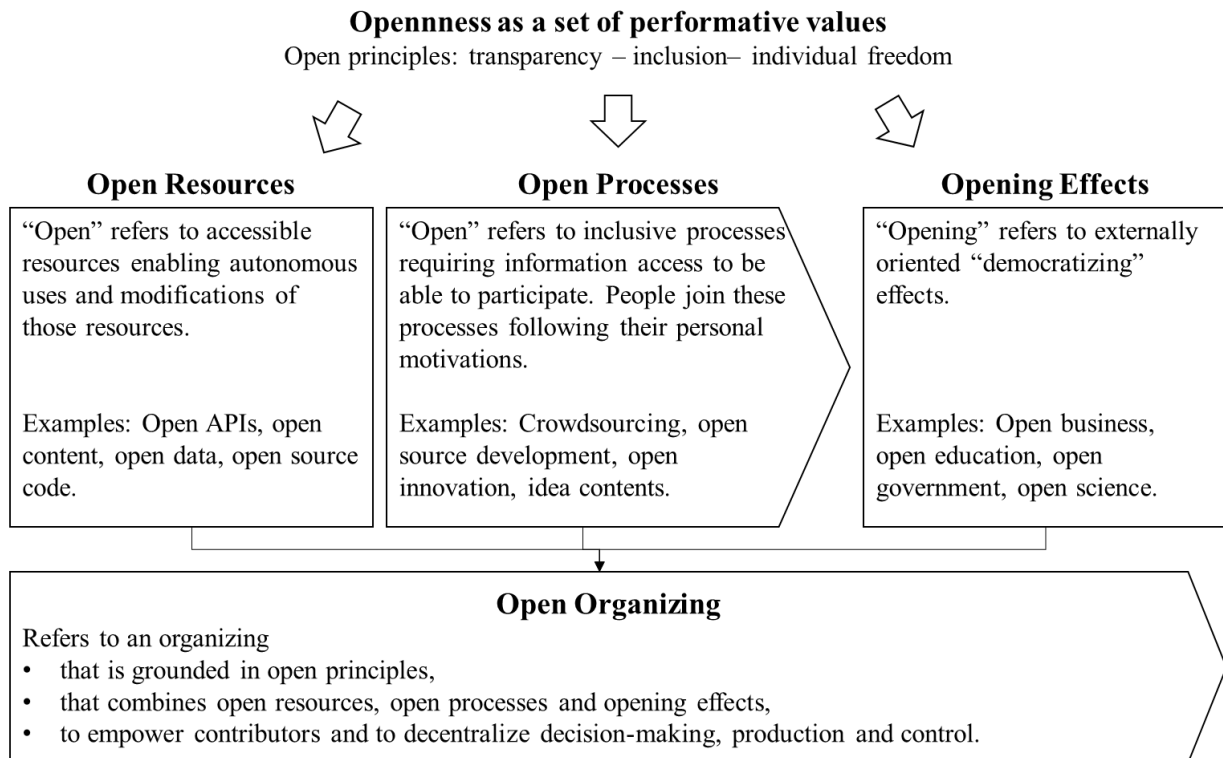
Understanding the way openness shapes the organizing requires capturing what the principles of openness are. As indicated before, this requires an analytical development, openness being criticized for suffering from conceptual ambiguity (e.g., Dahlander & Gann, 2010). Indeed, depending on their specific contexts, the multiple objects qualified as ‘open’ (e.g., open innovation, open science, open data...) provide a variety of definitions for openness (e.g., Schlagwein et al., 2017). In their higher-order concept of openness, Schlagwein et al. (2017) identify four grounding principles, access, participation, transparency and democracy (see figure 4 above-mentioned). However, as informed by its authors, this framework captures ‘*distinctions [that] are analytical only: resources are used in processes that produce effects*’ (ibid, p. 300). In other word, these analytical categories provide a static vision of the open principles that does not reflect how these are truly entangled, while entanglement is especially illustrated in cases of open organizing that combine open resources, open processes and opening effects.

To better consider how the open principles are intricate, I propose to refresh the dimensions included in the higher-order concept of openness (Schlagwein et al., 2017) using a cross-fields literature review on organizational openness and empirical observations. The conceptual propositions developed in this introduction are synthetized in an updated version of the framework for openness from Schlagwein et al. (2017) as illustrated in figure 5 below.

First, I mobilize inclusion and transparency, as these grounding elements can be found in almost all fields studying open phenomena (e.g., Dahlander & Gann, 2010; Janssen et al., 2012; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003; Whittington et al., 2011). Secondly, I suggest adding a new principle of individual freedom, based on the autonomous nature of contributions. This has been emphasized in studies on open-source communities (e.g., Von Krogh, Haefliger, Spaeth, & Wallin, 2012) but overlooked in open strategy research, while still appearing as a significant dimension to consider in actual practices of openness (e.g., Smith et al., 2018; see also the empirical essays of this thesis). Then, I propose to remove ‘access’ from the principles of openness because, as you will see below, accessibility is induced in each of the other dimensions. I also forewent the term ‘democracy’. On the one hand, as informed in the preceding subsection, I consider internal democratization to be pursued using the above-mentioned principles of inclusion, transparency, and freedom. Although, the desired external effects of openness may vary depending on the initiative, a wide part of the literature stresses

the benefits of openness on performance (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Janssen et al., 2012) and efficacy (Raymond, 1999).

**Figure 5. Updated framework for ‘openness’ inspired by Schlagwein et al. (2017, p.299)**



## Participation

Participation (also introduced as collaboration or inclusion) affords an easy access to the open resources and/or processes for a wide variety of actors coming from within and/or without the organizational boundaries (Hautz et al., 2019; Vaara et al., 2019). This principle includes various forms and degrees of participation (Hautz et al., 2019), such as suggesting ideas, taking on production tasks or attending meetings for instance, and encompasses both collaborative and competitive practices (Schlagwein et al., 2017; Tkacz, 2012). Among the different ways of being inclusive, participation to decision-making processes appears as fundamental and can range ‘*from the strongest form of “democratic” decision rights [...] to weak forms of participation such as occasional consultations*’ (Seidl et al., 2019b, p. 11). Obviously, enabling participation requires granting a right of access to the resources for use, such as information to ensure the quality of decision-making, or for modification, such as the source code of a program to be able to develop an added feature. When openness is sought after as a core principle of the whole organizing, participation also affects membership rules. More specifically, participating as an external contributor to an open project appears as the first step towards official

membership (Puranam et al., 2014). Participation thus challenges the porosity of organizational boundaries as it implies a more fluid and not necessarily formal form of membership (e.g., Dahlander & Mahony, 2011). For example, in the loose social collective of the Anonymous, being a member only consists in claiming to be part of the community (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015).

### **Transparency**

Transparency refers to a great diffusion of information to the participants about the open initiative. The degree of transparency is especially assessed using the quantity and the sensibility of information shared (Ohlson & Yakis-Douglas, 2019). As mentioned earlier, a wide access to information is a prerequisite to enable participation. Transparency is also linked to participation because it relates on the conversational (Turco, 2016) or dialogic (Heracleous et al., 2017) character of openness. Associated with the principle of open communication (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987), being transparent involves the unambiguous disclosure of personal and work-related information (Gibbs et al., 2013). Open communication also implies that participants can freely express their opinions, be they positive or negative, on any topics related to the organization (Turco, 2016). Finally, broad information sharing is supposed to improve contributors' accountability (Heimstädt & Dobusch, 2020; Ohlson & Yakis-Douglas, 2019). This highlights that transparency covers a control function, the specificity of which is to be distributed among the participants.

### **Individual freedom**

The third principle, especially salient when openness is applied to all the organizing processes, rests on individual freedom. I suggest adding this new principle as a basis of open organizing using two empirical observations. First, studied cases of open organizing show that organizational members are free to choose their degree of participation (which can be zero) and that this may depend on the open process (e.g., Luedicke et al., 2017; Turco, 2016). In other words, a contributor can be engaged in an open decision-making process related to a particular organizational topic while not being implicated in another. Secondly, participants can autonomously decide on the nature of their contribution, which draws on a fully decentralized task allocation and division. For instance, developers in open-source development can self-select the application features they want to improve following their personal interests and competences (Puranam et al., 2014; Von Krogh et al., 2012). The same conventions of intrinsic motivation guide contributions to Wikipedia articles. To enable this self-selection of tasks and parallel work, the task-structure has to be transparent (Puranam et al., 2014). Finally, this great



autonomy is supposed to limit centralized forms of control for the benefit of peer surveillance based on transparency and participation (e.g., Raymond, 1999; Turco, 2016).

At first glance, the values of openness appear as positively connoted both functionally and ideologically. By enabling to tap into broader resources such as information, creative ideas, or abilities from the crowd, the open principles are associated with value-creation improvement (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Janssen et al., 2012). When entangled, participation, transparency and freedom are supposed to empower contributors and to decentralize decision-making, production and control. As a result, in the software industry, this form of self-organization has been promoted for increasing efficacy (Raymond, 1999) and the quality of final products (Bonaccorsi & Rossi, 2003). The open principles also raise expectations regarding the reduction of power inequalities (Clegg, van Rijmenam, & Schweitzer, 2019), as some authors have explicitly linked openness with a more democratic order in organizations (e.g., Dobusch, Dobusch, & Müller-Seitz, 2019; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007; Stieger, Matzler, Chatterjee, & Ladstaetter-Fussenegger, 2012). If these (overly) positive discourses strengthen my suggestion to consider the open as a set of values, it also questions the ideological character of organizational openness.

### c) Questioning the overly positive character of openness

To bring nuance to the idealistic view promulgated by the open values, I draw on the literature studying post-bureaucracy to which critical approaches have widely contributed (e.g., Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Grey & Garsten, 2001; Josserand et al., 2006; Sewell et al., 1998). As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, the trend towards organizational openness enters the continuity of a global shift towards so-called 'post-bureaucratic' organizations as opposed to the bureaucratic ideal-type (Weber, 1978, first published in 1921). According to this view, rules and instrumental systems were introduced as the best means to achieve efficiency, because they came from calculation mastery (Weber, 1978/1921). However, bureaucracy had its detractors who criticized two main flaws, namely dehumanisation and inflexibility.

In his time, Weber already considered this process of over-rationalization had led to dehumanisation (Weber & Kalberg, 2013, 1905), an idea he expressed through the metaphor of the iron cage (*Stahlhartes Gehäuse*). Specifically, dehumanisation relied on « *eliminating from official business love, hatred and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation* » (Gerth & Wright Mills, 1948, p.216). This demonstrated the utilitarianism

behind the argument of rationality, in which employees' emotions, individualities and freedom are sacrificed (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Gouldner, 1955). A similar thesis was supported by Bauman (2000) in his book 'Modernity and the Holocaust' in which he argued the instrumental character of bureaucracy had led Nazi bureaucrats to become incapable of moral judgement.

The promotion of flexibility challenged the bureaucratic ideal-type since this view considered organizations as stable and predictable (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010) and therefore saw organizational change as '*accidental, transitory or even malfunctional*' (Chia, 2002, p.581). These critiques especially emerged in the social context of the 1990's, which has been qualified as 'liquid' (Bauman, 2013). As still relevant today, this characterization stresses that perpetual movement appears as the only constant in our contemporary society. This has been particularly the case in the economy where uncertainty and turbulences led scholars and practitioners to introduce organizational flexibility as a prerequisite for business survival (Piore & Sabel, 1986).

Since the 1990's, discourses of post-bureaucracy and openness advocates have been denigrating bureaucratic organizations for their lack of efficiency, which they blame on dehumanisation and inflexibility (Du Gay, 2000; Raymond, 1999). To answer these critiques, management gurus and mainstream academics assumed a welfarist position, rooted in the tradition of the Human Relation School, which correlates employees' wellbeing and performance. To develop work satisfaction and consequently efficiency, post-bureaucracies have been drawing on the hybridization of bureaucratic and democratic principles (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Josserand et al., 2006). More specifically, the democratic side of post-bureaucratic organization is associated with the empowerment of their members (e.g., Child & Mcgrath, 2001), the decentralization of authority (e.g., Child & Mcgrath, 2001), the collaboration of internal and external stakeholders (e.g., Josserand, Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2004), and on softer means of control (e.g., Barker, 1993; Barley & Kunda, 1992; Sewell et al., 1998). The open principles are thus reminiscent of these organizational features, but their implementation is promoted in an even more radical way, through the full inclusion of anyone who wants participation or a complete access to informational resources for instance.

The discourses promoting post-bureaucratic and open organizing introduce these organizational forms as win-win solutions, synonymous of progress, a more democratic workplace, wellbeing for workers, and performance for organizations, which questions why not all organizations have moved in this direction. Offering a sharp contrast with the overly positive rhetoric from mainstream research, critical management studies have highlighted the difficulties and fundamental issues raised by the implementation of post-bureaucracy. Particularly, critical

authors shed light on *'the ideological content behind these attacks [against bureaucracy] and assessing the costs involved when flexibility and networks take over from bureaucratic structures'* (Cock & Böhm, 2007, p.817). These critical contributions could provide interesting insights to nuance the overly optimistic view promulgated on open organizing.

A first family of critics revealed the instrumental use of façade values behind the promotion of a more 'democratic' workplace. Critical authors notably denounced post-bureaucracies for being emanations of the neoliberal spirit of capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999). Specifically, they highlighted how the emphasis on flexibility appears as a response to our context of *'liquid modernity'* (Bauman, 2013), in which society and markets are facing constant changes. The promotion of autonomy and self-organization thus follows an utilitarian purpose to make people adjust to the ongoing evolutions of the market (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999; Cabanas & Illouz, 2019). In addition, the arguments and assumptions promulgated in the mainstream literature on post-bureaucracy have ignored the disastrous consequences of this neoliberal ideology on individuals, including guilt, anxiety and burnout (e.g., Picard & Islam, 2019). In a theoretical piece, Tkacz (2012) argued openness carries similar neoliberal grounds, which is notably illustrated by the focus on efficiency and productivity in a large part of open phenomena scholarship (e.g., Appleyard & Chesbrough, 2017; Hautz et al., 2017 with the dilemma of process; Hutter, Nketia, & Füller, 2017; Kogut & Metiu, 2001). This acknowledgement brings us to interrogate the potential utilitarianism behind organizations built on the open set of values. It also questions whether members of open organizations could suffer from the implementation of the openness principles. These issues are notably addressed in the empirical essays of my thesis.

Critical authors have also revealed the mechanisms of subordination hidden by discourses promoting participation, autonomy and self-organization (e.g., Sewell, 2008; Willmott, 1993). More precisely, critical management studies have shed light on the new forms of control, surveillance and domination vested in post-bureaucratic structures (e.g., Clegg & Baumeler, 2010; Courpasson, 2000; Knights & Willmott, 2002; Willmott, 1993). The displacement in control mode, characterized as neo-normative control, aims *'to help exploit workers [...] via the indoctrination of shared corporate beliefs, norms and values'* (Sturdy, Fleming, & Delbridge, 2010, p.116). Studies conducted in post-bureaucratic structures have demonstrated how this neo-normative control acts as a domination mechanism to manufacture consent (e.g., Endrissat, Islam, & Noppeney, 2015; Islam & Sferrazzo, 2022; Picard & Islam, 2019). This type of control based on values has also been observed in open organizing through the

emergence of norms to sanction non-contribution and to privilege highly involved contributors (Puranam et al., 2014). Characterizing openness as a set of values thus raises questions about the potential drift towards totalitarianism of the open principles, participation, transparency and individual freedom, a particularly crucial issue to investigate since members of open communities often possess the right to reject contributions and claims of membership (Dahlander & Mahony, 2011; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). For instance, Clegg (1994) highlighted how an ideology revolving around openness can actually develop exclusive membership dynamics.

In conclusion, this thesis proposes to investigate the performative role of open values, participation, transparency and individual freedom. As a set of values, openness must contribute to shape the organizing processes as well as the behaviour of actors. At first glance, what is expected is a fairer distribution of power and a decline of domination mechanisms, but these promises are challenged by the insights of critical studies on post-bureaucracy. This thesis especially aims to take a closer look at these political issues through its empirical essays. This gap between brandished principles and actual practices is also reminiscent of the tensions, conflicts (Cooren et al., 2013), alienation (Chaput et al., 2011) and mis-dis-identification observed in the literature focused on values performativity (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). In a book chapter, the Dobusch siblings (2019) even brings us to question the performativity of open values due to their conceptual malleability:

*‘The articulation of openness as a goal for the organization or describing organizing practices as already “open” may be a non-intended way to conserve the status quo and actually complicate endeavors of “opening up”’ (p.327)*

Finally, to better understand how openness applied to the whole organizing works, it requires examining the performative character of open values by answering the following question: what happens when actors want to take openness seriously as values?

## **II. OPENNESS AS ANTI-ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

Taking the values of openness seriously means investigating how the principles of participation, transparency and individual freedom manifest in the organization. This is an especially key question to address since the set of values constituting openness challenges the traditional definition of the organization as inherited from the ideal-type of bureaucracy (Weber, 1978/1921). As noted precedingly, open organizing follows-up the post-bureaucratic shift, both

having promoted anti-bureaucratic discourses and basing their conception of organizations on features opposed to the ideal-type of bureaucracy. In a first subsection, I continue to rely on the literature on post-bureaucracy and mobilize research on loose social collectives as radical forms of open organizing to demonstrate the anti-organizational character of openness principles. The second subsection focalizes on listing the specific issues and challenges raised when actors want to settle the organization using anti-organizational principles.

a) Openness questions what organizations are

This subsection aims to demonstrate the anti-organizational character of open principles. To begin with, the classical conception of organization was inherited from the ideal-type of bureaucracy (Weber, 1978/1921). In this view, organizations were based on rationally and formalized structures and patterns to make replication easy, which justified the use of bureaucracy at large as the best means to achieve planned goals effectively. This focus on stability encouraged management gurus to correlate the inefficiency of bureaucratic organizations to their aversion to change (e.g., Peters, 1992; Raymond, 1999) and to a risk of path-dependence that could damage an organization's adaptability (Farjoun, 2010; Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010). In addition, impervious organizational borders, defining '*membership and [...] rules for entry and exit into the organization*' (Puranam et al., 2014, p. 163), have also been criticized for fostering misalignments between firms and their changing environments (Du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2016). Indeed, bureaucracy was considered as a closed system that '*excludes the public*' (Weber, 1972/1921, quoted in Kornberger et al., 2017, p.180), meaning it fosters secrecy and exclusion (ibid). These arguments paved the way for more participation, transparency and autonomy to contrast with bureaucratic traditional features.

Starting from the 1960's, the contingency theory and particularly the organic organization from Burns & Stalker (1961) stressed the use of organizational models deviating from formal structures to facilitate instability in moving environments. In his book '*Images of organizations*', Morgan (1986) showed that the organic metaphor of organizations has already been used by the Human Relation School. In this view, an organization is bound to its environment that consequently shapes both its technical and human dimensions. The question of organizing with a minimal organizational structure re-emerged in the 1990's through the study of new organizational forms entitled '*post bureaucracy*' (Kellogg et al., 2006), '*fluid*' (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010), '*boundaryless organizations*' (Ashkenas et al., 2015), '*platform*'

(Ciborra, 1996), and more recently open organizing (Dobusch et al., 2019). In particular, everything traditionally founding an organization, that is to say organizational boundaries, hierarchies, attributes, procedures and routines, is challenged as grounding organizational features. The open principles therefore revolutionize *‘the order within and between organizations, which has consequences for organizational layers and boundaries, spans of control and flexibility, and the empowering of employees’* (Dobusch et al., 2019, p.1).

These new organizational forms emphasize the principle of *‘organizing without organizations’* (Shirky, 2008). Specifically, in highly flexible configurations, Schreyögg & Sydow (2010) highlight that *‘processes [...] never settle down; they are in constant flux’* (p.1252). In other words, cognitions, working methods and organizational goals have to steadily evolve in response to external contingencies. In the early 2000s, ontological debates have similarly questioned the capacity of organizations to stabilize their internal features (e.g., Chia, 2002; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). More particularly, an ontology of ‘being’, based on static attributes and linear events, was opposed to an ontology of ‘becoming’ relying upon a permanently evolving reality. This processual turn invites scholars to consider the organization as a set of processes (i.e., organizing) instead of a static object (Whittington, 2003). This involves looking at the organizing over time (Helin et al., 2014; Hernes, 2014; A. Langley & Tsoukas, 2011) analysing how things are ‘becoming’.

As recommended by influential theoretical development such as dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997), to stay competitive, organizations have to enhance speed, adaptability and ad hoc solutions to be able to continuously (re)create their resource combinations. Especially, these fluid configurations should stimulate organizational learning, innovation and creativity (e.g., Ravasi & Verona, 2001). Furthermore, value-creation in the digital age, as shown by examples through YouTube or Wikipedia, is not only based on organizational members’ work but also on external networks of contributors (Endrissat & Islam, 2021; Heracleous et al., 2017). However, critical authors highlighted how this emphasis on fluidity has become an ideological discourse (e.g., Böhm, 2006). This ideology of change particularly tends to normalize the precariousness both of organizations and workers’ conditions (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019). It also leaves aside and downplays the role of social mechanisms such as collective memory (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001) or organizational identity (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010), which are still crucial to ensure collective action.

Related to openness, the recent concept of organizationality (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) appears as useful to grasp the flexible and ad hoc character of open organizing as it relates to

how the organizing can emerge beyond and outside formal organizations (e.g., Endrissat & Islam, 2021; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015). More specifically, this notion enables the shift from the binary conception of either organization or non-dis-organization ‘*to a more gradual differentiation*’ (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015, p. 1006). Studies on organizationality describe the way fluid social collectives considered as extreme cases of open organizing, like the Anonymous (e.g., Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) or bikers communities (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015), achieve ‘becoming organizational’, meaning ‘*whenever (human or nonhuman) actors come together to co-orient their actions and start acting on behalf of a collective other*’ (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019, p. 487). Collective identity thus plays a key role in delineating organizational actorhood (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010). This collective identity is especially activated by claims informing what the entity *is* or *does*, and relates to the particular form of authority observed in open organizing that relies on the acceptance or rejection of contributions and allegations of membership (e.g., Dahlander & Mahony, 2011; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). Furthermore, affects, as in ‘*visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion*’ (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p.1, quoted in Endrissat & Islam, 2021), appear as another crucial trigger to reach organizationality (Endrissat & Islam, 2021).

b) Key organizational challenges and issues raised by the open principles

Achieving organizationality is theoretically very easy since gathering people sharing affects and claiming actions on the behalf of a collective entity seems sufficient. However, as illustrated by empirical insights from the Anonymous (e.g., Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) or hackathons (Endrissat & Islam, 2021), this organizational actorhood appears as temporary and particularly fluid. This questions how cases, such as Wikipedia, the Linux communities, or Ouishare, which is studied in this thesis, can maintain an open (anti)organizing during years. Especially, the values of openness shake the way that organizational features operate inside the organization and with its environment. This raises key challenges and issues for actors to address that are particularly related to the overcoming of organizational dilemmas, the definition of legitimate closing arrangements and finally to the achievement of new forms of authority.

## **Emergence of organizational dilemmas**

Openness scholarship reports the emergence of organizational dilemmas and paradoxes that actors have to cope with when engaged in open organizing. These tensions seem to be more noticeable in the case of regularly involved communities than with large crowds who contribute in a one-time process (Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017). Some dilemmas are related to goal prioritization, notably through contradictory objectives, which are also introduced as the benefits of openness, of efficiency and democratization (see Adobor, 2020; Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2017) as well as the question of interests to defend (e.g., individual VS collective in Smith et al., 2018 and Turco, 2016). Identifying the (right) organizing processes to implement also raises a variety of paradoxes to cope with including transparency and opacity, centralization and decentralization, flexibility and stability, (e.g., Husted & Plesner, 2017; Raviola, 2017; Smith et al., 2018). A last family of dilemmas is associated with actors' expectations. For example, openness draws on social recognition and intrinsic motivation mechanisms to stimulate participation, however when their contributions are deemed insufficiently paid back, stakeholders might disengage (Hautz et al., 2017). Many authors especially agree on the inherent character of these tensions (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2017) that appear as common to numerous collective self-organization experiences. Nevertheless, the anti-organizational character of openness makes these paradoxes especially salient because they are traditionally contained and addressed through formalized procedures, hierarchies and attributes. Moreover, these tensions are critical to overcome because they might jeopardize contribution and ultimately collective action in open organizing as informed in the second essay of this thesis.

## **Dealing with closure**

In post-bureaucracy scholarship, authors have observed '*ambiguous dialectics of democracy and bureaucracy*' (Josserand et al., 2006, p.56) that have also been seen in cases of open phenomena (e.g., O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007 on open-source governance). In open organizing, this especially gave rise to the tension mentioned in the preceding paragraph about structure/stability against flexibility, or empowerment against centralized authority (e.g., Adobor, 2020; Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2017). In particular, the open attribute is associated with the empowerment of contributors and consequently raises expectations regarding the reduction of power inequalities (Clegg et al., 2019). However, the adoption of open principles leads to reproducing asymmetries across the dimensions of participation and transparency (Luedicke et al., 2017), notably through backstage agreements (Heimstädt, 2017).



Critical studies on radical transparency practices have also demonstrated the impossibility to achieve the utopian goal of complete disclosure since actors have recreated new forms of secrecy (e.g., Gibbs, Rozaidi, & Eisenberg, 2013; Ringel, 2019). These examples illustrate the constitutive and inherent relation between openness and closure as *‘inextricably linked and interacting with each other’* (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019, p. 328). In other words, openness implies forms of closure or exclusion exercised, voluntarily or unconsciously, which, when not perceived as legitimate by the actors, can lead to internal conflicts (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019). Organizational openness consequently implies for actors to cope with a contradiction between expectations shaped by open principles and practices (e.g., Heracleous et al., 2017), and to create new types of closure (e.g., Hautz et al., 2017). The question of closure is reminiscent of liberalist organization studies in which scholars advocated the necessity to organize the democratic realm using bureaucratic institutions to preserve pluralism, freedom and thus democracy itself (Armbrüster, 2003, quoted in de Cock & Böhm, 2007). More specifically, authors suggested two recommendations echoed from liberalist scholars to secure the open qualities of the organizing using predefined processes (e.g., Husted & Plesner, 2017), or the formalization of agreed procedures (e.g., Adobor, 2020; Dobusch et al., 2019).

### **Organizational fluidity and new forms of authority**

While this may seem to oppose the values of openness, closure and exclusion show how power relations and authority remain inherent dimensions in open organizing. Authority refers to legitimate exercises of power over organizational actors (Casey, 2008). According to the classical conception of bureaucracy, authority is grounded in legal-rational legitimacy (Weber, 1978/1922), as *‘formally assumed to be rationally based on the expertise of the office holder in whose position authority is vested’* (Casey, 2008, p. 88). Nevertheless, as highlighted in the preceding subsection ([Chapter 1, IIa](#)), the open set of values comes to challenge these formalized organizational characteristics. In particular, the fluid (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010) or liquid character of openness (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) makes the organizing particularly malleable and thus attempts to formalize quickly become obsolete. In addition, the principles of openness contribute to blur organizational boundaries and membership by bringing in external actors. On top of that, the open-source development method questions the interests of internal layers (i.e., hierarchy and task-distribution) by drawing upon emergent and ad hoc solutions from networks of collaborating peers (Demil & Lecocq, 2006; Raymond, 1999). In open organizing, authority is especially expected to be further distributed among participants and expressed mostly through the acceptance or rejection of contributions and

claims of membership (Dahlander & Mahony, 2011; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). In sum, authority as legitimate power over others appears as a key feature that actors have to reconfigure when engaged with organizational openness, and which questions what the appropriate spans of control and autonomy are to maintain collective action while preserving the open values.

c) Research questions and structure of the thesis

This essays-based thesis examines the institutionalized norm of openness, the increasing presence of which in organizations gives it weight as a topic of interest. In particular, I focalize on cases of organizations in which openness has been applied to the whole organizing, including processes and resources, and which pursue opening effects across their activities (Schlagwein et al., 2017). In these cases of open organizing, such as Wikipedia, Linux, Red Hat, or Ouishare, actors have been considering openness as based on a set of values that has grounded the specificities of their organizations. I suggest further engaging with this actor-instigated conceptual move by shifting from the approach of openness as an ideal-type (Schlagwein et al., 2017; Tavakoli et al., 2017) to a values-based conceptualization. This values-based perspective is not completely new (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Kornberger et al., 2017; Schlagwein et al., 2017) but remains underdeveloped in the existing literature on open phenomena. This perspective in terms of values especially emphasizes that openness includes both a moral and performative dimension affecting actors' behaviours, organizational goals and the diverse organizing processes.

To provide a holistic view of organizational openness, I argue the need to better consider the way that the open values are entangled. I thus propose that openness encompasses three principles that are participation, transparency, and individual freedom. These open principles are in line with the shift in organizational norms towards post-bureaucracy, as a bureaucratic-democratic hybrid, which has been observed over the past 40 years. While this trend has challenged the traditional conception of organizations inherited from bureaucratic principles, open organizing seems to offer an even more radical alternative to the past emphasis on formal structures and hierarchies. By questioning predominant organizing principles, openness also challenges the classical conception of authority, and consequently shakes the internal order of organizations, especially spans of control and of freedom granted to supposedly empowered contributors. However, despite these democratic ambitions, critical approaches of post-

bureaucracies have warned of their ideological deviations and subordination risks, which might also emerge in open organizing configurations.

This doctoral thesis aims to expand further a critical understanding of organizational openness. Using three essays each focusing on a specific angle, I propose to answer the following research question:

**how does openness, as a set of values, shape action and act in the organization?**

More specifically, the shaping dimension of open principles interrogates their performative role, meaning how these values actually affect individual and collective agencies. Then, the second part of this research issue ‘act in the organization’ brings to examine how actors achieve organizationality and overcome organizational tensions while the values of openness appear as particularly anti-organizational. To answer this general research question, my essays-based thesis is structured as informed in figure 6 below.

**Figure 6. Structure of the thesis**

How does openness, as a set of values, shape action and act in the organization?			
<b>Title</b>	<u>Essay 1</u> : For (re)politicizing openness	<u>Essay 2</u> : Organizational necrosis autopsy: how extremist openness can threaten the sustainability of open organizing	<u>Essay 3</u> : How to last as open organizing: explicitly making sense of three anchorings
<b>Research question</b>	What are the political assumptions behind the concept of openness?	How can an open organizing fail to address the inherent tensions of openness?	How do actors enact openness over time?
<b>Analytical approach</b>	Problematizing integrative review (Mats Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020) of the fragmented and multidisciplinary openness literatures	Domain interaction model of metaphor using organizational necrosis (Cornelissen, 2005)	Sensemaking lens (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005)
<b>Case</b>	NA	Focus on M21S	Focus on Ouishare
<b>Contributions</b>	<p>First, I unveil the competing political assumptions carried by openness, which highlights the key role played by management in the depoliticization of the concept.</p> <p>As a second contribution, I suggest the use of the ontology of becoming to bring the power dimension back in open organizing studies.</p>	<p>As a first contribution, I show how extremist openness shapes ideological closure that reduces actors' scope of action.</p> <p>I then highlight the way that this extremist conception leads to threaten the organization's sustainability.</p>	<p>We start by revealing how intensive discussions allow the actors to enact explicit sensemaking processes that performatively activate open organizational arrangements.</p> <p>Finally, we highlight that the actors articulate the three anchorings, identity, organizational and teleological, to compensate each other.</p>

The next chapter, 'Methodology', presents the methodology I mobilized to answer my thesis general research question. It aims to provide a faithful description of how my thinking has evolved throughout my doctoral journey, which is especially crucial since I used an inductive approach. This drew upon an ethnographic study conducted on two sites, Managers du 21ème Siècle and Ouishare, during almost two years:

- Managers du 21ème Siècle is a French association that promotes new organizational forms and managerial innovations based on autonomy, participation and

transparency, values that are reminiscent of open principles. More importantly, the members of Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> Siècle are dedicated to applying the organizational values they promote to their own organizing.

- Ouishare is a community and an association of freelancers working together on social innovation projects to achieve a fairer world. Since its creation in 2012, this organization has been founded upon open principles of participation, transparency and autonomy.

More specifically, the methodological chapter is divided into three sections ordered chronologically by describing what happened before, during and after the fieldwork. It starts with the description of the process of selecting and accessing the fields. Secondly, I focus on the fieldwork to unpack how the ethnographic and critical approaches developed in this thesis have emerged. The last section depicts how the research questions of the three essays composing my thesis emerged. Finally, adopting a critical view led me to expand my reflexivity by analysing the difficulties I experienced and the way that my stance as an ethnographer might have affected my research.

The chapters from 3 to 5 gather the three essays of my thesis to answer how the open values shape action and pave the way to a form of organizing based on anti-organizational principles. At the beginning of each essay, a vignette introduces how the paper responds to this global research question. Let us now present the three essays on which this thesis has been built.

The first essay (chapter 3), entitled '*For (re)politicising openness*', offers a problematizing review (Mats Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020) of the disparate literatures on organizational openness in different disciplines, including management. In our research area, openness is particularly promoted for its positive effects on value-creation and performance, which outlined the apolitical view of the open promulgated by management scholars. However, it appears as crucial to reconsider power issues in open organizing, to better grasp the inherent character of empirical tensions, the key challenges raised when opening of the organization, and the conceptual ambiguity of the notion of openness. What seems particularly surprising is that the open principles, participation, transparency, and individual freedom, are linked to power and notably to participants' expectations for more equality. Moreover, openness was first thought as a political notion. Considering these points, I argue that the reappropriation of openness by management played a significant part in its depoliticization. In this paper, I thus answer the following research question: what are the political assumptions behind the concept of organizational openness? My findings highlight two competing conceptual perspectives that are

promoting by organizational openness, (I) an emancipatory political project against authoritarianism, and (II) a managerial technique antagonistic to bureaucracy. The contributions of this essay are two-fold. First, the divergent conceptual assumptions within openness provide a new interpretation of the empirical tensions as resulting from these divergences. This also highlights that actors are not fully subjected to the managerial approach since they continue to advocate for the emancipatory view of openness. Secondly, I suggest a new reading key, the ontology of becoming, that appears as useful to repoliticize openness by offering the potential to shed light on power struggles in open organizing.

*‘Organizational necrosis autopsy: how extremist openness can threaten the sustainability of open organizing’* is the title of the second essay (chapter 4) in which I study a two-fold case of failure of openness. As shown in this thesis introduction, empirical tensions are an important research topic in the open organizing literature, however some interrogations remain. Particularly, the open organizations and processes studied in existing studies depict successful management of these contradictions. We thus do not know what happens when actors fail to cope with these tensions, which questions the mechanisms leading an open organizing to failure. I draw on the ethnographic study of *Managers du 21ème siècle*, a non-profit that presents the specificity to promote and to self-apply the principles of openness. As another particularity, this organization faces a crises escalation that threatens its very own survival. My findings rely on the metaphor of organizational necrosis to highlight how an extremist conception of openness can fuel two mechanisms, depersonification and disempowerment, that drastically reduce actors’ scope of action. This essay offers two critical contributions to the open organizing literature. First, it portrays the way that extremist open values can lead to the self-decline of openness through ideological forms of closure. Secondly, it shows how this extremist conception can become a threat to the organization’s sustainability.

The third and last essay (chapter 5), *‘How to last as open organizing: explicitly making sense of three anchorings’*, is co-authored with Véronique Perret and Lionel Garreau and particularly focuses on the challenge of organizing with anti-organizational principles. This research starts with the acknowledgement of the precariousness of organizational openness, which is reflected in investigations on the empirical tensions of open organizing, in the long-term deviations towards closure, and in research on organizationality. However, this observation is challenged by some radical open communities that have existed for over fifteen years, one of the most famous being Wikipedia. This raises one of the primary issues of organization studies, perennity. Using a sensemaking lens, we thus examine how organizational members enact

radical open organizing over time. We draw on the ethnographic study of Ouishare that has been able to remain radically open for over ten years. We find that the actors make sense and enact radical openness through intensive conversational practices in which three anchorings were mobilized: an identity anchoring (i.e., to define their collective identity), an organizational anchoring (i.e., organizing processes) and a teleological anchoring (i.e., finality / to evaluate). We contribute to research on open organizing by uncovering two phenomena that enable the actors to enact a lasting form of radical openness. First, we shed light on explicit sensemaking, a process relying on discussion to activate open organizational arrangements. Finally, we show how the actors mobilize and articulate the anchorings in a way that they compensate for each other to provisionally solve the organizing issues and tensions they faced.

The sixth and final chapter of this thesis aims to answer the general research question, interrogating how open values shape action and act in the organization. To do so, this chapter provides a general discussion based on the contributions from the three essays. To confront their inputs and further develop my analyses, I mobilize two new theoretical frameworks, (i) the literature on (dis)enchantment inspired by the work of Max Weber and (ii) research on ideologies and utopias and especially the Ricoeurian approach. In the first section, I suggest considering openness as an enchanting narrative of organization. More specifically, I demonstrate that actors engaged in open initiatives make decisions based on axiological rationality, while the existing literature rather introduced openness as a process based on calculation. Then, I draw upon the insights on emancipation and alienation from the literature on enchantment to discuss these phenomena in open organizing. This helps me uncover the dialogic relationship linking ideology and utopia in radically open organizations of which further scrutiny could contribute to better grasp the political dimension of openness. In the second section, I show the limitations of a dichotomic approach on ideology and utopia in openness scholarship. To overcome this dualism, I draw upon the writings of Ricoeur on these concepts (1984a, 1986) as well as some points from the three volumes book 'Time and Narrative' (1984b, 1985, 1988) in which he proposes to conceive ideology and utopia as complementary. The Ricoeurian approach helps me to uncover the mechanisms fuelling healthy and unhealthy relationships between ideology and utopia in radical openness, which appear as especially critical to cope with tensions in open organizations.

To conclude my thesis, I stress three boundary conditions and limitations of my thesis work, (i) the study of extreme cases, (ii) the status and privileged social position of field actors, and (iii)

how a further focus on sociomateriality could have enriched my analyses. On this basis, I suggest several avenues for future research.





# **CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I introduce the general methodological elements of my doctoral dissertation, which is based on an ethnographic study conducted across two sites. These two cases were chosen because of their comparable organizational features (common legal structures and values, a majority of freelancers in the membership) and of their distinct internal dynamics and tensions. As I used an inductive approach, this chapter follows a chronological order to depict the different steps of my reflection. I draw upon narrative writings to present the sequential phases in an accurate and reflexive way. More specifically, in section I, I describe the process of selecting the cases studies and develop a detailed presentation of these fields to justify their potential in studying how openness as a set of values shapes the organizing and acts in the organization. The second section focuses on the fieldwork based on a critical multiple ethnography. I especially introduce the implications of using such a method and report on the data collection. I also propose reflexive feedback on my experiences as an ethnographer and how it contributes to defining the research questions of my essays. In the last section, I present the processes of problematization and data analysis undertaken to develop my essays-based thesis as well as the difficulties I experienced during this sequence.

## **I. ENTERING THE EMPIRICAL DIMENSION**

When I started my thesis, I aimed to study organizational democracy, whereas the focus on openness only came a few months later. The research questions of my thesis emerged from the fields. Using an inductive perspective, I began the fieldwork without expectations of what I would find nor a strictly framed methodology; without knowing how long I would stay, what my stance would be, or what I would do with the collected data (a comparative case study, etc). I only had a vague idea of how I aimed to collect data using qualitative methods (observations, interviews, and documents). In this first section, I describe the process of selecting and accessing the fields, namely Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> Siècle and Ouishare.

### a) Selecting and accessing the fields

In this section, I depict the two steps followed to select and then access the fields. First, I conducted an exploratory study based on interviews with six organizations to identify the most relevant cases to study. Then, I detailed the conditions of access to Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> Siècle and Ouishare.

### Stage 1: Exploratory study

A few months after starting my thesis, spent on a literature review, I needed to give substance to my readings by experiencing the field. This led me to conduct an exploratory study to identify potential field(s) that I could join to support my research. My only discriminating criterion was to meet with organizations that had, or wished to adopt, a more democratic internal order since, as mentioned earlier, the focalization on organizational openness only appeared later. The academic and grey writings that I had read upstream allowed me to identify the management fashions (Abrahamson, 1996) and appropriate vocabulary used by practitioners and managers to characterize a more democratic workplace. This notably opened my inquiry for cases to trendy organizational forms such as liberated companies (Getz & Carney, 2013), sociocracies (Endenburg & Bowden, 1988), or holacracies (Robertson, 2015). Using methodological opportunism (Girin, 1989), I drew upon my professional network and my supervisor, which helped me find four potential fields. As recommended by qualitative researchers (Neyland, 2007, p.120), I also relied on social media, particularly [Twitter](#), using hashtags such as #sociocracy, #holacracy, #democratic governance and #democracy. This process resulted in six semi-structured interviews with managers or board members (see tables 1 and 2 below) where I questioned how the topic of democracy had emerged in their management conceptualization. All the interviewees had been informed of the purpose of my study and had initially accepted the idea of hosting a doctoral student for a potential data collection based on qualitative methods.

**Table 1. Exploratory study**

Organizations	Structure & organizational form	Strategic decision-making
<b>M21S</b>	Non-profit association & sociocracy	Open to its members, distributed across the circles
<b>TETRIS</b>	Cooperative (SCIC) inspired by popular education (horizontality, consent decision making)	Open to its members, during general assemblies
<b>Comebo</b>	Cooperative and freedom form	Open during general assemblies, transparency of the board
<b>Construction company</b>	Empowerment regarding the organizing of production	Closed, reserved to managers
<b>Ouishare</b>	Non-profit association fostering participation and flat hierarchy	Open and distributed among its members
<b>Wikimedia France</b>	Non-profit association in a liberating process (Getz, 2009)	Closed, reserved to board members. Willingness to open it to internal and external stakeholders

**Table 2. Interview guide for the exploratory study**

<i>Starting question</i>	Does the question of democracy arise in your management thinking?
<i>Themes</i>	How do you implement democracy into your management tools?
	How is democracy applied in practice?
	How is democracy reflected in your vision and values?
	How is democracy implemented in your decision-making processes?

Let us now focus on the meeting and selection process of the two cases studied in my thesis: Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> Siècle (M21S) and Ouishare (OS). I met André, the chairman of M21S, first, when he responded to my tweet in December 2017 and offered to discuss M21S and its new sociocratic model as a possible research field. During our first discussion, he told me that he had also just undertaken a doctoral thesis, a shared experience that contributed to creating a special relationship with him that helped me cope with some of the difficulties I would later encounter during the fieldwork in M21S. We then scheduled an official exploratory interview in which André told me how sociocracy had been implemented and experienced in M21S. He characterized the sociocratic form as a ‘*post-democratic*’ model adopted to challenge the leader's position in decision-making and consider everyone’s voice. This interview particularly revealed contradictions around members’ legitimacy and inclusion in decision-making that I was curious to investigate further.

I followed the snowball sampling method as well (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p.47) by asking André if he could recommend me other organizations that might be comparable to M21S, which was how ‘Ouishare’ (OS) was mentioned. After a quick check of OS’s website, André introduced me to Mégane, a former member of the OS community. Due to her recent departure from the organization, she was especially critical and emphasized its informal and friendship-based culture. As she had been less and less involved in OS activities and governance, she clearly stated that she was no longer aware of recent developments in the formal structure and could not provide any details. This is the reason why she introduced me to another, still active OS member, Taj, whom she described as ‘*the chairman even if he hated me for saying that*’. During this second interview, Taj explained the participation rules of OS in great details. He also expressed the tensions he experienced within the community regarding participation to decision-making, autonomy, or power. Then, Taj got me in touch with two other members of OS, Jamy (the elected chairman of OS) and Maëlys. During our interview, Jamy invited me to the annual French Summit, a key moment for strategic decisions in OS, which would take place a couple of weeks later in Marseille. This invitation to the OS Summit in

Marseille played a key role in the selection of Ouishare as a case for my thesis because I had to quickly plan my trip to the South of France to attend the Summit.

