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Changing imaginaries to address climate change: A study on the creation and change of climate imaginaries

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Manuel F. Ramírez. Changing imaginaries to address climate change: A study on the creation and change of climate imaginaries. Business administration. Université Savoie Mont Blanc, 2023. English. NNT : 2023CHAMA054 . tel-04545430

HAL Id: tel-04545430

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THÈSE

Pour obtenir le grade de

DOCTEUR DE L'UNIVERSITÉ SAVOIE MONT BLANC

Spécialité : **Sciences de Gestion**

Arrêté ministériel : 25 Mai 2016

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préparée au sein du **Laboratoire IREGÉ**
(**Institut de Recherche en Gestion et Économie, EA 2426**)
dans l'**École Doctorale CST**
(**Cultures, Sociétés, Territoires – ED 633**)

Changer les imaginaires pour faire face au changement climatique : Une étude sur la création et la transformation des imaginaires du changement climatique

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*To Tere, my wife;
Tomi, my son;
my parents and sister;
and to everyone that lent me a hand or gave me encouragement in this adventurous journey.*

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Acknowledgements

At the end of this adventurous journey my first and greatest acknowledgments are for my wife Tere and my son Tomi. The Ph.D. journey is an intellectual quest, but most of all, a test of spirit. And for these five years I have received the daily support of Tere and Tomi. In times of struggle, of hardship, of happiness, and doubt, they were there, giving me their love and support. This thesis would not have been finished without their love and encouragement. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I also received much support and encouragement from the academic community at GEM. Many thanks to my supervisor, Gazi Islam, for taking the time to read theory with me; for showing me the tricks of academic writing; and above all, for being always supportive and kind. Thanks also to the many professors that supported me in difficult times and for sharing their ideas with me in classes, in the corridor, around coffee, and in happy hours. Much of what I learnt at GEM I owe to you. Finally, to my Ph.D. peers, who always were there to share laughs, critique the system, and to share the weight of writing a thesis. A particular mention goes for my office pals on the 6th floor!

Finally, thanks to my extended family and ancestors, because I am where I am thanks to many big and sometimes invisible loving actions from you.

Abstract

Climate change is here and getting worse. Humanity needs to change course soon but has showed strong difficulties in doing so. Research has linked this slowness to climate imaginaries—the fundamental climate significations that guide human action. To address climate change, humanity's climate imaginaries need to change. This thesis engages with this challenge by asking: how are climate imaginaries created and changed? Chapter 1 studies how imaginaries differ from each other and how these differences affect how organisations engage with them. This is done with a qualitative study of the pavilion area of the 26th U.N. Conference of the Parties for climate change. Chapter 2 investigates how the creation of imaginaries is blocked within organisations. This theoretical chapter describes the means and actions through which climate imaginaries get blocked and how internal activists engage in unblocking them. Finally, Chapter 3 develops a methodology to study how internal activists unblock organisational climate imaginaries based on an ethnography of a French business school and the work of its sustainability manager. In sum, this thesis contributes to the literature on climate imaginaries by characterising the different kinds of climate imaginaries, theorising how imaginaries are blocked within organisations, and developing a method for studying how internal activists unblock the creation of new climate imaginaries.

Keywords: climate imaginaries, climate change, conference of the parties, organisational imaginaries, internal activists, sustainability managers.

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Synthèse étendue en français

S.1 Motivation de la thèse — Aborder le changement climatique à travers les imaginaires du changement climatique.

Le changement climatique est déjà là (Anderson & Bows, 2011). L'augmentation des catastrophes naturelles telles que les sécheresses, les inondations, les incendies ravagent la planète, provoquant la perte d'habitats, la mort d'animaux et d'humains, et le déplacement de milliers de personnes (IPCC, 2018). Malheureusement, les gaz à effet de serre, principaux responsables du changement climatique, continuent d'augmenter malgré les avertissements constants et clairs des scientifiques (Anderson & Bows, 2011; IPCC, 2021). La crise climatique — qui n'est qu'une des crises environnementales qui ravagent notre planète et qui comprennent notamment la perte de biodiversité, la perturbation du cycle du phosphore et de l'azote et la pollution (Rockström et al., 2009) — s'aggraverait encore si l'humanité ne prend pas des mesures radicales (Banerjee, Jermier, Peredo, Perey, & Reichel, 2021).

Malgré les efforts intergouvernementaux et citoyens pour freiner le changement climatique (Banerjee, 2012; Islam, Rüling, & Schüßler, 2019; Schüssler, Rüling, & Wittneben, 2013), l'humanité n'agit pas assez vite (IPCC, 2018, 2021). De multiples pistes de recherche ont été ouvertes pour comprendre pourquoi l'humanité ne change pas de cap. L'absence d'action a été expliquée de différents points de vue, notamment le déni de l'existence du changement climatique et de l'Anthropocène (Dunlap & McCright, 2011), l'existence d'une contradiction inhérente et insurmontable entre le marché et le changement climatique (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014), et la prédominance des forces du marché qui réduisent tout effort, ramenant tout changement de direction au statu quo (Nyberg, Spicer, & Wright, 2013; Nyberg & Wright, 2013; Wright & Nyberg, 2017).

Il semble que ce soit le système qui doit changer si nous voulons lutter contre le changement climatique. Bien que ce système comprenne les sphères politique et culturelle, une grande attention a été accordée à la sphère économique, car les gaz à effet de serre sont émis pour remplir ses mandats de croissance et de profit (Gilding, 2012; Jackson, 2009).

L'un des principaux acteurs de la sphère économique sont les entreprises, qui contribuent fortement au changement climatique par leurs émissions et la destruction de l'environnement (Wright & Nyberg, 2014), mais qui ont également les ressources et le pouvoir de changer de direction en raison des ressources concentrées entre leurs mains (Piketty & Goldhammer, 2017), de leur capacité de production (Wright & Nyberg, 2015) et de leur omniprésence dans l'économie mondiale d'aujourd'hui (Porta, Lopez-De-Silanes, & Shleifer, 1999). Malheureusement, les entreprises ne font que des petits pas pour diminuer leurs émissions de gaz à effet de serre, ou certaines ne changent pas du tout (Banerjee, 2003; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). Si les entreprises ne modifient pas rapidement leurs actions, il y a peu d'espoir de lutter contre le changement climatique. Cependant, certains chercheurs ont proposé que les entreprises ne changent pas leurs actions parce qu'elles sont bloquées par une compréhension inadéquate du changement climatique et de leur rôle dans celui-ci. Le fait de ne pas changer de direction peut être lié à un problème avec leurs imaginaires du changement climatique (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Wright, Nyberg, De Cock, & Whiteman, 2013) qui peuvent limiter leur champ d'action et les rendre aveugles aux opportunités de changer de direction.

S.2 Contexte théorique

S.2.1 Les imaginaires

Un imaginaire est une signification fondamentale qui guide la compréhension et l'action (Castoriadis, 1975; Jasanoff & Kim, 2009; Taylor, 2002). Un imaginaire est fondamental parce que, dans une perspective imaginaire, le sens vient en premier, puis la pensée et l'action (Castoriadis, 1975, pp. 195–196). En tant que tels, les imaginaires peuvent être compris comme la « création incessante et essentiellement *indéterminée* (sociale-historique et psychique) de figures/formes/images, à partir desquelles seulement il peut être question de « quelque chose ». Ce que nous appelons « réalité » et « rationalité » en sont des œuvres » (Castoriadis, 1975, pp. 7–8). Cette position primordiale dans la création de sens et l'action humaine place les significations à un niveau ontologique — les principes de la réalité et le guide qui sous-tend notre façon de penser, de comprendre et d'agir. Le principal argument qui sous-tend cette position est que les imaginaires centraux qui guident la société (l'État, le capitalisme, Dieu, etc.) ne peuvent être expliqués ni rationnellement ni fonctionnellement (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 180). Castoriadis, philosophe franco-grec, psychanalyste et principal promoteur de cette position, propose plusieurs exemples pour expliquer les imaginaires. Tout d'abord, un exemple pour comprendre la source imaginaire des significations. Il évoque le rôle des centaures dans la Grèce classique (Castoriadis, 1975, pp. 198–199). Les centaures faisaient partie d'une pléthore de créatures mythiques qui jouaient un rôle culturel important. Il ne s'agissait pas de créations rationnelles ou fonctionnelles, et personne n'a jamais fourni de preuves solides de l'existence des centaures. Plus intéressant encore, la signification « centaure » a donné lieu à de multiples significations ultérieures, qui ont ensuite été représentées dans des récits et des sculptures. Toutes ces significations provenaient d'une source imaginaire. Deuxième exemple, la réification — voir les humains

comme des choses — est également décrite par Castoriadis comme une « signification imaginaire » (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 198). Rationnellement, les humains ne sont pas des choses ; fonctionnellement, ils ne sont pas non plus des choses (ils respirent, ils dorment, etc.). La réification est une signification imaginaire — avec des implications terriblement réelles. Une observation intéressante de Castoriadis concernant la réification est que la réification existait bien avant que nous ne parlions de réification — elle existait en tant que signification (même pas exprimée en mots) qui n'est devenue rationnelle et fonctionnelle que plus tard. Comme dernier exemple, Castoriadis parle du droit (Castoriadis, 1975, pp. 165–168). Alors que le droit occidental semble être un système rationnel et fonctionnel qui structure les relations dans la société, il est né dans le droit romain comme un système avec plusieurs pratiques illogiques et des dysfonctionnements. Ce n'est qu'au fil des siècles que le droit a évolué et est devenu plus rationnel et fonctionnel. Cependant, au début, il n'y avait que la signification du droit, et ce n'est qu'avec le temps qu'il devient rationnel et fonctionnel. En résumé, une perspective imaginaire postule que les significations viennent en premier et que ce n'est que plus tard que viennent la rationalité et la fonctionnalité. L'implication principale est que pour changer la façon dont les humains pensent et agissent, ils doivent changer leurs significations fondamentales — leurs imaginaires.

Si la perspective imaginaire positionne clairement les imaginaires à un niveau fondamental, elle est moins claire sur la manière dont les imaginaires sont créés, modifiés et finalement matérialisés. Castoriadis affirme que les imaginaires naissent dans deux « lieux » : la psyché individuelle et l'ensemble collectif anonyme (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 493). Cette thèse travaille principalement sur le développement social des imaginaires (pour la source individuelle des imaginaires, voir aussi Adams, 2014, pp. 75–88). Cependant, tout en soulignant la création sociale des imaginaires, Castoriadis ne développe pas de théorie claire

sur la façon dont les imaginaires sont créés socialement. S'il ne développe pas en profondeur la naissance des imaginaires, il esquisse l'idée qu'il existe différents types d'imaginaires — centraux et périphériques.

Castoriadis retrace les imaginaires centraux — les imaginaires qui sont à l'origine d'importantes significations sociétales telles que l'État, le capital ou Dieu — à une construction de l'inconscient collectif. C'est ce qu'il appelle l'instituant (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 493). L'instituant constitue l'aspect créatif de la société qui crée continuellement de nouvelles significations. Cependant, l'instituant n'a « pas de chair » (De Cock, 2013) et doit être matérialisé pour affecter la compréhension et l'action. C'est ce que Castoriadis appelle l'institué (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 493). D'une part, l'imaginaire instituant est la création de nouvelles significations par la création d'images et de formes. Il correspond à « *ce qui structure, institue, matérialise* » (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 148) — ce qui « révèle le caractère contestable, contingent et inachevé de tout ordre établi » (Bouilloud, Pérezts, Viale, & Schaepelynck, 2020, p. 159). D'autre part, l'imaginaire institué peut être compris comme une compréhension matérialisée du Monde, basée sur les imaginaires de la société. Il correspond à des « structures données, des institutions et des œuvres « matérialisées » » (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 148), telles que « les lois, les normes et les conventions » (Bouilloud et al., 2020, p. 159). Enfin, c'est la dynamique entre l'imaginaire instituant et l'imaginaire institué qui est à la base du développement socio-historique de la société. C'est la création, la matérialisation et la destruction incessantes des imaginaires qui constituent l'histoire. Selon Castoriadis, « nous ne pouvons pas comprendre une société en dehors d'un facteur unifiant, qui fournisse un contenu signifié et le tisse avec les structures symboliques » (1975, p. 224).