### **Stage 2: accessing the fields**

After conducting this exploratory study, I finally decided to focalize on two cases, M21S and Ouishare. More specifically, I limited my case selection to two organizations because I aimed to realize in-depths investigations of these open forms of organizing. Indeed, it should be specified that the moment I selected my fields also coincides with my theoretical shift in focus to research on organizational openness.

Several reasons justified this choice of cases to scrutinize. On the one hand, M21S and OS appeared to be comparable organizations. First, they had the same legal structure, the non-profit association (loi 1901) that is considered as democratic and has less professionalized organizational settings (Laville & Sainsaulieu, 1997). In that sense, associations are considered as less structured therefore open organizational characteristics such as fluid membership rules or changing processes are to be expected. However, this type of legal structure appears as distinct from other cases of open organizing investigated in existing research, which are generally communities, like the Anonymous, that can be gathered around a specific tool, such as Wikipedia or the GPL licence, or foundations (e.g., Wikimedia, Apache, Mozilla). In addition, both associations gathered freelancers who could potentially earn money through their involvement in the organization's activities (through missions or opportunities provided by the members). Finally, at first sight, M21S and OS were converging on organizational openness as they formally shared common values related to open organizing, such as autonomy, participation, transparency and a meritocratic system based on the perceived level of involvement.

On the other hand, these two cases provided specificities that have motivated my choice of selection. Regarding the commercial dimension, it was more preponderant at OS than at M21S, since most OS members earned their living thanks to the missions provided by the network, whereas at M21S commercial development appeared rather taboo. But, more particularly, although the exploratory interviews depicted organizational and cultural similarities, they also highlighted distinct dynamics and tensions to further explore. For instance, the level of activities in the two associations were contrasted as Ouishare looked especially active while few things seemed to occur in M21S, or regarding the disparities between the easiness (in OS) and the difficulty (in M21S) to bond with organizational actors.

**Table 3. Summary of the steps to access the fields**

	M21S	Ouishare
<i>Dec 2017</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• André responds to my tweet</li> </ul>	
<i>Jan 2018</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploratory interview with André. Use of snowball sampling method &gt; André introduces me to Mégane, a former member of Ouishare</li> </ul>	
<i>Feb 2018</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploratory interview with Mégane, who introduces me to Taj.</li> </ul>
<i>March 2018</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploratory interview with Taj (connector) who introduces me to Jamy and Maëlys.</li> </ul>
<i>April 2018</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploratory interview with Jamy, Chairman, who invites me to the annual Summit twelve days later.</li> <li>• Validation of M21S and OS as my two research fields with Véronique Perret</li> <li>• Observation of a team meeting</li> <li>• Exploratory interview with Maëlys</li> <li>• 2 days Summit in Marseille</li> </ul>

As I wanted to be transparent on the choices considered for my data collection, I warned André and Taj (and then all actors I would meet) about my focus on open organizing and my will to conduct participant observation. Neither the focalization on open organizing nor the participative stance raised apprehensions from them. To deal with this participation issue, André directly offered to become a member of the association by paying the membership fee, which I did not: a decision I justify later in this methodological chapter. He also informed the most implicated members of M21S (those of the General Circle, in charge of coordinating the association) by email and asked for their consent regarding my involvement as a researcher conducting fieldwork. As nobody objected, André made sure that I was included in mailing lists to be invited to meetings and gave me access to online documents and to the Trello boards of M21S. I was also invited to a meeting day dedicated to M21S's vision as well, which was ultimately cancelled due to lack of participants.

The issue of formal membership or of a specific status to frame my presence on the field was not raised when I entered OS. A few days before the Summit I was invited to present my research project during a weekly team meeting. The same day, I also had a conversation with Jamy about the implications of becoming a case studied in my doctoral thesis for OS. More precisely, we identified the instances or digital spaces where I could collect my data so that he

could submit my access request for community approval. This process gave me the impression that Jamy wanted to follow the right process, rather than it being strictly necessary, because my presence might provoke an outcry from the members. In addition, when they invited me to the Summit, they paid the accommodation fees. Retrospectively, this onboarding appears as a first sighting of radical participation within OS.

In sum, entering the field was very easy and I think it was the first signal of the presence of radical openness in these associations. As an example, I encountered no obstacles in accessing the data. The main difficulty I could eventually face was to not be informed of an appointment, but I do not remember that happening on purpose for either organization. When it was the case, I was invited as soon as I had mentioned the omission. In that sense, M21S and OS appear as extreme cases (Chen, 2016) of open organizing. Extreme cases are defined as ‘atypical’ organizations that are supposed to possess the potential to tell us more about unknown phenomenon than average cases. These atypical fields encourage reflexivity since the researcher has to explicit “*what is this a case of?*”. By highlighting their specificities, the researcher can emphasize new theoretical constructs that can contribute widely to the study of organizations. M21S and Ouishare can be considered as extreme cases of open organizing in relation to the definition proposed in my thesis introduction. Indeed, anyone with the will can join and contribute to these organizations and openness is infused within their every organizing process. In addition, both cases depict radical embodiments of the open principles (i.e., individual freedom, participation and transparency) in their everyday practices, which will be detailed in the next subsections introducing each association. To better grasp the interests of studying M21S and Ouishare as extreme cases of organizational openness, let us now present these organizations in more details.

#### b) Detailed presentation of M21S

M21S is a non-profit association<sup>19</sup> founded in 2013 in France to bring together people interested in ‘*management of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*’, meaning new and open forms of organizing based on flat hierarchies, participative decision-making, autonomy, and trust. The case of M21S is put at the forefront in the second essay on ‘*organizational necrosis*’ and then mobilized with Ouishare in the thesis discussion.

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<sup>19</sup> Loi 1901 in France



### **Activities and business model**

Historically, the association was the primary advocate of the liberated company model (Getz, 2009; Getz & Carney, 2013). More generally, M21S has been challenging authoritarianism in the workplace and encouraging managers to adopt organizational practices based on open values, such as granting employees the freedom and related right to make mistakes to foster their intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), to give them a voice in decision-making, and to develop their individual responsibility which requires transparent information-sharing. Its members strongly believe in the win-win discourses of management gurus promoting post-bureaucratic forms according to which these ‘*managerial innovations*’ would develop wellbeing and thus organizational performance. M21S aims to promote these new and open organizational forms through the organization of conferences, debates, or training. They have also developed their own diagnostic tool to identify where organizations are in the liberation process, and thus offer companies paid diagnostic services based on its use. The business model of the association draws on membership fees and ticket sales to attend their events.

### **Overview of members and membership**

In M21S, membership mainly draws on membership fees. Two types of membership offers exist, for individuals and for organizations. The second one provides a member status to a defined number of employees from the same company. Following the legal requirements of an association, being a member of M21S entitles it to attend and vote in annual general meetings. Membership also allows people to benefit from preferential prices to attend the association’s events.

Joining M21S is mostly related to work motivation. Being a member of M21S provides opportunities to develop one’s professional network, but also to concretely experience open forms of organizing as M21S has adopted open values in its own organization. This consequently enables members to improve their skills and knowledge related to collective intelligence.

In 2018, M21S had just over 100 members of which<sup>20</sup>:

- Around 60% were coaches, consultants, or facilitators, who were mainly freelancers, and whose activity partly consisted in accompanying companies in their transformation processes towards more open practices. If, as members of M21S, they did not earn their

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<sup>20</sup> Result of an internal investigation in January 2019.

living from the activities of the association, they could receive a compensation when organizing or animating an event.

- The remaining 40% were managers or employees of organizations undergoing this type of transformation towards more open forms of organizing.

The members are supposed to contribute, based on their preferences, to one or to several circles that compose the organization: territorial circles based on region, operating circles (e.g., communication), and thematic circles (e.g., entrepreneurs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century). Members are supposed to join at least one circle, though that has not been the case for a large majority since 40% did not know they had to<sup>21</sup>.

Since members live all over France, they mainly keep contact using online tools such as WhatsApp, Trello, Slack, Zoom meetings, or emails and meet physically a few times a year. The pace of meetings for circles varies according to their convenience. Finally, the circles do not have any obligation to achieve results.

### **M21S as a *mise en abîme*, embodying the open principles they promote**

M21S members are actively dedicated to embodying the open values they are promoting. This self-fuelling process led to a governance crisis in March 2016, when some of the members accused the founder of the association of centralized, autocratic operating. This motivated the members to prepare and vote in a new constitution in June 2017 at an extraordinary general meeting. This informed of a new way of organizing M21S based on a radical conception of the key openness principles (i.e., autonomy, transparency, participation and shared decision-making).

As already mentioned, M21S is organized in circles. According to the governance charter, each circle is responsible for its area of activity (e.g., regional events, cross-functional support tasks) and regulates what happens within collectively with its members. In addition, a circle leader is chosen using an election without candidates and is responsible for ensuring the implementation of the principle of transparency by handling information sharing between the circles.

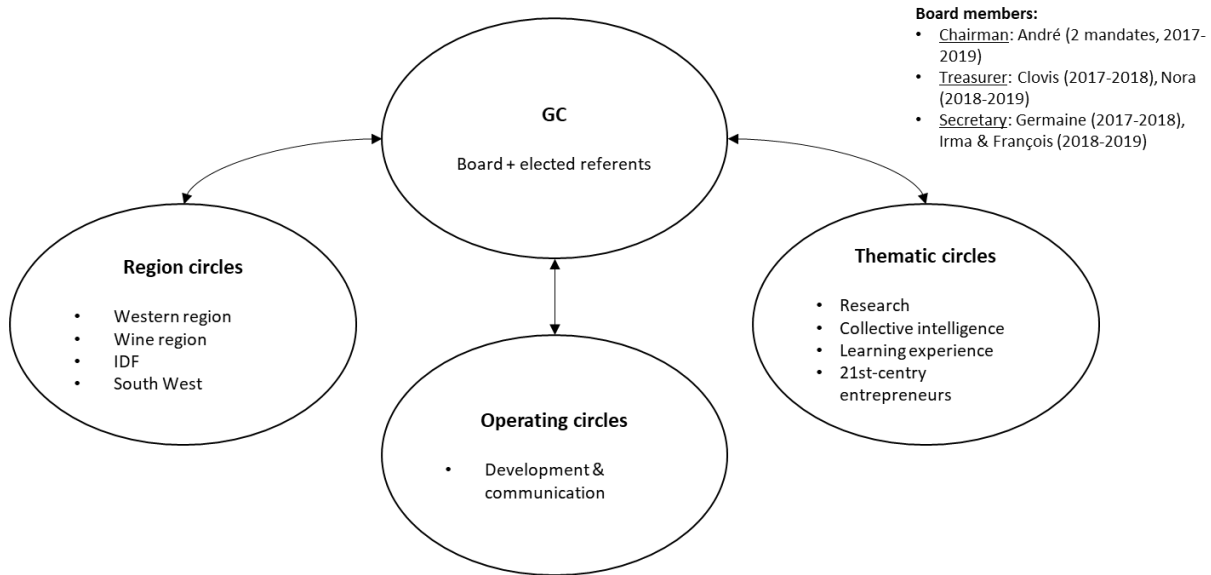
To replace the autocratic founder, the General Circle (GC) is collectively in charge of decisions relating to overall coordination of the M21S association (e.g., concerning investment or membership processes) and its administrative obligations as a non-profit organization. It is

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<sup>21</sup> Result of an internal investigation in January 2019.

composed of the Board (President, Secretary and Treasurer) together with the elected leaders of the various circles, thus making for around a dozen individuals.

**Figure 7. Composition of M21S**



The charter also states that collective decisions must be made unanimously, and in cases of disagreement, by consent. In consent decision-making, as in the election without candidates process, all participants can use their veto to pause the process until an acceptable solution is proposed. A choice is thus pronounced when no valid objection remains.

### **M21S as an extreme case of openness (Chen, 2016)**

M21S can be seen as an example of radical open organizing since the members embody the values of openness (i.e., participation, transparency and individual freedom) in an extreme way, towards more openness. Moreover, I have presented this conception of openness to members who acknowledged it as relevant to describe the organizing of M21S.

Finally, in line with the argument developed in section II of this thesis introduction according to which openness is based on anti-organizational principles, members of M21S define their organizing as '*organic*'. If this adjective appears as reminiscent of the seminal book from Burns & Stalker (1961), the actors here emphasize the perpetual movement of living things and possibility of change, thereby being comparable to the concept of organizational fluidity (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010), rather than contingencies adaptation. This metaphor thus is conceived in opposition to formalisation or labels as they might '*freeze*' the organizing. Hence, members foster emergence, to let things happen '*naturally*'.

**Table 4. The radical embodiment of the open values in M21S**

Open values	Justification
<i>Participation</i>	<p>In M21S, openness is used as a synonym for participation, and is mentioned when questioning who can join a circle or a decision-making process.</p> <p>Anyone willing can be invited to enter and then participate in a circle. Formal rules of participation are not always followed in favour of including everyone present, though they should formally not participate in the decision.</p> <p>Members mainly foster shared decisions, usually on a circle scale. To ensure that everyone concerned is considered, decisions are supposed to be made during physical meetings, not by email or instant messenger.</p>
<i>Transparency</i>	<p>Members willingly share sensitive information, even when newcomers attend a M21S meeting for the first time, or during general meetings. Moreover, the obligation to disclose information about the management of the structure is a requirement of the association's legal status.</p> <p>Transparency is also a value that is often invoked by members during conflict and decision-making. For members, transparency is conceived as a collective means of control to increase individual responsibility and accountability. As an example, they have decided to adopt open account books to be more transparent regarding the expenses and receipts.</p>
<i>Individual freedom</i>	<p>Autonomy is a value that is frequently brandished in M21S's communication and during internal debates about organizing issues.</p> <p>There are no prescriptions to inhibit how members are expected to contribute to M21S, and they can do only what they are willing to do. For instance, they could freely create new circles or organize an event if it did not involve the association's finances.</p> <p>In addition, external forms of control appear to be banned.</p>

c) Detailed presentation of Ouishare

Created in 2012 in France, OS was first a group of about ten friends with a shared interest for collaborative economy. Ten years later, Ouishare has grown and become international, and is now described as an '*international network*' or a '*community*' by its members. Despite these descriptions, it should be noted that Ouishare is mobilized as an organization case in this thesis. More specifically, OS's mission is to build a fairer and more collaborative society, a goal that the members also pursue in their internal organization. This alternative social order is based on the values of openness, which have been implemented through highly inclusive decision-

making practices and widely shared information. In my thesis, the case of Ouishare is scrutinized in the third essay questioning how radical open organizing can be enacted over time and is also mobilized in the [discussion section](#).

### Purpose and activities

This strong alternative position appears as the main motivator for members to join the community, to find meaning in their work and to work differently. The pursuit of this utopia is first reflected in the evolution of OS’s legal structure (see table 5 below). Despite what this evolution may suggest, OS does not necessarily have an economic growth purpose. The question of (de)growth has been raised several times without ever finding a clear answer.

**Table 5. Evolution of OS legal structure**

<b>2012</b>	OS is founded as a non-profit association. The Spanish community created its own association a few years later.
<b>2017</b>	Ouishare France achieves an annual revenue of approximately 2 million euros, which is not compatible with the non-profit requirements. To deal with these excessive profits, the association operates and owns an ‘SA’ (Société Anonyme) structure <sup>22</sup> . This structure is certified as a social company <sup>23</sup> , which is framed by the law of July 31st, 2014, and gives OS certain guidelines to follow regarding its limited profitability.
<b>2020</b>	The necessity to reduce structural costs leads the French members to replace the two legal entities with a single for-profit association.

Regarding its business, Ouishare operated in the field of collaborative economy until 2016<sup>24</sup> through consulting missions, event organizations and the realization of studies. These activities have since been dedicated to topics related to social innovation, in which they address a wide range of issues such as the impact of digital transformation on underprivileged people, the evolution of cities or the future of work. Their most famous event, called the Ouishare Fest and organized over seven times, aims to gather people from all around the world and from various professional backgrounds to meet around a specific theme for a couple of days. In line with its mission, the topics put forward during Ouishare Fests have always questioned our contemporary society through a critical lens (e.g., ‘it’s about time’ in 2021, ‘lost in transition?’ in 2015, ‘cities of the world, unify!’ in 2017).

<sup>22</sup> A French legal statute comparable to LLC

<sup>23</sup> ESS (économie sociale et solidaire) in France

<sup>24</sup> This article signed the end of activities directly linked with the field of collaborative economy: <https://www.ouishare.net/article/so-long-collaborative-economy>

## **Value capture and distribution in Ouishare**

Regarding the business model of OS, the members are essentially freelancers that are informally bound to the organization, indeed most of them are tied by an employment or delivery contract neither to the association nor the SAS firm. In sum, each member is responsible for managing his or her own livelihood. Except for specific positions (i.e., office manager) or missions (i.e., communication, chief editor of the ‘Mag’), the few salaried members’ contracts are based on the principle of revenue tracking (i.e., they have to produce the missions to finance their own salary). In 2018, in France, approximatively 60% of the most engaged members<sup>25</sup> were making a living mostly through OS activities.

Paid assignments are obtained by winning calls for tenders or by getting sponsor donations to finance what they call ‘entrepreneurial projects’ such as the OS Fest, meaning the initiatives they launch before being able to fund them without running a deficit. There is no process to define the distribution of paid missions among members. This depends on various contextual elements such as the will of the person who brought the client, on who is available, and sometimes on who is in the right place at the right moment. Entrepreneurial projects and paid missions are organized following the principle of subsidiarity, they are managed in an autonomous and decentralized way by the designated project manager. The members have to return 20% of the money earned through a mission to the organization to finance the support brought by OS such as administrative tasks and the use of the brand. This money will be used to pay for the organization's expenses (e.g., salaries, office rent) and to finance the launch of new projects.

Within Ouishare, the participants share their time between delivering their paid missions for external clients and conducting the volunteer internal task to make the OS community exist as a ‘commons’. This free work mainly involves recurring tasks such as managing human resources, monitoring budget, organizing the summits, etc. In the annual budget, a part of the charges is allocated to compensate people who took these commons in charge, yet the tasks paid and the amount vary from year to year, as does the person in charge. The commons also include the volunteer time spent participating in the governance and in activities that make OS an organization (e.g., attending summits, writing comments on Loomio, preparing a meeting).

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<sup>25</sup> Results from an internal survey submitted in December 2018

## **From international to more local management**

OS's headquarters are located in Paris, but offices have been rented in other large French cities (especially Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux), as well as Canada, South America, and European capitals. While OS has a physical presence in different towns, physical gatherings are rather limited to 'Summits' that are the only formalized gathering of the whole community, and to a few meeting days organized during a year (e.g., 3 during 2018 in France). During these gatherings, they address various strategic and sensitive topics such as commercial strategy or individual money perception in large groups.

Due to distance, the community is mostly active online. As they allow asynchronous participation, these tools are used as spaces for deliberation to centralise and trace discussions and choices. There have been public (open) spaces and private (close) spaces limited to connectors (i.e., the official members of OS). In particular, the community draws upon:

- Online tools for decision-making: from a Facebook private group at the very beginning to a consent decision-making software called Loomio.
- Instant messengers: previously Slack and now Telegram (comparable to Whatsapp).

Decisions related to Ouishare's activities and organizing have gradually moved from an international management (between 2012 and 2015) to a more local one (since 2015). From 2012 to 2015, strategic decisions were made at the international level. In 2015, the Parisian community raised funds and then reinvested them in the French community's projects. This created strong tensions between Parisians and non-French members. Hence, members have decided to adopt a more decentralised operating mode, giving more importance to local management with an emphasis on local budget for instance. This dynamic is reflected through the organization of Summits:

- Between 2012 and 2016, there were two international summits per year and since 2017, it has been reduced to only one.
- As the number of participants has grown, the role of international Summits has evolved from strategic meetings where budgets were approved and governance decided, to information-sharing regarding ongoing projects.
- For 5 years now, local summits (in France or Spain for instance) have been set up and become the new spaces to address strategic questions.

## Overview of membership

There are different member positions within the community. First, the role of ‘connector’, characterized since 2013, refers to members who ‘*put [the] mission into action day by day*’ (from the online Ouishare handbook)<sup>26</sup>. Becoming a connector is deemed to give rights and duties. Obligations mostly revolve around involvement in the community (attending the summits and meeting days or participating to online conversations for example) and the use of the brand for their freelancing activities. In return, the connector position gives access to closed decision-making spaces on Loomio, or during the Summits to discuss strategy-making, but also to specific Telegram channels where strategic information is shared. Moreover, connectors are the owners of the French association, so they constitute the general assembly. Secondly, ‘active members’ are people involved in Ouishare activities, paid or not. Usually, it concerns fewer active or recently included individuals that are considered as potential future connectors. In practice, active members are treated as connectors, they just have not gone through the formalized process yet. Finally, ‘friends’ are people spread across the network without being regularly involved, such as occasional volunteers on an event.

Anyone could aim to become a connector, as long as s/he was involved in projects and in the commons of OS. An emerging connector has generally been in the community for around 6 months or more, having gone through an informal trial period, sometimes working on projects unpaid. To prove their commitment, emerging connectors must be co-opted by three connectors, following with a public profession of faith to the community using a video for instance. Co-option is not based on any formalized criteria for evaluating the commitment of the emerging connector and therefore depends primarily on the willingness of the three supporting connectors.

In September 2013, OS had around fifty connectors at the international level, a number that grew to eighty by December 2015. The focus on the local level has impacted the recruitment of new connectors since they were 39 in 2020. In 2013-2018, the French community was the biggest with 24 connectors and around 60 friends. The number of connectors and active members in France has hovered around 20 since 2013. Regarding their profile, connectors are between 25 and 35 and have joined OS after an oft disappointing first professional experience to work differently and do something meaningful.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://handbook.ouishare.net/people> & <https://handbook.ouishare.net/people/connectors>



## Ouishare as an extreme case of openness

From its creation, OS has been inspired by various radical open initiatives such as the Open-Source movements, the Pirate Party from Sweden, or communities like Wikipedia or Enspiral<sup>27</sup>. Within OS, openness, transparency, collaboration (i.e., participation), autonomy (e.g., action and do-ocracy) have been explicit core values since the first attempt of formalization at the end of 2012.

**Table 6. The radical embodiment of the open values in OS**

Open values	Justification
<i>Participation</i>	<p>Everyone who claims his/her explicit will to join OS can.</p> <p>Radically open spaces are proposed, such as the weekly Friday meetings, Telegram channels or the public Loomio groups.</p> <p>Specific topics such as strategy, the management of commons, or governance are supposed to be managed collectively by connectors using Loomio. However, this formal rule is regularly disregarded in favor of more radical openness, many choices have thus been discussed by the attending members of the meetings, regardless of their position.</p> <p>When formal cases of exclusive spaces were implemented, they had been collectively validated beforehand</p>
<i>Transparency</i>	<p>Transparency was an explicit value that was removed in 2015, because for certain members full transparency did not seem to be realistically implementable. However, this value is still frequently invoked during deliberations.</p> <p>In OS, transparency concerns both the formalization of organizing processes and the access to the content of deliberations.</p>
<i>Individual freedom</i>	<p>The principle of individual freedom is associated with the OS value of ‘do-ocracy’ that ‘celebrate autonomy and initiative-taking within an interdependant network’ (Ouishare Handbook<sup>28</sup>).</p> <p>Within OS, members are encouraged to contribute to activities and governance according to their personal motivations. Moreover, contributing to projects (voluntary or remunerated) appears as the main way to join the community.</p> <p>The contributors are enabled to launch new initiatives, the only limitation being to submit the proposal for validation by the community if it involved public display of the OS brand.</p>

The fluid and anti-organizational nature of OS is associated with one of their values named ‘permanent beta’. Inspired by open-source development, a beta version is a work-in-progress

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.enspiral.com/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://handbook.ouishare.net/the-ouishare-values>

program that can be tested and then upgraded. In the context of OS, it carries a conception of organizing that is constantly temporary and changing. In practice, they do not wish to ‘freeze’ the community with heavy framework regarding legal structure or formal processes. Members instead foster the possibility to modify, to improve or to radically change their organizing depending on their experience.

## **II. REFLEXIVE ACCOUNTS OF THE FIELDWORK**

This section focuses on the fieldwork phase. As mentioned in the preceding section, I began collecting the data using an inductive approach and thus retrospectively described the methodology I used as an ethnography. More specifically, when I entered the fields, I did not have clear research questions in mind nor methodological plans other than to collect data using qualitative methods. Concretely, during the fieldwork, I let the flow of events carry me and seized opportunities as they arose. It turned out that such fuzzy plans can be characterized as the first step of an ethnographic strategy (Neyland, 2007). As I read and collected data, questions related to power stakes in open organizing emerged and so did the goal to offer a critical contribution to this mostly mainstream literature. This section is structured as follows. In a first subsection, I define what an ethnographic study is and especially what the implications of conducting a critical one are. Then, I give a detailed account of my data collection. The third and fourth subparts provide reflexive reports on the fieldwork by focusing on the key role of my participant stance and analysing the difficulties encountered on the fields.

### a) Critical ethnography: definition and implications

Ethnography is a qualitative research methodology derived from anthropology. It was introduced in management and organization research in the 1930’s through the work of Elton Mayo and the Hawthorn study (Neyland, 2007; Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009). Originally, the ethnographer aimed to observe and participate in the daily routine of a particular group in order to understand what it meant to be a member of this group (Neyland, 2007). Being a stranger on arrival, the anthropologist ‘sought to bring the “exotic” back “home”’ (Neyland, 2007, p.1). The first implication of ethnography thus concerns the adoption of an inductive perspective (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to enter the field as ‘an outsider to the social setting, unfamiliar with the culture studied’ (Ybema et al., 2009, p.102). Secondly, this involves

a broad and in-depth access to the field through a long period of time as well as the practice of (participant) observation (Emerson et al., 1995; Neyland, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009). Another key characteristic of ethnography relies on the combination of data sources, including observation, conversation and documentation (Ybema et al., 2009). In sum, this qualitative methodology is supposed to remain malleable and draw ‘*more on a logic of discovery and happenstance than a logic of verification and plan*’ (Van Maanen, 2011, p.220). As informed in table 7 below, the methodology followed in my thesis checks all these criteria.

**Table 7. Characteristics of my ethnographic studies**

<b>Inductive approach</b>	I started collecting data without a specific research question in mind, I could summarize my goal at this stage as studying how the actors managed their organizing through openness. I did not have any expectation regarding what I would find on the field and I wanted to let myself be surprised by what would happen (Van Maanen, 2011).
<b>Long time on the field</b>	I officially started both data collections in April 2018, which lasted for around 2 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• M21S: from April 2018 until December 2019</li> <li>• OS: from April 2018 until summer 2020</li> </ul>
<b>Participant observation</b>	M21S: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included in roundtable and discussions</li> <li>• Member of the research circle</li> <li>• Presentation of my research insights to co-build the findings into M21S</li> </ul> OS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included in roundtable and small groups brainstorming</li> <li>• Member of a group working on the future of organizations focused on recognition in OS</li> <li>• Presentation of my research insights to co-build the findings with the OS community</li> <li>• Conducting a consulting mission with another active member from OS</li> <li>• Organizing a French Summit</li> </ul>
<b>Combination of data collection methods</b>	For both fields, I collected data using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation</li> <li>• Netnography</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Secondary data (documents)</li> </ul>

Ethnography offers the potential to explore the tacit, emotional and political dimensions of an organization (Nyberg & Delaney, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009) whereas these dimensions are often set aside in literature on open phenomena (e.g., Clegg, van Rijmenam, & Schweitzer, 2019;

Vaara, Rantakari, & Holstein, 2018). In particular, the purpose of ethnographic research is to ‘*make sense of organizational actors’ sensemaking*’ (Ybema et al., 2009, p.8) by focusing on symbolic language such as inspirational myths, on symbolic acts like practices, on symbolic objects and on their entanglement. The more I advanced in my readings on organizational openness and observations of M21S and OS, the more interested I got in providing a critical perspective to “*reveal the complexities underlying dominations, tensions, ambiguities, conflicts, constraints, or injustices*’ (Nyberg & Delaney, 2014, p.64) in allocation or access to organizational resources or processes in open organizing. The focalization of ethnographic methods on the symbolic, tacit and political aspects therefore appears as relevant to exploring the performativity of open values and especially the way they shape organizing decisions and contributors’ action as theorized in the present thesis. Compared to interpretative ethnographic approaches, critical ethnography aims to develop multivocality (Nyberg & Delaney, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009). This involves investigating the tensions and paradoxical phenomena that arise in such open organizing, such as the gap between discourse and practice, prescription and actual actions, and actors’ disagreement. As suggested by Nyberg & Delaney (2014), I mobilized this pluralism as an empirical basis for the critiques on openness I built in my thesis. Finally, what distinguished conventional from critical ethnography is its transformative purpose, as participant criticism might enable them to question ‘*what [the organization] could be*’ (Thomas, 1993, p. 4). This transformative aspect will be the source of the difficulties encountered during the fieldwork in OS, which are reported in [subsection IIId](#) of this chapter.

Relying on a critical ethnography involves epistemological choices that this paragraph aims to explicit. First, critical approaches follow a non-essentialist ontology (Mats Alvesson, 2008) that argues reality is not given but is produced through social interactions, processes, and discourses (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014; Avenier & Gavard-Perret, 2012). It means there is no such thing as universal truth or a given reality, and that even natural sciences are embedded in social context, which influences their topics of interest and interpretations. This paradigm thus recognizes the agency of actors, meaning their intentional dimension and power to shape social reality (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014; Avenier & Gavard-Perret, 2012). Secondly, knowledge is conceived as relative and situational (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014; Avenier & Gavard-Perret, 2012; Van Maanen, 2011).

The choice of a critical ethnography also entails several implications on the researcher stance vis-à-vis the field and the contributions produced (Nyberg & Delaney, 2014). First, my relationships with the fields have shown me that being a totally objective and therefore neutral

observer was impossible. In parallel, my rapport with critical approaches led me to reflect on the researcher/researched relationship, especially on the way the ethnographer should remain humble since the actors are the actual ‘experts’ of their lived experience (Ybema et al., 2009). Thus, the produced knowledge is the fruit of our collaboration: as a researcher, I bring a certain point of view influenced by my readings, while the actors bring the ‘material’ of which we then try to make sense. This caused me to reconsider my own meaning-making processes and reflect on the way I might have influenced the knowledge we produced together (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Jeanes & Huzzard, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009). In this line, reflexivity appears as a crucial focus of critical management studies (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Jeanes & Huzzard, 2014). This includes the mobilization of specific theoretical lenses as well as to question methodological choices and how the presence and stance of the researcher may have affected what happened of the field. In my thesis, I chose to address reflexively upon two main axes:

- how I navigated the different degrees of participation during the fieldworks and how my participant stance contributed to building my analysis ([this chapter section IIc](#)),
- what the difficulties I encountered during the different phases of my research were (this chapter sections [IIId](#) & [IIIc](#)).

#### b) Detailed data collection

As indicated in the preceding subsection, one of the key characteristics of ethnographic approach is to mix fieldwork methods ‘*to grasp complex organizational processes at their fullest*’ (Ybema et al., 2009, p.6). In other words, mixing data sources allows the ethnographer to triangulate and expand her / his data, meaning ‘*using multiple perspectives to understand a single phenomenon*’ (Rouse & Harrison, 2016, p.286). Rouse and Harrison (2016) argue the interest in supporting triangulation across a variety of sources but also across multiple temporal stances. In line with their argument, my thesis relies on longitudinal data that reflects various temporal stances. More specifically, I started both ethnographies in April 2018 and I collected data for 22 months in M21S (until December 2019) while being fully committed to OS until summer 2020 (28 months). In addition, I combined ‘real-time’ data from virtual and on-site ethnographies, and then prospective and retrospective information by collecting data from other sources such as interviews and documents (A. N. N. Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). The breakdown of the dataset of both studied cases is provided in table 8. Let us now further detail each collection method mobilized during the fieldwork.

**Table 8. Data set for M21S**

Data sources	Details	Data related to period
<b>M21S</b>		
<b>Participant observation</b>	Over 70 hours of meetings observed of which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 meeting to prepare the General Meeting</li> <li>• 1 one-day General Meeting (for 2017)</li> <li>• 4 one-day meetings of the GC (12/2018; 03/2019; 06/2019; 12/2019)</li> <li>• Dozens of circle meetings (average duration 2 hours) between April 2018 and June 2019</li> <li>• My experiment as a member of the Research Circle starting January 2019</li> </ul> Informal discussion during meeting days	2018-2019
<b>Interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 interviews averaging 90 minutes (André, Maëva and Caroline) entirely recorded and transcribed</li> </ul>	2018
<b>Netnography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being on the mailing list of the GC and the BizCom Circle starting April 2018 (around 50 emails)</li> <li>• Being a member of the Slacks channels starting January 2019 (around 5000 messages exchanged; mostly public)</li> </ul>	2018-2019
<b>Secondary data</b>	Access to the shared folders of M21S containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operating charters, legal status of the association</li> <li>• Meetings and General Meeting reports</li> <li>• Workshop reports (e.g., brainstorming of the new tagline)</li> </ul> M21S Website and official communication supports (newsletter)	2017-2019

**Table 9. Data set for OS**

Data sources	Details	Data related to period
<b>Ouishare</b>		
<b>Participant observation</b>	Around 195 hours of participant observation, of which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 French Summits and mini-summits (2018, 2019 and online 2020)</li> <li>• 10 workshops for preparing the Summits</li> <li>• 7 Steerco meetings</li> <li>• 7 meetings dedicated to business development</li> <li>• 8 work meetings on paid missions</li> <li>• Around 20 meetings about strategy, finances, and governance</li> </ul> Informal discussions and fieldnotes	2018-2020

<b>Interviews</b>	<p>33 interviews averaging 90 minutes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alonso (Spanish connector)</li> <li>• Adam (Canadian connector)</li> <li>• Axel (co-founder)</li> <li>• Augustin (former connector)</li> <li>• Bastien (co-founder)</li> <li>• Clémence (connector)</li> <li>• Colette (connector)</li> <li>• Cora (connector)</li> <li>• Dominik (German connector)</li> <li>• Delphine (office manager)</li> <li>• Elphege (co-founder)</li> <li>• Enas (connector)</li> <li>• Fanny (co-founder)</li> <li>• Flavia (x2) (connector)</li> <li>• Isadora (active member)</li> <li>• Juliette (connector)</li> <li>• Janice (connector)</li> <li>• Mathis (former connector)</li> <li>• Maëlys (x2) (connector)</li> <li>• Magalie (connector)</li> <li>• Sacha (connector)</li> <li>• Taj x2 (connector)</li> <li>• Valéry (former connector)</li> <li>• Youna (active member)</li> <li>• Jade (connector)</li> <li>• Emmanuel (x2) (former member)</li> <li>• Maxime (connector)</li> <li>• Jamy (connector and chairman)</li> <li>• Mégane (former connector)</li> </ul>	2012 – 2020
<b>Netnography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telegram channels (more than 30 collective channels)</li> <li>• Slack channels (258 channels)</li> <li>• Loomio (international connectors page, French connectors page, public pages)</li> <li>• Facebook Connectors private group created in January 2012</li> <li>• Online storage containing administrative and legal documents, project-related files, commercial propositions, resources for communication, work-in-progress documents (around 17Go) that were commented by actors and the log histories of which were available</li> </ul>	2018-2020 2015 2015-2020 2012-2016 2012-2020
<b>Secondary data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online storage containing administrative and legal documents, project-related files, commercial propositions, resources for communication, work-in-progress documents (around 17Go)</li> <li>• Websites and online archives of the website</li> <li>• Articles written by members of Ouishare Magazine and Medium</li> <li>• Online handbook</li> </ul>	2012-2020

### **In person and online observation**

First, in line with my ethnographic approach, I mostly mobilized participant observation.

As a participant observer, I organized and animated workshops, of which some aimed to present the progress of my research. During my observations, I took notes (Journé, 2008; Neyland,

2007) and particularly focused on transcribing discussions. When writing was too difficult, when I was animating the meeting for instance, I recorded the conversations with the agreement of the participants. My fieldnotes were interspersed with jottings (Emerson et al., 1995; Miles et al., 2014) that reveal my feelings and opinions when something happened during my observations. Additionally, I kept a reflexive diary (Neyland, 2007) in which I wrote my thoughts at the end of an observation day or after an informal discussion. I also took pictures (Neyland, 2007) during workshops to capture the spatial position of participants for instance, or when the actors worked on graphic representations. Regarding my research focus on open organizing, I mostly observed meetings the agenda of which was focused on organizing issues. Though, my inductive perspective also led me to attend meetings on topics not directly related to organizing issues (see table 10 below).

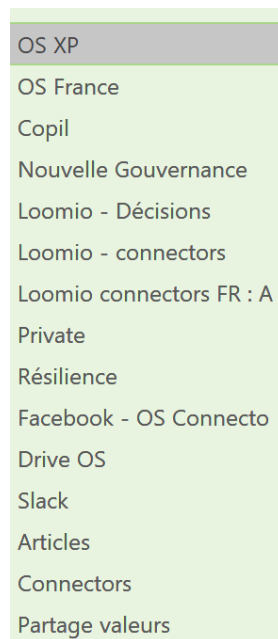
**Table 10. Summary of the observed issues**

	<b>M21S</b>	<b>OS</b>
<i>Organizing issues at the agenda</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GC meetings, during which topics related to the whole coordination of the association were addressed</li> <li>• General meeting + preparation</li> <li>• Development and communication circle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summits, during which strategic decisions were discussed</li> <li>• Organizing of the sales</li> <li>• Strategy formulation</li> <li>• Membership</li> <li>• Budget</li> <li>• Legal structure</li> <li>• Meetings dedicated to specific problems to solve</li> </ul>
<i>Issues not directly related to organizing issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plenary session</li> <li>• AssoConnect training</li> <li>• Research circle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR and community care topics</li> <li>• Studies of new forms of organizing</li> <li>• Project meetings</li> </ul>

Secondly, I completed my data collection using netnography (La Rocca, Mandelli, & Snehota, 2014), also called virtual ethnography (Neyland, 2007). The members of both M21S and OS live all over France and even the world, so they widely communicate using online tools, particularly within OS. By being added to email lists, to social media groups, to online tools such as Trello, and to instant messenger channels, I was able to follow discussions in real time. I could also access online documents that had been commented by the actors, which enabled me to access real time data from the past. I selected and gathered the data collected through netnography in organized OneNote files (see the example for OS on the picture 1 below). As for the rest of my fieldnotes, I added personal comments throughout the various conversations that I pasted in my documents.



**Picture 1. Organization of my netnographic notes**



## **Interviews**

I conducted the interviews based on a comprehensive approach (Kaufmann, 2011) to especially understand how actors of the field positioned themselves regarding the organizing issues they had collectively addressed. Comprehensive interviews are consistent with a critical perspective since the researcher is not considered as a neutral outsider. Following Kaufmann (2011), a reserved interviewer prevents the respondent from revealing herself / himself. He thus suggests for the researcher to be involved in interviews to facilitate a richer conversation. Accordingly, the interview guide is supposed to be as simple and malleable as possible, to be used only as support if the interviewer lacks self-confidence. Since I had a decent grasp of my research topic, which I had addressed through an inductive approach, I quickly stopped using an interview guide after my exploratory interviews. However, I loosely followed the same frame, I started by asking for the interviewee's journey within the organization, then we delved into specific events. If left unmentioned during an interview, I questioned the person about critical events (i.e., identified as significant by preceding interviewees or because I had experienced these events with the actors), as well as predefined topics, such as strategy. Regarding my posture as a comprehensive interviewer, I did not hesitate to share my own experience, being mindful that it fed the exchange, rather than steal the show (Kaufmann, 2011). I fully recorded each interview while also taking notes. Twenty-two out of thirty-five interviews were completely transcribed.

## **Secondary data**

I drew on secondary documents (meeting minutes, operating charters, official communications, etc). As Neyland (2007) notes, documentation provides '*a backdrop to observations, to analyse features of organizational identity and to follow ways in which particular bits of information are used in the day-to-day lives of organizations*' (p.121). Regarding my research, I was particularly interested in 'presentational data' that depicts the '*appearances that informants strive to maintain (or enhance)*' (Van Maanen 1979, p.542 quoted in Rouse & Harrison, 2016). Neyland (2007) warned about the challenges of documentary analysis. Namely, dealing with the large amount of information and considering how the documents were used by organizational members. I solved these difficulties by selecting my secondary data based on what was happening during my virtual and on-site ethnographies. Hence, I sought to mobilize the document in the same way as organizational members. Concretely, I read the documents that were published on instant messengers or on Facebook by the actors when they were related to organizing topics. Additionally, I paid attention to specific writings that had been suggested during informal discussions and interviews. Regarding the composition of this documentary material, it contained internal (meeting minutes, annual budgets, description of internal processes, etc), public (articles, website), and official (presentations for clients) documents at different levels of completion (drafts, in progress, or final version). This secondary data was mostly available in shared online storage, which granted access to the different versions of a document and displayed the modifications that had been made by specific authors. I supplemented this selection of documentary sources by researching specific topics or key events on the shared online spaces.

### **c) Participant observation, navigating between stances and roles**

Participation is a key element of ethnography. It especially relates to the transition from stranger to actual member of the organization studied, which thus '*offers a rich and meaningful method for gaining insight into the everyday life of organizations from the inside*' (Vesa & Vaara, 2014, p.290). My participant stance was a major topic of questioning throughout the fieldworks, which eventually revealed itself to be my own struggle. Specifically, I did not know what degree of participation would be accepted in M21S and OS and I did not want this to become an off-putting element, so I grasped to find the right degree of participation throughout the fieldwork. This appears as a common issue for critical ethnographers as indicated by Nyberg & Delaney (2014), since participant observation generally implies to cope with changes in stance and degrees of participation as well as to negotiate the roles of the ethnographer with the actors of

the field. The navigation between postures and roles *'is shaped by the conflicting expectations from the research participants, the 'gatekeepers' (often managers) who grant access, the nature of the work and workplace, the research institution you are part of, and you as a researcher'* (Nyberg & Delaney, 2014, p. 67). For authors, these interactions, which shape the ethnographer's behaviour on the field, are particularly interesting to analyse as they illustrate how the organization functions. In line with this suggestion, this subpart describes how I navigated between various degrees of participation during the fieldwork.

### **Navigating between participation and distance in M21S**

In M21S, participant observation was discussed briefly with André but not necessarily with other members. Yet, my participation seemed quite natural for them, as I was included in roundtables and discussions from the first meetings I attended onwards. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I felt free to participate in the debates and to give my opinion on the addressed topics. Quickly, I decided to play the 'incompetent' (Neyland, 2007), a strategy which consists in asking obvious questions regarding the situations experienced by the actors, to understand their positions. This information appears as key to grasping the transformative contribution of the critical researcher (Nyberg & Delaney, 2014). To do so, I made myself the spokesperson of absentees in meetings, particularly when their opinions differed from those of participants. I also asked 'obvious' questions based on mainstream management discourses to see if it challenged their open values. However, this provocative caused difficulties with the secretary of the association, Germaine, in summer 2018. She was not comfortable with me participating, although that did not change when I transitioned into a distant observer later.