En résumé, les imaginaires sont les significations fondamentales qui guident la compréhension et l'action. Ils sont plus fondamentaux que la rationalité et la fonctionnalité. Pour changer le mode de fonctionnement d'une société, ses imaginaires doivent changer. Pour faire face au changement climatique, nous devons changer les imaginaires du changement climatique de l'humanité.

S.2.2 Les imaginaires du changement climatique

Les imaginaires du changement climatique sont les significations créées autour du changement climatique. Ils constituent la manière dont les individus et les organisations comprennent le changement climatique et sont le guide fondamental des actions que nous entreprenons pour faire face ou non au changement climatique. Pour comprendre comment les imaginaires du changement climatique évoluent, il faut d'abord comprendre quels sont les imaginaires du changement climatiques actuels. Plusieurs études se sont intéressées aux imaginaires du changement climatique et ont décrit certains d'entre eux. Par exemple, certains chercheurs ont étudié l'industrie des combustibles fossiles et ont découvert qu'elle utilisait quatre imaginaires du changement climatique : « combustibles fossiles pour toujours », « apocalypse climatique », « techno-marché » et « modes de vie durables » » (Levy & Spicer, 2013, p. 660). En résumé, l'expression « combustibles fossiles pour toujours » signifie que les combustibles fossiles seront toujours disponibles, que le changement climatique est une externalité de l'utilisation des combustibles fossiles et que l'énergie fournie par les combustibles fossiles permettra d'atténuer cette externalité. L'« apocalypse climatique » est la position selon laquelle les dommages causés par le changement climatique sont déjà irréversibles, que les points de basculement ont été dépassés et que l'humanité doit se préparer au pire (cf. Campbell, McHugh, & Ennis, 2019). L'imaginaire du « Techno-marché » considère le changement climatique comme un

problème nécessitant une solution, qui devrait être trouvée et développée grâce à l'innovation technologique et aux forces du marché. Enfin, le « mode de vie durable » consiste à comprendre que notre système économique actuel est le problème à l'origine du changement climatique et que sa résolution passe par le développement de modes de vie plus durables. C'est l'adhésion à l'un de ces imaginaires qui guide les actions ayant une incidence positive ou négative sur le changement climatique. Par exemple, l'adhésion à l'imaginaire du changement climatique selon lequel les combustibles fossiles sont éternels conduira les personnes et les organisations à maintenir les choses en l'état, en espérant que quelqu'un s'attaquera au changement climatique en utilisant les mêmes stratégies que celles employées jusqu'à présent. Les personnes qui adhèrent à l'imaginaire du « techno-marché » favoriseront l'innovation, l'esprit d'entreprise et l'économie de marché pour développer des solutions. Ces deux imaginaires ont été dominants au cours des dernières décennies et le changement climatique continue de s'aggraver. Toutefois, il ne s'agit là que de quelques-uns des imaginaires du changement climatique possibles. D'autres ont décrit les imaginaires du changement climatique comme étant le « techno-optimisme », la « modernisation écologique », les « innovations perturbatrices » et le « changement de système » (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022, p. 629), qui présentent des recouvrements avec ceux de Levy et Spicer (2013), mais aussi des différences significatives ; des imaginaires du changement climatique entourant la géo-ingénierie comme l'« arrogance humaine » (Augustine, Soderstrom, Milner, & Weber, 2019) ; et d'autres qui présentent des imaginaires de la permaculture (Roux-Rosier, Azambuja, & Islam, 2018) ou de l'agriculture biodynamique (Roquebert & Debucquet, 2022). Ce large spectre d'imaginaires traités comme coexistant au même niveau est problématique, car il n'approfondit pas les relations et les différentes caractéristiques de

ces imaginaires. En d'autres termes, nous disposons d'une longue liste d'imaginaires, mais nous ne comprenons pas bien comment ils sont liés les uns aux autres.

Une deuxième étape pour comprendre comment les imaginaires évoluent consiste à comprendre la macro-dynamique de l'évolution des imaginaires. Certains chercheurs ont décrit le développement des imaginaires comme une lutte hégémonique (Levy & Spicer, 2013) ; d'autres, comme un développement dialectique (Augustine et al., 2019) ; et d'autres encore comme un résultat issu de la pratique (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018). En ce qui concerne la question de savoir pourquoi les entreprises ne modifient pas leurs imaginaires, la perspective de la lutte hégémonique offre certaines réponses au niveau industriel (voir également les enfermements imaginaires, Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022). Par la création de « régimes de valeurs » (Levy & Spicer, 2013), les acteurs dominants développent des articulations économiques, politiques et culturelles pour maintenir les imaginaires actuels en place et conserver ainsi leur position hégémonique. Ce point est important, car il montre comment les acteurs s'engagent à un niveau macroéconomique pour bloquer la création ou le changement d'imaginaires. Cependant, la littérature nous apprend moins de choses sur la manière dont les organisations bloquent les imaginaires de l'intérieur, c'est-à-dire que nous comprenons moins bien la dynamique de la création et du changement d'imaginaires à un niveau micro.

Pour comprendre comment les imaginaires changent au niveau micro, en particulier dans les entreprises qui peuvent bloquer les imaginaires au niveau macro, il est important de comprendre comment les imaginaires sont liés aux organisations. Ceci est d'autant plus critique que les chercheurs ont montré les limites des efforts intergouvernementaux pour freiner le changement climatique (e.g., Banerjee, 2012; Islam et al., 2019; Schüssler et al., 2013), ce qui signifie que si la lutte contre le changement climatique dépend de la

modification des imaginaires du changement climatique, une grande partie de ce changement devra se produire à l'intérieur des organisations. Si Castoriadis a théorisé les imaginaires au niveau individuel et sociétal, il a moins théorisé le niveau micro-organisationnel.

L'étude de la manière dont les entreprises modifient leur propre imaginaire est une voie de recherche prometteuse. Une question importante est de savoir comment les membres de l'organisation s'engagent dans la modification de leur imaginaire organisationnel. Cela peut déjà être observé dans certains efforts fructueux déployés par des activistes internes (comme les gestionnaires de la durabilité (Daudigeos & Valiorgue, 2009)) pour orienter leurs entreprises vers des directions plus durables (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Daudigeos, 2013; Wright & Nyberg, 2012). Cela signifie que les activistes internes peuvent être particulièrement bien placés pour débloquer la création et le développement des imaginaires du changement climatique, bien que cela ait reçu peu d'attention dans la littérature sur les imaginaires du changement climatique. En outre, des lignes directrices méthodologiques doivent être élaborées pour aider les chercheurs à étudier la manière dont les activistes internes modifient les imaginaires, car les imaginaires organisationnels n'ont pas fait l'objet de beaucoup de recherches empiriques.

En conclusion, la lutte contre le changement climatique passe par le changement des imaginaires du changement climatique. Cependant, on sait peu de choses sur la différence de nature entre les imaginaires, sur les relations entre les types d'engagement avec les imaginaires, sur la façon dont les imaginaires sont bloqués à l'intérieur des organisations, sur la façon dont ils sont débloqués par les activistes internes, et sur la façon dont les chercheurs peuvent aborder méthodologiquement l'étude des changements imaginaires par les activistes internes. Telles sont les questions auxquelles cette thèse cherche à répondre.

S.2.3 Création et changement des imaginaires du changement climatique

Étant donné le besoin urgent de faire face au changement climatique, de comprendre le rôle des imaginaires dans l'orientation de la compréhension et de l'action, et étant donné l'état actuel de la littérature sur les imaginaires du changement climatiques, cette thèse explore la question suivante : comment les imaginaires du changement climatiques sont-ils créés et changés ? Cette question générale est opérationnalisée en trois objectifs de recherche qui sont explorés dans les chapitres 1, 2 et 3 de cette thèse.

Le premier objectif est de clarifier les différents types d'imaginaires qui existent et de clarifier comment les acteurs s'engagent dans ces imaginaires. Cet objectif est résumé dans la question de recherche du chapitre 1 : comment les imaginaires du changement climatique diffèrent-ils en nature et comment les acteurs s'engagent-ils dans ces différents types d'imaginaires ? Cette question a été abordée de manière empirique en étudiant la manière dont les pays et les ONG ont présenté et utilisé les imaginaires lors d'une conférence mondiale sur le changement climatique : la 26e Conférence des Parties des Nations Unies (COP26).

Le deuxième objectif est de comprendre comment les imaginaires sont créés et modifiés au sein des organisations. Étant donné que la littérature sur les imaginaires du changement climatique a développé une perspective macro mais moins une perspective micro du changement et de la création d'imaginaires, je développe un document conceptuel dans le chapitre 2 qui relie deux théories. Premièrement, la théorie de l'imaginaire de Castoriadis (1975) pour explorer comment les entreprises bloquent le changement de leurs imaginaires du changement climatiques, opérationnalisé dans une première question de recherche : comment la création de nouveaux imaginaires est-elle bloquée au sein des organisations ?

Deuxièmement, pour explorer comment ces imaginaires sont débloqués, je puise dans la littérature sur les activistes internes (pour une revue, voir Briscoe & Gupta, 2016), également connus sous le nom de « radicaux tempérés » (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) ou « d'activistes en costume » (Carollo & Guerci, 2018). Cette perspective conduit à la deuxième question de recherche du chapitre 2 : comment le processus d'imaginaire créatif peut-il être débloqué au sein des organisations par des activistes internes ?

Le troisième objectif est de développer une méthodologie pour étudier les imaginaires. Compte tenu du potentiel théorique des activistes internes à débloquer les imaginaires au sein des organisations (thème du chapitre 2), nous développons dans le chapitre 3 une approche méthodologique qui aide les chercheurs travaillant avec des activistes internes à étudier la manière dont ils modifient les imaginaires organisationnels. Ce chapitre examine le positionnement intérieur/extérieur des activistes internes (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016) et le positionnement intérieur/extérieur des chercheurs (Cassell, Radcliffe, & Malik, 2020; Islam, 2015; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012). Cela crée une configuration de recherche intéressante pour l'étude des imaginaires du changement climatique, étant donné que les imaginaires peuvent également être considérés comme ayant une position « interne » (ils affectent ce qui se passe dans l'organisation) et une position « externe » (ils guident la façon dont la société comprend et agit sur le changement climatique).