These events led me to take a step back on my participating posture for a few months. André was a precious support during this period. He helped me relativize the situation by outlining that Germaine's personality was at play and that she was not shy about saying how she felt. Knowing the whole story now, I think her behaviour reflected the conflicted situation between her circle, the Western team, and the GC. Indeed, I had been introduced to M21S by André who was the chairman of the association and who had contributed to instigating the GC, yet as Neyland (2007) mentioned, *'entering the membership of an organization through connection with a particular member can carry significant connotations not necessarily welcomed by other members'* (p.84). Eventually, experiencing this malaise also enabled me to understand the norms that pressured M21S members. After these events, I decided to adopt a mixed posture during the GC meetings, I attended the discussion when they invited me to, and the rest of the time I positioned myself solely as an observer. However, even as in an observer stance, I

participated because I took notes for my thesis that I then sent the secretaries to fulfil their meeting minutes.

**Picture 2. Me taking a distant observer stance in GC meetings**



**Picture 3. Me being included in discussion circle during the general assembly**



My participation also relied upon joining the research circle. André mentioned his wish to create a research circle as early as April 2018 (when I officially joined M21S as an ethnographer). He associated this with me becoming an official member by paying the membership fees, a condition I had reservations towards. Specifically, it involved money and thus potential conflicts of interest regarding my expectations of M21S, both as a member and as a researcher. In addition, I was not comfortable with some of the management methods that were promoted by M21S because the members were questioning neither the assumptions behind these advocated organizational forms nor their promoted value. Besides, this malaise on membership registration helped me grasp the lack of critical thinking in M21S. André asked me to sign up several times over the next year, but I never did. The project of creating a research circle finally came to fruition in January 2019, when two other doctoral students, Emma and Aurèle, joined the association and agreed on launching the circle with André. Despite my reservations about becoming an official member of M21S, which I had shared with them, they still invited me as a participant to the first meetings of the Research circle, during which we decided how the circle would be organized. I then became a regular contributor of this circle, and this instance became a place where we could challenge the managerial innovations promoted by the association. This experience as a member allowed me to participate in debates about the opening of the research circle to decide who could attend the events and meetings we would organize.

In M21S, my participation also relied on sharing my thoughts and research analysis with the organizational actors. First, informal moments and relationships offered me opportunities to attend debates about the organizing. Particularly, at the end of meetings or during lunch breaks, I was included in debriefings of the meeting that had just ended to share my impressions. Then, I organized workshops to present my research project, some dedicated to the research circle, and others open to other members of the association. These spaces of dialogue were opportunities to collect supplementary data and to co-build the analysis of the experienced situations. Finally, I shared my immediate reactions and first analyses about M21S with André. He was both a ‘gatekeeper’, as in a member ‘*particularly useful in providing access to the group being studied*’ (Neyland, 2007b, p.16) and a ‘key informant’ since he ‘*provide[d] illuminating tales of the group under study and kn[e]w every member of the group*’ (Neyland, 2007b, p. 15). I particularly called upon him several times when I needed to put the pieces together. Eventually, I think our discussions helped us break down tough moments we had experienced together.

**Table 11. Summary of the stances adopted in M21S**

<p>April-July 2018 <b>Incompetent participant</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included in roundtables and discussions</li> <li>• Carrying the voice of absentees and playing the ‘incompetent’(Neyland, 2007) during meetings</li> </ul>
<p>Negative comments from Germaine on my participative stance</p>	
<p>July 2018-March 2019 <b>Distant observer</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking notes during meetings</li> </ul>
<p>Support from André as a gatekeeper and encouragement to participate</p>	
<p>March-Dec 2019 <b>Active participant</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking notes and participating during GC meeting</li> <li>• Regular participation in Research circle</li> <li>• Workshop to present my findings</li> </ul>

### **Becoming an active member of Ouishare**

I was immediately immersed into OS a few days only after validating this case for my doctoral thesis. I eased into the participant stance overtime using the opportunities that members offered me. During my first observations, the actors always asked about my thoughts at the end of meetings. I had the feeling that they were truly interested in my analysis, including one time when they recorded me to send my vocal feedback to the absentees. Soon, it became apparent that my presence as a researcher in the field contributed to the way they made sense of their actions. For instance, one of my first insights concerned the absence of a clear end in the decision-making process. Then, at the Summit in Marseille, Maëlys made a joke on this topic during a workshop, exchanging knowing looks with me.

Afterwards, I was able to easily enhance my participation through the trust I had developed with the actors. First, I quickly had the opportunity to attend informal moments with the members, over meals or drinks, even sharing a hostel room during the Marseille summit within the first month on the field. It allowed us to better know each other beyond a professional level. Similarly, one to one interviews provided bonding moments because people were sharing their analysis but also their personal feelings with me. Members regularly compared these sessions to therapy. Using a comprehensive approach (Kaufmann, 2011) allowed me to position myself as a listener but also as a participant since I could react and share my impressions with the interviewees, much like in conversation. For instance, when I interrogated an interviewee about a past event we had experienced together, I expressed how I had lived the situation. As another example, we sometimes finished the interviews by expressing our frustrations together or by

planning how we could solve the problems mentioned in our discussion. Another happy coincidence brought me closer to several members, since six of us who participated in the Steerco meeting<sup>29</sup> had babies in the same year. This event contributed to developing friendly relationships with those actors. Retrospectively, being perceived as a person and not only as a researcher helped me feel comfortable enough to get fully involved in a participative stance.

Having gotten to know OS members in the first few months, I gained enough confidence to share the critiques I had gathered. As in M21S, I was charged with taking notes when I attended meetings or workshops. As these were my research notes, they were sprinkled with my personal (sometimes sharp and to-the-point) jottings which I shared as is. At the end of 2018, I also organized presentations of my first order analysis, which focused on power relations within OS and particularly emphasized the gaps between the public discourse and the practices I had observed. I decided to start by sharing these results with a limited group, the ‘Steerco’, that gathered the most implicated and thus legitimate members according to the French community (i.e., the ‘gatekeepers’ who enable access to the field). I specifically wanted to know if they were comfortable with the idea of presenting these findings openly to the other members since these could have incriminated the Steerco actors regarding how they exercised their power and top position in this instance. Since they fully agreed, I presented my insights to the whole community during a participative workshop where members were invited to share their opinions to co-construct the analysis. This enabled me to nuance the findings by highlighting that actors were aware of their internal power struggles and the real consent they had regarding the Steerco endorsement even though it appeared as a form of closure. As an ethnographer, I perceived this exercise as ambivalent. On the one hand, I wanted to be consistent with a participant stance implying that I should be authentic when I shared my thoughts, be they critical or otherwise. On the other hand, I feared being excluded from the collective because I could have confronted the actors with a reality they did not want to talk about or justify. I will develop this specific difficulty of the fieldwork [in the next subsection](#).

In tandem, my degree of participation took a new turn. In Summer 2018, Jamy invited me to join a working group focused on the future of organizations. We aimed to produce articles on the topic and potentially work on consulting missions together. In addition, at the beginning of the school year 2018-2019, a connector named Maxime offered me to work on a consulting mission for OS<sup>30</sup> with Isadora, an active member. The project was to be paid by a French public

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<sup>29</sup> Short for steering committee translating from ‘Copil / comité de pilotage’

<sup>30</sup> OS was the beneficiary of the consulting mission.

administration called the ANACT<sup>31</sup>. Being offered a remunerated assignment appeared as the social recognition of a certain level of implication within the community. After the connectors had approved this suggestion, Isadora and I proposed several angles to work on, among which the members chose to focus on recognizing practices. This mission ran from October 2018 to April 2021 with ups and downs that enabled me to experience what the members involved in OS lived and felt. More specifically, I was frustrated with the lack of commitment from members whereas I was committed to delivering quality work in the allotted time.

I also organized the French Summit 2019 in Rouen with two connectors, Colette and Magalie. Colette and I launched the initiative after she suggested it briefly at the end of our interview. We mutually agreed upon the task distribution. I oversaw budgeting and then booking the accommodations. In addition to logistical management, I contributed to designing the program and to animating pre-workshop sessions on strategy with Taj and on sociocracy with Maxime, an organizing model the Steerco had suggested be implemented in OS. Here, I experienced other aspects of what it meant to be a member of the community. Particularly I found myself in the position that I had denounced a few months earlier, as a member of an informal oligarchy whose purpose was to convince the community to accept a sociocratic governance and to push them to work on a new strategic direction because I believed it was the best solution for the organization. Having access to information thanks to my observations and working with very implicated and legitimate members (especially Taj and Maxime), I was truly in a position of power. I started making phone calls to debrief meetings, to try to find a way to prevent individuals from doing something that could make our project fail. Even if I limited my



**Picture 4. Me presenting the proposition of sociocratic governance during the Summit**

participation in the standstill phases of the decision-making processes, I felt like I was scheming. It was neither inclusive nor transparent although our goal was to achieve a more participative and transparent organizing. Being in this position helped me understand what the motivations of actors engaged in these ‘backstage arrangements’ (e.g., Ringel, 2019) could be and enabled me to tend towards more empathy in my relationship

<sup>31</sup> Agence Nationale pour l’Amélioration des Conditions de Travail



with the field. At the end, the work on strategy failed but the sociocratic governance was validated by the community during the Summit. Finally, in April 2019, I was simultaneously a researcher and an active member of OS to the point that a connector told me she would endorse me if I wanted to become a connector. In sum, my experience as an active member of OS helped me better grasp the experience of the actors engaged and thus to be more empathetic towards how they acted and reacted in different situations.

**Table 12. Summary of the stances adopted in OS**

<p>April-July 2018 <b>Observer participant</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included in roundtables and discussions</li> <li>• Invited to the Summit in Marseille</li> <li>• Comprehensive interviews</li> </ul>
<p>Invitation from Jamy and Maxime to deepen implication in OS</p>	
<p>July 2018-March 2019 <b>Active member</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member of the working group on the future of organizations (invitation from Jamy)</li> <li>• Consulting mission on recognition (proposition from Maxime)</li> <li>• Workshop to present my findings</li> <li>• Comprehensive interviews</li> <li>• Informal relationship with very implicated connectors</li> </ul>
<p>Invitation from Colette to organize the 2019 Summit with her</p>	
<p>March 2019-Summer 2020 <b>Very active member</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization of the 2019 Summit in Rouen and various related workshops</li> <li>• Consulting mission on recognition</li> <li>• Informal relationship with very implicated connectors</li> </ul>

d) Difficulties during the fieldwork

**Disparities in data collection**

The first difficulty encountered occurred quickly after I started the fieldwork, related in nature to the disparities between M21S and OS in terms of quantity of data collected. As I already explained, I was immediately immersed in OS by being invited to the French Summit and several organizing meetings in the first two weeks within the community. In Summer 2018, my data set was composed of 10 interviews and around 30 hours of relevant observation regarding my research interests on organizing issues. In contrast, M21S seemed like a less dynamic association, a one-day workshop on the *raison d'être* initially planned in April had been

cancelled, and I could not attend the GC meeting organized at the end of May 2018. Consequently, for the same period of 4 months in M21S, I could only observe the following meetings:

- 2 half-days training sessions on a software to manage membership and newsletters, even though it was a less formal way to meet with the members, the data collected was not very useful;
- a two-hour session to prepare the general meeting;
- a one-day plenary meeting organized by the Western Team, in which half of the time was dedicated to conferences performed by guests.

Although it relied on the same amount of observation hours (around 30), half of the data collected in M21S was unrelated to my research focus on open organizing. Furthermore, after the 2018 summer holiday, the gap between M21S and OS regarding their level of activity became more pronounced and raised several questions about my fieldwork: was it worth it to keep on collecting data in M21S? how could I use the data collected in my thesis? I shared these doubts during a doctoral workshop and was reassured by the reviewer feedback, which encouraged me to focalize each one of my future thesis essays on a specific ethnography.

While it might be affected by the greater amount of time spent with them, I felt closer to OS members than M21S actors, a difficulty that appears as familiar for ethnographers (Nyberg & Delaney, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009). More specifically with OS members, we shared very similar backgrounds: we came from middle classes, had common professional past experiences, shared political opinions, and were around the same age. In contrast, most of M21S member could have been my parents and I sometimes felt as if I was considered as a ‘young lady’ in a benevolent way. This feeling was strengthened by the overbearing behaviours I observed from some M21S actors towards a female member in her thirties. I also felt welcomed in the OS community while the criticism on my researcher stance from Germaine in M21S slowed me in my tracks. It should be said that OS actors were used to welcoming scholars and students for research projects whereas it was not the case in M21S. This hardship bonding with M21S participants (except for André) was also reinforced by the difficulties in scheduling interviews with them, since they did not answer my emails, nor could I see them in person without a scheduled meeting. Though I sometimes experienced discomfort in M21S, the hindrance in developing closeness with M21S members still intrigued me, which led me to continue data collection despite it all. This will especially enable me to characterize the organizational

necrosis in the second essay of this thesis, to highlight how radical openness can lead to paralyze initiative and decision-making in an open organizing context.

### **Coping with a constant fear of exclusion**

The second difficulty I experienced lied in the constant fear of exclusion from the fields because this would jeopardize the success of my doctoral thesis. These types of insecurities appear as particularly commonplace for critical ethnographers (Nyberg & Delaney, 2014, p. 68):

*‘Critical research generally aims to ‘disrupt ongoing social reality for the sake of providing impulses to the liberation from or resistance to what dominates and leads to constraints in human decision making’ (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 1). [...] Critical researchers are dependent on the people in positions of power to gain access.’*

My anxiety was fuelled by stories of social exclusion I heard during interviews and behaviors I observed towards specific members who disregarded by the rest of the group. In addition to potential negative reactions of gatekeepers (i.e., people who grant the ethnographer access to the field), I also worried about social exclusion by the other members. My concerns were especially prevalent when I shared my findings both in M21S and OS, yet as recommended by Spicer et al. (2009), I had informed the actors of my critical approach. This quote from Ybema et al. (2009) rightly described the apprehension I experienced before my presentations:

*‘To organizational members, descriptions of routine, taken-for-granted ways of thinking and acting can often be both familiar and surprising, and even confronting, as they see themselves through someone else’s eyes. In revealing otherwise covert aspects of organizational life, ethnographies may at times even fly in the face of what organizational actors would like to hear or read about themselves and their organizations.’ (Ybema et al., 2009, p.7)*

In both studied cases, my critical analysis emphasized organization taboos, or at least what they called in OS ‘the elephant in the room’ such as power and domination between members when they advocated horizontality and distributed leadership. My findings also questioned how the discourses on open values fit the implemented practices of openness. They particularly highlighted the ‘dark sides’ of these promoted values, such as the feeling of injustice experienced by members or the reality of control mechanisms they were precisely trying to escape.

To overcome my anxiety, I implemented several strategies. First, before the official presentations, I tested my findings with some actors individually to see how they reacted and whether my propositions sounded relevant. I also headed all my presentations with a disclaimer

introducing critical management studies to explain that my stance as a researcher was not neutral and could possibly clash with their personal opinions. I presented my analysis to the actors of the fields using great tact as well as quotations to deliver especially tough messages. Finally, I drew upon humor to de-dramatize the presented analysis. These strategies seemed to pay off, as the actors of M21S and OS reacted positively to my presentations and brought up questions and comments. Above all, the actors confirmed that the findings were coherent with their experience while providing further explanations to enrich the analysis. These situations also highlighted how both organizations followed the principles of open communication ([see section Ib in this chapter](#)), as I was enabled and even encouraged to fully disclose my critiques.

### **Dealing with stance ambiguities**

My anxiety about exclusion was also related to my doubts regarding the appropriate degree of participation during the fieldwork. At one point, I considered the possibility that the adoption of a participant stance might be a deterrent for actors. Neither M21S nor OS ever clearly formulated whether they had expectations regarding my research, so I kept wondering about the legitimacy of my stance. Former members of OS were the only ones to encourage me to reveal the power struggles, as well as their unhealthy and ungrateful effects to newcomers. Especially because these issues remained silent in members' public discourse about the organization.

Additionally, participant observation entailed to oscillate between two roles, as a distant researcher and as an active participant. As Van Maanen (2011) wrote, participant-observation designates '*a rather stock if oxymoronic phrase that indexes one of the most impressive ways yet invented to make ourselves uncomfortable*' (p. 219). This malaise is frequently addressed in the literature on ethnography (e.g., Neyland, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009). However, the solution '*is not reducible to a physical sense of being in the field at some times and out of the field at other times*' (Neyland, 2007, p.81). When I was on the field, the oscillation between my two roles made me constantly wonder about the consideration of actors (do they consider me as a researcher or as a participant right now?) and my own stance (do I consider myself as a researcher or as a participant in that moment?). To answer these questions, I tried to implement spacetime compartmentalizing techniques, to focus on one identity at a time. While it worked well in M21S since I adopted a specific stance depending on the circle, it was not a success in OS because the organizing was more fluid, which made splitting both roles more challenging.

Beyond that, I encountered conflicting situations regarding my participation in both fields. In M21S, Germaine criticized me for too frequently calling to add the topic of *raison d'être* to the

general meeting's agenda because '*it ruins the atmosphere*', where my goal was to carry the voice of the members who could not attend. A few weeks later, during the plenary session, the participants were divided in subgroups, and it so happened I had to observe Germaine's. I was standing next to the group whose members were already sat, I was writing the instructions for the exercise in my notebook before sitting, when Germaine told me that I made her uncomfortable with my '*overbearing*' standing position. As for OS, after the Summit in Rouen in April 2019, Sacha told me that it would be better if we strictly framed my participation in OS. According to him, I used information, which I accessed by attending the Steerco meetings in the context of my thesis, to change OS's governance. To solve these conflicts, I called upon other members of the organizations to play the role of mediators. In M21S, André did it on an informal basis by telling me that it was not the first time Germaine acted conflictual with another member of the association. In the case of OS, Sacha and I both agreed that I had to consult the 'Water working group', in charge of HR and looking after the community, on the eventual necessity to frame my rights and duties regarding the fieldwork. The Water working group's members answered that they had not noted any problem with my stance and actions and conversely, they were glad for my involvement in the organization of the Summit and in governance topics.

However, added to my apprehension of exclusion, these events had consequences on my stance as a participant within both organizations. As I noted several times in this methodological chapter, I was in a state of passivity towards the fields, I settled for taking opportunities to participate rather than creating them myself. Furthermore, I always limited myself regarding my involvement, by refusing formal membership or by making it a point not to take part in formal decision-making processes. Therefore, I maintained an ambivalent relationship vis-à-vis the cases, between my will to act as a true member following the principles of ethnography and my own limitations.

### **III. FROM RAW DATA TO AN ESSAYS-BASED THESIS**

This third section describes the last phase of the methodology, the problematization process, meaning how the research questions of the three essays composing my thesis emerged. Following my inductive approach, problematization began during the fieldwork and continued until the writing stage. This 'headwork' (Van Maanen, 2011) was an iterative process based on a variety of techniques to achieve theorization from the empirical data (Locke, Feldman, &

Golden-Biddle, 2020). It should also be noted that this process has shaped both the content and the format of my doctoral research. More specifically, the first subsection highlights how my field experience contributed to the problematization processes of both the thesis and essays. In the second subsection, I describe the methods used to analyse the data. Finally, I report the difficulties I met during this last step of analysis in the third subpart.

a) Problematizing from the field

Miles et al. (2014) recommend starting the analysis along with the fieldwork to '*cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data*' (p.78). This first step was especially critical for my thesis work since I adopted an inductive approach that consists in drawing out the research questions from the fieldwork. In this subsection, I depict how I started problematizing from the fields.

First, the conceptual proposition I put forth, to conceive openness as a set of values, quickly aroused from the fieldwork as making decisions collectively, sharing greater information, protecting individuals' autonomy, which were all critical topics both in M21S and OS. The formalized values of these organizations were also very similar to the open principles (i.e., participation, transparency, individual freedom) and were regularly brandished during debates and interviews as an ideal to embody, or at least to reach towards. Compared to my previous professional experiences, I was surprised by the many extended discussions and reconsiderations of already made decisions about the organizing, which was common to both organizations. However, there were also numerous examples illustrating how the actors were struggling to enact these values of openness. Examples such as backstage agreements, or even what could appear as attempts of manipulation. This raised questions over the performativity of these open principles and the difficulties associated with their application.

The importance of events and their sequences for actors led me to further examine the dimension of temporality. During meetings or interviews, the actors from M21S and OS drew my attention on specific events they had experienced in their organization that had played a critical role in their organizing journey. These moments were always related to opening issues (e.g., the general meeting in M21S during which the founder was accused of authoritarianism that led to the adoption of a more open governance; the Calvanico Summit in OS, where members blamed the Parisian division for keeping the money they earned for their local community, which launched the creation of a fully participative investment process). This

brought me to focalize on temporality and the entanglement of events during which the open organizing of these associations was challenged or modified significantly in the members' view. These points of vigilance were identified in my fieldnotes using inductive codes (Miles et al., 2014; Neyland, 2007). Furthermore, I experienced critical events with the actors during my observations, such as the validation of the Steerco in the OS Summit (i.e., an event especially scrutinized in the third essay) or the general assembly for 2017 in M21S (i.e., a situation mobilized in the second paper to highlight the necrosing character of radical openness). I qualify these moments as critical because I knew they would influence the history of these organizations when they occurred. When these critical events had been formally planned, the actors were apprehensive about the upcoming discussions, and when these meetings were taking place, I could feel the tense atmosphere during debates. As already mentioned, these critical events had become topics discussed during my interviews and helped me identify the relevant person to be interviewed next or additional instances that I might observe. The importance of occurred events for actors led me to investigate how these situations might be intertwined to understand how the open values respectively affected the organizing of M21S and OS overtime.

As involved by my inductive approach, the events and tensions from the fields contributed to generate the research questions addressed in my thesis. Even if theoretical, the first paper entitled 'For (re)politicizing openness' emerged from the fieldwork conducted with OS. Especially, I observed how actors were struggling with contradictions and dilemmas that have been examined in the literature on open phenomena (e.g., Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2017). In OS, these tensions appeared as especially related to the beliefs and meaning that actors associated with openness, which interrogates the origin of these similar assumptions on the open that have been found in different open experiences. Furthermore, how the members of OS were attempting to cope with these dilemmas relied on internal power issues. This last consideration put the emphasis on the need to bring power back into openness scholarship. Then, my participating stance allowed me to experience the dark side of open organizing in M21S through the adoption of behavioural strategies such as playing the 'incompetent' (Neyland, 2007). For the second essay, entitled '*Organizational necrosis: how radical openness can threaten the organization*', my starting point was the feeling of discomfort that I felt regarding the values of openness that were regularly brandished as an ideal to reach without being questioned by members. This raises question on the paralysing effect of radical openness as an ideology. These two essays thus particularly provide insight on the performative character

of the open principles. Finally, the last paper emerged from the numerous changes that occurred in the organizing of OS, and especially the cyclical character of the dynamics towards more openness or closure in the organizing processes. As the organizing topic appeared as an old chestnut for the actors, these ongoing changes led me to investigate what their instigating mechanisms were. With my co-authors, this brought us to identify the recurrent topics of organizing as related to sensemaking issues about the contextual meaning of openness. This third paper therefore highlights how openness acts in the organization and specifically how the members endure as an open organizing form.

To be able to identify these inductive issues, I had to take a step back from what occurred on the fields. To do so, I combined sequences of data collection and phases of analytical work during which I was spatially away from the fields, at my desk, to gain hindsight from what was happening in the organizations. The next subsection particularly focuses on those steps of analytical work outside M21S and OS. These periods away from the cases studied also made the essays-based format of this thesis emerge inductively. More specifically, the idea of this particular format resulted from the first analysis completed in Summer 2018 as I identified three preliminary findings that I wanted to further investigate. The ensuing thesis structure was presented in doctoral workshops. The feedback received from the reviewers helped me strengthen the links between the different papers. Developing the essays then required to engage in new stages of analysis to identify the research questions for each one, which has brought out the global problematic of this thesis.

#### b) Data analysis

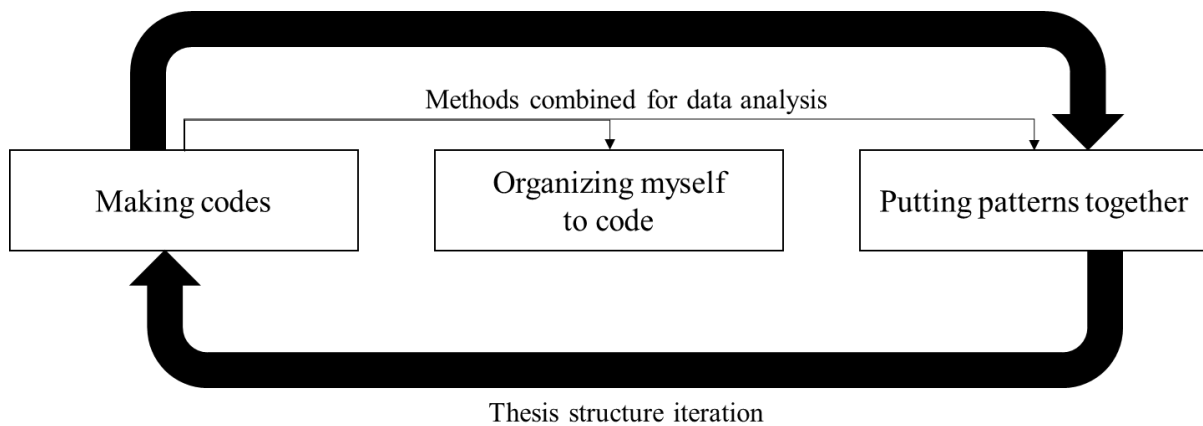
The current subsection describes the different methods used to analyse the empirical material, develop the thesis structure and identify the focus of the empirical essays (i.e., papers 2 and 3). The specific analysis processes conducted for the papers 2 and 3, which are explicated in the respective methodological sections of these papers, contributed to better specify the general research question of this thesis. In particular, the essays-based format led me to engage in several cycles of analysing that have made the global structure of this thesis evolve as illustrated in figure 7 below.

These sequential analytical phases have fuelled each other as *'iteration often takes place through the active work of pursuing the questions and noticing that arise in and from this analytic work with yet more analytic actions'* (Locke, Feldman, & Golden-Biddle, 2020, p.2).



The three parts of this subsection are especially built on the steps highlighted in the article from Locke, Feldman, & Golden-Biddle (2020), which are (1) making codes, (2) organizing to code, and (3) putting patterns together.

**Figure 8. Combined methods for an iterative thesis structure evolution**



### **Making codes**

In line with my inductive approach, ‘making codes’ (Locke et al., 2020) started as soon as I entered the fields using inductive codes (Miles et al., 2014) and jottings (Emerson et al., 1995). However, to capture the big picture and to better understand the organizing and cultures of both studied organizations, coding required to be more systematic. As mentioned in the preceding subsection, I combined inductive coding with phases of coding away from the fields to be able to gain hindsight from the empirical settings. For instance, coding the data ‘at my desk’ in July 2018 made the first global structure version of my thesis emerge and helped me get an idea over the topics I wanted to further scrutinize and the data sources I should use when I engaged in the data analysis for the thesis papers.

In particular, to conduct a more systematic coding work, I applied inductive codes from the fieldwork (Miles et al., 2014) plus open codes that emerged from the analysis to describe the practices, the processes, the management tools, the tensions and the emotions experienced by actors. These codes were used first to cover interviews since these offered a condensed view on the history and organizing of both fields. Then, I coded the fieldnotes taken during critical events experienced in ‘real time’ to expand my data (Rouse & Harrison, 2016). To do so, I used the software Nvivo to easily develop the code in tandem with the analysis, since ‘*researchers with start lists know that codes will change*’ (Miles et al., 2014, p.86). In particular, I follow Locke, Feldman, & Golden-Biddle (2020) according to which codes are ‘*provisional analytic objects constituted relationally*’ (p.4). This means that codes will be modified depending on the

progression of the researcher's thoughts, writing activities and discussions with other scholars or with the actors of the field, and the evolution of my thesis structure as well as the associated research questions have clearly followed this path.

### **Organizing myself to code: writing, discussing and reading**

To organize myself to code, I relied on other analytical actions based on (1) writing, (2) discussing, and (3) reading to further tighten my analytical focus when it seemed to be held back by coding techniques at times.

Let us begin with writing. As Neyland (2007) noted '*ethnography involves analysis through writing to a much greater degree*' (p.130). In other words, ethnographic redaction is required to go deeper in theorization. To further my analysis, I particularly wrote analytic memos that are defined as '*a brief or extended narrative that documents the researcher's reflections and thinking processes about the data*' (Miles et al., 2014, p.97). These narratives allowed me to synthesize the data to better characterize the phenomena that emerged from the codes and their relations. Moreover, writing helped me include the temporal dimensions in my analysis since coding generally provides a too static vision of what happened on the fields. I especially drew on two actions: making timelines to rebuild the history and using an event-based method (Hussenot, Bouty, & Hernes, 2019; Hussenot & Missonier, 2016). To bring the temporal dimensions, I relied on interviews to identify the critical events experienced by the actors, as well as the actions that led to these critical events and the future those shaped. Then, I combined these member interpretations to on-site and netnographic observations to expand the data. Writing timelines was the easiest part of the exercise, because even though it required an archaeological work in online archives, it was mostly based on objective facts such as changing the instant messenger software in OS. On the basis of these timelines, I established the structure of events (Hussenot et al., 2019) to '*show the continuous evolution of the structure of events through the current events*' (Hussenot et al., 2019, p.137, my translation). In other words, this work consisted in reflecting how the actors constantly translated, negotiated and redefined the situations they had experienced.

Discussions with informants (Neyland, 2007; Trefalt & Besharov, 2016; Ybema et al., 2009) and with other scholars (Trefalt & Besharov, 2016) also fuelled my analysis. As I previously mentioned, my critical approach led me to consider members of both fields as co-builders of the analysis, and this is the reason why I requested their feedback several times during the data analyses. It was significant that they could recognize their experience in the ethnographic studies I was writing, which meant that I was transcribing their reality correctly. The written

analytic memos thus served as support to invite questions and comments from actors during formal presentations within OS, and during informal interviews with André. These conversations also brought new insight, such as the empathetic position of the members of OS towards their informal leaders.

Moreover, exchanging with and consulting other scholars is fundamental for inductive researchers to help with the analysis or with the analysing process itself (Trefalt & Besharov, 2016). It provides the required social support because *'developing a qualitative paper can feel very lonely and emotionally taxing'* (Trefalt & Besharov, 2016, p.402). First, the various versions of my doctoral project and of its essays have been discussed with my supervisor (we planned meetings around 2 or 3 times a year). I also seized the opportunity to present my work-in-progress to invited teachers who were experts of the empirical objects I studied or on the theoretical perspectives I was considering mobilizing for my papers. These dialogues allowed me to identify the relevancy in the data through external perspectives on the stories of the fields and to gain hindsight on sources of frustration throughout my immersion in M21S and OS. Additionally, these meetings allowed me to move away from some theoretical perspectives I had started to mobilize without achieving conclusive results.

Finally, as I opted for an inductive approach, I reached into the literature parallel to the fieldwork. Reading helped in data sampling and identifying the sources to code, as well as the events especially relevant to my research questions. I used jottings (Emerson et al., 1995) in my reading notes, as *'fleeting and emergent reflections and commentary'* (M. B. Miles et al., 2014, p.96), to link the concepts of the literature to the empirical data. These jottings were also spread through my fieldnotes to highlight issues that might require further attention. In sum, reading contributed to the analysing process by helping identify the right theoretical lens to use and the relevant angle to contribute to open organizing scholarship (Locke et al., 2020). The evolution of my papers' research questions obviously affected the general problematic that my thesis intends to answer as well as its global structure (see table 13 below).

**Table 13. The analysing process of the thesis**

Period	General research question	Essays
<b>Summer 2018</b>	What are the power and resistance dynamics in democratic organizations?	<u>3 empirical articles</u> 1) Degeneration and regeneration of democratic organizations 2) Social regulation in democracy-based organizations 3) Control as an organizational taboo in democracy-based organizations
<b>June 2020</b>	Open organizing as a contemporary form of organizational democracy?	<u>3 empirical articles</u> 1) Open from the start: organizing through reflexivity and instability > How opening is enacted? 2) Autopsy of Organizational Necrosis: Positive Thinking in Open organizing > how can positive thinking harm the organization? 3) Towards fair value-sharing: commensuration of contributions in open organizing
<b>June 2021</b>	How do actors manage the dualities of open organizing?	<u>1 theoretical and 2 empirical papers</u> 1) What are the ideological tensions inherited from the successive conceptions of openness? 2) How do actors make sense and enact openness as an identity-based principle? 3) How does positive ideology hinder actors to address the tensions of open organizing?
<b>April 2022</b>	How does openness, as a set of values, act in the organization and shape action?	<u>1 theoretical and 2 empirical papers</u> 1) What are the divergent ideological assumptions behind the concept of openness? 2) How can an open organizing fail to address the/its inherent tensions (of openness)? 3) How do actors enact radical openness over time?

### Putting patterns together

The third step of the analysing process consists in ‘putting patterns together’ (Locke et al., 2020) that is how the patterns from coding and other mobilized analysis techniques can be understood and can interest organization scholars. It represents the core of the theorizing process when the contributions start to become clear to the researcher. During the first two years of my thesis, I had difficulties reaching this patterns phase despite writing and rewriting my papers. Taking a step back from the empirical data in favour of greater abstraction was especially difficult. I experienced what established researchers present as ‘bricolage’, which

really fit with the iterative process I went through. To overcome these difficulties, the activities described in the previous paragraphs (writing, discussing and reading) contributed to adjust my codes list by adding codes, removing others, renaming them, creating categories, etc. Then, I worked on defining each code and category (Miles et al., 2014), which helped me transform these patterns into theoretical concepts. Reading the existing literature at this stage also allowed me to make sense of situations informed by the data. Discussions with informants and the research community were also predominant activities. Again, as I wanted to be sure that the proposed theorization fit the experience of the actors, I organized participative restitutions with voluntary participants to present my papers, which pushed the proposed analysis further. The better characterization of the theoretical contributions of my essays made the global research question of my thesis evolve as illustrated in table 13 above-mentioned.

The other challenge of theorizing was identifying the right way to format the data to make it clearer and more convincing. On this topic, using the work of Spradley, Neyland (2007) notes:

*‘Ethnographic argumentation involves ethnographers using the particular to illustrate the general. That is, through building up a specific series of observational incidents, ethnographers can then produce a broader argument about the type of activity that is being presented.’* (p.127)

**Table 14. Summary of my thesis presentations**

<b>Global thesis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-defense (summer 2021)</li> </ul>
<b>Thesis introductive literature review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MOST seminar (April 2022)</li> </ul>
<b>For (re)politicizing openness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MOST seminar (April 2021)</li> <li>• PDW Business &amp; Society (July 2021)</li> <li>• PDW Organization Theory (February 2021)</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational necrosis: how radical openness can threaten the organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MOST seminar (March 2020)</li> <li>• M21S (May 2020)</li> <li>• AIMS 2020</li> <li>• Friendly reviews</li> <li>• Submitted to M@n@gement in March 2021, currently in the 3<sup>rd</sup> revision round</li> </ul>
<b>“We are open”: making sense of identity-based openness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MOST seminar (March 2019)</li> <li>• Ethnography Workshop 2019</li> <li>• Friendly reviews</li> <li>• M21S research circle (May 2019)</li> <li>• EGOS 2019 &amp; 2020 (revised version)</li> <li>• PROS 2020</li> <li>• PSB research seminar (October 2020)</li> </ul>

To find the most relevant forms to introduce my findings, I had to write and rewrite them several times. The best way to assess if a version was limpid and plausible was to present it during MOST seminars, in the research circle of M21S and during academic conferences. The detailed lists of essays' presentation I performed throughout my thesis journey is informed in table 14 above-mentioned. Additionally, I did not hesitate to ask for friendly reviews from more experienced researchers. Based on this feedback and the one from reviewers of M@n@gement, to whom I sent the second paper, I have rewritten each paper several times.

c) Difficulties during the analysis

**Dealing with emotional attachment to the field**

The main challenge I had to face in the problematizing and analysing processes was dealing with my own expectations and emotions. When I started the fieldwork, I mainly envisioned the open attribute as a continuum between openness and closure as described in the literature (Whittington et al., 2011). Seen so, domination and unequal power relations were not associated with the 'best practices' of organizational openness. However, ethnography allowed me to grasp openness in the complexity of social situations as noted by Ybema et al. (2009, p.191):

*'Participant observation may become participant intervention. In finding a problem, we wish to fix it. Identifying with our informants we take their side (Barnes, 1979: 171): to protect them from harm and make everything right. As a result, qualitative evaluation research, like all evaluation research, is contaminated by the perspective of the researcher and by the emotions that arise in the field.'*

Particularly, my data revealed that open organizing has put some members through situations of pain, and I felt that while these problems were acknowledged, they were not being addressed by the organizations. Furthermore, members of both fields used the word '*hypocrisy*' to describe their open values during our interviews. I thus started to develop ambivalent feelings towards the two organizations I was studying, and especially for OS. I was torn between the will to help them truly embody their open values and the disappointment of discovering such a reality. I also expected the analysis we had co-built with the members to lead the organization towards change and I was thus very frustrated that did not occur, at least not immediately.

In addition, when Sacha talked to me about framing my implication as a researcher, he said that I had not proven myself as a member of the community, that I had not been involved enough to use the information I gathered during Steerco meetings to affect the governance of OS. At this

moment, I felt particularly frustrated since I had just organized the French annual summit on a volunteer basis. These hard feelings made the fieldwork difficult to handle emotionally, I was upset at each end of meeting or when I read online discussions. In sum, I oscillated between negative evaluations and cynicism regarding both cases, which was noticed by my supervisor and by certain actors of the studied cases. These emotions were a problem for my analytical work because they made it difficult to distance myself from these experiences. Retrospectively, while cynicism could have been the result of my frustration, I think it was rather a way to distance myself from the fields. These difficulties to take a step back from the organizations studied are frequently experienced by ethnographers that *'find themselves unable to consistently sustain a watching, distancing stance toward people they are drawn to and toward events that compellingly involve them'* (Emerson et al., 1995, p.201).



**Picture 5. Summit observations with my daughter**

In the end, my success in distancing myself from M21S and OS came on its own. First, even if I kept on observing meetings after having had my baby (I even took my daughter to a Summit as illustrated in picture 5, I had to cope with the reality of taking care of a newborn. During my maternity leave, I fostered online observation, which took me away from the people in both organizations. Then, the first covid-19

lockdown quickly occurred, and I had to combine my research and teaching tasks while looking after a 6-month-old baby. This took up most of my time, and the observation took a step back. The lockdown period also affected the number of hours I could assign to my research, whereby in Summer and fall 2020 I attempted to catch up on this time by focusing on writing. Ultimately, it took me a year to clearly be able to say I had created distance from the fieldwork, but as Neyland (2007) wrote:

*'Stepping out of the organization [...] can provide a means of reflecting on who members are, what they are doing and how the ethnographer themselves is successfully cultivating a membership identity.'* (p.81)

Taking a step back from the studied organizations allowed me to get rid of my negative affect, which has contributed to producing a better analysis. I tried to swap negative judgment for a

more empathetic understanding of the actors' situations. Some of the techniques described in [subsection IIIc of this chapter](#), particularly discussing with researchers and writing, helped me consider the experiences of members in positions of power as well as the experienced situations of people who appeared less powerful in M21S and OS.

### **The challenges of the essays-based format**

Choosing an essays-based thesis was not an obvious and easy decision to make. It implied a greater amount of work since I had to conduct different analysis and to read specific literature for each paper. This format also provides its own challenges, on the one hand identifying consistent, complementary yet nonredundant research questions, on the other hand finding the unifying thread that would tie the essays together. I think my inductive approach was an asset in overcoming these challenges, since the design of my multiple ethnographies was loose, it was easier to cope with potential changes. Moreover, the wide data collection induced by my ethnographic approach provided the possibility to investigate numerous research issues, beyond just the three explored in this thesis.

Writing research papers has also been a challenging exercise that required discipline regarding how and what to write, how to cope with the specific constraints of the format (i.e., the limited number of signs and the focus on precise contributions). To succeed in this activity, reading methodology books can help but it is not enough. As far as I am concerned, I learnt a lot practicing scientific writing. In addition, this format allowed me to manage the institutional pressure experienced by PhD students, since we are asked for a doctoral dissertation all the while submitting articles to candidate for assistant professor positions.





# **CHAPTER 3 - ESSAY 1**

## **For (re)politicizing organizational openness**

### **Evolution of the essay**

This essay was presented:

- at the MOST research team seminar in April 2021
- at the PDW for the special issue of Business & society on '[\*Stakeholders engagement: opening up participation, inclusion and democracy\*](#)' in July 2021
- at the PDW for Organization Theory in February 2022

This paper aims for publication in the theoretical journal 'Organization Theory'.

### **How this essay contributes to answering the general research question of my thesis**

This theoretical paper, based on an integrative review, argues the need to bring politics back into the open organizing literature. More specifically, I examine which political assumptions the concept of organizational openness has been associated with. This research reveals that openness associates two divergent conceptions of open organizing under one notion, mobilizing either an emancipatory project or a managerial technique to enhance performance. This essay provides a two-fold contribution to answering the general research question of my thesis which investigates how openness, as a set of values, shapes action and behaves in the organization. First, the competing assumptions contained within the concept of openness seem to make empirical tensions arise, in which desires for emancipation and for organizational efficiency conflict. This means that being engaged in open organizing requires for organizational members to address emerging conceptual tensions to then be able to produce collective action. Therefore, openness shapes actions in a way that might not satisfy all the engaged stakeholders' expectations.

Secondly, I draw attention to several points, some of which I further explore in the empirical papers of this thesis, in particular to re-integrate the emancipatory dimension of openness by questioning the utopian possibilities of open organizing as well as its potential deviations (essay 2); and how the conceptual tensions, as dualities, are addressed in everyday practices by actors (essay 3).

# For (re)politicizing organizational openness

## Abstract:

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In management, openness is widely emphasized for its benefits in terms of value-creation and efficiency. This mostly performance-focused, watered-down vision reflects the apolitical vision of organizational openness promoted in management scholarship. Yet to reconsider power issues in open organizing matters, as it helps better understand the empirical tensions it involves, the complexity of its implementation process, and the polysemic character of the concept of openness. The dimensions of open organizing, transparency, participation and individual freedom, are, however, inherently linked to power. Moreover, openness was at first considered a political concept. I thus suggest that the reappropriation of openness in management contributed to its depoliticization. This paper aims to reveal the political assumptions which the concept of organizational openness has been associated with. To answer this research question, I conducted an integrative review of the fragmented and multidisciplinary openness literatures. From this analysis, I identified two conceptual perspectives on openness, (I) as an emancipatory political project against authoritarianism, and (II) as a managerial technique antagonistic to bureaucracy, which allows to improve performance and efficacy. In this article, I offer a two-fold contribution. First, I reveal the divergent conceptual assumptions within openness that mobilizes two competing conceptions within the same concept, an emancipatory and a managerial perspective. This casts new light over the empirical tensions resulting from these conceptual divergences and shows that actors continue to support the emancipatory view of openness. Secondly, I propose new reading key to repoliticize organizational openness by studying how actors navigate these conceptual divergences using the ontology of becoming.

**Keywords:** Open organizing, open-source, open strategy, critical management studies, depoliticization

## INTRODUCTION

In management, openness is widely emphasized for its benefits in terms of value-creation and efficiency (e.g., Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003; Whittington, Caillaet, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011). This paper specifically enters the field of open organizing, recently created to investigate how openness affects organizations by gathering the research focused on the diverse forms that open processes can take, such as open innovation (e.g., Chesbrough, 2003), open-source communities (e.g., Kogut & Metiu, 2001), open strategizing (e.g., Whittington, Caillaet, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011) or open government and data (e.g., Janssen, Charalabidis, & Zuiderwijk, 2012). This watered-down vision of open organizing, particularly focused on performance, reflects the apolitical vision of organizational openness, which was promoted by management scholars. Indeed, power issues such as domination, ideology, emancipation, and resistance have been mostly erased from open phenomena scholarship.