S.3 Design de la recherche

L'approche théorique des imaginaires de cette thèse est fortement influencée par la philosophie de Cornelius Castoriadis (1975). En tant que telle, la position onto-épistémologique de la thèse est alignée sur les hypothèses onto-épistémologiques de son travail. Comme indiqué dans l'introduction, Castoriadis propose que les imaginaires

constituent le niveau fondamental de la réalité. Cette réalité repose sur deux éléments. Tout d'abord, une « première strate naturelle » (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 493), une réalité physique qui ne détermine pas mais rend possible les conditions organisationnelles que les humains ont ensuite développées en significations. Le deuxième élément est la signification qui constitue la réalité sociale dans laquelle nous vivons, le monde des « possibles » et d'« impossibles » préconstitués [...] dans la position imaginaire d'une réalité » (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 358). Castoriadis place la signification au niveau ontologique pour saper les vues déterministes, en particulier celles issues à son époque du structuralisme. Bien que de nouvelles positions ontologiques soient apparues depuis lors (par exemple, voir le tournant ontologique en anthropologie (Viveiros de Castro, 2015)), Castoriadis offre une position intéressante qui relie une réalité physique organisable et une réalité sociale « imaginaire » basée sur la signification. Ce positionnement ontologique semble adapté à cette thèse, puisque son objectif est d'étudier un sujet qui relie des phénomènes physiques et sociaux : le changement climatique. D'un point de vue épistémologique, ce positionnement est lié au constructionnisme social (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Le constructionnisme social considère que les gens construisent des mondes par leurs actions et leur compréhension de ces mondes, et que la connaissance est dérivée de l'engagement dans ces mondes socialement construits. La principale implication de cette position est que la connaissance n'est pas la vérité ultime et qu'il n'existe pas de réalité incontestable. Plutôt que l'explication, c'est la compréhension qui est recherchée.

Castoriadis ne s'est pas engagé dans la recherche empirique, ce qui a privé sa théorie d'une composante méthodologique sur laquelle les études de sciences sociales pourraient s'appuyer. Toutefois, la place centrale des significations dans la théorie des imaginaires suggère que des méthodes permettant de saisir les significations et le sens dans les

interactions sociales seraient appropriées. Heureusement, la littérature sur les études d'organisation présente plusieurs exemples d'études d'imaginaires à partir desquels des lignes directrices méthodologiques peuvent être obtenues. Par exemple, les études longitudinales sur les imaginaires mettent en évidence la façon dont les imaginaires sont reflétés dans les médias (nouvelles, blogs, etc.) (e.g., Augustine et al., 2019; Levy & Spicer, 2013). Plus en rapport avec cette thèse sont les études qui se concentrent sur des données transversales, comme l'étude de l'influence des imaginaires sur les actions des entreprises (Lê, 2013), les études sur la façon dont les ONG développent des imaginaires sans fossiles (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022), et comment les imaginaires sont influencés par l'utilisation de médias multimodaux (Davoudi & Machen, 2022; Garland, Huising, & Struben, 2013; Oliveira, Islam, & Toraldo, 2017). À partir de ces études, les méthodes qui peuvent capturer la construction, le développement et le partage des significations seront utiles pour cette thèse, comme décrit ci-dessous.

La principale méthode utilisée dans cette thèse est l'ethnographie. L'ethnographie est une méthode développée en anthropologie pour décrire et comprendre les cultures (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Avec le temps, l'ethnographie s'est étendue en dehors de l'anthropologie et est aujourd'hui une méthode couramment utilisée en sociologie et dans les études de gestion et d'organisation (entre autres) (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009). Le développement de matériel empirique avec l'ethnographie est basé sur un engagement profond du chercheur sur le terrain. En participant à la culture étudiée, le chercheur commence à comprendre ses significations fondamentales, ses rites, ses règles et, d'une manière générale, la façon dont le groupe cible vit. L'observation joue un rôle très important dans l'ethnographie ; en outre, le chercheur utilise tous ses sens pour saisir autant que possible la façon dont vivent les informateurs. Le chercheur — généralement appelé

travailleur de terrain en ethnographie — enregistre tout ce matériel empirique à l'aide de notes de terrain : des notes rapides qui consignent les événements importants, des notes plus détaillées pour enregistrer les conversations et les pensées, et enfin de longues descriptions de l'expérience vécue pour construire une description approfondie de la culture étudiée (Clifford, 1990; Geertz, 1973). Pour parvenir à cette compréhension approfondie, il faut beaucoup de temps pour gagner la confiance des informateurs, apprendre leur langue (au sens propre comme au sens figuré) et comprendre la culture du point de vue du groupe lui-même. Les développements récents de l'ethnographie organisationnelle ont montré qu'il fallait moins de temps, car les chercheurs partagent une grande partie de la culture du groupe observé (par exemple, leur langue parlée, parfois leur langue organisationnelle, etc.) (Ybema et al., 2009). Dans le chapitre 3, l'ethnographie a été utilisée pour étudier comment une responsable du développement durable a cherché à changer les imaginaires environnementaux de son école de commerce. À partir de cette étude ethnographique de trois mois dans une école de commerce française, une méthodologie a été élaborée pour étudier comment les activistes internes s'engagent dans le changement des imaginaires du changement climatique de l'organisation. Parfois, cependant, le chercheur ne peut rester suffisamment longtemps sur le terrain pour développer une ethnographie complète. Le chapitre 1 est basé sur une étude de terrain de la Conférence des Parties de l'ONU qui ne dure que deux semaines. Dans ce cas, étant donné que la durée de l'événement est courte, l'un des outils utilisés en ethnographie — l'observation participante — a été utilisé.

L'observation participante peut être utilisée lorsque le chercheur souhaite saisir la manière dont les initiés comprennent leur monde, mais qu'il ne dispose pas de beaucoup de temps pour le faire (Brannan & Oultram, 2012). Dans le cadre de l'observation participante, le chercheur s'efforce de participer le plus possible au terrain afin de saisir le mode de vie et

de pensée de la personne concernée. L'utilisation de notes de terrain est également d'une importance cruciale, car le chercheur ne se contente pas d'enregistrer ce qui se passe : en les rédigeant, il donne un sens à sa compréhension du terrain et en y réfléchissant, il peut découvrir des aspects de la culture qu'il aurait pu manquer au départ. Étant donné la brièveté du délai, l'observation participante n'est généralement pas suffisante pour saisir le point de vue d'un initié sur la culture. C'est pourquoi le chercheur utilise d'autres méthodes pour compléter ses observations : les entretiens et les données d'archives.

Les entretiens sont une méthode adéquate pour comprendre comment un initié appréhende son monde (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012). Dans les études qualitatives, les entretiens semi-structurés (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012, p. 248) sont généralement utilisés, car ils présentent l'avantage d'avoir une certaine structure pour poser les questions (par exemple pour faire des comparaisons entre certains sujets) et la flexibilité d'explorer en profondeur les domaines qui pourraient apporter des éclaircissements à l'objectif de la recherche (Charmaz, 2014). C'est pourquoi le guide d'entretien est généralement modifié au cours du travail sur le terrain, afin de refléter la compréhension du terrain par le chercheur. En outre, le chercheur peut répéter les entretiens avec certains informateurs clés, afin de clarifier certaines parties de leurs entretiens précédents ou d'aider le chercheur à comprendre ce qu'il a appris d'autres personnes interrogées. Ainsi, les entretiens semi-structurés sont un outil flexible qui permet au chercheur de trouver, d'étendre et d'approfondir ses investigations. Cependant, plusieurs commentateurs ont mis en évidence les problèmes que peuvent poser les entretiens (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012). L'un des plus importants est de prendre pour argent comptant ce que disent les informateurs, car cela peut être influencé par plusieurs facteurs, comme la gestion de l'image (comment les informateurs veulent être perçus par le chercheur ou le public imaginé), en essayant d'influencer la politique locale

(en pensant que le chercheur pourrait influencer le terrain), et par des craintes de représailles si l'informateur ne croit pas que le chercheur respectera la confidentialité de l'entretien. En outre, l'entretien reflète le point de vue d'une seule personne (l'informateur), même si elle parle de ses propres perceptions ou de la façon dont les autres pensent. Même si l'entretien présente ces inconvénients, il reste un outil très précieux pour le chercheur, notamment pour clarifier des questions à partir d'observations directes ou d'autres documents. C'est pourquoi l'entretien n'est pas utilisé comme une méthode à part entière, mais plutôt comme l'un des outils de recherche permettant de créer des matériaux empiriques. Par exemple, il est courant dans la recherche qualitative de coupler les entretiens avec des données d'archives.

La collecte de documents écrits, d'artefacts ou d'autres supports est généralement appelée collecte de données archivistiques ou documentaires (Lee, 2012). Ce matériel empirique peut fournir de riches informations sur le langage et les symboles utilisés sur le terrain. L'un des avantages des données d'archives, par rapport aux entretiens, est que la production de ces artefacts ne se fait (généralement) pas à la demande du chercheur — ils font partie de la culture observée. Compte tenu des inconvénients des entretiens, la présence naturelle de données d'archives constitue un bon complément, car elle permet au chercheur d'accéder à des documents non médiatisés issus de la vie de l'informateur. Cependant, les données d'archives présentent également certains problèmes dont le chercheur doit être conscient. L'un d'eux est que les données d'archives sont généralement fragmentaires et incomplètes — du point de vue du chercheur — parce que le matériel n'a pas été élaboré pour son étude. En outre, il peut être difficile pour le chercheur, en particulier lorsqu'il n'a pas encore acquis une compréhension approfondie du contexte, de comprendre le rôle ou l'importance des données d'archives. Par exemple, il peut lire un courriel qui, à première vue, ne décrit que

les sujets d'une réunion et passer à côté de plusieurs points importants : pourquoi certains sujets sont discutés et pas d'autres, pourquoi certains mots ou concepts sont utilisés et pas d'autres, et pourquoi seuls certains membres de l'organisation ont été invités et pas d'autres. Si l'on considère les avantages et les inconvénients des entretiens et des données d'archives, on comprend mieux pourquoi ils sont généralement utilisés ensemble : la flexibilité et la possibilité d'aller en profondeur grâce aux entretiens vont de pair avec l'existence naturelle des données d'archives. Ces deux méthodes peuvent être utilisées de manière dialectique, les entretiens donnant des indications sur l'importance de certains documents et ces documents suscitant des questions que le chercheur peut chercher à clarifier lors d'entretiens ultérieurs. Associés à l'expérience vécue de l'observation participante, les entretiens et les données d'archives constituent une base solide pour le développement du matériel empirique.

Enfin, le matériel empirique doit être analysé. Cependant, les méthodes ethnographiques utilisées dans cette thèse ne font pas la séparation stricte habituelle entre la collecte et l'analyse des données. Au contraire, l'analyse est effectuée en même temps que la construction du matériel empirique (Charmaz, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009, pp.41–42). Dans l'ethnographie, l'analyse se produit lors de la rédaction des notes de terrain — le chercheur est déjà en train de théoriser (Clifford, 1990; Col & Graeber, 2011). Et lors de la rédaction du document final, la description détaillée est elle-même enchevêtrée avec la théorie (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973). C'est ainsi que le chapitre 3 — l'ethnographie sur la responsable du développement durable d'une école de commerce — a été analysé et rédigé. Le chapitre 1, l'étude de la zone du pavillon de la COP26, est quelque peu différent. Les méthodes utilisées pour créer le matériel empirique utilisé dans ce chapitre sont l'observation participante, les entretiens et les données d'archives ; par conséquent,

l'analyse s'écarte de la manière dont elle est effectuée dans l'ethnographie. Dans ce cas, j'ai utilisé une approche ancrée qui considère une épistémologie de la construction sociale (Charmaz, 2014), car elle correspond bien à l'épistémologie de la construction sociale des imaginaires utilisée dans cette thèse ; également, parce que c'est une méthode d'analyse qui fonctionne bien avec différents types de données (observation, entretien et documentaire) (Charmaz, 2014). Par conséquent, pour le chapitre 1, une grande partie de l'analyse a été réalisée d'une manière similaire à l'ethnographie : par la rédaction de multiples notes de terrain et de mémos — en particulier après les rencontres importantes et à la fin de chaque journée — et par la théorisation continue de ce qui a été trouvé. Une fois l'événement terminé, j'ai transcrit tout le matériel et je l'ai codé de manière itérative pour développer les principaux thèmes et concepts utilisés dans la théorisation. L'analyse des données et la théorisation du chapitre 1 ont été effectuées pendant et après l'événement, ce qui a permis de cibler les méthodes de collecte des données et d'explorer ultérieurement le matériel empirique en détail.