Reconsidering power issues in management and organizational studies on open organizing matters, first because it could enable a better grasp of openness as an empirical phenomenon. The literature highlighted empirical tensions that arise among the actors engaged in open processes, which are related to the relevant degree of structuration and authority (e.g., Heracleous, Gößwein, Beaudette, & Wales, 2017; Kornberger, Meyer, Brandtner, & Höllerer, 2017), the pursuit of opposed finalities (Hautz et al., 2017), and the consideration of contributions (Von Krogh et al., 2012). In sum, these contradictions arise from the heterogeneous expectations of participants, but the apolitical analyses from existing research does not allow to portray the full complexity of these tensions. Other studies show that implementing openness is not a smooth process (e.g., Husted & Plesner, 2017; Luedicke, Husemann, Furnari, & Ladstaetter, 2017; Smith, Callagher, Crewe-Brown, & Siedlok, 2018). More specifically, the contributors have to cope with asymmetries in terms of participation opportunities and information sharing, however current investigations do not associate these issues with power struggles. Furthermore, unveiling the political dimension could provide a more holistic understanding of openness from a theoretical perspective. While the ‘open’ appears as a common attribute in organizations, this notion is considered polysemic (Dahlander & Gann, 2010; Schlagwein et al., 2017) as applied to a diversity of objects and effects. This lack of collective meaning is also reflected in the empirical tensions which show actors may not all share the same meaning of openness (e.g., Dobusch, Dobusch, & Müller-Seitz, 2019; Hautz et al., 2017; Kornberger et al., 2017).

However, the dimensions of open organizing, which are transparency, participation and individual freedom, are inherently linked to the power dimension because they carry a promise of participants' empowerment compared to more traditional forms of organization, as outlined by Clegg, van Rijmenam, & Schweitzer (2019, p. 307, '*openness changes the power dynamics within an organization*'). In addition, openness was first seen as a political concept, as it is considered a social system (Tkacz, 2012), by nature openness thus interrogates the power struggles at stake. In this paper, I suggest that the reappropriation of openness in management contributed to depoliticize the concept, meaning to erase the founding power dimension from the open notion. This proposition involves that the supposed benefits of open organizing, performance and efficacy, should also be interpreted through a political lens. Hence, this paper aims to reveal the political assumptions with which the concept of organizational openness has been associated, especially before and after having been introduced in management.

To answer my research question, I carried out an integrative review of the fragmented and multidisciplinary openness literatures. This appears especially suited to the 'redirection goal' (Cronin & George, 2020) targeted by this paper: bringing power back in open organizing scholarships. The research question led me to follow the problematizing approach of Alvesson & Sandberg (2020), which recommends to focalize on a limited corpus of texts to scrupulously unpack it. I started questioning the assumptions inherent to openness by retracing the order of emergence of open empirical phenomena, from the Free / Libre and Open-Source Software movements to the more recent managerial trend of open strategizing, to identify phases in the rise of the open. To do so, I focused on writing considered as seminal in the software movements, in particular the musings of their founders as well as the book of Karl Popper (1962, first published in 1945). Three steps have emerged therefrom: the open society (from the 1940's), the open software (from the 1980's) and the introduction of openness in management (from the 2000's). Then, I conducted a content analysis of the grounding assumptions of these phases using seminal essays that I also confronted with academic publications, especially in management. On this basis, I identified two conceptual perspectives on openness, (I) as an emancipatory alternative to authoritarianism supported by Popper (1962/1945) and Stallman, one of founders of the Free Software Movement in the 1980's, and (II) as a managerial technique against bureaucracy defended by the open-source guru Eric Raymond (1999) and the open strategy literature. It turned out that both views follow the sequential development of the notion of openness.

This article provides two contributions to the open organizing scholarship. First, I reveal the divergent conceptual assumptions vehiculated by the open attribute that gathers two competing conceptions of openness under the same notion, one as emancipatory and one managerial. This first contribution confirms the key role played by the introduction of this notion in management in its depoliticization, by turning a concept that was first conceived as political into an instrumentalized one. In addition, this brings a new understanding of the empirical tensions within open organizing literature as resulting from these conceptual divergences. Besides, the observations of these empirical contradictions on the field highlight that actors continue to support the emancipatory view on openness. Secondly, I suggest a new reading key to repoliticize organizational openness. More particularly, I argue the need to re-integrate an emancipatory vision by studying how actors navigate these conceptual divergences using the ontology of becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Notably, I show the points of this processual approach to reveal the power struggles at stake in the everyday life of open organizing.

## **I. OPENNESS, AS AN EMANCIPATORY PROJECT**

As a result of my analysis, a first conception of openness motions for a political approach thereof, by considering society at large, including social and industrial orders, as open. This political perspective is supported by Popper (1962/1945), whom Lessig (2005) and Tkacz (2012) consider as the late father of openness, and inspired the founder of the Free Software movement, Richard Stallman. More particularly, according to this political viewpoint, openness is conceived against authoritarianism, meaning as opposed to totalitarian ideologies and capitalism, as an emancipatory project referring to '*the process through which individuals and groups become freed from repressive social and ideological conditions*' (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, p. 432). I qualify the purpose of this conception of openness as emancipatory because Popper and Stallman both defended the principle of equal rights for individual freedom while pointing out different ways to achieve it, through a system designed to constantly evolve for the former and using public owned software for the later. This approach of openness was therefore inherently linked to power issues, although it could be noted that the questions related to social inequalities such as class struggle, gender and race issues, were addressed in this conception of openness.

a) Openness against totalitarianism

Karl Popper was one of the pioneers in conceptualizing openness in a book entitled ‘The open society and its enemies’ (1962, first published in 1945). The essay was a real success when published, consequently, it was mentioned in politicians’ discourses and fuelled discussion with other authors in philosophy, economy and political science (Armbrüster & Diether, 2002; Cock & Böhm, 2007; Tkacz, 2012).

Through the notion of ‘open society’, Popper described a political system that appears as interchangeable with democracy (Tkacz, 2012). Indeed, the open society relies on voting governments that can be discharged ‘*without bloodshed*’, and on decentralized institutions that mutually control each other (Popper, 1962/1945). These suggested requirements for a democratic realm have been criticized for being legitimate but insufficiently developed (Armbrüster & Diether, 2002; Tkacz, 2012). Indeed, rather than proposing a detailed description of the open order, Popper mostly focused, in this essay, on questioning authoritarianism:

*‘The theory I have in mind [...] rests upon the decision, or upon the adoption of the proposal, to avoid and resist tyranny.’* (Popper, 1962/1945, p.124)

Popperian openness was mainly built upon the criticisms of who he considered as the adversaries of his time, namely the Soviet Union and Nazism as forms of totalitarianism. Born in a Jewish family, Popper wrote the text while exiled after fleeing from German-occupied Austria during the Second World War. From this context, Popper outlined a closed pattern of thinking that can lead to totalitarianism through valuing ‘*collectivism as opposed to individualism, certainty of knowledge as opposed to continuous learning, all-encompassing planning as opposed to stepwise changes/improvements, and substance of content as opposed to procedures for change*’ (Armbrüster & Diether, 2002, p.173-174). Table 15 below summarizes the Popperian conception of openness and closure.

**Table 15. The Popperian conception of openness and closure**

<b>Popperian openness</b>	<b>Popperian closure</b>
Fostering individual freedom	Valuing collectivist interests
Questionable and evolving knowledge	Indisputable truth / knowledge
Stepwise change in procedures	Centralized power
Focusing on procedures	Focusing on content / substance of the doxa



By questioning how to limit authoritarianism, Popper aimed to provide an emancipatory approach to openness. First, he considered that personal freedom should only be limited to protect the equal right to liberty of everyone (see the definition of liberalism in Parker et al., 2007). This emphasis on individual interests involves that '*humans are equal in value (though unequal in character) is a trait of openness*' (Armbrüster & Diether, 2002, p.178). This position contrasts with the closed society in which the collective interests of the community are fostered over individuals. In Popper's view, collectivist interests could be especially dangerous because they are introduced as indisputable truths that can be based on seductive ideals, such as justice for example, that legitimize following them in the first place. On the road towards totalitarian ideas, Popper particularly emphasized the impossibility to challenge the '*patterns of history*' or the specific values put forward. In other words, closure focuses on the substance (i.e., the promoted ideas) without questioning the resulting system (i.e., the related processes).

Popper also relied on a liberalist conception of emancipation based on '*the need to organize democratic society through bureaucratic institutions*' (Böhm, 2009, p.149) to preserve individual interests and freedom. In other words, he suggested focusing further on processes, i.e., laws and institutions, to support the fundamental assumption of equality (Armbrüster & Diether, 2002; Cock & Böhm, 2007). More specifically, he argued that the open society's procedures should be based on decentralized power to control eventual totalitarian deviations, and on incremental changes to emphasize the need for the institutions to evolve (Popper, 1962/1945). These shifting possibilities thus involve constantly debated ideas that fuel struggle in the open society, since specific groups might attempt to modify or even invert the social order in place (Cock & Böhm, 2007; Tkacz, 2012). These conflicts may furthermore threaten openness itself if indisputable truth were promoted (Armbrüster & Diether, 2002; Hayes, 2008; Tkacz, 2012). Armbrüster & Diether (2002) have therefore highlighted the ambiguous and vulnerable character of Popperian openness, which appears both as a necessary condition for evolution and improvement, and as its own threat since social changes can lead to a totalitarian turn-around.

In sum, I suggest that Popperian openness provided the basic characteristics on which the contemporary approach to openness, found in management, was built: a clearly stated individual freedom; transparency using clearly defined rules and institutions; and participation, illustrating through the role of citizens in making knowledge and social order evolve. In the open society, these attributes were specifically conceptualized against authoritarianism. To prevent the open system from alienating individuals, the emancipatory character of Popperian

openness resulted from evolving procedures and the need for the founding ideology to remain questionable. Popper also stressed the constant threats to which openness can be subjected because of its own fundamentals. If this was criticized by Tkacz (2012) as a lack of conceptual robustness, I suggest that this internal vulnerability rather contributes to building the potential of openness for emancipation. Regarding the closed pattern of thinking, the ongoing struggles fuelled by the possibility to change the system (i.e., processes and institutions) and of the promulgated knowledge (i.e., substance) are what prevents ideological alienation.

b) Openness against private property

The history of the Free / Libre and Open-Source Software (FLOSS) has its roots in the formalization of the Free Software Movement (FSM) at the beginning of the 80's. The FSM later split from the open-source community and therefore contributed to shape the next conceptual, practical, and theoretical developments of openness.

The FSM was notably founded by Richard Stallman, who then became one of its gurus when he launched the GNU project in 1983, a chargeless operating system, the source code of which is easily available online to read or modify. Later, in 1989, Stallman developed the GNU General Public Licence based on the principle of copyleft (Bonaccorsi & Rossi, 2003; Kogut & Metiu, 2001), which provides individuals with the right to copy licensed programs. The GNU license also ensures that *'any derivative of an earlier text/program must also adopt the same license'* (Tkacz, 2012, p.391). What motivated Stallman to engage in these transformative projects was the consideration according to which coding is a political activity (Bradley, 2006). The political view of openness defended by the FSM originates from the 'hacker ethic' of the 60's and 70's (Coleman, 2012). Indeed, in the book 'Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution' (1984), Levy introduced Stallman as *'last of the true hackers'*. Particularly, hacking was considered as a way to oppose existing society and transform the world (Lallement, 2015) thanks to the personal productions of developers (Hussenot, 2017).

In parallel, Stallman produced several essays that spelled out the FSM's position against the authoritarian character of software private property (Stallman, 1983, 1985). Specifically, he argued that capitalism and market laws, reflected through private ownership and profit motives, alienate programmers, users, and citizens at large by hampering social progress:

*'The political power of business has led to the government adoption of both this criterion and the answer proposed by the developers: that the program has an owner, typically a*

*corporation associated with its development. I would like to consider the same question using a different criterion: the prosperity and freedom of the public in general.*' (Stallman, 1983)

Stallman also criticized private property in software industry for impeding individual freedom:

*'When we call software "free," [...] This is a matter of freedom, not price, so think of "free speech," not "free beer."*' (Stallman, 2009)

Because the free flow of information appeared as the main condition to develop social progress (Coleman, 2012), Stallman recommended that software should be openly modifiable, rewritable and remixable, which parallels the systems and ideas in Popperian openness (1962/1945). In sum, like Popper, Stallman supported a conception of openness that should contribute to people's interest and individual emancipation, this is why Lessig (2002) claimed that no one has done more than Stallman to emancipate modern society.

As mentioned before, in Stallman's eyes, openness was linked to political values inspired by the hackers' ethic, which suggest the implementation of a different order in organizations. His position against authoritarianism therefore also drew upon challenging the '*central control*' and '*obstructionism*' of corporations and the state in favor of '*a system where people are free to decide their own actions; [...]. A system based on voluntary cooperation and on decentralization*' (Stallman, 1983). The basic principles of the hackers' ethic informed us of the organizational form promoted in Stallman's musings, which include:

*'•Access to computers—and anything which might teach you something about the way the world works—should be unlimited and total. [...]*

*• All information should be free.*

*• Mistrust authority—promote decentralization.*

*• Hackers should be judged by their hacking, not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race, or position'* (Levy, 1984, p. 39-49)

Relying on the hackers' ethic, Stallman considered that collaboration and autonomy in application development might provide the conditions for people's emancipation (Bradley, 2006; Stallman, 1983, 1985, 2009). This is illustrated in many examples of free / libre initiatives, such as in India where libre activists trained students in informatics free software exclusively<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.gnu.org/education/edu-cases-india-ambekar.en.html>

Through this analysis of the FSM discourse, I suggest that Stallman's view contributed to the characterization of openness in management by fostering transparency of information and the total availability of resources (here the code) to be freely used, distributed, and modified. In particular, I outline the role played by the FSM in linking the open attribute with resources (source code), processes (development method) and effects (social progress) (Schlagwein et al., 2017). In addition, Stallman associated openness with additional organizational features, notably decentralization and collaboration between peers. This political approach of openness later led to open access, describing the availability of published content particularly related to academic papers, and to open / libre publishing through initiatives like Wikipedia (Parker et al., 2007). This view carried the seed of a second managerial conception of the open advocating for autonomy against alienating bureaucracy, which eventually led to the depolitization of openness.

In sum, I highlight that the FSM promoted a conception of openness reminiscent of Popper, as emancipative from the private ownership of the software industry because the latter hinders the development of public interest and social progress, even though they are the required conditions to provide freedom to individuals. This proposition to consider the political view of openness, vehiculated by Popper and the FSM, as emancipatory differs from Tkacz's analysis (2012) which especially emphasized the neoliberal character of the open attribute. More particularly, Tkacz argued that neoliberal values, such as the primacy of the individual, of his autonomy, and the underlying functionalist logic supporting economic growth were reflected in the different approaches of openness, including the ones of Popper and Stallman. His analysis therefore did not consider the managerial turn of openness, which, I propose, was the turning point to spiral this emancipatory political project into neoliberalism.

## **II. OPENNESS, AS A MANAGERIAL TECHNIQUE**

At the end of the 1990's, the open-source guru, Eric Raymond, promoted the first managerial recommendations towards organizational openness in his seminal essay 'The cathedral and the bazaar' (1999). The open label was then borrowed in management research, first to qualify open innovation because '*there are some concepts that are shared between the two, such as the idea of greater external sources of information to create value*' (Chesbrough, 2006, p.1). This appropriation of the open attribute by management led to the development of a second conception of openness as a managerial technique, promoted as antagonistic to bureaucracy,

that enhances efficiency and value-creation. This anti-bureaucratic stance echoed managerial discourses of the same period, notably emanating from management gurus like Tom Peters (1992), who bashed bureaucracy for its lack of performance. This trend led to the promotion of post-bureaucratic organizations (e.g., Grey & Garsten, 2001), which deviated from formal structures both internally and externally (e.g., ‘fluid’ in Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010; ‘boundaryless’ in Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr, 2015; ‘platform’ in Ciborra, 1996). This was seen as the only way for organizations to perform in contemporary economy. I suggest that the emphasis on performance in this second conception of openness has participated in toning down the emancipatory ambitions of the first conception in favor of a more instrumental approach, which ultimately shelved the political angle of the open label.

a) Openness against bureaucracy

At the beginning of the 1990’s, commercial companies began to pay attention to communally produced copylefted software and to consider their use in daily work (Bradley, 2006; Kogut & Metiu, 2001). A part of the FLOSS contributors wanted to seize this opportunity to develop sustainable business models for their programs. This led to the split of the FLOSS movement into two communities, the FSM and the OSS, especially distinguishable by their ideological roots (Bradley, 2006; Parker et al., 2007). Like the FSM, the OSS claimed the right to access the source code of softwares for usage, modification, and improvement; but open-source contributors took on a more ‘business friendly’ position, in which the choice of the distribution mode of a software, being given or sold<sup>33</sup>, is at the discretion of its developer. The open-source community therefore created its own licence called the Open-Source Definition in 1997 (Kogut & Metiu, 2001). In addition, the OSS was no longer focused on providing applications for the common good. Eric Raymond, one of the founders of the OSS, especially criticized Stallman’s political position (Bradley, 2006; Tkacz, 2012) and argued that the open-source movement should instead focus on technical excellence and efficiency (Bonaccorsi & Rossi, 2003; Bradley, 2006).

In 1999, Raymond published an influential essay named ‘The cathedral and the bazaar’, which criticized bureaucracy and offered managerial recommendations to improve efficiency through openness. The title emphasized the dichotomy between the ‘cathedral’ (i.e., the bureaucratic ideal-type), as the top-down and over-structured production method used in corporations; and

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<sup>33</sup> <https://opensource.org/osd>

the ‘bazaar’ as the unorganized and ad hoc approach of open-source projects. Raymond (1999, p. 29) criticized the slowness of the cathedral. He also tackled the development methods of the GNU Emacs based on a specific task division, notably for a centralized group that controlled the quality of the produced features (Raymond, 1999, p. 24, 27). Indeed, Stallman put public interest first and this required a more controlled project than the self-oriented view promoted by the OSS (Bradley, 2006, p.587).

As an answer to these criticisms, Raymond (1999) sold the bazaar on being dramatically efficient ‘*at a speed barely imaginable*’ (p.24) and providing software of better technical quality (Bradley, 2006; Pearce, 2014). Contrary to the bureau, the bazaar is introduced as an inclusive community, without member selection (Demil & Lecocq, 2006), that gathers ‘*differing agendas and approaches [...] out of which a coherent and stable system could seemingly emerge only by a succession of miracles*’ (p.24). The bazaar especially draws on a decentralized network of contributors, meaning there are no hierarchical lines or enforced tasks (Demil & Lecocq, 2006), that enables a wider access to resources and competences:

*‘The Linux world behaves in many respects like a free market or an ecology, a collection of selfish agents attempting to maximize utility which in the process produces a self-correcting spontaneous order more elaborate and efficient than any amount of central planning could have achieved.’* (Raymond, 1999, p.40)

In addition, the use of small but frequent releases illustrated the benefit of flexible work processes.

In sum, throughout this analysis, I stressed how the OSS pushed a view of openness based on very few restrictive rules, against the traditional bureaucratic order in IT (Puranam et al., 2014). With the open-Source movement, openness was for the first time associated with recommendations that could be qualified as managerial. These promote the organization of software development based on a large network of contributors, the availability of source code, and incremental releases, to achieve communal projects. This flexible and decentralized production mode was lauded as more effective (quicker, less costly) and performant (technical excellence of the code) than the closed bureau. I thus follow Tkacz (2012) who introduced Raymond’s vision of openness as neoliberal, because the open organizing principles he promoted were supposed to follow the rules of the free market in which individuals freely pursue their own economic interests. The split in the Internet utopias enacted by the FLOSS communities, in which openness shifted from an emancipatory to a managerial vision to pursue an instrumental goal, represented a major turning point in the depoliticization of the concept.

As an example, while Raymond criticized the cathedral's centralisation, he did not address the potential tensions and power issues that arise in decentralized open-source projects.

b) Openness as a win-win opportunity

The ideas instilled by the OSS were introduced in management research through the field of open innovation to characterize a renewed way of implementing innovation in the early 2000's (Chesbrough, 2003). Open innovation should be addressed as part of the opening of strategy (Chesbrough, 2003), a phenomenon that has also been portrayed in public administration under the title of 'open' (e.g., Janssen et al., 2012; Kornberger et al., 2017). In this section, I will thus include all these activities and refer to this managerial trend using the term 'open strategy'.

Like the OSS, open strategy is described as a paradigm shift that challenges the bureaucratic view on organization (e.g., Chesbrough, 2006; Kornberger et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011). Traditionally, organizations were conceived as based on formalized attributes, such as boundaries (i.e., allowing to identify outsiders from insiders of the firm), internal layers, and defined roles. In contrast, the first writings on open innovation emphasized the need to fluidify organizational structure by suggesting that '*firms can and should use external ideas as well as internal ideas, and internal and external paths to market, as the firms look to advance their technology*' (Chesbrough, 2003, p24). As mentioned, this anti-bureaucratic stance inscribed open strategy into the post-bureaucratic trend that critical authors denounced for concealing, behind the discourses that promote less control and a wider autonomy in these organizations, new mechanisms of subordination implemented to actually further pressure employees (e.g., Barker, 1993; Grey & Garsten, 2001; Sewell et al., 1998). Specifically, by instead focusing on the positive effects of post-bureaucracy on performance, these mechanisms were overlooked by mainstream literature.

The field of open strategy also belongs to 'mainstream' literature in management, the larger part of contributions relying either on a causal or a practice-based view view (Tavakoli et al., 2017). The causal approach (e.g., Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Hutter, Nketia, & Füller, 2017; Passig, Cohen, Bareket-Bojmel, & Morgenstern, 2015) unveiled the conditions following which openness affords organizational performance. According to this view, the performance benefits of openness rest upon the collaboration of a large contributor base that allows to tap into a greater set of knowledge and creative ideas (Stieger et al., 2012), enhancing the possibilities for community-driven value, which are then captured by the instigating firm

(Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007). The large number of participants which enable the assessment of strategic decisions also reduces the cases of mistakes (Whittington, Yakis-Douglas, & Ahn, 2016; Yakis-Douglas, Angwin, Ahn, & Meadows, 2017). On the other hand, researchers using the practice-based approach focus more on the actors' experience, and how their actions, entangled with agency, routines, context knowledge and material artefacts, influence open phenomena (Orlikowski, 2010). Portraying participants' experience highlighted that participating in an open strategy process could be considered as a reward for actors who were traditionally excluded from this activity (Hautz et al., 2017). As another observable actors' benefit, collaborative practices may develop their knowledge and abilities (Splitter, Seidl, & Whittington, n.d.). The prevailing approaches of openness have thus promoted this notion as a win-win solution for the instigating organization and for the included actors, which contributed to promulgating a watered-down and apolitical image of openness.

It should be noted that the practice-based approach still attempted to bring a more nuanced vision of open strategy notably by conceiving openness as a continuum (Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011), meaning as a matter of degree across and between three dimensions: inclusion, shared-decision making and transparency (Seidl et al., 2019b). The degree of transparency is therefore investigated based on '*the range of internal and external audiences with access to strategic information*' (Seidl et al., 2019, p.10) and on the sensibility of the content divulged (Dobusch et al., 2019; Seidl et al., 2019b). Secondly, the degree of inclusiveness depends on the range of invited participants (Whittington et al., 2011) and on the qualitative depth of implication (Hautz et al., 2019). However, some power issues remained unexplored in open strategy research, for instance how visibility practices enable or disable access to specific informational resources, the way inclusion is allowed or hindered (Vaara et al., 2019), and if the meaning of open principles is shared or resisted by participants. Regarding the last dimension of openness, the extent in which stakeholders are involved in decision-making (Dobusch et al., 2019; Seidl et al., 2019), the transfer of decision-making rights actually appears as uncommon (Whittington et al., 2011), openness is thus often limited to broader information sharing or to general brainstorming (e.g., Hautz et al., 2017 on the dynamics of open strategy). The practice view also sheds light on the empirical tensions of open strategy (e.g., Diriker et al., 2022; Dobusch et al., 2019; Heracleous et al., 2017; Kornberger et al., 2017; Luedicke et al., 2017). However, these tensions strongly focus on what could hamper efficacy (e.g., Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017; Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Niemiec, 2017; Stieger et al., 2012) and on the factors that demotivate participants from contributing because it would



prevent the benefits of collaboration (see Hautz et al., 2017). In sum, the power dimension has been neglected in open strategy studies by still too rarely questioning domination stakes, inequalities, and ideological issues, even though pursuing emancipatory ambitions makes them into core issues.

In this analysis, I pointed out that the reappropriation of openness by management follows up on that of the OSS by defending an anti-bureaucratic stance. As it provides an opportunistic and instrumental perspective of openness, the open strategy literature could also be criticized for promoting neoliberal schemes. More specifically, open strategy discourses promote the pursuit of efficiency, profit maximisation and the idea that decentralized and fluid systems are required to do so (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999). Utilitarian principles of choice both for people and for organizations are also emphasized, which contributes to building the depoliticized approach that is supported in the open strategy literature (Böhm, 2009).

Another specificity in management research is to suggest the implementation of organizational openness for spatially and temporarily-bound activities such as innovation, strategy, etc. Following this view, the emphasis on autonomy and freedom found in Popper's conception, the FSM and even the OSS, has disappeared in favor of the open attribute as based on inclusion, transparency, and shared decision-making in the most radical open processes. In addition, the conception of openness as continua highlighted that some authority and centralized forms of control have been re-legitimized in open processes, which reflects how openness and its emancipatory promises are considered in management.

### **III. DISCUSSION**

#### **a) The competing ideological assumptions behind the 'open' label**

This article aims to unveil what the different political and ideological assumptions behind the concept of openness are. To do so, I conducted a problematizing integrative review depicting how the contemporary conception of openness has been built on successive conceptual developments and then reassembled under the same 'open' label despite its foundation being built on divergent assumptions. This analysis brought out two contrasting conceptions of openness: (1) an emancipatory project promoted by Popper and the FSM; and (2) a managerial technique in open-source and open strategy literature. These views associate openness with

distinct purposes, dimensions and organizing processes, in sum with competing assumptions that are synthesized in table 16 below.

**Table 16. The competing conceptual assumptions of openness**

	<b>Openness as an emancipatory project</b>	<b>Openness as a managerial technique</b>
<i>Purpose of openness</i>	Emancipation through supporting individual freedom and social progress	Personal interests (for individuals), efficiency and productivity (for organizations)
<i>Dimensions of openness</i>	Individual freedom as a finality	Free contribution as a means
	Participation and transparency to address pluralism	Instrumental participation and transparency of information to support value-creation
<i>Open organizing</i>	Evolving decentralized structure	Flexibility
	Shared decision-making & empowerment	Legitimate managerial authority and control
	Providing the required resources to enable contribution	Autonomous contribution based on contributors’ own skills and motivations

While Tkacz (2012) considered openness to have been created as a neoliberal concept to mask power struggles, this article instead points out how openness was first conceptualized as a political notion that has since been emptied of its power dimension. More specifically, openness has been depoliticized by shifting from an alternative to authoritarianism promoting emancipation to a managerial technique against bureaucracy to improve productivity and performance. This led to a change in the emancipatory dimensions of openness, freedom, participation and transparency, to utilitarian means for profit maximisation. This is illustrated in the literature through the use of openness as a tool for impression management or as instrumentalized towards organizational communication (e.g., Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017; Heimstädt, 2017; Kornberger et al., 2017). I thus highlight the key role played by managerial appropriation in the process of depoliticizing openness, which both practitioners and management scholars took part in. This depoliticization process tends to happen after managerial reappropriation, for example with organizational culture (Smircich & Calás, 1987), and organizational learning (Contu & Willmott, 2003). While this has contributed to ‘kill’ off some social concepts (e.g., Smircich & Calás, 1987, about organizational culture), the empirical tensions reported in open strategy literature (e.g., Diriker et al., 2022; Dobusch et al., 2019; Heracleous et al., 2017; Kornberger et al., 2017; Luedicke et al., 2017) highlight that, despite

the attempt to depoliticize the open, actors' emancipatory openness still exists in tandem with the managerial conception. In other words, I argue the need to re-consider the forgotten emancipatory conception of openness to better understand these tensions.

The competing assumptions of openness unveiled throughout this paper indicate that the empirical tensions reported in open organizing literature seem to emerge from these conceptual divergences. More specifically, I suggest that all open processes cause this type of conceptual tensions, wherein the desire for emancipation and for organizational performance collide. As an example, the dilemma of process (i.e., the risks of slowness in open practices in terms of efficiency) and escalation (i.e., expectation for greater openness) identified by Hautz et al. (2017) reflect the divergent purposes pursued by managerial and emancipatory openness (i.e., performance and efficacy VS protecting individual freedom). The emancipating view of openness involves giving participants an equal voice (i.e., shared decision-making & empowerment), making the slowness of the process into a minor concern. This contrasts with the managerial perspective according to which the performance goal justifies an unequal distribution of decision rights (i.e., legitimate managerial authority and control). The co-existence of such competing expectations, which can be effectively summarized as decision-making processes VS equal consideration for all participants, is depicted in the open strategizing process of the Wikimedia foundation (see Dobusch et al., 2019), in which the time pressure collides with the willingness to invite as many contributors as possible (p.18). This instrumental choice, taken by Wikimedia's board members, created dissatisfaction and internal conflicts between the organizers of the process and contributors on the right degree of structure and authority to implement to both respect the emancipatory ambitions of Wikipedia (i.e., to promote free knowledge) and the organizational necessity to meet deadlines (see Heracleous et al., 2017 on the same case). To conclude, how actors address these conceptual contradictions can lead to power struggles, and notably resistance based on contributors' disengagement and domination by imposing what is perceived as an authoritarian (i.e., illegitimately closed) process.

b) Reconsidering the power dimension of organizational openness

Since the managerial reappropriation of openness, it has been growing depoliticized, despite the notion still eminently relating to power issues, particularly for actors engaged in open processes. The forgotten emancipatory conception of openness should therefore be re-integrated in future studies on open organizing. As a second contribution, this paper thus provides reading keys to help grasp the political character of open practices and further consider

the coexistence of competing assumptions / expectations, of divergent meanings associated with the open principles, and of the utopian character of organizational openness. These propositions aim to deepen the critical approach of open organizing by (re)politicizing openness.

**Embracing the conceptual dualities of openness.** My first suggestion for future research is to move from a static view to a more processual approach based on the ontology of becoming (Hernes, 2008; Hussenot, Hernes, & Bouty, 2021; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This perspective suggests to conceive dichotomies and dualisms, here the empirical tensions based on competing assumptions of openness, as dualities. More specifically, the concept of dualities refers to *‘the twofold character of an object of study without separation [...] it retains the idea of two essential elements, but it views them as interdependent, rather than separate and opposed’* (Farjoun, 2010, p. 203). This processual perspective (Hussenot et al., 2021) is reminiscent of the work of Dobusch & Dobusch (2019), which proposed to adopt a constitutive perspective of the relationship between openness and closure as both sides of the same coin. This processual approach appears promising to grasp how actors navigate the inherent conceptual divergences of openness illustrated in the preceding section (see table 16).

Whereas previous studies mainly focused on the results of organizational openness implementation (e.g., Birkinshaw, 2017; Hautz et al., 2017), a scrutiny of dualities also involves paying attention to the supporting mechanisms of these outcomes (Farjoun, 2010). In particular, focusing on these mechanisms enables the re-integration of actors’ freedom of action by examining the agency of participants, which was a defining characteristic of openness, since shelved by open strategy literature (Helin et al., 2014). Looking at actors’ agency invites an investigation on how the conceptual dualities of openness are addressed by organizational members, and more specifically how their resolution is subjected to negotiations to orient collective action towards an emancipatory or performative goal at any given time. The weak processual view also calls for a greater consideration of the passing of time in management research (Helin et al., 2014; Hussenot et al., 2021). The resolution of conceptual dualities therefore appears as provisional and might be reconfigured overtime, depending on events that occur, which can lean towards either conceptions of openness. This perspective in terms of dualities thus reveals the power dimension of openness by unveiling how actors address the issues and conflicts linked to these conceptual dualities, which leads them to either the emancipatory or managerial approach of the open.

**Questioning the performativity of openness.** Some critical studies (e.g., Funes & Mackness, 2018 on inclusion ; Gibbs, Rozaidi, & Eisenberg, 2013 on open communication; Ringel, 2019 on transparency) demonstrated that actors struggle to fully embody the emancipatory conception of openness that they support. For instance, Gibbs et al. (2013) and Ringel (2019) unpacked how organizational members committed to enact total transparency were in reality recreating new forms of secrecy. To better grasp the performative nature of openness, and especially of its emancipatory conception, the weak processual approach allows scholars to study how the dimensions of open organizing are entangled, meaning how the underlying assumptions behind an open initiative might shape the actors' practices.

Following this perspective, transparency should be studied as the processes that make information and knowledge visible, that is '[doing] *something to that which is being observed, monitored and made legible*' (Garsten & De Montoya, 2008, p.284). Scholar can therefore observe how transparency interacts with other (in)visibility practices, individuals, artefacts and norms, to reveal what enables or disables access to informational resources (Albu & Flyverbom, 2019). Furthermore, scholars should pay attention to who is involved in an open process, the diversity of participative practices implemented, and the way they are embedded in political agendas (Vaara et al., 2019). More specifically, future research could investigate how inclusion and shared decision rights are enabled, prevented, or contested and who is engaged in decisions related to power distribution in the open process. Finally, the meaning that members associate with the open principles, participation, transparency, shared decision, and individual freedom, as well as the sensemaking processes mobilized to achieve these collective meanings should come under scrutiny. In sum, questioning the performative character of open organizing contributes to repoliticizing openness by unveiling the power struggles at stake and their outcomes.

**Openness as a utopia.** Some authors have suggested to encompass the FLOSS movements as interesting research objects for the field of alternative organizing (e.g., Parker et al., 2007; Pearce, 2014), and the persistence of emancipatory openness in empirical situations revives this theoretical proposition. In studies of alternative organizing, researchers pinpointed that organizational actors consciously decide to get organized in otherness, which requires them to navigate between what their community shares and what they reject (Del Fa & Vàsquez, 2019; Dorion, 2017). In this paper, I highlight that the different conceptions of openness have been built as alternatives to different paradigms, totalitarianism, capitalism, and bureaucracy, and that the empirical tensions captured in the open strategy research revealed that actors still shift

between accepting or dismissing the managerial approach of openness. In particular, considering openness as part of the field of alternative organizations calls to study the utopian possibilities held by the emancipatory conception of the open.

Originally, utopias were fictions, socially and historically embedded, written to denounce the concerns and injustices of a given period (Parker et al., 2007). By referring to future or hoped for situations, utopias also aimed to overcome the criticized issues through alternatives ‘*either positing [...] in radical opposition to, or by extrapolation from, the here and now*’ (Grey & Garsten, 2002, p.10). In management studies, two types of utopias have been identified, namely organized and disorganized utopias (Grey & Garsten, 2002; Picard & Lanuza, 2016). Each kind of utopia aims to answer key issues (Grey & Garsten, 2002, p. 9) that appear as reminiscent of the different conceptions of openness portrayed in this paper. First, organized utopia interrogates ‘*how can work be arranged so as to be precisely and efficiently correlated with societal aims?*’, which echoes emancipatory openness. Secondly, like managerial openness, disorganized utopia rather questions ‘*how will any work get done at all and how, since it is a collective activity, can it be coordinated?*’ and have been criticized for its neoliberal assumptions. These two types of utopias also reflect one of the main conceptual divergences about the open, regarding its (un)structured character. This article shows how these competing conceptions still co-exist in open organizing. In that sense, organizational openness seems to carry renewed utopian possibilities that could denounce specific inequalities or considerations of our time. In other words, looking at open organizing as an organizational utopia contributes to repoliticize the concept by unveiling contemporary power and domination stakes in organizational life. Dystopian possibilities might be taken into account as well. In literature, they refer to ‘*realist nightmare[s]*’ that ‘*parody the good intentions of some reform of society or people*’ (Parker et al., 2007, p.80-81). Applied to organizational openness, dystopia can be used to investigate the darker sides of open organizing where good intentions eventually result in negative consequences, such as ideological deviations since utopia and ideology seem to share similar grounds (see Mannheim, 1929 and Ricoeur, 1986).



## **CHAPTER 4 - ESSAY 2**

# **Organizational necrosis autopsy: how extremist openness can threaten the sustainability of open organizing**



### **Evolution of the essay**

This essay was presented:

- at a MOST research team seminar in February 2020
- at the AIMS conference in June 2020 (STAIMS entitled ‘Pratiques contemporaines de travail et nouvelles dynamiques organisationnelles’)

This paper was submitted to the journal M@n@gement in March 2021 and is currently undergoing a 4<sup>th</sup> round of R&R.

### **How this essay contributes to the general research question of my thesis**

This paper questions how open organizing can fail to cope with the inner tensions of openness. Regarding the general research question of this thesis, how openness, as a set of values, shapes action and acts in the organization, this essay highlights the ideological and normative potential of openness, meaning the way open principles (i.e., participation, transparency and freedom) can tend towards extremism. It therefore emphasizes how enacting openness is no easy task.

In the case studied, their extreme conception of openness influences the actors’ decisions to best fit with the open principles, even if said decisions can impoverish the sustainability of their organization (i.e., organizational necrosis). In particular, the findings pinpoint how extremist open values act as a form of normative control that limits actors, since their responses to organizational problems must be congruent with extremist openness and what its principles entail (for instance, the interdiction to put forward an individual at the risk of contrasting with the radical principle of participation).

Despite the sincere willingness of actors to enact an open form of organizing, extremist open values produce the decline of radical openness principles through ideological closure and the limitation of members’ autonomy. In addition, this process of organizational necrosis can threaten the open organization’s sustainability, since actors are unable to face the crises they encounter while sticking to extremist open principles, which fosters inaction instead of adaptability.

# **Organizational necrosis autopsy: how extremist openness can threaten the sustainability of open organizing**

## **Abstract:**

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Organizational openness emerged from the Free Libre and Open-Source software movement as an alternative organizing to emancipate contributors from the bureaucratic project organization usually found in the software industry. The literature showed that actors engaged in the opening of their organizations must address inherent tensions and competing expectations related to openness. Scholars have mainly been concerned with cases of organizations that successfully manage the tensions of openness through the implementation of legitimate forms of closure. However, we still do not know what happens when organizations fail to deal with these tensions of openness. This paper thus answers the following issue: how can an open organizing fail to address its inherent tensions? I draw on the ethnographic study of Managers du 21ème siècle, a non-profit that promotes and embodies openness as an organizing principle and that is in dire straits due to crises escalation threatening its survival. Using the metaphor of organizational necrosis, my findings show how an extremist application of openness principles can hamper organizational actions even in cases of major crises. This extremist conception fuels two mechanisms: (i) depersonification, which aims to preserve the fit between actions and radical open values, and (ii) disempowerment, which manifests into avoidance strategies to deflect value conflicts. As a first contribution, I show how extremist openness shapes ideological closure that reduces actors' scope of action. I then highlight the way this extremist conception threatens the organization's sustainability.

**Keywords:** Open organizing, closure, critical management studies, ethnography, control

## INTRODUCTION

Organizational openness first emerged from the Free Libre and Open-Source software movement as an alternative form of organizing to emancipate contributors from the bureaucratic production method usually found in the software industry (Raymond, 1999; Stallman, 1985). This concept was then introduced in management research giving rise to a growing body of fields labelled ‘open’, such as open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003), open-source communities (Von Krogh, Spaeth, & Lakhani, 2003), open government (Janssen et al., 2012), or open strategizing (Whittington et al., 2011). Openness relies on a common ‘ideal-type’ (Tavakoli et al., 2017), granting anyone willing (i.e., internal and/or external participants) the right and material conditions (i.e., technological tools, strategic information, source code, etc.) to contribute to the open initiative (Schlagwein et al., 2017). More specifically, this paper figures in the recently-emerged field of open organizing to study cases in which openness is applied across all organizing processes (see the special issue in *Organization Studies*).

The literature pinpoints that enacting openness is not an easy endeavour. More particularly, the actors engaged in the opening of their organizations must address the inherent tensions and competing expectations related to openness (e.g., Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017; Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2017; Kornberger et al., 2017). To cope with these liabilities, actors can implement legitimate forms of closure by designing a formalized process (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Husted & Plesner, 2017) or by drawing on a culture of self-responsibility and self-censorship (e.g., Luedicke et al., 2017; Turco, 2016). So far, scholars have mainly been concerned with cases of organizations that successfully manage the inner tensions of openness (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007; Turco, 2016) and give few examples of more negative experiences (except for Heimstädt, 2017 on an instrumental use of openness; Ringel, 2019 on how a radical transparency can lead to produce new invisibility and secrecy practices). This ‘dark side’ of open organizing began to unfold under scrutiny, notably by questioning the overly positive view of openness that pervades the mainstream literature (e.g., Funes & Mackness, 2018; Gibbs et al., 2013; Tkacz, 2012). Thus, we still do not know what happens when organizations fail to deal with the inner tensions of openness, even though openness is included in alternative organizations (see the definition of open-source software in Parker et al., 2007, p. 204; Pearce, 2014). Its sustainability should therefore be a topic that matters to critical scholars (Land & King, 2014). Consequently, this paper raises the following issue: how can an open organizing fail to address the/its inherent tensions (of openness)?

To answer my research question, I draw on an ethnographic study conducted over 22 months in a professional non-profit association called *Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (M21S). Therein, members promote managerial innovations based on features of openness such as participation, transparency, and autonomy. They also aim to radically embody these open principles in their own organizing. The specificity of this case is to present an organization in great difficulty since the adoption of open organizing, the very survival of which is threatened due to an escalation of crises. My findings outline what I term an ‘organizational necrosis’. In medicine, necrosis is the result of damaged cells destroying the living tissue of their own organ. In M21S, organizational necrosis is the process that led its members to unintentionally drive the organization towards self-destruction. The necrosis was driven by three mechanisms: (i) an extremist conception of openness that shaped the judgement and behaviour of regular actors, (ii) depersonification, to ensure total congruence between members’ actions and open values, and (iii) disempowerment, characterized by strategies that enabled members to dodge all initiatives that failed to fit with open values.

This paper aims to expand the critical approaches of open organizing through this two-fold case of failure, the organizational necrosis illustrating both the decline of radical openness and a threat to the organization’s sustainability. First, this process highlights how an extremist approach of openness spirals into ideological closure that imposes a total fit between action and the open values, drastically reducing individual initiative. Secondly, by fuelling the mechanisms of depersonification and disempowerment, extremist open values lead to passivity at the organizational level, to the point where the organization’s survival is compromised.

## **I. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### a) The inherent tensions of open organizing

The ‘open’ attribute has been used to characterize a wide variety of activities (Dahlander & Gann, 2010; Schlagwein et al., 2017) and practices (Whittington et al., 2011). The latter shares common assumptions (either implicit or explicit) defining what being open means, based on three principles, (i) participation, (ii) transparency, and (iii) individual freedom. In open organizing, especially when actors are linked by a collective identity (Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017), these dimensions are subjected to inherent tensions.