En résumé, la création et l'analyse des données empiriques de cette thèse ont suivi une approche ethnographique et une approche théorique ancrée qui prend en compte une épistémologie de la construction sociale. Grâce à ces méthodes, la théorie a été intégrée dans une description dense pour permettre au lecteur de saisir les riches significations des imaginaires du changement climatique.

S.4 Problématisation et principaux résultats

La principale question de recherche de cette thèse est de savoir comment les imaginaires du changement climatique sont créés et modifiés. Comme expliqué dans l'introduction, l'importance de poser cette question est qu'elle peut ouvrir la possibilité de changer les

actions qui alimentent actuellement le changement climatique. Cette question est mise en œuvre à travers trois chapitres. Le chapitre 1 étudie empiriquement quels sont les différents types d’imaginaires et comment les acteurs s’y engagent ; le chapitre 2 étudie théoriquement comment les imaginaires sont bloqués au sein des entreprises et comment les activistes internes débloquent la création de nouveaux imaginaires ; enfin, le chapitre 3 développe une approche méthodologique pour étudier la création d’imaginaires par les activistes internes.

Le chapitre 1 problématise la caractérisation des imaginaires dans la littérature sur les imaginaires du changement climatique. Il soutient que les imaginaires sont traités au même niveau, c’est-à-dire que les imaginaires ne diffèrent que par leur contenu, mais pas par leur nature. En comparant les études de la littérature, je soutiens que les imaginaires ne sont pas les mêmes : ils ne s’excluent pas mutuellement, mais se chevauchent et sont dépendants les uns des autres. En outre, je problématise la manière dont l’engagement des acteurs dans les imaginaires a été théorisé, en montrant que les théorisations actuelles — par exemple, hégémoniques, dialectiques et basées sur la pratique — n’ont pas été prises en compte dans leur ensemble. En étudiant la zone du pavillon de la COP26, je soutiens qu’il existe trois types d’imaginaires : le tronc, la branche et la brindille. Ils sont nommés d’après les parties d’un arbre car cette métaphore (Cornelissen, 2005) décrit bien la façon dont ils sont liés les uns aux autres. Les troncs sont des imaginaires qui sont partagés par la plupart des gens dans un certain contexte, qui ne sont généralement pas remis en question et qui servent de base de légitimation pour les imaginaires dérivés. Les imaginaires dérivés dépendent des troncs et ne disposent que d’une partie de la base de soutien du tronc. Les branches sont généralement en tension avec d’autres branches, qui ont des significations différentes, voire contradictoires. Enfin, les brindilles sont des imaginaires naissants issus d’une branche. Ils sont ouverts à la critique, car ils n’ont que quelques partisans.

En outre, le chapitre 1 affirme qu'il existe trois types d'engagement des acteurs vis-à-vis des imaginaires. Le renforcement consiste à soutenir un imaginaire de tronc, de branche ou de brindille et a été le type d'engagement le plus courant lors de la COP26. Le renforcement d'un tronc est la position la plus conservatrice, tandis que le renforcement d'une brindille est la position la plus risquée. La ramification est la présentation d'un nouvel imaginaire, c'est-à-dire d'une brindille. Les brindilles étant ouverts à la critique, les acteurs qui s'y engagent cherchent à se légitimer en renforçant l'imaginaire d'une branche et/ou d'un tronc. Enfin, la greffe est l'hybridation d'un imaginaire par le mélange de deux ou plusieurs troncs, branches ou brindilles. Elle est également critiquable car elle présente un nouvel imaginaire sans large support. Les pavillons qui ont eu recours à ce type d'engagement ne sont généralement pas à l'aise avec l'« arbre » actuel des imaginaires et tentent de créer une position plus proche de la manière dont ils comprennent le changement climatique. Grâce à ces nouvelles caractérisations des types d'imaginaires et des types d'engagement des acteurs, je soutiens que les chercheurs seront mieux équipés pour comprendre quels types de nouveaux imaginaires sont créés et comment.

Dans le chapitre 2, je pars de l'idée que les imaginaires sont bloqués à un niveau macro (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022) et j'étudie comment les imaginaires sont bloqués à l'intérieur des organisations. En outre, j'étudie comment les activistes internes — qui ont fait preuve d'ingéniosité pour changer les organisations de l'intérieur (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020) — débloquent la création d'imaginaires. Je soutiens que les organisations bloquent la création de nouveaux imaginaires en bloquant les deux aspects de la création imaginaire : l'instituant (c'est-à-dire la création de significations) et l'institué (c'est-à-dire la matérialisation des significations). L'instituant est bloqué en restreignant la capacité imaginative de l'organisation, en cooptant la

possibilité d'alternatives aux imaginaires actuels et en exerçant une coercition directe. L'institué est bloqué en étouffant la critique et en obstruant l'accès aux ressources nécessaires pour matérialiser les nouveaux imaginaires.