First, openness invites greater participation of previously excluded internal and/or external audiences (Hautz et al., 2019; Seidl et al., 2019b). This includes different degrees of participation, from simply voicing opinions to actively engaging in decision-making in the most radical forms of open organizing (Dobusch et al., 2019; Vaara et al., 2019). A dimension that raises specific challenges. The first is related to decision-making because it requires a large number of actors to make sense of a situation (Bencherki, Basque, & Rouleau, 2019), and reach an agreement over the various interests defended by the participants (Adobor, 2020; Mack & Szulanski, 2017; Smith et al., 2018). Another dilemma, based on commitment (Hautz et al., 2017), suggests that actors can disengage if disappointed by the low impact of their contributions, particularly when their voices were not heard as much as they had hoped (e.g., Baptista et al., 2017). The tensions related to participation thus question the distribution of decision rights in open organizing, i.e., who can participate and how participants are selected, whether contribution is facilitated or hindered, and is the meaning of the participatory dimension shared or resisted (Vaara et al., 2019, p. 27).

The second principle, transparency, promotes greater diffusion of information in terms of quantity and sensitivity (Seidl et al., 2019b). This dimension also relates to the communicational nature of openness (Heracleous et al., 2017; Turco, 2016), which is grounded in the principle of open communication. This involves that participants freely express their position by promoting but also criticizing the suggestions brought to the agenda (Turco, 2016). A full disclosure that is meant to make deciders and contributors more accountable for their actions (Ohlson & Yakis-Douglas, 2019). However, some investigations highlight how oversharing information can erode understanding (Luedicke et al., 2017; Ripken, 2006), trust (Ringel, 2019), and thus participation. In addition, studies on organizations claiming full transparency reveal the production of new forms of secrecy or dissimulation practices, illustrating the difficulties for actors to embody their ideology (e.g., Gibbs et al., 2013; Lingo, 2022; Ringel, 2019).

The third principle invites greater individual freedom, particularly in terms of contribution. This principle largely stems from open-source development where developers are able to work on decentralized tasks freely chosen according to their interests and competencies (Von Krogh et al., 2012). A knock-on effect of greater autonomy is that it delegitimizes centralized forms of control (Raymond, 1999; Turco, 2016), which leads to the emergence of tensions between structure and fluidity, or centralized authority and decentralization (Heracleous et al., 2017; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). Members' willingness to participate in an open project is,

however, an often overlooked factor in open innovation or open strategy scholarship (Smith et al., 2018).

However, total freedom implies that actors hold the possibility to join or leave the organization whenever they want. It thus requires for the organization to heed the expectations of participants, since disregarding them may impede the inclusive and transparent qualities of the organizing (Hautz et al., 2017; Reischauer & Ringel, 2022; Ringel, 2019), which are the specific features that make openness an alternative (Parker et al., 2007, p. 204) and more democratic form of organizing (e.g., Armbrüster & Diether, 2002; Dobusch et al., 2019). In other words, open organizing carries within itself the tensions that can lead it astray, which begs the question how the actors engaged in open processes navigate these inner threats.

b) Coping with the tensions of open organizing

We can find diverse recommendations for managing the endemic tensions of openness in the literature that especially rely on the implementation of legitimate forms of closure. A first response can be implemented at the organizational level by setting formalized procedures (e.g., Diriker et al., 2022; Dobusch et al., 2019; Husted & Plesner, 2017). Formalization is about the opening of the process (Dobusch et al., 2019) as it requires actors to deliberate and agree on exclusion modalities (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019) through an explicit account of the procedures, rules, or responsibilities related to information sharing, participation, and decision-making. Another solution consists in predefined procedures that can be enacted through guidance for participation (e.g., Malhotra et al., 2017; Stieger et al., 2012), via a split between individuals who can attend deliberations, and those empowered to take part in decision-making (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Turco, 2016), or through separate, specific spaces for each step in the process (e.g., Holstein & Rantakari, 2022; Husted & Plesner, 2017)

The literature illustrates another means of managing the inherent tensions of open organizing at the individual level, relying on self-responsibility and self-regulation. In particular, Luedicke et al. (2017) pinpoint the personal strategies that actors enact to implicitly counterbalance an unequal distribution of knowledge and power, together with an information overload in the collective Premium Cola. On her side, Turco (2016) highlights that TechCo's employees manage these tensions by drawing on conversational practices based on the only official policy of the company: 'Use Good Judgement'. However, Turco (2016) emphasizes this self-regulation can lead to authoritarian deviations in such open organizing settings.

These examples of successful tension management highlight that closure is constitutive of openness ‘*as inextricably linked and interacting with each other*’ (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019, p. 328). Dobusch & Dobusch (2019, p. 328) even argue that ‘*openness requires the possibility of closure attempts [...] otherwise it could not be framed as “open” in the first place*’. Opening initiatives thus lead actors to create or replicate forms of exclusion, either based on legitimate exclusionary criteria and / or processes (e.g., Diriker et al., 2022; Dobusch et al., 2019; Husted & Plesner, 2017) or using improper backstage arrangements to limit openness (e.g., Heimstädt, 2017; Ringel, 2019). Unintentional, and we can even say unaware, closure implementation can also be considered but has not been depicted in the literature yet (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019). However, closure is required to address the tensions of openness while these inner contradictions seem particularly complex to manage. According to the dilemma of escalation, openness calls for ever-greater strengthening of inclusion and transparency (Hautz et al., 2017). As partial embodiments of openness, these closing processes might therefore create frustration among contributors (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Heracleous et al., 2017).

In sum, the literature has extensively described a diversity of inherent tensions related to organizational openness by especially staging cases of organizations that successfully manage them (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Luedicke et al., 2017; Turco, 2016). Where a few critical studies have started to shed light on more negative experiences of openness (e.g., Heimstädt, 2017 showing its instrumentalization; Ringel, 2019 depicting the difficulties for actors to embody their supported ideology), failures of open organizing remain overlooked. Accordingly, This article addresses the following research question: how can open organizing fail to address its inherent tensions?

## **II. METHODS**

### a) Research setting

To understand how actors can fail to address the inner tensions of open organizing, I draw on the case of Managers du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle<sup>34</sup> as an instance of organization based on openness facing numerous crises that threaten its sustainability.

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<sup>34</sup> Managers of 21<sup>st</sup> century in English

Founded in 2013, this non-profit brings together professional actors interested in collective intelligence and managerial innovations aiming to “*move away from blind servitude [...] to give the power back to the field to make decisions in real time*” (from the M21S’s website). In particular, the mission of M21S is to promote organizational forms based on “*trust and autonomy*” (from the M21S website) by organizing conferences, ‘learning expeditions’, debates, and training sessions. The members are supposed to contribute, based on their preferences, to one or to several circles that compose the organization: territorial circles in the regions, operating circles (e.g., communication), and thematic circles (e.g., entrepreneurs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century).

The case of M21S appears as a *mise en abîme*, where members promote organizational principles related to openness while at the same time endeavouring to self-apply these open values. It was through this self-fuelling process that M21S experienced a governance crisis that led them to establish a new constitution around a year later. In this context, the General Circle (GC) was created to collectively manage the functions that had previously been held by the founder, including the overall coordination of the association (e.g., concerning investments or membership processes) and the administrative obligations. The GC was composed of the Board (President, Secretary and Treasurer) together with the elected leaders of the various circles, making for around a dozen individuals.

This new way of organizing thus fostered a radical conception of the key openness principles, individual freedom, transparency, and participation, that is reflected in the actors’ practices. First, members are supposed to enjoy an uncompromised autonomy by having no obligations governing the way they are expected to contribute to M21S, and they can do only what they are willing to do. Then, transparency is observed through a formalized principle of full disclosure of activity-related information, and through authentic communication in which members regularly voice their feelings—both positive and negative. Finally, even though participation is formally framed in the governance charter, the rules of exclusion are not respected (e.g., who is able to attend GC meetings), and anyone who wants to can effectively participate.

M21S can be considered as a case of failure, or at least of an open organization in great difficulty, because it faced an escalation of crises right after the change in governance. First, the extremely late cancellation of a costly event hastened the departure of the salaried chief delegate and almost resulted in the dissolution of the association. Secondly, there was a decrease



in internal<sup>35</sup> and external activity<sup>36</sup>, which led to difficulties keeping members who felt they were paying “*a membership fee for nothing*” (André, in his chairman’s speech at the year-2017 Annual General Meeting). Thirdly, the auditor refused to certify the accounts due to an incomplete follow-up of accounting and a suspicious debt left from the founder. Finally, M21S saw an important portion of the members who organized external activities quit the association on very bad terms.

#### b) Data collection

The fieldwork consisted in an ethnographic type of research. Following the recommendation of ethnographers to apply a “*treatment of strangeness*” (Neyland, 2008, p. 18), the research question, i.e., how an organization can fail to address the inherent tensions of openness, emerged inductively as the data was collected.

Ethnography is characterized by research led over an extended period of time, using various data sources and adopting a participatory observation stance (Neyland, 2007). The fieldwork took 22 months, during which I had to deal with some uncomfortable situations that ultimately led my research question to emerge: the lack of action within M21S.

Despite this lack of activity, I still gathered ‘real time’ data (A. Langley & Tsoukas, 2011): (i) I attended almost all in-person events or online meetings (around 70 hours of participant observation) during which I took notes and transcribed the discussions ; (ii) I used a netnographic approach (La Rocca et al., 2014; Neyland, 2007) by getting added to email lists and Slack channels ; (iii) I also took notes during informal exchanges with the members. I completed my collection process by using retrospective data (A. Langley & Tsoukas, 2011): (iv) I conducted open interviews that were fully recorded and transcribed, and (v) I gathered secondary data (meeting minutes, operating charters, official communications, etc.). This collected data enabled me to cover a two-year period before beginning the fieldwork to understand how the implementation of open practices had influenced the escalation of crises encountered by M21S. Details of the dataset are reported in Table 16 below.

To adapt to the inclusive practices employed in the field, my stance grew more participative over time, from being invited to the introductory round table to becoming an active member of

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<sup>35</sup> From an internal survey, 40% of the members of M21S did not know that they were expected to join a circle.

<sup>36</sup> In 2018, the externally-oriented actions were mostly organized by the Western-Region circle.

the Research Circle. Participation enabled me to develop a relationship of trust with the members, which helped improve the data collection process. Ethnography is also known to offer the potential to explore the tacit, emotional and political dimensions of an organization (Ybema et al., 2009). The emotions I experienced during the fieldwork helped draw out the question of extremism from these openness principles (Munkejord, 2009). The rare events or meetings that the members organized turned out to become episodes of conflict that cemented the members' commitment to fit their actions to their open principles. I became uncomfortable with the lack of critical thinking surrounding the open values preached by the M21S members, which allowed me to identify some ideological underpinnings. I was also shocked by the (lack of) reaction of members during episodes of crisis, and specifically the way they employed open principles as justification for not taking action.

**Table 166. The dataset**

<p><b>Observations:</b> Over 70 hours of meetings observed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 meeting to prepare the Annual General Meeting (AGM)</li> <li>• 1 one-day AGM (for 2017)</li> <li>• 4 one-day meetings of the GC (12/2018; 03/2019; 06/2019; 12/2019)</li> <li>• Dozens of circle meetings (each lasting 2 hours on average) between April 2018 and June 2019</li> <li>• My experience as a member of the Research Circle from January 2019</li> <li>• Informal discussions on the days where meetings were held</li> </ul>
<p><b>Open interviews:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three interviews, averaging 90 minutes each (with André, Maëva, and Caroline), recorded and transcribed in full</li> </ul>
<p><b>Netnography:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being on the mailing list of the GC and the BizCom Circle from April 2018 (around 50 emails)</li> <li>• Being a member of the Slack channels from January 2019 (around 5000 messages exchanged; mostly public)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Secondary data:</b> Access to the shared folders of M21S, containing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operating charters, legal status of the association</li> <li>• Meetings and AGM reports</li> <li>• Workshop reports (e.g., brainstorming workshop for a new tagline)</li> <li>• M21S website and official communication supports (newsletter)</li> </ul>

c) Data analysis

Investigating the way an open organizing fails to cope with its inherent tensions was an iterative process, using various techniques (coding, writing, and discussing) to inductively theorize from empirical data (Locke et al., 2020). I started by observing how open principles were expressed in M21S. I carried out open coding (Miles et al., 2014) on my interview material using the attributes of openness (i.e., freedom, participation, transparency) as interpretation anchors. This helped me (i) identify the presence of values relating to openness principles, and (ii) identify the behaviours and actions that resulted from them. My preliminary findings were presented during academic meetings, and the discussions they generated led me to formulate depersonification and disempowerment as aggregated categories.

To further characterize depersonification and disempowerment, I drew on my field experience to identify these mechanisms as being particularly salient during moments of crisis. Using the retrospective data and my direct observations, I wrote a narrative (Miles et al., 2014) of the crises that occurred between the shift in governance and the election of a new board almost three years later, in order to understand the implications of depersonification and disempowerment for the organization. It revealed a pattern based on the absence of action by members to promptly resolve problems that arose, and how this failure to act ultimately came to threaten the survival of M21S. I decided to use the metaphor of ‘necrosis’ to emphasize these internal deviances and their consequences. Necrosis is a medical term for progressive injury and premature death of cells that generally affects a limited area of living tissue but can extend to the whole organ. I saw the term as appropriate here to stress the severity of the situations that the organization ran into and deliberately left unaddressed. More specifically, I borrowed the domain interaction model from Cornelissen (2005) to draw upon the key notions of necrosis from medicine (i.e., its potential complications) to make additional codes, as well as the relationships with each other, emerge from my data analysis.

In line with my participative stance, I organized a roll-up report of my work-in-progress analysis with the M21S members of the studied period (including former members). The presentation was interspersed with moments of discussion to strengthen the plausibility of my interpretations. According to the actors, the depersonification and disempowerment mechanisms were consistent with their experience. They also cited the key role played by their adherence to open principles as the trigger sparking the necrosis process. I thus further mobilized the domain interaction approach of metaphor to identify the potential cures to

necrosis, which, combined with the actors' suggestion, helped me highlight the value of an extremist conception of openness.

In light of this added category (extremist openness), I conducted a final analysis stage on the crises narrative to gain a deeper understanding of the relations between these extremist open principles and the mechanisms of necrosis (i.e., depersonification and disempowerment). This helped me grasp how this extremist view on open values shapes what was perceived as a problem and a valuable solution, whereas depersonification and disempowerment serve to preserve congruence with these principles. On this basis, I refined my themes and categories using a systematic coding method. I focused on coding information related to the key events faced by M21S that were identified in the narrative. More specifically, this work concerned the transcription of discussions that occurred in each key event, and the associated secondary data (meeting reports, charters, official communications on said event, etc.). Table 17 above-mentioned reports this final version of the codes.

**Table 17. The coding**

<b>First-order themes</b>	<b>Second-order categories</b>	<b>Aggregated categories</b>
Controlling for actions–open values fit	Surveillance between peers	Depersonification
Collectivistic decision-making		
Rules to fit with values as the only response to dysfunction	Rules conception	
Rules based on self-regulation		
No mediation with the people involved in cases of conflict	Turning a blind eye	Disempowerment
No accountability-related sanctions		
Absence of support	Passive behaviour	
Normative exclusion	Ideological Closure	Extremist openness
Blaming the lack of congruence of the GC		
Unspecified meaning of open values		
Criticism (directed healing)	Unusual reactions (Necrosis cure)	
Support from new or irregular members (transplant)		

The findings illustrate the mechanisms of depersonification, disempowerment, and then extremist openness underpinning the necrosis process within M21S. As these mechanisms are

particularly salient in critical events, data will be shown using vignettes. Names of the organization and actors have been changed.

### III. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

#### a) Depersonification

This section illustrates depersonification as a first mechanism fuelling the crises escalation. Depersonification combines (i) techniques of surveillance between peers to control adherence to open values that imply erasing individualities to homogenize behaviours, and (ii) rules designed to fit to the extremist principles of openness as best as possible.

As an act of surveillance, the members of M21S closely control congruence of realized actions with open principles. The non-fit with values of openness is seen as a primary problem to pick up and manage, even in times of major crisis, as illustrated in the following vignette:

#### Vignette 1

The ‘Frégate de la Joie’, a costly event organized by M21S, had been cancelled too late to recoup all the financial outlay. The financial consequences were so significant that the association almost had to disband. Encouraged by the GC, members organized two events to bail out the accounts. One of these events received criticism on the grounds that the organizers put their personal brands forward whereas fluid inclusion prohibits self-promotion.

During a process organized to review these three events, the non-compliance with open values was considered a more serious issue to address than the significant financial loss from the ‘Frégate de la Joie’ fiasco:

*“We spent the beginning of the year giving feedback on two events that had apparently not gone well [...] I think we spent a lot of time on it, whereas for me the real problem was the Frigate of Joy. There was still somebody who messed up”* (from the interview of Caroline).

By the end of the review process, the organizers of the criticized event had quit the association.

This example highlights how the actors focused on their will to fully adhere to open principles at the expense of individual frustrations and sound crisis management. Indeed, M21S members did value securing strategic resources, in this case the people who successfully brought in money for M21S but who received no recognition for putting the association’s finances back on track, and who finally decided to quit the association.

Controlling the action-values fit is also enabled by collectivistic decision-making practices based on two rules. First, the governance charter states that “*decision-making is ideally done unanimously*”, meaning based on the agreement of all participants. Nevertheless, consensus-based choices can reduce expression of individuality and tend to homogenize the directions chosen by a group (Haug, 2015; Lee & Romano, 2013). Second, in the GC, decisions are only supposed to be taken during in-person meetings that make both the process and the outcomes collectively examinable.

### Vignette 2

The mandated organizer of a GC meeting presented the agenda set by herself and the chairman. It had been emailed to all the group beforehand but got no response.

Henri voiced his disagreement: “*All the decisions that were made or attempted outside [of the GC] created huge conflicts: we therefore don’t make decisions outside of the GC [...] we arrived at the decision that no decision was to be made by email*”

[...]

Irma: “*I am quite shocked by everything you say. [...] In our circle we work like that: the one who does it will do it their way.*”

This second vignette shows that the extensive surveillance, which exists to ensure decisions are congruent with open values, still created tensions in the GC, as it inhibited decentralized arrangements and the principle of subsidiarity (i.e., uncompromised autonomy).

In M21S, rules conception serves as the only response when members face a dysfunction or demand. This enables actors to conceive of solutions that best fit with their open principles. The example below also shows that guidelines designed in M21S are largely based on self-regulation to align with the uncompromising stance on autonomy.

### Vignette 3

After the failure of the ‘Frégate de la Joie’ and of the two events organized to bail out the association accounts, a review process was conducted to avoid repeating the same mistakes and resulted in a ‘questioning tool’. The ‘questioning tool’ is a checklist formulated as a series of questions to be answered before organizing an event to “*be accountable and avoid turning the Deontology and Maturity circle into an enforcer in charge of censorship or policing*”. The latter emphasizes the autonomy of the project: “*there is confidence that everyone has a clear picture of what they have to do and will do it in due course.*” This checklist also recalls the other open principles of the association, such as not displaying the logos of the organizers’ own personal brands.

b) Disempowerment

This section focuses on a second mechanism that reinforced M21S' difficulties, disempowerment, according to which members attempted to push their problems aside by either (i) deliberately turning a blind eye to identified issues or (ii) adopting passive behaviours.

At M21S, rather than attempting to deal with problematic situations, the GC members consciously swept them under the rug, fearing they could threaten the organization's open values. This strategy is first portrayed through the absence of accountability -related control or sanctions, notably whenever formalized rules are neglected (i.e., procedures and role's duties). The following vignette portrays the explicit disregard for the treasurer's accountabilities and subsequent lack of reaction from GC members:

**Vignette 4**

When delivering his annual report, Clovis, the treasurer, announced a discrepancy in the accounts:

Thomas, an unusual member, angrily told André [the chairman]: *“You don't mention this event [The Frigate of Joy] in your AGM report, and yet it affects the accounts. What exactly was this event? Or is that confidential?”*

André: *“We've received feedback on the experiment, we lost 12 grand.”*

In the wake of the significant financial losses caused by the Frigate of Joy fiasco, no further checks and balances or transparency on the accounts was implemented.

Clovis, annoyed, tried to justify his failure in providing the right information: *“The previous treasurer was on vacation, and I had other things to do.”* Clovis explicitly stated that he did not mark all the receipts and payments during his tenure, whereas it was part of his collectively-validated accountabilities, which he could have refused when he was elected treasurer.

Nora: *“The treasurer's job was poorly done.”*

Clovis, defending himself: *“If being treasurer means doing an accountant's job, it's not worth the hassle.”*

[...]

André: *“We won't forget the €24,000 [gap in the accounts], but that was last year's finances.”*

Nora, member of the Western-region circle: *“If you weren't physically here last year, then you wouldn't be able to know.”*

The treasurer's report was ultimately validated as it stood. Clovis still sat on the GC as "representative of the coaches". He even got votes a few weeks later supporting his nomination for a second term as treasurer at the election of the new board members.

The absence of task-related control or sanction appears to be justified by the precept of uncompromised autonomy, with members considering that "[laissez-faire] is really our house philosophy. Rubbing someone's nose in it will only get you so far" (from an informal discussion with André, the chairman). This stance also leads to the establishment of a contextual prioritization among open values—in this case to compromise on transparency around the M21S accounts in an effort to preserve the organization's autonomy principle. In other words, prioritizing among open principles means defining the most relevant issue to address.

Another strategy employed by GC members to avoid dealing with situations that challenged their open values was to not meet with actors who were openly in conflict with M21S. This was pointed out by a new member who attended her first GC meeting:

*"We're regulating a major conflict with the Western Region [who blamed the GC for a failure to demonstrate open values], and nobody is present. Same for the founder [who was accused of an unpaid debt]. So, the very process of managing this conflict raises questions. I'm not comfortable with the idea that the problem is still being brushed aside on the provision that the Western Circle has wanted its independence for years. That's not the issue: the real issue, so I've heard, is Nora's ethical problem."* (Stéphanie, during a GC meeting).

The GC also adopts a passive behaviour by not addressing demands from members when such demands could conflict with open values. More specifically, the GC either ignores or postpones such demands, which demonstrates an absence of support:

### Vignette 5

Nora, recently elected as treasurer, found that the incomplete bookkeeping prompted the auditor to refuse to certify the association's accounts. She also discovered a debt that had been contracted by the founder a few years previously but not registered in the accounting records. She requested the help of the GC, and suggested a few ideas on how to manage these issues:

Nora: *"What I want is for these people to remedy what they have done: it is those who did this who are responsible [...] I flatly refuse to handle this on my own."*

Other than the inquiry conducted by Nora, no concrete decisions were implemented by the GC to solve these issues:

*"There is [...] an absence of sincere and expressed intention to change these situations: these facts have not prompted any kind of reaction from the GC, no openness to regulation, no willingness to operate otherwise"* (from the resignation email signed by the Western-Region members, including Nora).



The members of the GC recognized that they had not moved to help Nora because they were uncomfortable with her suggestions:

Henri: *“I wouldn’t want René [the founder] to be dragged in, brought to his knees and forced to do something, but I would want us to put our house in order.”*

[...]

André, the chairman: *“The support that Nora could have asked for and expected during her investigation... I didn’t give her that support because I didn’t agree with her approach.”*

### Vignette 6

Nora, recently elected as treasurer, found that the incomplete bookkeeping prompted the auditor to refuse to certify the association’s accounts. She also discovered a debt that had been contracted by the founder a few years previously but not registered in the accounting records. She requested the help of the GC, and suggested a few ideas on how to manage these issues:

Nora: *“What I want is for these people to remedy what they have done: it is those who did this who are responsible [...] I flatly refuse to handle this on my own.”*

Other than the inquiry conducted by Nora, no concrete decisions were implemented by the GC to solve these issues:

*“There is [...] an absence of sincere and expressed intention to change these situations: these facts have not prompted any kind of reaction from the GC, no openness to regulation, no willingness to operate otherwise”* (from the resignation email signed by the Western-Region members, including Nora).

The members of the GC recognized that they had not moved to help Nora because they were uncomfortable with her suggestions:

Henri: *“I wouldn’t want René [the founder] to be dragged in, brought to his knees and forced to do something, but I would want us to put our house in order.”*

[...]

André, the chairman: *“The support that Nora could have asked for and expected during her investigation... I didn’t give her that support because I didn’t agree with her approach.”*

Once again, this situation resulted in a loss of strategic human resources: the disempowerment manifested by the GC prompted the whole Western-Region circle to collectively resign. Their defection especially raised questions around how the members of M21S can replace them and address the resulting drop in activity<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> In 2018, the externally-oriented actions were mostly organized by the Western-Region circle.

c) Extremist openness

This section introduces extremist openness as a third mechanism to play a key role in M21S crises. I characterize the open principles of M21S as extremist because the regular actors are so deeply committed to embodying their open principles that these values affect their judgement and behaviour by (i) fuelling a form of ideological closure that is emphasized by (ii) newcomers and irregular actors displaying unusual behaviour that the usually engaged members would not. M21S has been introduced as a case of ‘radical’ openness that is distinct from extremism, as it is characterized by the application of open principles in all the organizing process, these values also fostering more openness than official closure.

While official forms of closure appear as inappropriate in M21S because they are antagonistic to open values, the regular actors still unintentionally enact implicit exclusion to sanction the non-fit with the principles of openness. This normative exclusion draws upon public criticism (e.g., holding the Western members responsible for not taking initiatives) and manifests as aggressive behaviour oriented towards those actors whose actions are considered inappropriate, as reflected in the example below and in vignette 1:

*“Caroline is asking Nora [referent of the Western circle] to account for the reimbursement of travel expenses [to attend GC meetings] because it was not part of the deal, and it was never decided. ‘Germaine herself validated the fact that you are to be reimbursed’. She evokes Josiane who never asked for anything”* (from my fieldnotes taken during a GC meeting)

While it is the gatekeeper of the action-values fit in M21S, the GC is still blamed, by newcomers and irregular actors, for its lack of congruence, in particular with the principle of uncompromised autonomy. These accusations are notably related to normative exclusion attempts:

*“I felt angered by the criticism on the ‘independence of the West’ [because the circle self-organized events] [...] It is a dynamic group that wants to build — and on a small scale we experienced that in Bordeaux too —, to move and grow on its own two feet, free from group inertia”* (Jeanne, at a GC meeting)

While M21S members work towards an imaginary total congruence with open values, the data also reveals divergences in their conception of these open principles:

*“Within the GC, there are differences as to what M21S is, its values, its vision, etc.”* (Arthur, during a meeting to prepare the AGM)

Even though members are committed to fitting with the values of openness, these values have not been defined or even discussed as a step towards defining a collectively-understood meaning. Open principles are brandished at every debate on organizing as an ideal to be achieved, but without ever specifying a shared vision of these open principles. Some members

even refused to put the issue on the agenda as it “*polluted*” the atmosphere of the meetings. The avoidance to specify the meaning of open values reflects the ideological character of extremist openness as something that cannot be challenged.

This ideological form of closure is especially evident in the reactions of newcomers and less regular members that sound unusual compared to the regular actors’ behaviours. First, the criticism from new or irregular actors, who are less subjected to extremist open principles, serves to change the course of action of the GC. For instance, during the AGM, Thomas, an unusual member directly criticized the behaviour of the GC: “*That's all I've heard since I've been in this organization, trust.... Trust the Western team! You are in control!*” (see vignette 4 on the AGM and Irma’s quotes as a newcomer as well). Combined with other arguments, this remark from Thomas led the GC to change the investment process. Yet, these singular attitudes appear as inappropriate as they collide with the value of uncompromised autonomy and its related prohibition of external control.

Along the same line, new or irregular actors make decisions and take initiatives, particularly during moments of crisis, that have not been adopted by the GC, although they prove effective in solving the encountered problems. These less committed actors thus allow themselves to act against the extremist values when necessary.

### Vignette 7

As the GC did not act to actively address the suspicious debt issue, a senior but irregular member of M21S, who was not in the GC, accompanied Nora (the treasurer) to meet with the founder and the auditor.

*"To date, René is committed to looking for [...] proof of these loans as well as any repayments that may have taken place. [...] For the credit amount, no solution has been found."* (commitment letter signed by the treasurer, the auditor and the founder)

Then, a few months later, during the AGM, the members of the association asked the founder to sign an acknowledgment of debt.

Anthony: *"These financial issues must be dealt with as proposed at the AGM [...] there is no need to procrastinate: René has committed himself to repaying. We can see where the solution lies."* (during the GC meeting after the AGM)

In sum, the involvement of individuals who were new or not part of the GC thus provided the crisis management support that the GC members had failed to give.

## IV. DISCUSSION

This paper aims to question how open organizing can fail to address its inherent tensions by studying M21S, as a case of organization relying on radical open values that encountered great difficulties to cope with crises. M21S thus appears as a two-fold case of failure related to a process of organizational necrosis that will be discussed throughout the discussion section. First, I depict the way an extremist conception of openness leads to the decline of open principles through the emergence of a necrosing ideology. Secondly, because the members were so focused on fitting with extremist openness, I show how depersonification and disempowerment led the association to fail in managing successive waves of crises, to the point its very survival came under threat.

### a) Extremist openness fuelling a necrosing ideology

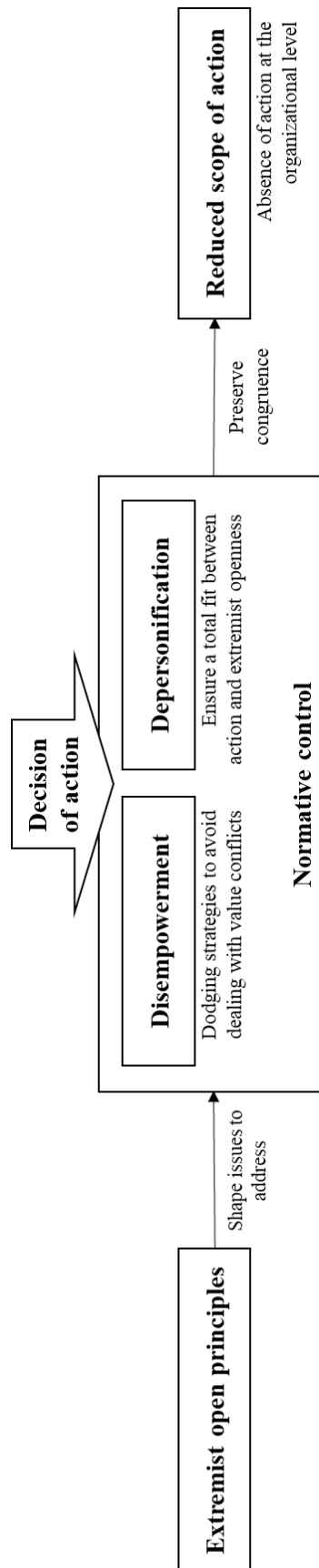
If authors have identified how risks for efficacy (Hautz et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017; Stieger et al., 2012) or engagement (Hautz et al., 2017; Hutter et al., 2017) can damage the contribution dynamic, they did not relate this problem to the ideological dimension of openness. This article therefore provides a first critical contribution to the open organizing literature by highlighting how the drive to implement extremist openness can spiral into necrosing ideology. More specifically, the organizational necrosis process (see figure 8 below) results in the self-decline of the open principles by drastically reducing members' scope of action (i.e., individual freedom) and by creating exclusion, despite the sincere willingness of actors to enact an open form of organizing.

The process is set off by extremist open principles. Extremist, here, entails the deep commitment of actors to embodying the open principles, so much so it creates a form of normative control. Depersonification is especially designed to foster a total fit between actions and open values, notably using peer-surveillance and rules based on self-regulation. Similar dynamics have been demonstrated in post-bureaucratic and other neo-participative organizations, which share common characteristics with organizational openness such as an emphasis on participation, autonomy, and transparency (e.g., Daudigeos et al., 2019; Josserand et al., 2006; Puranam et al., 2014). In critical investigations on these new organizational forms, researchers have shown that supervisor control has been replaced by comparable systems of peer surveillance and normative regulation (e.g., Barker, 1993; Barley & Kunda, 1992; Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). My findings, however, add to critical research since, as a particularity of

radical open organizing, the actors of M21S have decided to apply these open principles to themselves without the deliberate decision of a leader. In addition, compared to employees contractually bonded to a company, M21S actors are free to leave the association whenever they want without having to face the consequences of unemployment. I also shed light on an original mechanism, disempowerment, representing avoidant strategies to escape having to deal with situations that conflict with the open values.

To heal living tissue affected by necrosis, a doctor can excise the diseased area and thus stop the necrosis from expanding. The combination of depersonification and disempowerment fuelled the necrosis process by compelling a narrower scope of actions to preserve congruence with the absolute ideal of openness. In other words, actors focused more on their fit with open principles than on curing the necrosis itself. This highlights similarities with mechanisms described by Picard & Islam (2019) in a liberated company, particularly by fostering fantasies about the congruence across the group and by excluding actors who failed to embody the new values. As in the case of Cookiz (Daudigeos et al., 2019), the open basis of the organizing of M21S was unspecified, which fuelled this fantasied total congruence. More specifically, Daudigeos et al. (2019) showed how actors of this liberated company became dominated by a system they criticized because their criticism was undermined by ideological plasticity (i.e., management co-opting the criticism to offer win-win arrangements), the use of sacrosanct conventions (i.e., principles that actors were unable to challenge) while continuously changing the rules of application, and prohibiting negative emotions in the workplace. In M21S, there was no discussion around the meaning given to open values and the overriding drive to fit with the radical open values remained unquestioned, making it difficult to excise the necrosed (i.e., ideological) part of the organization.

**Figure 9. Process of organizational necrosis**



b) Extremist openness threatening an organization's sustainability

As a second contribution to critical and openness literatures, this paper demonstrates how, through depersonification and disempowerment, extremist open principles can necrose the organizing, as in drastically reduce action at the organizational level to the point where the organization's survival is threatened.

The organizational necrosis develops along the following steps. Within M21S, extremist open principles first dictate what is considered as problematic, then depersonification and disempowerment state how issues should be prioritized and addressed. Disempowerment, as upstream control, is primarily observed whenever a problem is identified and potential solutions discussed. Whenever an action is implemented, depersonification ex pot prompts members to assess its fit with open principles and conceive corrective solutions if the fit is unsatisfactory. Actors thus focus essentially on the optimal fit with open principles at the expense of addressing other problems that arise around them in the organization, specifically when the options offered during deliberation, on how to solve their problems, conflicts with their open ideal. This results in the absence of action from the GC, leading to the loss of strategic human resources, much like necrosis can lead to the loss of a limb; and to a decrease in activity, like the dysfunctional nature of a necrosed organ. Ultimately, this enables the necrosis to expand through crisis escalation.

Critical authors have warned us about the damage that post-bureaucracies and neo-participative organizations may have on individuals, but not organizational sustainability. More particularly, the critical literature denounces how the race for performance can affect individuals' wellbeing and health (e.g., through anxiety, guilt, and burn-out in Picard & Islam, 2019). The damage caused by putting too much pressure on people can also cause disengagement and absenteeism (e.g., Daudigeos et al., 2019; Fleming & Spicer, 2007), which differ from the necrosis described here, as members of M21S continued to express their engagement, attend and actively participate in meetings. In addition to its negative consequences on people, which also manifested in M21S through defections, extremist openness also carries an as of now neglected risk of driving the organizations into a particularly precarious position.

The recent debates on critical performativity (D. King & Learmonth, 2015; Learmonth, Harding, Gond, & Cabantous, 2016; Spicer et al., 2009) argue the role of critical scholars in promoting alternative organizational forms, to which open organizing belongs (Parker et al., 2007; Pearce, 2014). In other words, some authors assert that critical research must now turn to

a practical engagement, notably using recommendations to be organized ‘otherwise’ (Land & King, 2014). While the process that builds a ‘closed pattern of thinking’ in democratic organizations (Armbrüster & Diether, 2002) has already been demonstrated, this paper adds to critical thinking by revealing the consequences the ideological deviation of alternatives have on their sustainability. Nevertheless, while unusual reactions of new or irregular actors emphasize the ideological closure phenomena observed in M21S, they also imply that open principles seem to possess the tool to heal the necrosis, when not based on an extreme conception. Just like a transplant can replace the necrosed tissue, the involvement of newcomers or actors who were not part of the GC counterbalanced the normalized behaviour of the GC by concretely handling necessary action and identifying new solutions. Another medical cure for necrosis is based on a directed healing process, which we can compare here to the criticism raised by these new or unusual members, ultimately setting the course of action to be followed by the GC.



## V. APPENDIX

**Table 18. Timeline of the studied period**

Dates	Events
June 2017	Vote to adopt the new constitution in extraordinary general assembly.
	“Frigate of Joy” event cancelled, but too late to recoup all the financial outlay.
July 2017	First GC meeting, a new Board was elected (with André as Chairman, Clovis as Treasurer, Germaine as Secretary).
	Departure of the salaried chief delegate.
	André, the new chairman, encouraged planning as many events as possible in order to bail out the accounts.
Fall 2017	First externally-oriented event organized, a movie projection.
	After-work meeting organized by the Western-Region circle.
October 2017	Negative feedback on the movie projection event.
	Second externally-oriented event organized, a workshop on Collective Intelligence.
November 2017	Diffusion of a video of the event that put forward the organizers’ own personal brand, which contravenes the rules of the association.
	Diffusion of the ‘questioning tool’ and definition of the dead-weight rule.
December 2017	M21Smeter training session, externally-oriented event organized by the Reptile Circle.
January 2018	GC meeting.
February 2018	GC meeting, with feedback on the Frigate of Joy fiasco on the agenda.
March 2018	GC meeting, in which the members decided to stop addressing finance-related topics during their meetings.
May 2018	GC meeting, the 2017 AGM was on the agenda.
April 2018	M21Smeter training session, externally-oriented event organized by the Reptile Circle.
June 2018	Meeting dedicated to the organization of the 2017 AGM.
July 2018	Plenary session, externally-oriented, organized by the Western-Region Circle.
October 2018	2017 AGM, in which the members found out about the financial difficulties of M21S in the wake of the ‘Frigate of Joy’ affair.
December 2018	GC meeting, with election of a new Board and vision of M21S on the agenda. The elected Board members: André as Chairman, Nora as Treasurer, Irma & Jonathan as Secretaries.
March 2019	Plenary session, externally-oriented, organized by the Western-Region Circle.
	GC meeting, in which Nora spoke up about (i) how she had discovered that part of the €24,000 discrepancy was the result of a debt contracted by the founder and not shown in the accounting records; (ii) incomplete bookkeeping prompted the auditor to refuse to certify the association’s accounts. The last hour of this one-day meeting was dedicated to budgetary autonomy.
	Plenary session, externally-oriented, organized by the Western-Region Circle.
April 2019	Plenary session, externally-oriented, organized by the Western-Region Circle.
June 2019	GC meeting, the topic of budgetary autonomy was on the agenda.
July 2019	Plenary session, externally-oriented, organized by the Wine-Region Circle.
October 2019	2018 AGM, in which the members found out about the debt contracted by the founder and asked him to sign a promise to pay it back.
November 2019	Externally-oriented workshop organized by the Paris-Region Circle.
	Collective resignation of the Western-Region Circle.
December 2019	GC meeting, with the departure of the Western-Region Circle on the agenda.

GC meeting, AGM, Externally-oriented action

**Table 19. Additional evidence**

Second-order categories	First-order themes	Vignettes and example quotes
Surveillance between peers	Controlling for actions—open values fit	“I’m not comfortable with the idea that the problem is still being brushed aside on the proviso that the Western Circle has wanted its independence for years.” (Stéphanie, during the debrief about the defection of the whole Western-Region circle)
	Collectivistic decision-making	“Very often, when a decision is made, if a person who is absent has an objection, it leads to a clash” (interview with André)
Rules conception	Rules to fit with values as the only response to dysfunction	While the treasurer was delivering the financial report, the topic of the financial autonomy of the circles came up on the agenda: Arthur: “Each circle should be able to manage its own budget, and then we would be in agreement with our <i>raison d’être</i> . [...] Do we decide now? Or is it the GC’s decision? [...] This needs to be addressed” [...] Clovis, ironically: “You already know how to do it, so that’s good.” The topic was brought to the GC’s agenda to work on a detailed process.
	Rules based on self-regulation	During a debate about the financial autonomy of circles: Henri: “The key is: we do what we want but it’s transparent. It’s based on autonomy, the principle of the envelope is that we can act without authorization, as long as we’re transparent.”
Turning a blind eye	No mediation with the people involved in case of conflict	“I felt like I was being judged without having an opportunity to debate the situation: it’s not fair and it’s not easy to live with.” (Irma, during a GC meeting)
	No accountability-related sanctions	“I am concerned: we have this recurrent pitfall at M21S. We start a process, then we stop it right in the middle.” (Germaine, during a meeting)
Passive behaviour	Absence of support	At the 2017 AGM, the Western-Region circle raised the topic of giving budgetary autonomy to the circles to help organize events by using the funds on the association’s accounts, which would be a more facilitative process than having to adhere to the self-finance obligation. André: “That’s one operating account per region. We’ve always been against it. But we can talk about it.” Germaine, the former leader of the Western-Region circle, annoyed: “But we’ve never talked about it! It always gets put off. In the regions, we’re treated like children, we’re not autonomous.”
Ideological closure	Unspecified meaning of open values	“We don’t give ourselves the means to deploy our values” (Josiane, during an informal talk)
	Blaming the lack of congruence of the GC	“The experience shared over the past two years with the GC at the AGMs [...] show that the principles of M21S are neither respected nor embodied. Indeed, there are: significant gaps between the intention (vision, values) and the reality of the practices within the GC; lack of respect for the M21S principles [...] which leave room for the emergence of ego in all its forms.” (Letter of resignation of the Western circle)

	Normative exclusion	<p>“If there is a real problem of legitimacy [of a person] <i>that arises, it's not in those moments that we want to conduct a real decision-making process by consent because there is nothing more annoying than dealing with the objections of someone you consider illegitimate.</i>” (André’s interview)</p>
<p><b>Unusual reactions (Necrosis cure)</b></p>	Criticism (directed healing)	<p>“<i>I can't stand it when people talk about absentees in the GC, I find it very deviant, I could have not been there, I have too much work, I couldn't make progress.... I'm going to mention my failures, but, please, those who are not there are just absent</i>” (François, a recent member, during a GC)</p>
	Support from new or irregular members (transplant)	<p>During the election without a candidate of a new treasurer to replace Clovis, someone proposed the name of Nora, who recently joined the GC, but Caroline objected. Nora, answering the objection: “<i>We asked for services and we waited to reimburse a caterer, as a matter of principle, I commit myself to pay the suppliers quickly, that's what bothers me the most. [...] Clovis does not have the time to enter all the expenses in the books, and no one does, and it is a priority that this work be done by either the treasurer or the circle leaders.</i>”</p> <p>As a new GC member, Nora thus stepped up to be elected as a new treasurer by committing to do the expected work correctly.</p>

## **CHAPTER 5 - ESSAY 3**

**How to last as radical open  
organizing: explicitly making  
sense of three anchorings**

### **Evolution of the essay**

A first version of this essay was co-authored with Véronique Perret, which was presented:

- at a MOST research team seminar in February 2019
- at the Ethnography Workshop in March 2019
- at the EGOS conference in July 2019 (subtheme on processual approach of power)

Then, Lionel Garreau joined the authorship, which led us to fully reframe the article. This new version was presented:

- at the EGOS conference (subtheme: Openness as an Organizing Principle: Revisiting Diversity and Inclusion in Strategy, Innovation, and Beyond) in July 2021
- at the PROS conference in September 2021

We aim to submit this paper to the journal ‘Organization Studies’.

### **How this essay contributes to answer the general research question of my thesis**

This paper explores how openness as a set of values behaves in the organization and shapes action by focusing on the long-term enactment of radical open organizing within Ouishare. Regarding the way openness manifests in the organization, our findings reveal that OS members must engage in ongoing sensemaking processes on open principles to cope with the fluid nature of open organizing. The actors especially draw on explicit sensemaking to identify what the plausible meaning and enactment of openness can be in a particular situation. To do so, explicit sensemaking is based on regular and intensive discussions that activate organizing processes using the performative character of open values. On the shaping action issue, our research sheds light on the use of three anchorings in sensemaking processes, an identity, an organizational and a teleological anchoring. More particularly, the members of OS show an ability to articulate the anchorings to compensate for each other. This anchoring articulation provides actors with a margin of freedom to temporarily move away from radical openness without sensebreaking. These conscious provisional closing arrangements appear to be quickly challenged, pushing actors into a new sensemaking process, as an ongoing quest to enact radical openness as best as possible.

# How to last as radical open organizing: explicitly making sense of three anchorings

Margaux Langlois, Lionel Garreau, Véronique Perret

## **Abstract:**

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Openness appears as a new norm that challenges the prevailing bureaucratic organization. The literature emphasized the precarious character of organizational openness because of the emerging tensions and dilemmas that occur in open processes, the provisional character of organizational arrangements in social fluid collectives, and of deviations towards closure in the long run. However, some open initiatives have existed for over fifteen years despite being built around radical openness, which interrogates one of the primary issues of organizations, perennity. We thus look through a sensemaking lens to investigate how organizational actors enact radical open organizing over time. We mobilize an ethnographic inquiry of Ouishare, an extreme case of organization that has been able to remain radically open for over ten years. Our findings uncover that the actors make sense and enact radical openness in the long run by articulating three anchorings using intensive conversational practices: an identity anchoring (i.e., to define their collective identity), an organizational anchoring (i.e., organizing processes) and a teleological anchoring (i.e., finality / to evaluate). Our two-fold contribution sheds light on the three phenomena enabling the actors to enact a lasting form of radical open organizing. First, we reveal how discussion allows the actors to enact explicit sensemaking processes that performatively activate open organizational arrangements. Then, we show the role of anchorings, combining a steady anchor and an enlarged perimeter, in making sense of organizational openness. In particular, we highlight how organizational members articulate the three anchorings to compensate for each other and avoid leaning too far into opening or closing processes, which would sound the death knell of radical open organizing.

**Keywords:** open organizing; sensemaking; ethnography; organizationality

## INTRODUCTION

Openness appears as a new norm (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019; Tkacz, 2012) promoting greater transparency, participation, and individual freedom in society and organizations. In organizational settings especially, openness challenges traditional organizing principles based on the bureaucratic ideal-type (Weber, 1978, first published in 1922). Openness shifts organizational boundaries through unclear membership rules, internal layers and attributes, by emphasizing horizontality notably (Puranam et al., 2014). Furthermore, routines and procedures are also impacted through ongoing re-organizations (see Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010). In sum, openness could be considered as anti-organizational in nature.

Open phenomena scholarship has emphasized the precarious character of open organizing. On the one hand, the literature revealed a variety of tensions and dilemmas endemic to open processes (e.g., Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017; Janssen, Charalabidis, & Zuiderwijk, 2012; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003). In parallel, other investigations have focused on ‘organizationality’ (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Endrissat & Islam, 2021), which, without explicitly mentioning the concept of openness, refers to a form of radical open organizing observed in loose social collectives. Specifically, organizationality is based on provisional organizational arrangements that draw on identity claims, i.e., expressing what the entity is or does, to recognize an action as emanating from a collective (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010). Finally, in the long run, radical openness seems to deviate towards more closed forms of organizing (e.g., Dahlander & Mahony, 2011; Kavanagh & Kelly, 2002; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007) and a loss of steam in contributions, despite participation being necessary to sustain the community (Curto-millet, Jiménez, & Curto-millet, 2022). Some radical open initiatives, however, such as the Anonymous (established since 2003), Wikipedia (created in 2001), or the Swedish Pirate Party (founded in 2006), have existed for more than fifteen years and are still organized around radical openness. These examples question one of the primary stakes of organizations, perennity, which seems to be particularly compromised by the precariousness of open organizing, as demonstrated in current research.

In this article, we suggest using a sensemaking approach (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) as it is useful to understand the dynamics that enable radical open organizing to last over time. As informed by Bencherki, Basque, & Rouleau (2019), sensemaking occurs throughout the implementation of organizational openness as both processes draw on widespread information sharing and participation through dialogue (Heracleous et al., 2017). The sensemaking process

also helps better grasp the diverse tensions (e.g., Hautz et al., 2017; Janssen et al., 2012; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003) and closure trends (e.g., Dahlander & Mahony, 2011; Kavanagh & Kelly, 2002; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007) that emerge during open processes and question the established narrative. Finally, the sensemaking process appears as deeply link to identity and identity moves (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Vough, Caza, & Maitlis, 2020), while identity is considered a core attribute in the activation of organizationality (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). In this article, we thus aim to scrutinize how organizational actors enact radical open organizing in the long run.

To answer our research question, we draw upon an ethnographic inquiry of Ouishare. This extreme case of open organizing (Chen, 2016) has remained radically open for more than ten years by combining a strong collective identity based on openness and open practices in daily activities. Openness is at the heart of reflexive debates about the organizing that occur regularly thereby requiring a lot of time from the actors. Our findings uncover how actors make sense and enact radical openness over time through the articulation of three anchorings: an identity anchoring (i.e., to define their collective identity), an organizational anchoring (i.e., organizing processes) and a teleological anchoring (i.e., finality / to evaluate). Instead of moving on to further issues, the actors iteratively seek to articulate their open identity, their open practices / organizing and their ideal of openness without reaching sensebreaking because of extremes in opening or closing processes. This endless unfulfilled quest contributes to make the organizing of Ouishare particularly fluid but lastingly grounded in radical openness.

This article works towards revealing three mechanisms that enable actors to enact radical openness over time. First, the intensive and regular mobilization of dialogue fuels what we named 'explicit sensemaking' processes, which remove the ambiguities of organizing fluidity to materialize organizational arrangements. Secondly, we show the key role of anchorings in sensemaking for the actors to allow themselves to deviate from radical openness without straying too far. Finally, we highlight the ability of actors to articulate the three anchorings (identity, organizational and teleological) in ways that compensate for each other. This capacity is continuously mobilized to cope with the tensions of openness through conscious provisional processes that enable collective action.

## **I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**



a) Organizational openness as temporary

The emerging field of open organizing contains a variety of research studying organizational openness as an organizing principle. Based on greater transparency, inclusion and autonomy, this organizational principle changes how an organization is meant to function (i.e., designed structure, decision-making processes, control systems, culture). The existing literature has shown how the adoption of open practices led to the emergence of tensions and dilemmas (e.g., Diriker et al., 2022; Dobusch, Dobusch, & Müller-Seitz, 2019; Hemetsberger & Reinhardt, 2004; Kornberger, Meyer, Brandtner, & Höllerer, 2017). Two main avenues have been scrutinized to cope with these contradictions, by identifying a balanced combination of practices at the individual level (e.g., Lingo, 2022; Luedicke, Husemann, Furnari, & Ladstaetter, 2017; Turco, 2016) or by formalizing collective procedural arrangements (e.g., Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019; Husted & Plesner, 2017). However, as Heracleous et al., (2017) have shown in open strategy processes, the inherent character of these tensions involves that their resolution only remain temporary because quickly challenged by participants (e.g., Diriker et al., 2022; Dobusch et al., 2019; Turco, 2016).

At the empirical level, a large part of the phenomena labelled ‘open’, such as open innovation (e.g., Martínez-Torres, Rodríguez-Piñero, & Toral, 2015), open-source software, open government government (e.g., Kornberger et al., 2017) or open strategizing (e.g., Stieger, Matzler, Chatterjee, & Ladstaetter-Fussenegger, 2012), focuses on the opening of specific activities (e.g., innovation, strategy, software development) or processes (e.g., an innovation project, the reformulation of a firm’s strategy), which are thus temporarily and/or spatially framed. Few works have thus focalized on radical open organizing (i.e., when all of the organizing processes are based on inclusion, transparency and freedom) and, when it has been the case, the organizations were not investigated using the openness lens, but rather by mobilizing the research on organizationality. More specifically, the literature on organizationality studies social loose collectives that are characterized by fluid membership rules and shared instances of decision-making (e.g., Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Endrissat & Islam, 2021; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015), attributes that are reminiscent of open organizing and challenge the traditional features of an organization. The concept of organizationality precisely refers to the organizational arrangements that lead loose collectives (e.g., a bikers’ collective, the Anonymous, and hackathons) to exist provisionally in concrete or material ways at a given time. According to Dobusch & Schoenebor (2015), three criteria have to be met to activate organizationality: (i) interconnected decision-making processes (taken from Ahrne &

Brunsson, 2011); (ii) attributing these decisions to a collective actor (taken from King et al., 2010); (iii) enacting the collective identity through claims establishing who the social entity is (or isn't) and what it does (or does not) (i.e., identity claims). For instance, to be acknowledged as having been led by the Anonymous, a website hack has to express the values promoted by the community (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015).

In sum, authors have mostly focused on the provisional character of open organizing. First, the literature on open phenomena has emphasized the precariousness of framed open processes as these are subjected to emerging tensions that actors only solve temporarily. In parallel, investigations on organizationality demonstrate how loose (open) communities activate ephemeral forms of collective action. Although a variety of empirical examples of radical open organizations have existed for around 20 years (e.g., Wikipedia, BSD, etc), exactly how these communities grounded in openness have managed to thrive appears as an overlooked research area that some authors have called to further study (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Von Krogh, Haefliger, Spaeth, & Wallin, 2012). This topic appears as particularly crucial to unfold since management and organization studies have shed light on the way radical openness can lead to long-term deviations. For instance, in the long run, the Linux open-source community has faced closing tendencies, when its founder attempted to concentrate authority and when a bureaucratic structure was implemented (Dahlander & Mahony, 2011; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). Along the same line, Kavanagh & Kelly (2002) have shown how open multiorganizational networks had to close off spaces of communication to preserve safety and efficiency. Finally, open-source software has also been considered as part of the knowledge commons (Hess & Ostrom, 2007). Regarding failure cases, this means these communities can be subjected to the 'tragedy of the commons' accord to which radical openness might lead the over-exploitation of resources, the contributors here, who risk disengaging (see Von Krogh et al., 2012) even though maintaining a great participation appears as a core mechanism of sustained openness (Curto-millet et al., 2022).

#### b) A sensemaking approach of organizational openness

Except for Seidl & Werle (2018) and Teulier & Rouleau (2013), the sensemaking perspective has not been mobilized to investigate what occurs in the implementation of organizational openness (Bencherki et al., 2019). In the existing literature, the production of meaning has rather been considered as the antecedent (e.g., Birkinshaw, 2017) or the consequence (e.g.,

Hutter, Nketia, & Füller, 2017) of the adoption of more inclusive and transparent practices. Yet, sensemaking appears to be constitutive of open organizing as both are distributed processes that draw on transparency and inclusiveness (Bencherki et al., 2019) as well as an intensive use of dialogue (Heracleous et al., 2017). More particularly, in the meaning creation process, information-sharing and participation allow participants to mobilize new contextual understanding to address equivocal situations. With the organizing and meaning production processes occurring simultaneously, sensemaking provides an interesting approach to study organizational openness ‘in the making’.

Weick (1995) describes sensemaking as an ongoing and situated process based on four steps that enables individuals and groups to generate plausible appreciations of situations previously perceived as ambiguous or contradictory. Achieving the last stage of sensemaking (i.e., retention referring to ‘*plausible images that rationalize what people are doing*’ in Weick et al., 2005, p. 409) appears as especially challenging in open processes since it requires to reach an agreement between numerous actors who do not necessarily share the same organizational identity (Bencherki et al., 2019). In addition, even once established, plausibility still appears especially at stake. Indeed, the tensions observed in open processes ((e.g., Hautz et al., 2017 on open strategy ; Janssen et al., 2012 on open government ; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007 on open-source) can breach ‘*the narrative through contradictory meanings*’ (Aula & Mantere, 2013, p. 343) potentially leading to sensebreaking, referring to ‘*a fundamental questioning of who one is*’ (Pratt, 2000, p. 464). Resolution therefore requires for the actors to minimize the contradictions (Schildt, Mantere, & Cornelissen, 2020), notably between their collective identity and their open practices. Sensemaking thus appears as particularly relevant to better grasp both the nature and the solving mechanisms mobilized by organizational actors to face the tensions of open organizing.

As underlined by the sensebreaking phenomenon, identity and sensemaking construction appear as associated processes. Establishing prevailing identity narratives, which declares what the organization is, does or should become, results from the contestations and negotiations that constitute the sensemaking process (Rodrigues & Child, 2008; Vough et al., 2020). Identity specifically affects how members make sense of their enacted practices, which in turn shape actors’ meaning on their collective identity (Vough et al., 2020). This two-fold interaction enables the actors to build plausibility (Schildt et al., 2020). In parallel, studies on organizationality have shown the key role played by collective identity in the activation of provisional organizational arrangements in loose communities (Dobusch & Schoeneborn,

2015). However, Bartel & Dutton (2001) argued that an equivocal organizational membership, which is a characteristic of open organizing, challenges the construction and the stabilization of a collective identity. A sensemaking lens should thus allow us to better grasp the dynamic between openness, identity and plausibility since building and maintaining a collective identity are key issues of meaning making (Vough et al., 2020).

Finally, scholars have highlighted how, in the long run, actors were struggling to preserve a radical form of open organizing. These difficulties especially appear as related to sensemaking issues. Deviations towards closure reflect how actors had to make sense of particular situations (e.g., an attempt from the founder of the Linux community to centralize power in O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007; refocus on local identity and dynamics in Kavanagh & Kelly, 2002) that led them to move away from radical openness. According to Dobusch et al. (2019), closure appears as constitutive of open organizing, this counterintuitive mechanism compels actors to constantly make sense of the relevant closure conditions related to a situation. Furthermore, the 'tragedy of the commons' can be associated with commitment issues (Von Krogh et al., 2012). In particular the dilemma of commitment (Hautz et al., 2017) refers to a perceived gap between contribution and retribution pushing actors to disengage from open initiatives. A sensemaking perspective could thus help capture what happened for actors who experienced overcommitment.

To conclude, we still know little about the dynamics that enable radical openness to persist over time. As we demonstrated, the implementation of organizational openness draws on sensemaking (Bencherki et al., 2019), specifically to enable actors to cope with the emerging contradictions in open processes and to enact fluid organizational arrangements. Sensemaking also appears as the process that can lead the members to deviate from radical openness. In sum, a sensemaking lens could contribute to capture the mechanisms, in enacting and making sense of organizational openness, that fuel a lasting form of radical open organizing. In this paper, we thus answer the following research question: how do organizational actors enact radical open organizing?

## **II. RESEARCH DESIGN**

a) Ouishare as a case of lasting open organizing

Because we knew little on how actors make sense and enact openness in the long run, we pursued our investigation inductively through an interpretive unique case study: the international community of Ouishare (OS). More specifically, OS can be characterized as an extreme case of radical open organizing (Chen, 2016). The community was founded to propose an alternative working system to bureaucracy using values such as collaboration, horizontality, transparency, and do-ocracy (i.e., a meritocracy based on autonomous action, and experimentation). This strong open identity appears to be the main reason why members have joined Ouishare. While a ‘permanent beta’ value has illustrated the fluidity (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010) of its organizing, the values of Ouishare have not changed much since its creation. Yet in everyday activities, OS members spend a lot of time discussing and reflecting on the open character of their organizing. In that sense, they can be qualified as reflexive actors as qualified by Giddens (1991), referring to the ability of the subject to analyze the origin, consequences, and construction of his/her own activities and situations. Regarding our focus on the long-term enactment of openness, the OS community has existed for more than 10 years, surviving the departure of its founders as well as the turnover of its members. This highlights that the sensemaking processes of this organization did not lead to sensebreaking and have enabled the community to endure over time.

Let us now introduce OS activities and operations. Though they performed in the field of collaborative economy until 2016<sup>38</sup>, the activities of Ouishare are now dedicated to social innovation, by addressing topics related to ecology and social inequalities for instance, through consulting missions, event organization and various studies. Its members are mostly freelancers who make a living through freely chosen OS missions<sup>39</sup>. However they are not tied by any delivery contract with the organization. Regarding membership, the rules are quite unclear since there are different positions, which are not necessarily formalized within OS (i.e., connectors, active members, supporting members). As the only formal statute, the connectors are co-opted members who can access limited space dedicated to strategic decisions (concerning strategy, governance, or usage of the brand for instance). As the community is international, the open practices primarily draw on online tools such as Facebook private groups, a consent decision-

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<sup>38</sup> This article signed the end of activities directly linked with the field of collaborative economy: <https://www.ouishare.net/article/so-long-collaborative-economy>

<sup>39</sup> From an internal survey, approximatively 60% of the French members were making a living mostly thanks to Ouishare activities in December 2018.

making software called Loomio, or instant messengers like Slack and Telegram. Per year, physical gatherings are limited to annual meetings called “Summits” plus a few meeting days organized by local communities (French, Spanish, etc) to address topics like commercial strategy or individual money perception (3 were organized during the year 2018 in France for instance).

b) A data collection based on a two-fold ethnographic and netnographic approach

The fieldwork consisted in an ethnographic style of research conducted by one of the authors. This method appears as particularly relevant to studying sensemaking, because it aims to *‘explicit the often-overlooked, tacitly known and/or concealed dimensions of meaning-making, including its emotional and political aspects’* (Ybema et al., 2009, p.6).

As our research question interrogates long-term enactment of open organizing, we relied on longitudinal data from the creation of Ouishare in 2012 until 2020. We collected both ‘real-time’ and retrospective data (A. Langley & Tsoukas, 2011; Leonard-Barton, 1990) to grasp what happened when actors were engaged in collaborative sensemaking (i.e., the negotiation, potential reconfiguration, etc) as well as the outcomes of the meaning-making processes (Bencherki et al., 2019). Regarding real-time information, we combined observation on site, carried out between April 2018 and June 2020; and a netnographic approach (La Rocca et al., 2014; Levina & Vaast, 2016; Neyland, 2007) using online discussions that occurred between 2012 and 2020. In parallel, the retrospective perspective drew on interviews and secondary data, which showed the ongoing reconfiguration of the meaning that actors associated with organizational openness.

Our data was thus collected from various sources: (1) mainly posts and comments from Facebook and Loomio; (2) observation of meetings (around 195 hours), during which the ethnographer took notes and especially focused on transcribing the discussion; (3) she conducted open interviews that were fully recorded and transcribed; (4) she gathered secondary data (meeting records, operating charters, official communications...); (5) she took notes during informal exchanges with members. The details of the dataset are in the above-mentioned table 20.

**Table 20. Data set**

Data sources	Details	Data related to period
<b>Participant observation</b>	Around 195 hours of participant observation, of which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 5 French Summits and mini-summits (2018, 2019 and online 2020)</li> <li>● 10 workshops to prepare the Summits</li> <li>● 7 Steerco meetings</li> <li>● 7 meetings dedicated to business development</li> <li>● 8 work meetings on paid mission</li> <li>● Around 20 meetings about strategy, finance and governance</li> <li>● Informal discussions and fieldnotes</li> </ul>	2018-2020
<b>Interviews</b>	33 interviews of an average duration of 90 minutes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Alonso (Spanish connector)</li> <li>● Adam (Canadian connector)</li> <li>● Axel (co-founder)</li> <li>● Augustin (former connector)</li> <li>● Bastien (co-founder)</li> <li>● Clémence (connector)</li> <li>● Colette (connector)</li> <li>● Cora (connector)</li> <li>● Dominik (German connector)</li> <li>● Delphine (office manager)</li> <li>● Elphege (co-founder)</li> <li>● Enas (connector)</li> <li>● Fanny (co-founder)</li> <li>● Flavia (x2) (connector)</li> <li>● Isadora (active member)</li> <li>● Juliette (connector)</li> <li>● Janice (connector)</li> <li>● Mathis (former connector)</li> <li>● Maëlys (x2) (connector)</li> <li>● Magalie (connector)</li> <li>● Sacha (connector)</li> <li>● Taj x2 (connector)</li> <li>● Valéry (former connector)</li> <li>● Youna (active member)</li> <li>● Jade (connector)</li> <li>● Emmanuel (x2) (former member)</li> <li>● Maxime (connector)</li> <li>● Jamy (connector and chairman)</li> <li>● Mégane (former connector)</li> </ul>	2012 – 2020
<b>Netnography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Telegram channels (more than 30 collective channels)</li> <li>● Slack channels (258 channels)</li> <li>● Loomio (international connectors page, French connectors page, public pages)</li> <li>● Facebook Connectors private group created in January 2012</li> </ul>	2018-2020 2015 2015-2020 2012-2016

c) Studying openness at Ouishare through a sensemaking lens

As recommended by Bencherki et al. (2019), we consider sensemaking as a distributed process. This view appears especially relevant to the case of OS since its members spend a lot of time discussing organizing topics, and notably openness issues, in a particularly reflexive manner. We thus started by inductively coding the recurrent topics of discussion related to organizing concerns. To do so, we relied on the real time data from the studied time span (2012-2020) obtained through ethnographic and netnographic observations. This first step illustrated how widespread openness was in the organizing of OS, notably its association with a diversity of

organizational objects and processes. Some of them are even regularly re-debated at different times with more recent members.

Then, as open organizing draws upon the production of meaning (Bencherki et al., 2019), we decided to identify the sensemaking episodes on organizational openness issues that occurred between 2012 and 2020. More specifically, we sought to establish the timeline of each sensemaking episode as they happened. These meaning-making episodes were notably related to events considered critical by OS members, so we started the analysis with the interviews to focalize on actors' interpretations. We completed our identification of the sensemaking episodes by examining the real time data. Our bracketing led us to consider that the first occurrence of an open organizing issue was at the origin of a new sensemaking episode that ended when a response was collectively established by the actors. Seen so, the episodes may overlap because the debates during and at the end of an episode can signal the beginning of a new open organizing issue related to a different organizational object or process.

As openness appeared as a reflexively addressed topic by OS members, we finally led a content analysis to shed light on the nature of the interactions during sensemaking episodes. Using the open codes from the first step of our analysis (Miles et al., 2014), we unpacked the range of meaning and enacting related to organizational openness according to actors' interpretations. We especially focused on four episodes that cover the studied timespan and that illustrate the diversity of organizational objects and processes associated with openness: (1) the structuration of Ouishare as a non-profit association in 2012; (2) the process of strategy formulation conducted between June 2012 and June 2013; (3) the budgeting process from 2014 to 2015; and (4) the Steerco as a governing instance implemented between 2017 and 2019. We scrutinized the arguments mobilized in debates about the open character of Ouishare that occurred during these four episodes by coding what and who provoked new sensemaking steps, the answers enacted in response, as well as the assertions and questions raised by actors. This last stage of the analysis allowed us to highlight three anchorings constantly used over time by organizational actors to make sense of their radical open organizing: an identity anchoring, an organizational anchoring and a teleological anchoring.

### **III. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

In this article, we focus on the way members of OS enact and make sense of openness over time. The sensemaking processes we observed are fueled by three anchorings, an identity



anchoring, a teleological anchoring, and an organizational anchoring, that allow to substantiate radical openness in the long run.

a) Making sense of openness through three anchorings

Anchoring can be defined as a set of cues around which the actors enact and produce meaning, in the case of OS these are openness and its related values. We conceptualize the anchoring from the metaphor of an anchored boat, that is moved by the sea's ebb and flow, thereby floating in a delineated perimeter around its anchor. In an organizational setting, the anchoring thus relies on steady pillars around which actors allow themselves to deviate, meaning to act differently than stated by these fixed points. In other words, the anchoring encompasses the possibilities to 'act around' openness in the actors' enactment. Nevertheless, by outlining a perimeter, the anchoring emphasizes that the actors acknowledge they will drift away from openness but in a way that will remain acceptable. Organizational members keep the ability to stay radically open by entangling three anchorings together, in a way which depends on the situation. In particular, we identified three salient anchorings in the sensemaking processes that occurred in OS, an identity anchoring based on organizational values, a teleological anchoring referring to the aimed finalities, and an organizational anchoring drawing on organizing processes. The following table (table 21) presents a sensemaking situation for each episode using citations to support our analysis of the three anchorings. Drawing on this data, the next subsections describe each anchoring in broader details.

**Table 21. Data supporting the three anchorings**

Episode 1: the legal structuration of Ouishare as a non-profit association		
Situation: Axel made a post on the OS private Facebook group to criticize the second version of the association statutes written by Fanny (April 2012)		
Organizational and teleological anchoring	Identity anchoring	Teleological anchoring
<p><i>"Do we need a Board? Do the Board members make the day-to-day decisions for OuiShare? [...] In my opinion, the question is less in terms of active member vs. supporters but more in terms of impact on OuiShare vs. parallel activity. In concrete terms, day-to-day strategic decisions are no longer made in this group, you can blame me for that but it's a fact. They are made by Fanny, Bastien, Elphège and me [...]. Let's give ourselves six months. This is the time I think is necessary to consider a new organization (including active members and sympathizers)."</i> (Axel Facebook post)</p>	<p><i>« It seems to me that this whole debate (collaborative, open, with several alternatives, etc. ...) helped propose something light on the [legal] structure and that is as close as possible to what we have, without impacting the operation of projects, right? »</i> (Comment from Guillaume on Axel's post).</p>	<p><i>"I have to tell you that [...] the way the situation is summarized here and the way the tensions are expressed is discouraging because it doesn't seem to me to be entirely faithful to the debates that took place, which tends to discredit [...] the collective effort to try to find a solution that meets these two objectives: to serve the development of OuiShare projects, and to keep the horizontal and open spirit of the community. [...] What risk do you see precisely in this V2 governance? Risk of blockage because of the restrictive processes? It seems to me that we succeeded in creating a mechanism that is sufficiently "light" not to break the OuiShare dynamic. [...] Risk of not being able to control the development of OuiShare? [...] In the first instance, it is necessarily the people who are currently active who will take on responsibilities in this governance. So why would you want to freeze this [governance] mechanism? I have the feeling that we have agreed on the principles several times before, but that we then go back on them."</i> (Facebook post from Fanny to answer Axel's)</p>

**Episode 2: the process of strategy formulation (December 2012)**

**Situation:** Carlos shared a comment about OS heard from a colleague: "A non-profit organization who does consultancy and workshops?... it sounds kind of weird..." (December 2012)

<b>Organizational anchoring</b>	<b>Identity anchoring</b>	<b>Teleological anchoring</b>
<p><i>"OuiShare is a distributed organization with a purpose. Being a For Profit or a Non-Profit doesn't matter so much"</i> (Axel, answering Carlos's post)</p> <p><i>"I really think it would be great for all of us to get some clarification on these questions, because being part of something but not being able to describe what it really is (for instance legally) and not knowing what is our long-term goal (except for changing the world;-) always puts you in an unfortunate position!"</i> (Flavia, answering Axel's comment)</p>	<p><i>"Strategy is not top-down, it is bottom-up" If you want OuiShare to evolve in a certain way, just make it happen" The clarity can come from you as well :-)"</i> (Axel, answering Flavia's comment)</p>	<p><i>"I like to think of the future OuiShare as something in between the following models:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- open-source models (a Foundation managing the Commons + an entrepreneurial coalition)</i></li> <li><i>- distributive enterprises (companies "putting the open replication of their business models at the core of their strategy", see Open-Source Ecology and WikiSpeed)</i></li> <li><i>- phyles (transnational communities of people who share a set of values, and that reach economic autonomy through the shared ownership of several cooperatives, see Las Indias)." (Bastien, answering Carlos's post)</i></li> </ul>

### Episode 3: the budgeting process from 2014 to 2015

Situation: conception of the Management Handbook to handle new big sponsorships (Summer 2014)

Identity anchoring	Teleological anchoring	Organizational anchoring
<p>“Based on a combination of our past experience, inspiration from friend organizations (ex: Cocoon and its LiquidO model) and from proven frameworks (e.g. holacracy/sociocracy, and do-ocracy/swarms). [...] The OuiShare Way is certainly not perfect, but it’s a start, and it will improve based on member feedback and ongoing experimentation :)” (Samuele, during the budgeting process, Summer 2014 on a Management Handbook’s comment).</p>	<p>‘Not all members, local groups, topical sub-cultures will be facing the same barriers to action. If OS provides rules &amp; support in an area where there is no perceived need, chances are it will feel invasive, limiting, patronizing and/or frustrating. Could the rule then be to let members ask for what they need (only if they feel like asking), then a small team of connectors including the relevant geo/topical connectors designs the appropriate support plan, and possibly submit a financial allowance request to the core team.’ (Damien commenting the draft proposed by Samuele)</p>	<p>‘a framework that will enable us to manage part of our budget on a dynamic weekly basis, while the rest will be distributed via several-month fellowships The idea is that this budget will be reviewed at the summit to plan the next 6 months. a considerable chunk of the budget will be spent on delivering the services we sold with the partnerships, as well as the so-called "scaffolding activities", which include Accounting, Coordination, Partnership Management &amp; Fundraising, Communication and Tech Support and Website Development. To distribute the work in these areas will all have fellowships, for which any connector can apply’ (Flavia, introducing the process to which the discussions have led on a Facebook post)</p>

#### b) Identity anchoring

The identity anchoring refers to the way actors define or describe what the organization is or does. In the case of Ouishare, the community has portrayed “a non-hierarchical organization, which anyone can join and contribute to. Decision-making is based on peer governance and meritocracy. What we produce is open source, making it easy to reuse, remix and share alike” (definition of the value ‘openness’ in the document “A Beginner’s guide to OuiShare”, December 2012). The identity anchoring therefore draws on OS values, openness, collaboration, transparency, action, do-ocracy, permanent beta. While these values have been regularly discussed for updates or reformulation over the past decade, they have not changed much. In addition, the identity anchoring of Ouishare was inspired by the open-source movement (“Ouishare being an open source design process”, Etienne on a Facebook comment related to strategy formulation in 2013). Consequently, this origin as well as organizations of

this movement (e.g., Apache, Wikipedia, Enspiral) and other organizational models drawing on individual freedom, participation and transparency (e.g., swarm, holacracy, sociocracy) can be referred to as reminders of OS's open identity (see identity anchoring in episode 3). As illustrated by the anchoring identity of episode 1, this anchoring is not used to evaluate organizing suggestions, nevertheless, it fuels an ideal of openness on which actors rely to feed their teleological anchorings.

The identity anchoring is used by the most instigative members to drive the other actors to action (see the identity anchoring of episode 2). In particular, brandishing OS open identity encourages individuals to suggest modifications or new organizing processes. During debates, members of OS also regularly mobilize the identity anchoring through identity claims, underlining values or inspirational references, to emphasize the open principles from which their enactment should not stray too much. More specifically, the quotes from episode 1 (see table 21) highlight how actors draw on the identity anchoring to oppose to organizing propositions as well as teleological arguments, while the identity anchoring from episode 3 reflects an attempt to instill reassurance by emphasizing how the 'Ouishare way' is the right way to do things.

### c) Teleological anchoring

Making sense of openness requires that actors share their individual appreciation of the satisfying (or otherwise) open character of a specific organizing process. This assessment draws upon a teleological anchoring that relies on the purpose(s) pursued by an organization or an individual, which aims to channel collective action towards a specific result.

As informed in table 21, within Ouishare, the teleological anchoring is strongly link to the members' ideal of openness, which is a purpose both sought externally (through Ouishare's mission to develop a more collaborative and fair world) and internally (through the way the community is organized in daily activities). The teleological anchoring notably enables the re-activation of the identity anchoring in a future-oriented direction by questioning 'what would we like to become? how would we like to embody openness?' as demonstrated in episode 2. This example also illustrates that, much like the identity anchoring, the teleological anchoring is sometimes brought up by referring to inspirational organizations and models. In other instances that we can qualify as sensegiving attempts, some teleological cues appear to be

fueled by the identity anchoring in a way that bends the values to justify closure criteria (see table 22 and 23 below).

However, while the teleological principles can be linked with the actors' ideal of openness, it is not always the case. Particularly, depending on the situation, actors can use the teleological anchoring to advocate for more openness and, in contrast, can sometimes argue for other finalities to justify closure (see episode 1). The mobilization of such competing cues raises tensions between members. Regardless of their defended positions, actors experience these tensions as particularly frustrating and exhausting due to their recurrence for the most senior members, and sometimes even as painful (see also episode 1).

*“I'm thinking about how to optimize the tensions and conflict management / It's good and normal, but sometimes a little bit too violent for me. I saw people get hurt or others who still haven't expressed discomfort.”* (feedback from an anonymous member about the 2015 summit in Calvanico during which the budgeting process had been challenged).

#### d) Organizational anchoring

The organizational anchoring refers to the way radical openness can be and is enacted (i.e., through practices and processes). As an organizing principle, openness is entangled in all organizational processes thereby requiring actors to continuously reconfigure the meaning they attribute to its diverse enactments. The organizational anchoring is very frequently mobilized by the actors since it is at the heart of the numerous discussions about the sense of openness. As depicted in table 21, these propositions of amendments or of new organizing processes are evaluated with regards to the teleological anchoring (see episode 3) and that may result in a reminder of the values using the identity anchoring if too far astray from the open principles (see episode 1). As informed by Bastien during his interview *“how do we make decisions? where is the shared information? where are the communications?”*, thus appear as old chestnuts in Ouishare. To be enacted, an organizing process consequently requires to be articulated with the identity and teleological anchorings. This often leads to the fine tuning of this process through conversational practices to end up with an organizational feature to be implemented that is considered as a plausible narrative of openness in Ouishare by members (see the organizational anchoring of episode 3).

As a consequence, the organizational anchoring appears as especially fluid in OS: the organizing of the community has changed numerous times in 9 years, sometimes to re-implement old organizational features without members being aware. For instance, the 4<sup>th</sup>

episode on the Steerco appeared as reminiscent of a former membership statute called the core-connectors. This fluidity, however, is viewed both as a blessing and a burden by the actors, especially because of the exhausting character of the intense discussions that might lead the organizing to evolve.:

*“That’s what I love about OS, which also makes me very tired. We are able to question ourselves completely, and when someone comes and says ‘what is this rule, it’s not possible’, we are able to tell ourselves ‘ok maybe we took the decision too quickly, in any case there is something that doesn’t work’. We set up a small working group, we ask ourselves the questions again and let’s go. [...] All this is very interesting and sometimes very, very, very wearisome. [...] It’s great to ask yourself all these questions but sometimes I wish it was easier. There are things about the traditional firm that I miss, like resting.”* (Interview from Mailys, connector).

*“One of the things that irritated me about this type of organization was that the same questions were asked again and again, as soon as a new group arrived six months later, they did the same job, they asked the same questions again, with the same pretentiousness as we had at the beginning. There were issues that came up all the time, so we had the feeling that the organization was learning little”* (Interview from Augustin, former connector).

e) Articulating identity, organizational and teleological anchorings

**Figure 10. Timeline of the Steerco episode**

Fall 2017		December 2017	
New organizing issue	The organizational anchoring challenges the identity anchoring	Achieving a provisional articulation between anchorings	
How to manage the 2018 yearly budget?	Informal creation of the Steerco as a narrow team to work on the 2018 yearly budget. Criteria: degree of information, of involvement in Ouishare activities	Endorsement of the Steerco by the French community to efficiently monitor the yearly budget, on provision of the transparency of their meeting minute	How to make the Steerco more compatible with the open identity?

April 2018		January 2019	
Refining the articulation between anchorings	Perceived decoupling between the three anchorings	Identity principle signals a new organizing issue	
Collectively validated criteria regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The members and their rotations in the Steerco</li> <li>- Decision-making scope</li> <li>- Shared meeting minutes</li> <li>- Inclusion of the individual(s) affected by a decision</li> </ul>	Steerco point of view: equivocality of the closure criteria, competing teleological principles  Community point of view: lack of openness	End of the Steerco. How to manage Ouishare activities more openly?	

To depict how the actors articulate the identity, organizing and teleological principles, we focalize on the episode of a governing instance called the Steerco that occurred between 2017 and 2019.

**A new organizing issue to address.** In 2017, there was no formalized process informing who was in charge and how to prepare the yearly budget for Ouishare France. Yet as there were fixed costs to pay, there was also a need to budget future cash inflows.

**The organizational anchoring challenges the identity anchoring.** As a response, a narrow team, ‘the Steerco’, was built on the initiative of the chairman to work on the 2018 yearly budget for the French connector community. However, rumors on the creation of Steerco quickly spread as did criticism: as a small and informally formed group, this instance challenged the identity anchoring of OS.

**Achieving a provisional articulation between anchorings.** A meeting day dedicated to the yearly budget for 2018 was the occasion to officially introduce the Steerco to the French community. This organizational anchoring, and particularly the closure criteria of the Steerco, was particularly debated. There were tensions between the finality advocated by Steerco members, who aimed to be formally mandated to efficiently administer the 2018 budget, and the one advocated by the other connectors who defended the identity of OS. The arguments illustrated in table 22 below show how the identity anchoring fuels the teleological anchoring.

**Table 22. Cues mobilized during the meeting day**

<i>Cues</i>	<b>Data supporting interpretation</b>
<i>From the Steerco members</i>	<p><b>Efficiency:</b> <i>“There are decisions to be made every day in an organization and these decisions cannot be made, for rational reasons, on a decision-making platform [i.e., Loomio]. [...] if we had to use a formal decision-making process. It would considerably limit the organization's ability to act.”</i> (Interview from Taj, a member of the Steerco)</p> <p><b>Teleological anchoring:</b> <i>“For once, [there was an] honest effort to say: ‘yes, we are launching an instance, we are sharing it with everyone and we are explaining how it is going to go’ [...], and it is a huge subject of tension, that’s what I found interesting. Guys, it was worse before, but we couldn’t say anything because we couldn’t see it.”</i> (Interview from Maëlys, a member of the Steerco)</p>
<i>From the community</i>	<p><b>Identity anchoring:</b> <i>“It must remain open, possibility to nurture people with the vocation to evolve...”</i></p> <p>[...] <i>“it is obvious that we need to have a fairly open communication about the content of these decisions.”</i></p> <p>[...] <i>“trying to describe the type of decision that is made in this body”</i> (from the meeting minute of the mini summit)</p>



The debates between Steerco and the other members have shaped specific rules (i.e., organizational anchorings) for the Steerco that were articulated with teleological and identity anchorings. This articulated entanglement was still considered as provisional since the connectors agreed to mandate the Steerco in managing the 2018 budget for a few months only. In other words, provisional articulation was achieved because the members knew that they had approved an organizational arrangement that would only be temporarily enacted. Indeed, several closure criteria needed to be further addressed later (e.g., scope of work, who was legitimately included, transparency of meeting minutes) to achieve a better, and thereby long-lasting articulation with the identity anchoring.

*“Today, there is uncertainty about our governance and the Steerco: does the Steerco have a mandate to propose orientations for community validation? Does the Steerco have a mandate to make budget decisions? It is not clear-cut and the objective would be to leave this workshop with a clearer idea of the mandate of the Steerco. Then, there is the question of rules: who are the people present in the Steerco? How do we make it evolve? [...] What are the rules in terms of openness and transparency? Should the Steerco propose shared minutes? Should there be observers? Can they intervene or not?”* (Sacha, a steerco member, Summit 04/18)

**Refining the articulation between anchorings.** A few months later, nearly an entire day of the Summit was dedicated to fine tuning the rights and duties (i.e., closure criteria) of the Steerco. Five topics revolving around organizational openness were put on the agenda: the scope of decision, degree of inclusion, membership criteria, transparency of meeting minutes and an obligation for the members’ rotations. Steerco members tried to justify its current degree of closure. However, the French community did not entirely buy this sensegiving attempt and remained hung up on the necessity to make this governing body more inclusive and transparent (see these competing cues in table 23 below). Finally, the rights and duties of the Steerco (i.e., organizational anchoring) were modified to be aligned with the community’s ideal of openness (i.e., the identity that duels the teleological anchoring) and the finalities advocated by Steerco members. These new organizing principles were endorsed by the connectors a few weeks later.

**Table 23. Cues mobilized during the Summit**

<i>Cues</i>	<b>Data supporting interpretation</b>
<i>From Steerco members</i>	<p><b>Teleological anchoring:</b> <i>“The burden of making decisions rests on a few people. There is a desire from these people to share this risk-taking and this mental burden, and to share this decision-making among several people: the Steerco was born like that.”</i> (Jenna, Summit 04/18)</p> <p><b>Competence requirement:</b> <i>“Proposing this [members rotation] without doing the support work before, it is a parody of participative democracy [...] Creating the framework to make the governance go round is a necessity”</i> (Taj, Summit 04/18)</p> <p><b>Hurtful distrust:</b> <i>“To write the minutes, to look at the stuff, to put it on the wall, all for what? To say and to show that we are transparent or to reassure people who are afraid that we are scheming behind their back? Just shut up. You think we’re scheming behind your back, but get out of here!”</i> (interview with Juliette).</p>
<i>From the community</i>	<p><b>Identity anchoring:</b> <i>“What I criticize about this Steerco [...] is that it is not clear and it is not transparent. [...] This is something that bothers me a lot. I joined this collective because there is this notion of transparency and this notion of ‘we are clear with each other’”</i> (interview with Clémence, connector)</p> <p><b>Teleological anchoring:</b> <i>“I think that the Steerco is not incompatible with Ouishare, but not as it is today. I think that we can improve the way in which the decision-making process is made, the way in which people get involved, the way in which decisions are made. [...] the Steerco should not make decisions alone, without the people concerned being there at the time. [...] if it is painful, we have a Steerco, with people who have access to more exhaustive information, that’s why they are more numerous, not everyone carries the same information, but together with this information they manage to make decisions. That’s interesting, but alone on their own, no it doesn’t work.”</i> (Interview with Jade, connector, to debrief after the Summit)</p>

**Perceived decoupling between the three anchorings.** According to Steerco members, there still was equivocality about the organizing rules endorsed during the Summit that resulted in decision-making difficulties, whether choices were related to issues of budgeting, strategy or members rotation. These ambiguities led to tense debates in the Steerco, which were related to the teleological anchoring, some of the members advocating for the strict respect of the validated rules while the others were ready to hijack them (see the vignette below). While in parallel, it seemed like the community’s expectations, related to their ideal of openness, were not met, given that the criticism towards Steerco members continued to spread.

**June 2018, on the Steerco private Telegram channel:**

Maxime: *“Miguel [a member of the Spanish community] is worried that the Steerco will affect the image of Ouishare because it does not correspond to the story Ouishare tells about its organization. He feels that the centralization brought by the Steerco is going in the wrong direction. He is worried about the repercussions on other communities and on Ouishare’s leads/partners in other communities (for example, he doesn’t want this to appear in the handbook).”*

[...] Sacha : *“Do we assume, in a logic of perpetual movement and permanent beta, to test a form of verticality to make the organization grow?”*

Taj: *“If it's only to talk about finance, this Steerco is pointless. It's funny because we did a Summit where we clarified the role of the Steerco, which was approved almost unanimously, therefore why change your position when faced with the concerns of a member of Ouishare who is not involved in France...”*

[...] Maxime : *“Sacha, to me, I don't think that the issue is to reverticalize in order to scale up. It's just that the best solution at the time was to organize budgetary and financial decision-making around a limited number of people to move quickly and meet the requirements that the projects, our structure and our clients set for us (if I understood correctly). If we start to legitimize the verticalization of governance, then we will go far beyond financial and budgetary issues, and this small group will make decisions on the organization of the French community, on how to manage projects, etc. Which brings me to Taj's comment, I disagree and think that the Steerco should be limited to budgetary decisions.”*

Around 6 months later, the internal conflicts of the Steerco as well as the blame of other connectors led Steerco members to discuss a more open organizing process for governance issues. Its members especially expressed how being part of this governing instance was experienced as a burden due to the related workload, intensive discussions and the frequent criticism from the community for straying from the open identity anchoring of Ouishare: *“The Steerco is a semi-failure: it pisses off the people who are not in it; it pisses us off to do one every two months, I find creating circles on specific topics in which each appropriate Ouishare member would participate rather more interesting”* (Maxime, during the Steerco meeting of January 2019). It ended up with the decision of Steerco members to put an end to this instance and to question how to decentralize the responsibilities among the French community using an open discussion on Loomio.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

In this article, we aim to scrutinize how organizational members enact radical openness in the long run. In a radical form of open organizing, all the organizational processes draw on inclusion, transparency and freedom. However, few studies have focused on cases of radical openness, and particularly not within the literature on open phenomena. We contribute to the field of open organizing by highlighting two mechanisms that allowed Ouishare to enact a lasting form of radical openness: (1) the use of explicit sensemaking and (2) the role of anchorings and of their articulation.

a) Explicit sensemaking using conversational practices

Dialogue is a recurrent and intensive activity in Ouishare. Organizational members spend a significant amount of time in discussion, especially regarding the diverse ways they can enact organizational openness. Our study thus extends past research in which the key character of debate in open organizing has already been established (e.g., Heracleous et al., 2017; Turco, 2016). More specifically, Heracleous et al. (2017) have highlighted that openness draws on a contextual use of discussion, which can support either greater participation or closure. In parallel, Turco (2016) has focused on an open communication culture in which actors are engaged in ‘*ongoing debates, to continuously question, iterate, and improve organizing*’ (Otto, 2019, p.1). We add to these studies by unfolding how the continuous improvement of the organizing in Ouishare have supported the enactment of open organizing over time because the conversational practices allowed to express what openness means in a particular situation.

We follow Bencherki, Basque, & Rouleau (2019) who introduced sensemaking not as an analytical framework but as an empirical phenomenon. In particular, we characterize the processes of sensemaking observed in OS as explicit because they rest on the expression of numerous questions and challenges that fuel intensive public discussions (either oral or written) within the community. These debates are mobilized by the actors to conceive (or refine), implement and then assess whether an organizing process yields a plausible narrative of openness in Ouishare. In cases of radical openness like OS or the Anonymous (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015), this form of explicit sensemaking appears as necessary to remove ambiguities because the organizing is especially fluid, explicitation thus draws on the performative character of openness to materialize the organizing.

Finally, our findings depict how the actors most involved in governance issues (such as the Steerco members) consider explicit sensemaking both as a benefit and a burden. Like in TechoCo (Turco, 2016), the members of OS demonstrate great reflexivity. However, in the firm studied by Turco (2016), the actors did not possess decisional rights and were thus frustrated when choices were blocked, postponed, or ignored by managers. In OS, reflexivity is associated, on the positive side, with greater critical thinking and capacity to question the status quo. Yet, this ability also leads some actors to exhaustion by fueling the intensity of communicational interactions and by conducting the members to regularly change their organizing processes. Some of the actors also emphasize that traditional bureaucracy appears as a piece of cake compared to the radical open organizing of OS. These frustrations and fatigue are reminiscent of the dilemma of empowerment (Hautz et al., 2017) stating that giving a voice

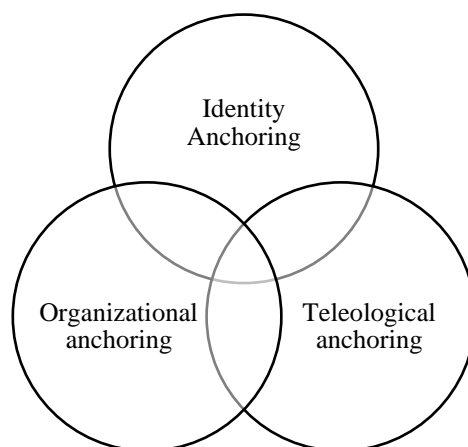
can empower a large audience while burdening the participants, yet we showed that this phenomenon particularly affects the members most involved in governance issues. To conclude, if explicit sensemaking allows the radical open organizing of Ouishare to emerge and to last over time, these processes are not experienced as a smooth ride by the actors.

b) A provisional articulation of the anchorings

After having highlighted the roles of explicit sensemaking and anchorings, we propose that the ability of members to articulate the three anchorings, identity, teleological, and organizational, has played a significant part in the longevity of OS as a radical form of open organizing.

Because the combination of inclusion, transparency and freedom challenges the traditional bureaucratic view of organizations, our study focuses on the opening of the process (of organizing) and not of the content (e.g., of strategy, innovation, etc) as is usually the case in research on open phenomena (Dobusch, Dobusch, & Müller-Seitz, 2019). More specifically, as reliant on anti-organizational characteristics, openness requires the actors to activate organizationality through explicit sensemaking. In our view, the three anchorings, especially, appear as the basics of any organization since they rely on values (identity anchoring), a finality (teleological anchoring), and organizing processes (organizational anchoring).

**Figure 11. The articulation of identity, organizational and teleological anchorings**



Building and maintaining radical openness occurs through an ongoing (re)articulation of the three anchorings using sensemaking. Articulation, in our research, does not refer to a matter of fit or of openness degree but rather means manifesting these anchorings within dialogue to make sense of the open organizing processes in an equivocal situation. This echoes the literature on organizationality, according to which actors need to articulate their actions and collective

identity to be able to implement provisional organizational arrangements revalidating the act (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). When articulated, the anchorings compensate for each other, which is the reason why actors allowed themselves to deviate from openness in some organizing processes. The four episodes presented in this paper thus demonstrate several reminders of the ideal of openness formulated by members of OS using the identity or teleological anchorings. On the other hand, when actors implemented some processes that they considered as overly open, the principle of anchoring articulation led them to conceive additional closure criteria to ensure the continuity of collective action (e.g., the equivocal situation allowing the Steerco to emerge). Anchoring articulation therefore contributes to better understanding how organizational actors cope with closure, as an antagonistic but constitutive dimension of open organizing (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019; Dobusch et al., 2019).

So far, the provisional character of open organizing has been depicted in the literature on open phenomena by focusing on tensions (e.g., Hautz et al., 2017; Janssen et al., 2012; Von Krogh, Spaeth, & Lakhani, 2003). The articulation mechanism enables to avoid sensebreaking despite the heated debates and conflicts that animate the community. In other words, anchoring articulation is the dynamic that allowed OS members to provisionally cope with some of the tensions identified in the open phenomena literature, such as the emphasis on efficiency VS openness escalation (Adobor, 2020; Hautz et al., 2017) or contradictions related to organizing structuration (Dobusch et al., 2019; Heracleous et al., 2017).

In our findings, we also demonstrate that members of Ouishare were fully aware of the ephemeral character of their anchoring articulations. Here, provisional refers to a few months' duration as depicted in the four episodes. In particular situations, achieving a temporary organizational arrangement even appears as the only way to consider a given narrative as demonstrating plausible enough openness, because members know they will refine the organizing process later. The anchoring articulation thus seems to be an ongoing incomplete quest that helps Ouishare to remain grounded in radical openness over time. This emphasizes the role of organizational fluidity to help maintain openness over time.

c) Boundary conditions

Ouishare has lasted as a radically open community using explicit sensemaking practices based on three anchorings that are articulated differently according to the situation. Nevertheless, we shed light on two boundary conditions that point out the specific conditions that enable OS to succeed in this endeavor. First, if turnover has always been high enough over time, the

community has never faced an extreme case of renewal of its members such as a buyout. This allows the continued transmission of Ouishare open values and culture from senior members to newcomers. Moreover, this relatively stable turnover rate might highlight the exhaustion and frustrations observed in the most senior members, who have progressively taken on more responsibility, notably regarding governance issues. Secondly, as in other open communities such as Wikipedia<sup>40</sup>, individuals who join Ouishare generally possess some financial and social capital that allows them to engage in this experience of open organizing. Indeed, they hold a certain financial and social security that provides a backup plan, were the organization to fail and their job disappear. In addition, engagement in organizing discussions within OS is part of the unpaid activities, even though it requires a significant amount of time of members. Social capital also appears as a prerequisite to be able to participate in the reflexive conversations that occur within the community.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikimedia\\_Strategy\\_2018%E2%80%932020/Create\\_Cultural\\_Change\\_for\\_Inclusive\\_Communities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikimedia_Strategy_2018%E2%80%932020/Create_Cultural_Change_for_Inclusive_Communities)

## V. APPENDIX

**Figure 12. Timeline of the process of formal structuration of Ouishare (episode 1)**

April 2012		1 <sup>st</sup> version of the statutes		2 <sup>nd</sup> version of the statutes	
New organizing issue	Organizational anchoring	Identity fueling teleological anchoring	Seeking anchoring articulation		
The need to create a legal entity for Ouishare to receive funds	<p>1st version of the non-profit association statutes:</p> <p>- Propositions for membership rules, board members and decision-making process</p>	<p><i>“This comes from a desire not to institutionalize the community. It would continue to function organically, and the association created would just serve as a vehicle, a tool.”</i> (introductory comment on the 1<sup>st</sup> version of the statutes)</p>	<p><i>“To add a principle of transparency / open functioning (permanent and not only during the GA etc) of the management of the association</i></p> <p><i>In order to limit the effect of "lag" that the community, which did not participate in the drafting of the statutes, might feel when it discovers them. They must be drafted in the OuiShare spirit (cf. 1st remark on an alternative vocabulary).”</i> (V2 Statutes)</p>		

Conflict between Axel and Fanny		3 <sup>rd</sup> version of the statutes	
Competing cues	Refining anchoring articulation resulting in an approved version of the statutes		
<p>Axel argues the need to formalize the informal narrow governance circle that emerged around the co-founders. Fanny, another co-founders, disagreed.</p>	<p>Axel met the founder of another fundamentally open French association ‘MeaningMaking’</p> <p>From this meeting, a third version of the statutes was written</p> <p>Proposition of membership degrees</p> <p>Strategic decision made in unrelated events to the legal association</p>	<p><i>“Axel has come back on two of the important dimensions for the organization of ouishare that were discussed here in the last few days: A/ give a real content to the ouishare base association (a triple mission: 1/animate the community with events and media, 2/ empower and facilitate collaboration [...] 3/capitalize on knowledge and know-how to make them the common of our community [...] B/ give autonomy to the projects led by the coalition's entrepreneurs”</i> (Etienne)</p>	



**Figure 13. Timeline of a strategy formulation process (episode 2)**

March - June 2012	December 2012	May 2013
<b>New organizing issue</b>	<b>Seeking anchoring articulation</b>	<b>Teleological anchoring</b>
<p>Need for a baseline and a manifesto for OS's website</p> <p>Inclusion of new international members, which questions what the strategy and business model of Ouishare are.</p>	<p>Rome Summit focused on defining Ouishare and its values</p> <p><i>"I think these [commercial opportunities] are one of the key topics to discuss [...] as it's the only way to make ouishare a lasting effort made of a community of involved people (and not of a team of few strictly co-located persons)."</i> (Samuele, commenting a Facebook post)</p>	<p>Axel invites connectors to share their thoughts on the future of Ouishare. He emphasizes sustainable development as a critical stake to address.</p> <p><i>"Talking about funding means talking about money [...] questions will be: who decides? How? For what? For whom?"</i> (Till, commenting Axel's post)</p>

June 2013	July 2013	August 2013
<b>Refining anchoring articulation</b>		<b>Achieving provisional anchoring articulation</b>
<p>Collaborative group work and document to address strategic issues</p> <p><i>"This project aims at coordinating actions and projects required to make OuiShare thrive as a peer-to-peer organization, achieving financial sustainability while ensuring effective governance and fair retribution of individual contributions."</i> (Scratchbook Ouishare Organization)</p>	<p>Peer working session on OS's vision and mission</p> <p><i>"clarifying our mission and activities is the #1 priority that will drive everything else [...] it merges current activities and future activities"</i> (Bastien, sharing on Facebook the notes of the working session to the community)</p>	<p>Formalization of the strategy and business model of Ouishare in a document called 'Big orga question' notably proposing to classify activities between:</p> <p><i>"GENERAL INTEREST vs COMMERCIAL PROJECT vs RECURRING Activities"</i></p>

**Figure 14. Timeline of the budgeting process after the signature of two big sponsorships (episode 3)**

Summer 2014		September 2014
New organizing issue	Seeking anchoring articulation	Achieving provisional articulation
Ouishare signed two big sponsorships that question how to use these funds and what would be the budgeting process?	<i>“We have a lot of work to do in order to organize OuiShare’s memberships, empowering our community, setting up clear and transparent management/governance processes, getting better at disclosing our decisions and financials as we go, and of course building more and more amazing projects :)”</i> (Bastien, on a Facebook post announcing the signature of one big sponsorship)	<i>“we will manage one part of the budget on a dynamic, weekly basis, enabling any Connector to jump into the process and work on paid activities if they like. Any connector can work on projects financed through this dynamic budget by joining our global coordination calls and either volunteering to work on a prioritized activity, or suggesting a new one.”</i> (Flavia, on Facebook announcing the approved process)

Jan-March 2015	June 2015	
Competing cues	Perceived decoupling of anchoring articulation	Achieving provisional anchoring articulation
<p>In the community’s view: need to increase participation on budgeting topics.</p> <p>Re-centralization of the decision-making process related to traveling expenses</p>	<p>Calvanico Summit renamed ‘Calvary-nico Summit’</p> <p><i>‘since we make a lot of money thanks to partnerships, which everyone has contributed to because of the collective brand.... meaning this was the following issue: we all contribute but those who are closest to the core get paid on the missions they get.’</i> (interview of Emmanuel)</p>	<p><i>‘This global investment should be allocated through participatory budgeting. We should give more recognition to everyone’s achievements.’</i> (quoted from the report on the June 2015 Summit)</p>



# **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION**

## **I. SUMMARY OF THE ESSAYS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

In this thesis, I propose to investigate open organizing under a renewed perspective, contrasting with the functional view that prevails in the existing literature, which is to consider openness as a set of values encompassing participation, transparency, and individual freedom. I especially focus on radical openness, as in cases of organizations in which the open principles are intertwined across all organizing processes. Throughout my thesis, composed of three essays, I question how open principles shape action at individual and collective levels, and how they behave within the organization to better grasp the inherent struggle between values and practices that actors engaged in radical open organizing face. To do so, this research issue first aims to unveil the performative role of openness. Performativity refers to the way that describing things, discourses and practices produces reality, more specifically materiality and identities (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016). On the one hand, open organizing enters the continuity of post-bureaucratic discourses that have been criticized for promulgating new subordination mechanisms while claiming actors' empowerment (e.g., Barker, 1993; Grey & Garsten, 2001; Sewell et al., 1998). I thus examine how the open principles (i.e., participation, transparency, and individual freedom) shape individual and collective delegated capacity to take action (i.e., agency, defined by Hatchuel, 2012). On the other hand, I show, in my thesis introduction, that openness relies on principles that could be considered as anti-organizational, because they challenge the bureaucratic standards, external boundaries, internal layers, formalized attributes, etc (e.g., Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Puranam, Alexy, & Reitzig, 2014). Consequently, I investigate how actors manage to implement organizing processes regardless.

To answer my thesis research question, I produced three essays summarized hereunder:

In the first paper, I draw on a problematizing multidisciplinary review (Mats Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020) to unfold the political assumptions behind the concept of openness. This essay offers a two-fold contribution. I start by highlighting the competing political assumptions upon which the notion of openness stands, providing two conceptions of the open: one emancipatory; the other managerial. This suggests that the empirical tensions informed in existing literature on open phenomena is more conceptual than practical (e.g., Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017; Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017; Kornberger, Meyer, Brandtner, & Höllerer, 2017; Von Krogh, Haefliger, Spaeth, & Wallin, 2012). In other words, these contradictions are fuelled by divergent perspectives on openness. This contribution also sheds light on the key role played

by managerial discourses in the process of depoliticizing research on organizational openness, despite contributors seeming to still buy into the emancipatory conception of the open. as showed by the empirical tensions. Secondly, this essay outlines new reading keys to better grasp the power dimension in open organizing studies. I notably suggest mobilizing the ontology of becoming to portray the dynamics used by organizational members to address the empirical tensions of openness, the mechanisms enabling or impeding participation, information sharing and freedom of action, and lastly to consider the utopian possibilities vehiculated by open organizing.

In the second essay, the great difficulties encountered by M21S (i.e., financial crisis, drop in externally and internally oriented activities, the refusal of the auditor to certify the association's accounts) led me to investigate how an open organization can fail to address the inherent tensions of organizational openness. This paper first contributes to current research by revealing organizational necrosis, referring to the vicious circle that an extremist view on open values can fuel, by primarily fostering the action-open values fit. More particularly, extremist openness encouraged the creation of ideological forms of closure that limit the actors' scope of action and therefore what can be considered as appropriate solutions to implement in order to solve the crises encountered. As a second contribution, I pinpoint how the mechanisms of depersonalization and disempowerment, resulting from extremist open values, reduce actors' agency to a state of passivity at the organizational level that compromised the sustainability of M21S.

Finally, the third and last essay focuses on the case of OS, a radical open organization created 10 years ago. Particularly, with my co-authors, we unpack how actors succeeded in radically enacting openness over time using a sensemaking lens. This paper highlights the two mechanisms that fuelled the perennity of radical openness in OS. First, we unveil what we characterize as 'explicit sensemaking', referring to intensive and frequent discussions allowing organizational members to spell the meaning of open principles out in each situation they face. In other words, explicit sensemaking should be seen as an ongoing process. Explicit sensemaking especially enables the removal of ambiguities related to the fluidity of their organizing. Therefore, at the end of the explicit sensemaking process, actors can performatively activate organizing processes by affording a thick description of the organizational arrangement on which they agree. Secondly, our findings point out that explicit sensemaking relies on three anchorings, values (identity anchoring), a finality (teleological anchoring), and organizing processes (organizational anchoring). These three anchorings borrow from the basics required

to establish an organization and are thus especially needed in the case of openness to activate organizing processes, given its usage of anti-organizational principles. Specifically, what allows OS members to build and maintain a radical form of open organizing is their ability to articulate the anchorings in a way that compensates for each other and is appropriate to face the tension at hand.

The goal of this discussion section is to answer the general research question of my thesis by creating a dialogue between the essays that compose it. To do so, I draw on two new theoretical frameworks to further expand the analysis provided in the papers. Three additional contributions emerged from the confrontation of my essays and contribute to the development of a critical angle in the open organizing literature. Because the empirical essays show the prevailing role of open values to shape individual and collective agency as well as organizing processes, I mobilize the concepts of enchantment and disenchantment from Weber (based on a lecture first given in 1917, translated in English in 1946) in a first subsection. This allows me to propose two additional contributions to the open organizing literature. First, contrary to existing research in which the emphasis is put on calculation and performance, I reveal that actors involved in radical openness decide using an axiological form of rationality. Secondly, based on the interesting insights on emancipation and alienation from the literature on enchantment, I suggest that these two phenomena are linked by a dialogic relationship in radically open organizations. Then, the second section explore the ideological and utopian character of openness, which is reflected in the different essays of my thesis, by relying on the work of Paul Ricoeur (1984a, 1986). Thanks to this Ricoeurian perspective, I unveil the way that ideology and utopia fuel a dialogic relationship that, depending on the role of each type of narratives, can be either healthy or unhealthy.

## **II. OPENNESS AS A RE-ENCHANTMENT OF ORGANIZATIONS**

In this first subsection, I draw upon the concept of enchantment (i.e., the ascendancy of values over calculation and predictability) of Max Weber (1946/1917) to demonstrate how the principles of openness affect individual and collective agency in radically open organizations. More particularly, I highlight that, despite the ‘disenchanted’ ideas of predictable efficiency conditions and performance purpose conveyed in research on open organizing, actors engaged in radical openness make their decisions based on axiological rationality. Then, I mobilize the studies on enchantment to explore the tension between alienation and emancipation in open

organizing, which is notably embedded in the competing conceptions of openness highlighted in the first essay. While thought as a dichotomy in the existing literature, I show how emancipation and alienation can rather be considered as sharing a dialogic relationship that affects organizational members' scope of action.

a) (Re)enchancing organizations: axiological rationality in radical open organizing

Before unfolding the link between openness and enchantment, let us start by characterizing the concept of disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of Weber, which he further developed, leaving the concept of enchantment on the side lines.

**Defining (dis)enchantment**

Disenchantment refers to '*the knowledge or belief [...] that there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation*' (Weber, 1946/1917, quoted in Suddaby, Ganzin, & Minkus, 2017, p.285). Weber (1946/1917) considered this relentless rationalization as a general transition towards modernity in Western society, beginning with the industrial revolution. More specifically, through disenchantment Weber (1978/1921) portrayed the shift towards a formal rationality based on calculation (*Berechenbarkeit*), meaning on predictability and instrumentalization. The process of disenchantment represents the domination of facts, esteemed by modernity, over traditional values through a transition from religion to secularism, from myth and tradition to scientific knowledge, from family and community to bureaucratic social structures, all to promote and celebrate the expansion of formal rationality (Berman, 1981). In Weber's view, bureaucracy was included in this disenchantment of society by becoming the prevailing mode of organization in modern times (Courpasson & Clegg, 2006, p.320), which over-rationalized the organizational structure to enhance efficacy. The concept of disenchantment has thus been borrowed in management to describe the excessive rationalization of work and production (e.g., Ritzer, 2013, about the McDonaldization of society).

Although open phenomena are introduced as anti-bureaucratic (see [essay 1](#)), organizational openness and its applications are mostly related to formal rationality and calculation in the existing literature. In [this thesis introduction](#), I show that openness has been characterized as an ideal-type based on descriptive and functional characteristics (Schlagwein et al., 2017), which reflects a focus on calculation. The first essay outlines that these functional attributes are broadly promoted by what I call the 'managerial approach of openness' for their own benefit in



terms of efficiency and value-creation (e.g., Appleyard & Chesbrough, 2017; Kornberger, Meyer, Brandtner, & Höllerer, 2017; Passig, Cohen, Bareket-Bojmel, & Morgenstern, 2015; Raymond, 1999). In the same vein, the literature abounds with examples illustrating the risk of slow decision-making due to a large amount of participants (e.g., Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017; Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Niemiec, 2017; Stieger, Matzler, Chatterjee, & Ladstaetter-Fussenegger, 2012). Finally, Heimstädt & Reischauer (2018) highlighted how organizational openness was used to better grasp future uncertainties (i.e., to predict).

Enchantment, in contrast, is defined as ‘*the feeling of being connected in an affirmative way to existence*’ (Pessi, Seppänen, Spännäri, Grönlund, & Martela, 2022, p.83). This concept especially outlines the importance of emotions, the quest for meaning, and relationships between individuals, over calculation (Boje & Baskin, 2011). In management, enchantment is notably related to the implementation of new forms of organizing (e.g., Endrissat et al., 2015; Islam & Sferrazzo, 2022; Korczynski & Ott, 2004). In the same vein, Suddaby et al., (2017) bridge some recent social trends with a return of enchantment. These social phenomena, populism, tribalism, and the resurgence of craft, are also reminiscent of open principles (see [essay 1](#)). I thus propose to consider openness as an enchanting narrative of organizations.

### **Openness as an enchanting narrative**

Contrary to disenchantment, enchantment is based on axiological rationality, in which actors focus on their supported values to make sense of a situation. Axiological rationality, or ‘rational by value’ (*Wertrational*) as qualified by Weber (1978/1921), also refers to the absence of consideration for the foreseeable consequences of an action, which notably leads actors to overlook the potential resulting perverse effects. In that sense, Weber (1978) stated that irrationality is constitutive of axiological rationality, especially when the value orienting action covers an absolute meaning. While organizational openness has mostly been associated with formal rationality, my thesis essays rather point out that actors engaged in open processes are committed to embodying the principles of openness they support (i.e., axiological rationality) over calculation. The first paper, ‘*For repoliticizing openness*’, shows how openness was primarily conceived on political values and then became an instrumentalized concept, serving calculation for performance interests when appropriated in management. In addition, I unveil that two divergent views co-exist in the only concept of openness, the emancipatory and managerial perspectives, which value different forms of rationality. The enchanting character of openness appears as related to the emancipatory approach as it moves away from an instrumental and calculated vision of open principles to foster axiological rationality. In the

second essay depicting the case of M21S, the findings portray an extremist conception of openness, in which members are devoted to achieving a total action-open principles fit, meaning this was the primary criteria to meet when taking action. The irrationality of the axiological logic highlighted by Weber (1978/1921) is outlined in this case, because congruence with extremist open principles is valued at the expense of implementing adequate solutions to the crises faced by the association, to the point of compromising its sustainability. More specifically, suitable responses would have required to compromise on the action-values fit by prioritizing another form of rationality, using the mobilization of legal remedies to cope with the founder's suspicious debt, for instance. In the third paper, the members of OS mobilize axiological rationality in their everyday activities by engaging in sensemaking processes about their open values for each new encountered situation. On a given issue, I observed that actors spent more time discussing the use of open principles than addressing the process content (e.g., in the budgeting process, members provided feedback on the followed procedure and not necessarily on the outcomes, here the proposed budget). In addition, the rejection of propositions inspired by more traditional organizational features reflects the opposition of actors to formal rationality (see for example the episode of legal structuration in the paper in which the usual components of an association, like the board, are criticized by the members of OS).

In sum, I draw on the concept of enchantment to shed light on the prevalence of axiological rationality in radical open organizations by showing that actors' decisions primarily rely on the values of openness (participation, transparency, individual freedom). In the thesis introduction, I challenge the current conception of openness built upon a functional and instrumental prism and suggest to rather think about open organizing as a set of values that includes participation, transparency, and individual freedom. The emphasis on axiological rationality in radical open organizing makes this conceptual proposal particularly meaningful. This contributes to the literature on organizational openness by questioning the prevailing narratives, emphasizing efficiency and the use of formal rationality, currently promulgated about the open by pinpointing that radical open organizing appears as a value-driven form of organizing. This instrumentalized approach gave the lion's share to the managerial perspective on openness, which is especially linked to temporarily and spatially limited open processes, while overlooking the key role of open values and more radically open organizations. Open organizing thus promotes an enchanting narrative of organizations. The opposition between axiological and formal rationality of actors noted in my empirical papers reinforces the

proposition of the first essay regarding the need to reconsider the emancipatory conception of openness, as it appears as particularly linked to open principles and axiological logic.

b) Openness as enchantment: alienation or emancipation

Precedingly, I mentioned that axiological rationality appears as strongly linked to emancipatory openness. In this subsection, I discuss the relation between emancipation and alienation in theoretical developments on (dis)enchantment to better grasp this tension in open organizing.

**Enchantment as emancipatory**

Disenchantment was criticized for its alienating character, which drastically delineates individual agency. For instance, some authors denounce that focusing on calculation reduces the *‘possibilities for exercising individually differentiated conduct’* (Bell, Winchester, Wray, & Bell, 2021, p.252). Other consider disenchantment as the abdication of individuals’ agency to institutions (Suddaby et al., 2017). In the same vein, disenchantment is associated with a loss of meaning for actors (Endrissat et al., 2015). These denunciations echo the metaphor of the ‘iron cage’ and the criticism of dehumanization addressed to bureaucracy (e.g., Bauman, 2000; Gouldner, 1955; Weber & Kalberg, 2013) ([see Chapter 1, subsection I.c](#)). To answer these problems, Suddaby & Laasch (2019) stressed the need to re-enchant management and organizations and recommended *‘to think a little bit about authenticity and ideas to do things because they’re the right thing to do’* (p. 92).

Berman (1981) suggested that, in contrast with the alienation of disenchantment, the experience of enchantment seems to contain emancipatory possibilities by developing *‘participating consciousness’*. This implies that an individual is not a separate object or subject from its environment and can thus alter it. In other words, enchantment gives actors the capacity to affect what occurs to them and their environment. In that vein, Berman (1981) associated enchantment with a social order based on a *‘highly decentralized political autonomy’*. Berman’s approach of emancipation appears as reminiscent of the emancipatory conception of openness of Popper and the FSM outlined in the first essay entitled *‘For repoliticizing openness’*. More specifically, in open organizing, participation, transparency, and individual freedom are the principles meant to emancipate participants by providing them the power to affect their social environment, including the internal organizing processes of their community and its relationships with the outside world. Drawing on the empirical tensions of the literature on open phenomena (e.g., Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017; Hautz et al., 2017; Kornberger et al., 2017; Von Krogh et al., 2012),

I stress, in the first essay, that emancipatory openness is a conception still solicited by participants. The reading of the two empirical essays showed that this suggestion is also supported by the actors from the field who demonstrated their willingness to emancipate work through openness:

- In M21S, open values were meant to give power back to organizational members for them to be able to self-organize. To succeed, the association suggested giving actors the power of acting by encouraging initiative taking and by limiting external forms of control.
- Regarding OS, emancipation was a purpose induced in the organization's mission, to produce a fairer society, and is reflected in community values and organizing. Besides, most of its members joined Ouishare to break from more traditional conceptions of work, free from the pressure of hierarchy and able to choose their own missions to deliver.

### **Enchantment and the role of social imaginary in alienation**

In management research, (re)enchantment is a notion primarily mobilized in marketing, to study consumption. It describes the use of values as a powerful dynamic to (re)attract (new) consumers (e.g., Matusitz, Palermo, Matusitz, & Palermo, 2014; Ritzer, 2005). This highlights an instrumental use of enchantment that was instead associated with disenchantment and calculation. Existing research thus depicted examples of enchantment implemented to control employees' behaviour (e.g., Endrissat et al., 2015; Islam & Sferrazzo, 2022). Endrissat et al. (2015) referred to this process as 'enchanted work' and described it as *'to at once mystify and be real, to promote meaningful work relations that foster creativity and participation, and put customers, workers and wider community members in less formalized relationships with each other'* (p. 1559). In other words, this article portrayed how managers mobilize the personal feelings and experiences of employees, as well as the socially meaningful (i.e., non-market values), to fuel new modes of subordination through *'symbolic manipulation'*. The authors therefore argued that enchantment should be thought as *'ideological rather than emancipatory'* (p.1556).

Through the description of organizational necrosis, the second essay sheds light on a similar case of subordination to extremist open values. However, in the case of M21S, there was no attempt to instrumentalize since members had decided for and by themselves to re-enchant their organizing by implementing open principles after a governance crisis. While the actors showed authenticity and commitment in the process of opening up their organization, they imposed an

extremist conception of openness upon themselves, fuelling normative control, implicit exclusion and a reduction of members' agency through mechanisms of depersonification and disempowerment. Although open organizing was introduced as an answer to the dehumanization and alienation observed in bureaucracy, the mechanisms of depersonification and disempowerment paradoxically seem to affect individuals in comparable ways.

In short, the case studied by Endrissat et al. (2015) shows how instrumentalizing non-market values contributed to alienate organizational actors, whereas what happened in M21S highlights that instrumentalization was not a necessity to achieve similar limitations in freedom. The commonality between both studies therefore appears as the prevalence of values in shaping the organizing processes, which reflects the key role of social imaginary as a powerful alienation mechanism. This also portrays the tension between reality (i.e., practices) and the imaginary (i.e., values), which is experienced by actors engaged in radical openness and that I stress in my thesis title. Indeed, even when pursuing an emancipatory purpose, like in M21S, implementing principles from the collective imaginary appears as a particularly difficult process that can result in a variety of contradictions, notably in achieving the total opposite of what was expected (alienation instead of emancipation in this case).

### **The relation between emancipation and alienation in open organizing**

The criticism of alienation addressed to disenchantment and the emancipatory purpose of enchantment emphasize a dichotomic perspective of these concepts. However, recent theoretical contributions highlight that disenchantment and enchantment may be complementary at the level of society. A first approach argues that disenchantment narratives lead to the creation of new forms of enchantment (see Boje & Baskin, 2011; Stone, 2006). A second perspective takes on a constitutive approach according to which '*disenchantment and rationality cannot exist in the absence of mystery and enchantment*' (Suddaby et al., 2017, p.286). In brief, according to these studies, the phenomena of enchantment and disenchantment emerge in reaction to each other and share a relation in which they appear as complementary.

This complementarity between enchantment and disenchantment can help us further understand the nature of the link between both views of openness pinpointed in the first essay, according to which the emancipatory conception co-exists alongside a managerial approach to the open. To do so, I focus on the empirical essays of my thesis. In M21S (essay 2), actors conceive both approaches of openness as linked by a causal relation, as promoted in management research. They believe in the welfarist perspective that associates performance with emancipatory working conditions. In contrast, the case of OS, studied in the third paper, reflects the

coexistence of both perspectives on openness. More specifically, these views of openness, either emancipatory or oriented towards performance, are regularly mobilized and pitched against one another during debates about organizing issues ([see the teleological anchorings related to efficacy that are advocated by Steerco members in essay 3](#)). These conflicts of opinion are resolved through explicit sensemaking processes based on the use of three anchorings (i.e., identity, organizational and teleological) that actors articulate to compensate for each other in each specific situation. For a particular organizing issue, some of these anchorings might therefore tend towards emancipation while the other(s) may instead lean towards performance.

This observation joins Weber's perspective, who considered that any action may induce diverse categories and levels of rationality (1978/1921), which invites us to consider the relationship between emancipatory and managerial openness as non-exclusive and as continua at the organizational level. This means that both conceptions of openness can be combined at different degrees, depending on the practices enacted in the organization and on the situation to face. This contribution highlights the significance of a pluralistic logic in open organizing that Suddaby & Laasch (2019) have associated with a re-enchanted form of organizations. In addition, how Ouishare members articulate the anchorings to navigate between both conceptions of openness highlights that actors might agree on provisional closure as a form of temporary and consented alienation. Consented here relates to explicit sensemaking because it implies that a validated organizational arrangement was intensively discussed between actors before its implementation, until an anchoring articulation that is plausible to the collective is agreed upon. Regarding the provisional character of alienation, we show the ability of members to constantly question and redesign the organizing processes of Ouishare depending on the situation in the third essay, which appears gruelling, as indicated by actors in interviews. This consuming ability also appears as a motivation for actors to temporarily relinquish their full capacity to act on their own environment (i.e., emancipation as defined by Berman, 1981). The relationship binding emancipatory and managerial openness within an organization can thus be characterized as dialogic, which refers to their co-dependant shifts towards emancipation or alienation. More precisely, dialogic involves that two opposed concepts can share a dialogue, as an ongoing struggle between monologic forces (e.g., centralization, closure, unity) and dialogic ones (e.g., openness, decentralization) (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014 on Bakhtin dialogism).

In sum, mobilizing the literature on enchantment and disenchantment contributes to highlight the tension between emancipation and alienation in radically open organizations, which is

especially linked to the two perspectives on the open pinpointed in the first essay. I show through the study of Ouishare that this issue of alienation (i.e., managerial openness) and emancipation (i.e., emancipatory openness) should be addressed as a dialogic. This conceptual proposition adds to existing research on open organizing by reconsidering the dichotomic view on the empirical tensions (e.g., Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous, Gößwein, Beaudette, & Wales, 2017; Kornberger et al., 2017; Von Krogh et al., 2012). In other words, rather than looking at two opposed poles, I suggest thinking about alienation and emancipation in open organizing as a co-dependent relationship. Regarding the first essay of my thesis, this contribution leads to understanding the dynamics between the competing assumptions of openness as following a similar dialogic. This conceptual proposition joins the calls of Heracleous, Gößwein, Beaudette, & Wales (2017) and Dobusch & Dobusch (2019) to introduce less represented ontologies, particularly more relational ones, in research on open organizing. In the first essay, I especially advocate the potential of the ontology of becoming (Chia, 2002; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) to reveal the power struggles at stake in open organizational contexts, notably by investigating dualities. Shedding light on the dialogic relationship between emancipation and alienation reinforces the advantage of adopting such a relational approach to investigate the political dimension of organizational openness. In addition, this contribution raises new issues to further examine, for instance the question of consent and particularly of informed or contrived consent in organizations applying openness to all their organizing processes. Finally, this also provides a contribution to the literature on enchantment, in which the link with disenchantment is considered complementary (Boje & Baskin, 2011; Suddaby et al., 2017), by further specifying how the relation between these two phenomena is fuelled.

### **III. OPENNESS, BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA**

In this second section of the discussion chapter, I draw on the notions of ideology and utopia to better understand what the tension indicated in my thesis title, between values and practices, entails in open organizing. I begin by showing the limits of the dichotomic view of openness vehiculated in management research, which is considered either as ideological or utopian. This leads me to focus on the work of Paul Ricoeur (1984a, 1986) who studied the relation between both concepts. The second subsection therefore exposes the Ricoeurian perspective on ideology and utopia. Based on this approach, the third subpart examines the dialogic between utopia and

ideology in open organizing and particularly highlights how this dynamic can be either constructive or destructive.

a) Openness, either ideological or utopian

In the preceding section, I argue that openness can be considered as an enchanting narrative of organizations in which axiological rationality is fostered. I also highlight the potential deviations of this emphasis on values, namely instrumentalization and extremism, which invite us to examine the key role played by the social imaginary in open organizing. In the existing literature, organizational openness and its values (i.e., transparency, inclusion, shared decision-making, autonomous contribution) are affiliated either to an ideological or a utopian character depending on the writing.

In management, ideologies and utopias are areas of investigation traditionally anchored in critical approaches. More specifically, (managerial) ideologies are considered for their pervasive subordination effects on organizational actors (Mats Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2009; Seeck, Sturdy, Boncori, & Fougère, 2020). Conversely, organizational utopias are related to the field of alternative organizing by focalizing on communities that organize differently to challenge dominant paradigms such as capitalism, managerialism, etc (e.g., Fournier, 2002; Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014; Parker, Fournier, & Reedy, 2007).

**The ideology of openness**

In studies on ‘open communication’, some authors clearly qualify openness as an ideology (e.g., Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Gibbs et al., 2013), because it advocates injunctions on the right way to communicate and promotes an overly positive vision that conceals the reality of occultist practices. On a critical basis, management (or managerial) ideologies are defined as ‘*collective or socially embedded, and yet also contestable, set of ideas that describe and/or seek to justify managerial authority*’ (Seeck et al., 2020, p.54). This insidious system of belief therefore shapes individual and collective agency by determining which moral principles, cognitive processes, ways of behaving, etc, are considered as adequate. Shedding light on the managerial conception of openness contributes to extending the reach of critical works on post-bureaucracy, in which this organizational model was denounced for its instrumental use of democratic values to notably hide a neoliberal ideology and insidious subordination mechanisms (e.g., Clegg & Baumeler, 2010; Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Knights & Willmott, 2002; Willmott, 1993) ([see section I.c in the introductory chapter](#)).



## Openness as utopia

Openness is also emphasized as presenting the potential to democratize previously exclusive activities (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Stieger et al., 2012 on strategy), a view that is characterized as a *‘utopia or an idealistic form [...] – reflecting the values of equality and unlimited engagement in a virtual and global society’* (Vaara et al., 2019, p.34). In the same vein, I suggest studying open organizing using a utopian lens in the first essay to uncover the politics of openness and notably the mobilization of the emancipatory concept by organizational actors. Utopias are socially and historically embedded narratives (Parker et al., 2007; Vogt, 2016) that are related to existing matters by proposing an antagonist view or a solution to the identified problem (Christopher Grey & Garsten, 2002). In management, two main types of utopia are identified, organized and disorganized utopias (Christopher Grey & Garsten, 2002; Picard & Lanuza, 2016). According to Grey & Garsten (2002), organized utopias are inherited from the Enlightenment philosophy (see the writings of Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) and seem less represented nowadays. These organized utopian narratives relied on a liberalist doctrine, which states rules and institutions are the only way to preserve individual freedoms since, otherwise, people would oppress each other. Conversely, as they fit with neoliberal principles, disorganized utopias are much more present in contemporary representations of the workplace. These modern disorganized utopias draw upon the common post-bureaucratic and open characteristics, such as *‘networks, value chains, and so on - a more dynamic, process-centred usage’* (Grey & Garsten, 2002, p.20).

Some real cases of disorganized utopias were investigated in organization studies. One of the most famous is ‘Le Familistère’ and was initiated by the Godin family who possessed a company with the same name that produced cast-iron stoves in the 19th century (Godin, 1874). Specifically, Le Familistère is described as *‘a closed architectural complex that brings together (and blurs the distinction between) places of production and places of life, with unparalleled cultural (le « Palais social »), social and educational services; and a community organized using participatory governance arrangements’* (Picard & Lanuza, 2016, p. 76, my translation) and was studied by numerous authors for over two hundred years (e.g., Desroche, 1976; Dos Santos, 2018; Lallement, 2009; Trouvé, 2005). As indicated by Fournier (2002), other fragmented, local grassroots initiatives attracted the attention of researchers interested in utopianism, such as Los Indignados (Nez, 2012), the Bauen hotel in Argentina (Evans, 2007; Picard & Lanuza, 2016), as well as other examinations of diverse social movements (for

instance Fournier, 2013; Sutherland, Land, & Böhm, 2014) some of which are especially active online (Sullivan, Spicer, & Böhm, 2011; Turner, 2021).

### **Ideology and utopia as a relational issue**

Because they are considered as antagonistic concepts in management research, the ideological or utopian character of openness is currently addressed in a fragmented manner across distinct publications. However, throughout the three essays of my thesis, I highlight that the embeddedness of openness in ideology and utopia should be addressed as a relational issue. In other words, both views seem to coexist and be linked together in open organizing.

In essay 1, I suggest openness draws its utopian character from its alternative ambition portrayed in the different approaches of the concept. More particularly, these distinctive conceptions were built to solve what were considered as problematic paradigms in their times. The emancipatory perspective appeared as an answer to totalitarianism in Popper's approach (1962/1945) and to private ownership of software for Stallman (1983). The managerial conception, which is found in the Open-source movement and open strategy, responded to the weaknesses of bureaucracy according to Chesbrough (2003) and Raymond (1999). Although it might be considered as an instance of disorganized utopia, I argue that the managerial conception of openness covers an ideological character instead, because it is anchored in the dominant paradigm of neoliberalism and does not move question it. Particularly, I show that this managerial approach promulgates openness as a win-win opportunity for organizations and participants, but, because it prioritizes performance and productivity (e.g., Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Raymond, 1999), it actually serves management interests. In other words, all the negative aspects observed in open processes, even regarding participants dissatisfaction, were examined as risks that might affect organizational efficiency. Furthermore, this instrumentalization of open principles enables to (re)legitimize managerial authority, through closed decision rights and control, which was earlier considered as antagonistic to openness in the conception provided by Popper and the FSM. This focus on value-capture appears as a main distinction with the emancipatory conception of the open, which put individuals' interests at the heart of the emancipation issue. This question of actors' emancipation is central to utopianism (Picard & Lanuza, 2016) thereby making the emancipatory approach of openness a utopian proposition. In this essay, I also stress that the two conceptions of openness, one appearing as ideological and the other as utopian, still coexist in actors' perception as reflected in the empirical tensions informed in open phenomena scholarship (e.g., Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017; Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017; Kornberger, Meyer, Brandtner, & Höllerer, 2017;

Von Krogh, Haefliger, Spaeth, & Wallin, 2012), which opposed these two approaches of the open. This highlights a duality between ideology and utopia in open organizing that seems to be linked to actors' interpretations of openness principles, thereby calling for their further investigation to better grasp the nature of this relation.

The second paper, based on the case of M21S, illustrates another ideological deviance that might affect radically open organizations despite members supporting the utopian emancipatory conception of openness: extremism. The extremist conception of open principles in M21S means that actors are so devoted to embodying the open values that their over adherence creates mechanisms of normative control. Extremism impedes organizational members from questioning the meaning of open principles and straying from action-open values fit. As a means of normative control, depersonification ensures total congruence with extremist openness through peer-surveillance and rules based on self-regulation, while disempowerment enables actors to evade situations that conflict with the open principles. While their pursuit of an absolute ideal of openness is sincere, this process of organizational necrosis led to the self-decline of the open values by fuelling exclusion and a narrower agency both at the individual and collective level. This process also challenges the sustainability of M21S since members are mostly focused on the optimal fit with open values rather than addressing the crises that arise in the organization, either because these problems are not related to congruence issues or because the envisaged solutions conflict with their ideal of openness. Like the first essay, the case of M21S stresses the limit of an analysis in terms of ideology and of its opposition to the notion of utopia, as found in management studies. Indeed, the ideal of open organizing pursued by M21S members portrays a non-intentional manner to justify their supported ideology through utopian discourses.

In addition, the third essay shows that other cases of radically open organizations (here Ouishare) have been able to avoid these ideological deviances while remaining committed to their ideal of openness. Their dedication to an ideal vision of open values is reflected in their very frequent mobilization during debates about organizing issues. OS members especially remind the ideal of openness through the teleological anchorings. Teleological anchorings are notably nurtured by the identity anchorings (i.e., illustrated in the formalized values, OS's mission, etc) and can lead to change the discussed organizational arrangement to ensure its alignment with the community's ideal of open organizing. While this emphasis on an idealized vision of openness could have deviated towards extremism like in M21S, OS actors were able to resist ideological pressure while sustaining their commitment to an open organizing utopia

by drawing on the anchorings and their capacity for articulation. Articulating the anchorings creates a compensation mechanism that enables actors to explore away from their ideal of open principles without straying too far. In other words, OS members use both utopian and ideological pressures to make sense of and enact their radical open organizing.

In sum, this subsection sheds light on the relationship between ideology and utopia in open organizing and stresses that the nature of their interconnection requires further clarification. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the fragmentation between these concepts, traditionally observed in management research, to better understand how ideological and utopian narratives are linked in radical open organizing.

#### b) A Ricoeurian perspective of ideology and utopia

To unpack how ideology and utopia are connected, I draw upon the work of Paul Ricoeur (1984a, 1986) who developed the idea of a complementarity between both concepts in a series of conferences transcribed across two publications. He notably mobilized the former work of Mannheim (1929), who, together, are the only authors to have written about the relationship between these notions. According to these philosophers, the social imaginary or ‘*when an idea departs from the real*’ (Vogt, 2016, p. 367) lays the foundation of any ideology or utopia. These concepts are then specified, notably through their position in time and their varying functions, which I will present over the next paragraphs.

#### **The Ricoeurian definition of ideology**

Let us begin with the particularities of ideology. According to Ricoeur, ideology covers three functions. When all three are present in a social context, it ‘*reinforces, redoubles, preserves and, in this sense, keeps the social group as it is*’ (Ricoeur, 1984a, p.60, my translation). More specifically, he defined the following functions (Ricoeur, 1984a, 1986):

- **Ideology as a distortion of reality:** ideology is the process according to which reality (i.e., praxis) is corrupted by imagined representations.
- **Ideology as a legitimization of domination:** domination requires to be justified using universal values that have been inherited from past systems of authority.
- **Ideology as an integration in social memory:** ideology draws on key events that are used to constitute the social memory and therefore the identity of a social system. Ideology is thus the foundation of the vision of the world promoted by this group.

These functions of ideology are reminiscent of Ricoeur's development in his three-volume book entitled 'Time and narrative' (Ricoeur, 1984b, 1985, 1988). In the second volume (Ricoeur, 1985), he establishes the distinction between history and fictional narratives of previous philosophical works. Then, he stresses how ideology is based on a narrative account of history by offering a retelling of how events occurred. This narrative of history comes from a particular standpoint and a different perspective could therefore provide variations. This relationship between history (events from the past) and narrative appears as the reason why ideology can only draw on corrupted representations. On a similar basis, Ricoeur (1988) emphasizes the fleeting nature of the present, which results in the impossibility of grasping it other than through narratives.

In the same vein, Vogt (2016) mobilizes Mannheim's approach to study theories of post-industrial society, such as 'knowledge society', 'knowledge workers', 'knowledge-based economy', 'the new economy', 'information society' and 'network society'. He showed how the influence of these theories in public debates and government policies reflects a transformation from utopian concepts to ideologies. What this transformation entails is the concrete application/utilisation/implementation of these concepts into present reality from mere theory. The notion of ideology is thus specifically embedded in a relationship between past and present events.

### **The Ricoeurian definition of utopia**

Based on its etymology (meaning 'in no place' in ancient greek), Ricoeur stated that the main function of utopia is '*to project the imagination out of reality into an elsewhere which is also a nowhere*' (Ricoeur, 1984a, p. 60, my translation). The utopian logic, as theorized by Ricoeur, therefore draws a clear line between the imaginary and the real world. The author thus emphasizes what Mannheim called '*utopian mindset*'<sup>41</sup>, that is the exclusion from utopian thinking of any thoughts on practical issues or potential application risks of utopian ideas in a real context. Mannheim (1929) also included the impossibility to conceive the political implications of a utopian idea, while their implementation can lead to a more tyrannical order than before. Consequently, Ricoeur (1984a, 1986) argued that the utopian mindset involves disregarding the logic of action. In sum, the inaccuracy of utopian thinking comes from the focus on some elements in the present order while neglecting others (Mannheim, 1929). These

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<sup>41</sup> Mentalité utopique en français

considerations of utopia are reminiscent of Weber's work on axiological rationality and its irrational character (Weber, 1978/1921) of which it proposes a complementary interpretation.

The anchorage of utopia in the imaginary leads Ricoeur (1984a, 1986) to characterize the three functions of utopia as follow:

- **Utopia as an alternative society.** Actors draw upon utopia to propose an alternative conception of society by expressing potentialities that are inhibited in the existing order.
- **Utopia as a new power structure.** Utopian narratives challenge existent power structures. By stressing the gap between fantasy and reality, utopias can generate new, potentially more tyrannical, power dynamics.
- **Utopia as an all-or-nothing logic.** Utopia substitutes the logic of action, which may generate contradictions, to an all-or-nothing logic that makes reality vanish in favour of perfectionist, almost impossible to achieve, endeavours.

### **Ideology and utopia as complementary**

Where Mannheim (1929) argues that a practical application turns utopia ideological, Ricoeur (1984a, 1986) suggests the two concepts share a relationship instead. In his definitions of the functions of ideology and utopia, Ricoeur (1984a, 1986) emphasizes how these forms of social imaginary can become '*pathological*'. More specifically, the author argues that ideology and utopia both possess a constructive (or healthy) and a destructive (or unhealthy) dimension. The constructive role of ideology is related to its function allowing the integration of history in collective memory. Conversely, Ricoeur refers to its destructive side through the term '*illusion*', which represents a deviation of the legitimation process to protect the status quo, including the privilege system as well as injustices. Regarding utopia, its healthy dimension relies on subversion as utopian narratives enable to open the field of possibilities, which can lead to changes in the social order for a better future. However, its unhealthy role relates to perfectionist endeavours, the practical application of which appears as unachievable and results in hindering action.

Both utopia and ideology provide partial, deformed and/or inaccurate descriptions of present or hoped for situations (Mannheim, 1929). According to Ricoeur, this inaccuracy is at the origin of the constructive dimensions of integration in ideology and of subversion in utopia. In Ricoeur's view, however, these healthy dimensions are in competition, but also complementary: '*We still need utopia in its fundamental function of contestation and projection in a radical elsewhere, to also carry out a radical criticism of ideologies. The reciprocal is*

*right too. Everything happens as if, to cure utopia of the madness in which it risks to sink unceasingly, it was necessary to appeal to the healthy function of the ideology, to its capacity to give to a historical community a narrative identity.’* (Ricoeur, 1984a, p.63-64, my translation). Ricoeur defines the concept of narrative identity as ‘*the fragile offshoot issuing from the union of history and fiction*’ (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 296) that is assigned to a person or a group. A narrative identity reflects ‘*the story of life*’ that is shaped through ‘*a series of rectifications applied to previous narratives*’ (ibid, p. 297). In other words, narrative identity is conceived as relational and is subjected to changes over time. If we refocus on ideology and utopia, a narrative identity appears as the result of the entanglement of ideological and utopian forces. Ricoeur refers to the ongoing tension between the constructive dimensions of ideology and utopia, which produces a narrative identity, as ‘*oscillation*’.

**Table 24. Synthesis of the constructive and destructive dimensions of ideology and utopia**

	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Utopia</b>
<b>Constructive dimension</b>	Integration in narrative identity	Subversion of narrative identity
<b>Destructive dimension</b>	Illusion to protect the status quo	Perfectionist but unachievable endeavours

c) Healthy and unhealthy relationships between ideology and utopia in radical openness

In the conception of Ricoeur (1984a, 1986), ideology and utopia share similarities and differences that are at the origin of tensions but also of a complementary relationship between them. The following table (table 25) synthetizes the three supplementary characteristics of ideology and utopia. On this basis, I propose to discuss the findings of my empirical essays to explicit the relationship between ideological and utopian narratives in open organizing, and particularly how this dynamic can be either healthy or unhealthy. Having successfully remained radically open since its creation in 2012, the case of Ouishare illustrates a relation that appears as healthy. The organization also grew in revenue and memberships until the period of 2018-2019. Conversely, within M21S, the level of activity quickly slowed down a few months after the radical opening of the association. In addition, the metaphor of organizational necrosis invites us to consider this process, which leads to a self-decline of radical openness and threatens the organization’s sustainability, as unhealthy.

**Table 25. Synthesis of the supplementary functions of ideology and utopia**

	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Utopia</b>
<i>Inaccuracy of representations</i>	Imagined representations of reality and events	An envisaged but uncomplete alternative to reality
<i>Temporality</i>	Derivate from and oriented towards past & present events	Derivate from present matters Future-oriented
<i>Power structure</i>	Legitimization of existing power relations	Shift of existing structure

### **Inaccurate representations**

The ambiguity of the imaginary representations provided by ideology and utopia questions the possibility to concretely implement these narratives in the real world. More specifically, ideology draws on fictional accounts, corrupted by design, of key events to constitute the social memory and therefore the narrative identity of a social system (Ricoeur, 1988). Regarding utopia, idealized schemes are valued without any consideration for real world constraints, or for the first concrete step required to implement ideas from the social imaginary. How reality is grasped by actors is examined in the empirical essays of my thesis. Both in M21S and OS, tensions related to the practical application of what came from the imaginary of actors emerged, however they were managed differently by the actors.

In the case of M21S, described in the second essay, inaccuracy was a problem raised several times by organizational members ([see the findings subsection on extremist openness](#)). Particularly, they pointed the lack of clarity of the meaning of open values and the vision (i.e., strategic purpose) pursued by the association. The open principles took on an absolute meaning, closed to potential reinterpretation depending on the situation, which led to conflicts in the GC. Nevertheless, this criticism was not resolved by GC actors who consciously dismissed the subjects. In M21S, the inaccurate representations of open values thus contributed to perpetuate the extremist approach of openness because of an unhealthy complementarity between utopia and ideology. More particularly, the destructive dimensions of utopia fuelled the absolute vision of open principles supported by members (i.e., perfectionist but unachievable schemes) and of ideology motivated their refusal to see and then challenge the power structure in place (i.e., legitimization of existing power structure). In short, practical applications and their foreseeable negative consequences were seemingly not considered by M21S actors who would rather nurture a deformed vision of reality.



In OS, the case studied in the third essay, equivocality, as a form of inaccuracy, appeared as a redundant organizing issue to answer, but the major difference with M21S is that OS actors addressed these points head-on. In OS, ambiguities were limited thanks to explicit sensemaking processes based on regular and intensive discussions between members. Explicit sensemaking revolves around three anchorings (i.e., identity, organizational, teleological) ensuring that no crucial element of building and activating the organizing is overlooked. In other words, explicit sensemaking and anchorings enable the articulation of key events grounded in the past from ideology and envisaged alternatives of utopia into more accurate narratives. The endless quest towards the ideal of openness highlighted in this essay can thus be considered as a journey towards unreachable accuracy, which also contributes to better understanding the redundant character of explicit sensemaking in OS, since meaning making is a process meant to overcome equivocality (Weick, 1995). In sum, this case seems to portray a healthy relationship between ideology and utopia, which complement each other to reduce equivocality and enable the actors to grasp a more complete and thus less deformed account of reality.

### **Temporality**

Ideology and utopia are differentiated by their temporal positions. Ideology is based on the interpretation of past and present events, whereas utopia involves future situations that are yet to happen (Mannheim, 1929; Ricoeur, 1986). The centrality of temporality in differentiating ideology from utopia invites us to read Ricoeur's work on 'Time and narrative' (1984b, 1985, 1988). In the conclusion of the third volume (Ricoeur, 1988), he raises an aporia (i.e., an insoluble contradiction in reasoning) related to '*the dissociation among the three ecstases of time -the future, the past, and the present- despite the unavoidable notion of time conceived of as a collective singular [...] [which] appeared to us to be the fruit of an imperfect mediation between a horizon of expectation, the retrieval of past heritages, and the occurrence of the untimely present*' (p. 300). This aporia therefore suggests that the link between ideology and utopia could be key in associating the three ecstases of time into a healthy or unhealthy way.

In the second paper, I showed that M21S appeared as an organization that is almost stuck in present times, meaning that collective action was mainly conceived as immediate, because past and future orientations were limited by the extremist approach of openness. Regarding past events, the essay illustrates how a few negative experiences led to the addition of new rules (e.g., the questioning tool) as a form of organizational change, but other situations did not cause an evolution of the members' conception of open values. In M21S, actors also have little ability to act on past events because an internalized norm forbids external forms of control, like

sanctions. It also pushes some members towards less transparency about what previously occurred to protect the wrongdoers from the judgement of others. The only exception to this norm appears to be the lack of action-open values fit. This limited hold on past events shapes the integrative function of ideology that results in deformed representations of the past. In addition, there were few possibilities for actors to envision future-oriented actions, as some were perceived as a questioning of the open values, while others were restricted through the reduced scope of action that was enforced by the total fit between action and open principles ([see vignettes 5 and 6 in the second essay](#)). In M21S, the normative control mechanisms drew on the characteristics of a present situation using self-control and collectivist decision-making, which involved the presence of all GC members to be able to decide. The present orientation of M21S therefore contributed to the strict monitoring of the action-open values fit. The difficulty for actors to consider future actions, meaning the utopian possibilities of openness, limits their ability to subvert the defective order in M21S. A comparable phenomenon is also observed regarding past events, which limits their integration into appropriate types of memory in the ideological narrative of the community. When combined, this lack of concern for past and future events can lead to the self-decline of open principles and threaten the association's survival. In other words, the dominance of ideological pressure in M21S inhibits the possibility the benefits of the healthy complementarity provided by utopia.

In contrast, by drawing on the three anchorings (i.e., identity, organizational, and teleological), the frequent and intense discussions between OS actors enabled a dialogue between different temporalities on a common issue. More specifically, the identity anchoring is associated with inspiring past events that occurred inside or outside the organization and that serve to fuel the identity narrative of OS as a radically open organization. The organizational anchorings are rather related to a current organizing situation to address, which can be nurtured by already implemented organizational features (i.e., from the past) or ones that have only been imagined so far (i.e., future-oriented). Finally, teleological anchorings relies on what the organization aims to become in the future. In sum, the members of Ouishare succeeded in fuelling a healthy relationship between the ideological (i.e., identity anchorings, which include the collective memory) and the utopian character of openness (i.e., the constant reconsideration of the current narrative to always strive for a perfect account). This is particularly enabled by the anchoring articulation that reflects the actors' capacity to articulate the three ecstases of time, past, present and future, into what they consider as a plausible reification of openness through time. Since

depending on the situation, how the members articulate the three ecstases of time varies, providing a diversity of unified timelines and thus different accounts of their radical openness.

### **Power structure**

Ideology and utopia both fuel a relationship with existing power structures (Ricoeur, 1984a, 1986). Ideology legitimizes the power relations in place, for instance managerial authority. Conversely, utopia possesses a subversive function that leads utopian ideas to challenge existing power structure, but not necessarily to further enhance social justice and equality. In open organizing, questioning power structure requires to focus on the activation of organizationality and on the degree of fluidity of the organizing.

As unveiled in essay 3, the organizing of OS is performatively activated through explicit sensemaking, that is using discussive practices. Explicit sensemaking leads members to spell out the collective meaning of their open values to then implement organizing processes based on this agreed upon meaning. Regarding the stability of the power structure, the sense given to radical openness evolves depending on the situation, which involves engagement with new explicit sensemaking processes as soon as an organizing issue emerges, even when this question has already been answered in the past. Explicit sensemaking therefore prevents the meaning of openness, and power relations, to become taken for granted in the OS community. The performative character of explicit sensemaking thus enables actors '*to articulate the effort of definition and the will of denaturalization*' (Dorion, 2017, p. 154, my translation). In addition, the principle of anchoring, allowing collective action to temporarily stray from open values, and their compensating articulation give the actors room to manoeuvre in their organizing processes. In other words, the three anchorings and the ability of OS members to articulate them in a variety of manners fuel the high degree of organizational fluidity in the community. OS can be considered as especially fluid because its organizing processes are regularly subjected to change to embody radical openness in most situations, meaning that its power structure is also often (re)evaluated by its members. Regarding the power structure, the relationship between ideology and utopia nurtured in Ouishare can thus be considered as healthy thanks to explicit sensemaking. Through intensive discussions, the actors can identify the power structure(s) that should evolve in their organizing processes (i.e., the function of utopia to shift existing power relations), or justify others (i.e., the function of power legitimation of ideology) for a temporary period, even if these structures appear as potentially closed. This capacity for change is reminiscent of the definition of emancipation of Berman (1981) and seems especially connected to the fluidity of the organizing.

The room to manoeuvre and the ability of actors to provisionally stray from their ideal of openness foster an organizational fluidity that I did not observe in M21S. The second essay depicts that the organizing of M21S was activated in the GC through the collective and in person validation of a formalized organizational arrangement. Some cases of ‘emerging decisions’, which drew on performativity, were thus blocked by GC actors because they did not fit with the extremist open principles. In addition, the extremist conception of openness has made it difficult for regular actors to question the action-open principles fit and thus to shift organizing processes and existing power structures. In M21S, I also showed that the meaning of open values was neither discussed nor defined, thus considered as natural and, to some extent, as understood in the same way by every member. Criticism, which sometimes led to change in organizing processes and power structure, only came from irregular or new members as they enabled themselves to act in ways the GC actors did not. This lack of organizational fluidity appears as surprising in an organization promoting the benefits of experimentation and in which all the formalized rules were not necessarily respected ([see vignette 4 on treasurer accountability](#)). Because of the few opportunities possessed by actors to challenge existing power structures in M21S, I propose to characterize the relationship linking ideology and utopia as unhealthy here. Once again, ideological forces prevail, fuelled by the pursuit of a total action-open principles fit that tends to over-legitimize the power relations in place. As depicted in the paper, questioning the existing order seems especially difficult for regular members, which contributes to preventing utopian thinking from playing its part to balance out the relationship with ideology. Nevertheless, this role is enacted by irregular or new members who dare criticize the existing structure of power in the association. This emphasizes the need for fluid processes triggered by organizational members in radical open organizing to resist ideological deviances. As in the small-step changes of Popperian openness (Popper, 1962/1945), when activated by actors, organizational fluidity shows their ability to question what appears as critical to maintaining a radical form of open organization.

### **Utopia and ideology sharing a dialogic relationship**

In this last subsection, I rely on the three complementary characteristics of ideology and utopia based on the work of Ricoeur (1984a), to examine how the link between these two concepts operates. Ricoeur (1986) considers that both ideology and utopia possess a constructive and a destructive dimension, meaning that their interaction can be either healthy or unhealthy. He also suggests that individual and group narrative identity is caught in ongoing oscillations between ideology and utopia (Ricoeur, 1986). The complementarity aspect combined with

oscillations reflect a relationship that I propose to characterize as dialogic, to emphasize the constant interactions between forces from utopia and the ones from ideology. Depending on the dialogic characteristics, I suggest this relation can fuel healthy or unhealthy effects on radical openness.

Because oscillations between ideology and utopia are particularly visible in the case of Ouishare and underrepresented in M21S, I suggest that these interactions specifically indicate a healthy dialogic. In the third essay, explicit sensemaking showcases how members manage to articulate the three anchorings, which contributes to nurturing the identity narrative. As mentioned, utopia is particularly related to the teleological anchorings that draw upon the ideal of openness in Ouishare members, and ideology is expressed through the identity anchorings, as it is built on the history of the community. In other words, anchoring articulation confronts ideology and utopia. These interactions fuel a healthy dialogic that reduces the inaccuracy of their identity narrative, to reify the three ecstases of time, and to question what could be implemented or maintained in the power structure in order to stay radically open. This healthy dialogic is nurtured despite situations in which the constructive and destructive dimensions could have been combined (e.g., [when the steerco members attempted to legitimate their position of power while the other actors wanted to subvert this power structure](#)), meaning it is also established by a balancing effect between ideology and utopia.

In M21S, conversely, few interactions between the constructive dimensions of ideology and utopia were observed. The inaccuracy of the actors' representation of reality is nurtured by the destructive dimensions of ideology (i.e., illusion to protect the status quo) and of utopia (i.e., perfectionist but unachievable endeavours), portrayed here by the identity narrative of full congruence with open values. This situation is reminiscent of Ricoeur's thought following which *'utopia is then only a way of dreaming about action while avoiding reflection on the conditions of possibility of its insertion in the current situation'* (Ricoeur, 1984a, p. 54, my translation). Regarding temporality, the ideological narrative dominates the relationship with utopia by emphasizing what happens in present time as a powerful control mechanism that inhibits actors from acting according to past or potential future events. A similar phenomenon of ideological prevalence is observed with the power structure, nevertheless, utopian ideas, which allow to question the status quo, are still promoted by new or irregular members. This notably helped the organization to sustain despite the escalation crises it faced, particularly since it still exists in 2022. The case of M21S therefore depicts two unhealthy dynamics, namely

the combination of the destructive dimensions of ideology and utopia as well as the predominance of one type of pressures over the other because it impedes their interactions.

To conclude, the following table synthetizes how the dialogic relationships between ideological and utopian pressures, healthy or unhealthy, can be nurtured. Ricoeur (1984a, p. 63, my translation) notes that ‘*action generates inescapable contradictions in reality*’. The mention of contradictions echoes the empirical tensions from the open organizing literature and the cases studied in my thesis show the role of a healthy dialogic between ideology and utopia to cope with them. Indeed, while the OS members have been able to successfully manage difficulties and internal conflicts, it was not the case in M21S in which the destructive relationship between ideology and utopia fuelled a crises escalation. This contribution adds to research on open organizing by scrutinizing the role of social imaginary (i.e., ideology and utopia) that has so far only been briefly mentioned. In particular, this reveals the critical role vested by the dialogic relationship between ideology and utopia, when constructive, in managing the empirical tensions of open organizing.

**Table 26. Synthesis of the forces fuelling a healthy or unhealthy dialogic between ideology and utopia**

Healthy dialogic is fuelled by...	Unhealthy dialogic is fuelled by...
Combination of the constructive dimensions of ideology and utopia	Combination of the destructive dimensions of ideology and utopia
Balance between constructive and destructive aspects	Prevalence of a type of pressure

#### **IV. CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS**

To conclude this thesis, I discuss some of the boundary conditions and limitations of my research work as well as the resulting avenues for future research. This section is articulated around three points, (i) the extreme nature of the cases studied, (ii) the social status and origins of the organizational members, and (iii) an interest in investigating materiality and spatiality in open organizing.

a) Boundary conditions and research limitations

In this subsection, I draw on two boundary conditions, meaning the specificities of the examined organizations, and a methodological focus to highlight three research limitations.

**Extreme cases of open organizing**

The first particularity of this doctoral research is related to the nature of the cases investigated, M21S and Ouishare. Namely, they are considered as extreme cases (Chen, 2016), which emphasizes their alternative and specific nature. They can be labelled extreme because of their radical approach to openness, illustrated by their fluid membership (i.e., anyone willing can join and contribute), their embodiment of open values (i.e., participation, individual freedom, and transparency), and the omnipresence of these principles throughout their organizing processes ([see Chapter 2, section I](#)). These choices of organization thus deviate from the type of organizations and open processes traditionally studied in the open organizing literature, which appear to be framed spatially and temporarily (e.g., Diriker, Porter, & Tuertscher, 2022; Dobusch et al., 2019; Hutter, Nketia, & Füller, 2017).

A few other points seem to emphasize this radicality. To begin with, M21S and Ouishare share a common legal statute that is the association (loi 1901 in France). M21S was created and has remained in the form of a non-profit, while OS shifted from non-profit to a for-profit structure. This status might be related to the radical nature of these cases, since, in France, researchers consider associations as democratic organizations (Hoarau & Laville, 2008; Laville & Sainsaulieu, 1997). More specifically, in French associations, democratic control is held by members and notably exercised during general meetings. In addition, an association board is legally mandated to share specific information with members, including financial data that must be approved by the assembly. Board members are also supposed to be elected and the assembly can request the resignation of their mandate. In other words, there are obligations of transparency and participation in French associations that are reminiscent of the open principles. In addition, associations are characterized as value-driven organizations (Hoarau & Laville, 2008, chapters 5 and 9), which is also the case for M21S and OS ([see chapter 6, subsection Ia](#)). Research on French associations shows how these organizations are inscribed in the French political landscape by pursuing objectives related to the common good (Hoarau & Laville, 2008). In other words, associations are generally built to defend certain values and a particular vision of the world. This notably contributes to putting axiological rationality at the core of associative governance mechanisms (Hoarau & Laville, 2008).

Secondly, because most actors of both organizations were caught in a strong desire to experience different relationships to work, they were particularly devoted to implement open values, which they considered as emancipatory, in their daily activities. As indicated in the [cases presentations](#), a large part of Ouishare members have joined the community, after a first negative professional experience, to work differently, while M21S are actors of these organizational transformations either by supporting them (for coaches and consultants) or by experiencing them (as employees or managers of a newly liberated company for instance). In sum, both M21S and OS promote an alternative way of working through radical openness for themselves and for the world. By advocating and self-applying the open values, which I characterize as ‘mises-en-abîme’, actors tend to further nurture their dedication to these principles. Here, the mission of M21S invites its members to promote new organizing forms and managerial innovations based on openness whereas Ouishare’s mission prones the advancement of a fairer and more collaborative society.

Despite their specificities, these extreme cases highlight expectations towards contemporary management that are related to broader societal changes, the centrality of which research has already highlighted in modern era. As mentioned in this thesis, studies on post-bureaucracy and (dis)enchantment have proposed some characterisation elements of contemporary management, such as the hybridity of bureaucratic and democratic principles (e.g., Clegg & Courpasson, 2004; Josserand, Teo, & Clegg, 2006; O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007), the prevalence of autonomy (e.g., Knights & Willmott, 2002; Picard & Islam, 2019; Willmott, 1993), and the implementation of neo-normative modes of control portraying how peer-surveillance is now more accepted than managerial authority (e.g., Barker, 1993; Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; Sewell et al., 1998; Sturdy, Fleming, & Delbridge, 2010). These points reflect broader societal expectations towards management and organizations, like the quest for meaning, the transformation of managerial authority and the development of work autonomy, which are also exposed in other fields of research (e.g., positive organizational scholarship, see Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; institutional theory, see Creed, Gray, Höllerer, Karam, & Reay, 2022). Critical authors reveal that all these characteristics serve neoliberal schemes by worshipping organizational performance and profits, and this ongoing promotion of efficiency tends to be societally questioned. The cases of M21S and Ouishare shed light on the high expectations of actors for organizations and management to be more authentic and more congruent with their promoted values, however these key dimensions go beyond radically open organizations as illustrated with a variety of recent scandals exposing the gap between a firm’s action and



discourse (e.g., Google and the promotion of its exclusionary diversity policy<sup>42</sup>; the greenwashing of the brand H&M conscious<sup>43</sup>). Besides, other major societal issues (i.e., grand challenges) that question the current social order, notably related to ecology, were also part of the agendas of M21S and OS. Radical cases of open organizing such as those studied in my thesis therefore invite us to reinvigorate the question of values in organization theory and management models.

### **Social status of the studied actors**

A second boundary condition is related to the status and social positions of the actors studied in my thesis.

On the one hand, they are mostly freelancers (60% of M21S members and around 90% of OS members). It should also be noted that salaried OS members are under a specific employment contract based on revenue tracking, which means that these individuals must find the missions that pay their salaries on their own. On a daily basis, the salaried members of OS globally work the same way as freelancers. Being part of professional networks is a common practice for freelancers (Van den Born & Van Witteloostuijn, 2013), particularly to find remunerated activities, which could explain the prominence of freelancers in M21S and Ouishare. Networks draw upon organizational features that are common to open organizing, notably decentralization, autonomy, participation, and self-management (Ekbia & Kling, 2005). The prevalence of this particular status of freelancer brings out some specificities. As used to work in networks, they are familiar with the way open values operates and shapes their scope of action. As part of a more global transformation of work, choosing to become an independent worker seems associated with specific expectations related to individual freedom, since it allows for freelancers to limit subordination relationships (Hussenot & Sergi, 2018). This specific status, nevertheless, requires some cultural and economic capital for independent workers to succeed.

On the other hand, members of M21S and OS represent a rather privileged population. As already mentioned, a large part of M21S actors are consultants, coaches (following a career reorientation), or managers. These jobs require a certain level of academic qualification (most of them possess a master's degree) and of experience, implying they already have a successful career. In sum, it reflects the high cultural and economic capital possessed by these people. In

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/technology/google-employee-israel.html>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/retailwire/2022/07/13/hm-case-shows-how-greenwashing-breaks-brand-promise/>

addition, the regular members of M21S, who are part of the GC, are mostly white people past their forties. In Ouishare most actors also own great cultural and economic capital. Regarding cultural capital, during a sharing table on social domination all participants introduced themselves as belonging to the ‘middle class’ (for instance, a lot of members’ parents were physicians). At the professional level, most of them have a five-year degree and are trained to work in consulting, project management and engineering. Economic capital also appears as a pre-requisite in Ouishare due to the precarity of freelancing, for instance during interviews some told me that they lived off welfare payments during their first months in the community. Finally, if the male-female distribution is roughly equivalent, most Ouishare members are white.

The demographics of both associations show an important representation of privileged people with few members from minority groups. Such distribution appears as a blind spot, as neither is taken into consideration in these open communities or in research on organizational openness. However, some examples from the cases investigated in this thesis show that the topic of social domination matters:

- The culture of Ouishare makes cultural capital a necessity to be included in the community. For instance, to participate in debates an individual should have a grasp on some sociological and political concepts and possess developed argumentation skills.
- The rare attempts to include people from a different background in OS have failed.
- Some female members testified regarding a culture of masculinity in Ouishare. If men represent a small majority of the members, they are those who are the most visible, particularly in conflicts, leading some women to qualify these disputes as ‘*cockfights*’ and withdraw their participation.
- The topic of racial domination has not been a deeply discussed issue in Ouishare, which causes tensions between members.
- In M21S, and particularly in the GC, I observed more criticism addressed publicly to younger female members. I also indicate in my methodology that I sometimes felt treated as an ignoramus, albeit in a benevolent way.

### **Materiality and spatiality in open organizing**

This third limitation is of a methodological nature. More particularly, I suggest that adding the dimensions of materiality and spatiality could have enriched my analyses.

In my thesis, I focus on practices and actors’ interpretations to investigate how openness, as a set of values, shapes individual and collective action and influences organizing processes. This

research issue required to empirically examine the symbolic order to notably understand the tacit and political effects of radical open principles. I thus mostly focalized on collecting data related to what the actors said or did, using on-site and online observations, interviews and documents. If symbolic is effectively entangled in language (i.e., discourses and interpretations) and acts (i.e., practices), it is also embedded in objects (i.e., physical and virtual artifacts) and in space (i.e., how space is arranged, how people are positioned in space, etc) (Ybema et al., 2009). This stance called sociomateriality (see Orlikowski, 2007) argues that, even as non-human actors, space and artifacts should be considered as equally important and pertinent to research as individuals. In my thesis work, however, I clearly gave the lion's share to human beings, since, even if I scrutinized practices when analysing the data, they were mediated by the actors' interpretation. How openness is played out through socio-material practices therefore remains an implicit dimension of my essays.

Sociomateriality is based on a relational ontology according to which space and artifacts should be characterized as social constructs (Dale & Burrell, 2007). While sociomateriality has been broadly mobilized in the field of strategy-as-practice (e.g., Dameron, Lê, & LeBaron, 2015; Kaplan, 2011; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011; Whittington, 1996), only a few studies on open organizing have explicitly drawn upon this perspective, which include Holstein & Rantakari (2022) and Husted & Plesner (2017) that particularly focus on a spatial approach of openness. Some studies, in which authors did not claim their enrolment with sociomateriality, give some insight on virtual spaces and on the way open organizing is mediated by these spaces (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Hutter et al., 2017; Luedicke, Husemann, Furnari, & Ladstaetter, 2017). Except for Holstein & Rantakari (2022), physical spaces have been neglected in the open organizing literature. These authors, however, highlight how spatial features matter since they contribute to the dynamic between openness and closure through three dimensions that are visibility, the presence of artifacts, and the way space is designated in discourses. In their chapter of the Cambridge Handbook of Open Strategy, Morton, Wilson, Galliers, & Marabelli (2019) also emphasize some opportunities provided by taking the sociomaterial turn in research on open organizing, which they qualify as follows (p. 179): *'the notion of sociomateriality can be a means by which the "social" (people) and the "material" (objects) in Open Strategy are viewed as interwoven rather than merely interacting, and are thus imbued in practices'*. A few lines later, the authors outline that sociomateriality appears as promising to better grasp power dynamics because they are notably intertwined with space and objects. In sum, there is still work to be done to fully grasp the stakes played by space and objects in openness.

If I sometimes used my phone to take pictures or described the way spatial arrangement of actors in writing, I could have gathered data on physical spatiality and materiality more systematically. Nevertheless, I collected several interesting bits of empirical evidence that could be further scrutinized to



**Picture 6. Actors have to position from oldest to newest**

understand the role played by objects and space in open organizing. During my on-site observations, I attended some workshops that were based on spatial features (i.e., in which actors were required to position in a specific configuration) and physical objects (e.g., post-its, wooden boards) as illustrated in the pictures below. These physical arrangements seemed to be used to explicit the actors' positions and compared them, which questions why members need to physically anchor their stances.

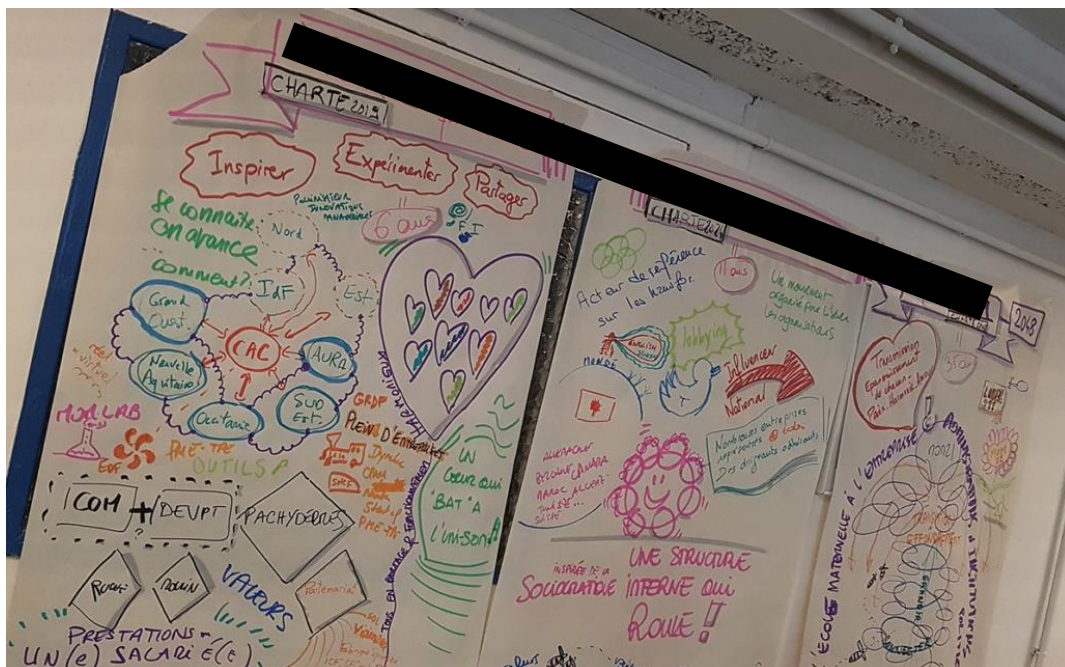
**Picture 7. Actors must position according to whether they think they should favour growth or decline (in revenue)**



Picture 8. Actors must position according to their planned commitment in Ouishare



Picture 9. The results of a workshop based on drawing



To further the work of Holstein & Rantakari (2022), the way actors occupied space appears as a promising dimension to continue exploring how spatiality shapes opening and closing dynamics. In M21S, during the GC meetings, actors were usually placed in a circle to easily see each other when talking. I remember a particular GC meeting during which the relationship between Nora and Caroline was explicitly tense, each publicly questioning the work and goodwill of the other. During this meeting, Nora received more support from the GC members than Caroline. At the end of the meeting, Nora was still in the circle while Caroline had taken a step back to sit behind the group. She had also put her sunglasses on. This anecdote illustrates

the interest to further study how actors use spatial and material arrangements to enact a radical form of openness.

b) Future directions

Drawing upon my thoughts on the boundary conditions and limitations of my thesis work, I suggest three directions for future research. These avenues aim to extend my thesis contributions to the open organizing literature by further developing the critical approach within this field. More particularly, these suggestions include (i) an attempt to articulate the prevalence of open values observed in radical openness with a macrolevel analysis of more global societal changes, (ii) a focus on social domination in open organizing, and (iii) avenues to develop contributions on the role of sociomateriality in organizational openness.

The first boundary conditions I mentioned is related to the extreme nature of the cases examined in my thesis. These organizations, effectively radical in their embodiment of openness, show the predominance of open values in daily activities notably using axiological rationality to guide actor actions and decisions to align with these principles. However, as I indicated in the preceding subsection, this observation is in line with more important societal issues, in particular the expectations of individuals regarding contemporary management and organizations. This highlights the need to articulate the microlevel of analysis on open organizing, as I do in my essays, with a macrolevel study of these more global challenges on a societal scale. This raises several questions: why is the open introduced as a valued alternative in current society? why do individuals share a desire for emancipation in a democratic society, which, above all, is still present among participants in open initiatives? In sum, these interrogations invite us to reexplore work and capitalism in our modern era. To do so, future research could begin with a comparative study of a case of radical openness with a temporarily and spatially framed process in a traditional company, to examine the similarities and differences in the predominance of open values and the solicitations of the emancipatory conception of openness by contributors. Another research issue that could be answered using a case comparison might elucidate the link between open values and grand challenges, such as ecological stakes. Indeed, as already noted, I observe affinities and even affect within the actors of M21S and OS regarding these societal challenges and especially the need to address them.

In the same vein, a rise of issues related to social justice can be currently observed at the societal level (e.g., Mahoudeau, 2022). While I already show that social domination is a topic neglected

by research and field actors, fairness appears as a key dimension in open organizing and is notably associated with the emancipatory approach of openness. In Ouishare, the fluidity of the organizing creates different feelings of injustice among members. On the one hand, the most committed individuals feel unrecognised, despite enjoying more decisional rights and legitimacy within the community. On the other hand, the other members feel they are being short-changed in terms of value sharing and power in the community. However, fairness is only implicitly studied in existing research. In their article focused on motivation in open-source communities, Von Krogh et al. (2012) examine how contributions are compensated. With the dilemma of commitment, Hautz et al. (2017) illustrate how the perception of unfairness can lead actors to withdraw their participation. This outlines the investigation of the role the fairness/unfairness duality plays in opening and closing dynamics as a promising opportunity for future research.

The second boundary condition I outlined in the preceding subsection is the underdevelopment of issues related to race, gender, class, or privileges in open organizing, both among field actors and academics. Except for Dobusch et al. (2019) who briefly introduced a few elements about social exclusion, this topic is not fully scrutinized in open organization. It seems critical for the pursuit of emancipation though, which is a purpose solicited by actors engaged in radically open organizations. Based on this observation, two directions for future study can be outlined. On the one hand, it could appear as surprising that in a radically open organization, the community suffers from a quasi-absence of minorities while claiming greater inclusion. This highlights the presence of exclusionary dynamics in open organizing that could be better understood by unfolding how they are enacted and why. On the other hand, the instance of conflicts qualified as '*cockfights*' by OS female members reflects the necessity to investigate how the mechanisms leading to the exclusion of minorities affect the organizing. For example, future study could unveil how the appreciation of behaviours considered as virile shapes organizational processes and the closure dynamics.

The last limitation is of a methodological nature and specifically points towards the weak attention that I provided to sociomateriality in my thesis work. I also argue that, considering the lack of existing research on this matter, there are numerous future contributions to add to open organizing literature thanks to the study of the material and spatial dimensions. The most invested topic related to spatiality that has been investigated is the way openness is mediated by technology and virtual spaces (e.g., Dobusch et al., 2019; Hutter et al., 2017; Luedicke, Husemann, Furnari, & Ladstaetter, 2017). Conversely, physical spaces have not drawn a lot of

attention except for Holstein & Rantakari (2022) who show the role of sptatiality in the relationship between openness and closure. This article especially focuses on a case of open strategy in a prime minister office, which appears as quite distinct from the cases of radical openness studied in this thesis. In the future, researchers could therefore explore how actors, in radically open organizations, invest physical spaces and, perhaps, propose a comparison with more traditional offices. At the crossroad of virtual and physical spaces, future research could study how these different types of space are intertwined in open organizations and how they contribute to shaping agency and organizing processes.





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## RÉSUMÉ

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Cette thèse contribue au champ de l'open organizing en interrogeant la façon dont l'ouverture, en tant qu'ensemble de valeurs, agit dans l'organisation et façonne l'action à travers trois essais. Le premier essai théorique met en évidence les assomptions contradictoires sur lesquelles est fondé le concept d'ouverture, mêlant des ambitions émancipatrices et de performance. La deuxième étude montre comment une conception extrémiste de l'ouverture peut conduire à une fermeture idéologique et à menacer la durabilité de l'organisation. Dans le troisième papier, cosigné, nous révélons trois mécanismes permettant aux membres d'enacter une forme radicale d'ouverture sur le long terme.

## MOTS CLÉS

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Open organizing, Etude critique en Management, Ethnographie, Idéologie, Valeurs, Emancipation

## ABSTRACT

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This thesis is inscribed in the recently emerged field of open organizing to study how openness, as values-based, acts in the organization and shapes action. To answer this research question, I draw upon three essays. In the first essay, I highlight the competing assumptions behind the concept of openness, including emancipatory ambitions and a performance target. The second study shows how an extreme conception of open values can lead to ideological closure that threaten the organization's sustainability. Finally, in the third co-authored paper, we investigate how actors have managed to enact radical open organizing over a decade-long period using three specific mechanisms.

## KEYWORDS

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Open organizing, Critical management studies, Ethnography, Ideology, Values, Emancipation