Dans un deuxième temps, je soutiens que les activistes internes — bien que limités par leur dépendance à l'égard de l'organisation (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016, p. 20) — disposent de multiples ressources pour faire avancer un programme social (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016, pp. 21–24; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Scully & Segal, 2002). En ce qui concerne les blocages que les organisations opposent au développement de nouveaux imaginaires, les activistes internes s'engagent dans de multiples tactiques pour les contrer. Par exemple, pour débloquent l'institué, les activistes internes créent des espaces d'imagination, intègrent l'imagination dans des projets réguliers, développent de nouvelles significations en utilisant l'ambivalence, se connectent à des réseaux d'activistes externes pour apprendre les meilleures pratiques, et développent des mécanismes de protection collective. Et pour débloquent l'institué, ils réinterprètent l'histoire de l'organisation, créent des canaux de rétroaction, divisent l'opposition et légitiment de nouveaux imaginaires par des moyens multimodaux. En résumé, je soutiens que la création d'imaginaires n'est pas seulement bloquée de l'extérieur, mais aussi de l'intérieur des organisations, et que la création d'imaginaires peut être débloquée par des activistes internes.

Enfin, le chapitre 3 explore méthodologiquement comment les chercheurs peuvent collaborer avec les activistes internes pour étudier empiriquement la manière dont les imaginaires sont créés et développés au sein des organisations. En partant d'études sur les activistes internes qui ont problématisé leur position d'initiés et d'outsiders (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020) et d'autres études qui ont également problématisé la position du chercheur en tant qu'initié ou outsider (Cassell et al., 2020; Islam, 2015;

Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012), nous problématisons la manière dont la collaboration de recherche entre les activistes internes et les chercheurs se produit. Cette problématisation s'inscrit dans le contexte de la littérature sur la collaboration entre chercheurs et praticiens, qui est divisée entre les chercheurs qui soutiennent qu'une collaboration totale est possible (e.g., Shani & Coghlan, 2014) et d'autres qui affirment que la collaboration n'est pas possible (e.g., Kieser & Leiner, 2012). C'est la conjonction de ces trois observations théoriques (l'intériorité/l'extériorité du chercheur et de l'activiste interne et la possibilité de collaboration) qui est à l'origine de notre question de recherche : comment les connaissances et la pratique sont-elles façonnées par la dynamique des collaborations entre chercheurs et praticiens dans des contextes d'activisme des employés ? Cet article empirique co-écrit est basé sur une ethnographie de la façon dont une responsable du développement durable dans une école de commerce française a transformé l'imaginaire environnemental de l'école. En analysant nos interactions, nous soutenons que la collaboration se développe dans ce que nous appelons une « rencontre critique ». Nous soutenons que chaque participant à la collaboration réside dans son « espace » — le chercheur dans l'espace théorique et le praticien dans l'espace pratique. Si, au départ, ils ne peuvent pas contribuer directement à l'espace de l'autre, une relation à long terme permet de développer la confiance et la compréhension entre les deux parties et d'estomper la frontière entre les deux espaces. Cela permet à chaque partie d'entrer dans l'espace de l'autre et d'y contribuer, c'est-à-dire au praticien de contribuer à la théorisation et au chercheur de contribuer à la pratique. Cela signifie, d'un point de vue méthodologique, qu'une manière d'étudier comment les activistes internes travaillent pour créer et changer les imaginaires du changement climatique organisationnel passe par une relation à long terme dans laquelle une compréhension et une confiance mutuelles sont développées.

S.5 Contributions à la littérature

Cette thèse apporte plusieurs contributions à la littérature et ouvre plusieurs pistes pour de futures recherches. Le chapitre 1 contribue à la littérature sur les imaginaires du changement climatique en décrivant trois types d'imaginaires : le tronc, la branche et la brindille. Cette caractérisation clarifie les relations et le fonctionnement des imaginaires du changement climatique et montre que les imaginaires ont un cycle de vie : ils sont créés (brindilles), ils gagnent un soutien social et entrent en conflit avec d'autres imaginaires (branches), et évoluent parfois vers des imaginaires du tronc qui organisent l'action climatique. Si la lutte contre le changement climatique nécessite de changer les imaginaires (Wright et al., 2013), cet article soutient qu'il est important de comprendre quel type d'imaginaire doit être modifié. En outre, ce chapitre contribue à la conceptualisation de trois types d'engagement des acteurs dans les imaginaires — le renforcement, la ramification et la greffe — et à l'établissement d'un lien avec les développements macro-imaginaires (par exemple, hégémonique (Levy & Spicer, 2013) et dialectique (Augustine et al., 2019)). Enfin, ce chapitre contribue à montrer que la caractérisation des imaginaires est relative à leur contexte et que différents médias multimodaux sont utilisés par les acteurs pour matérialiser les imaginaires.

Dans le cadre d'un programme de recherche futur, le chapitre 1 souligne le potentiel de l'étude du cycle de vie des imaginaires. Il souligne que la naissance même des imaginaires n'a pas fait l'objet d'études empiriques. Cette naissance a probablement lieu dans des endroits où les gens se rencontrent et discutent, comme les organisations, les réunions et les lieux de rencontre en ligne, et moins dans les endroits où les imaginaires sont présentés (conférences, médias d'information, etc.). Elle souligne également que la « mort » des imaginaires n'est pas non plus bien comprise, ce qui pourrait éclairer la façon dont les

imaginaires du changement climatique survivent et comment (et pourquoi) ils s'étiolent et disparaissent. De même, de nouvelles études pourraient établir un lien entre la manière dont les engagements « micro » avec les imaginaires constituent des configurations « macro » telles que celles décrites comme des luttes hégémoniques ou des développements dialectiques. Cela permettrait de préciser de quelle manière les acteurs développent ou non des imaginaires. En ce qui concerne l'importance du contexte pour l'étude des imaginaires, les recherches futures pourraient également étudier la manière dont le contexte affecte la distribution des types d'engagement. Par exemple, dans des contextes moins médiatisés, il est possible que les acteurs s'engagent moins dans le renforcement des imaginaires et plus dans la ramification et la greffe. Dans ce cas, les chercheurs pourraient étudier si cela affecte le cycle de vie des imaginaires (par exemple, davantage de brindilles se transforment-ils en branches ?)

Le chapitre 2 théorise la manière dont les imaginaires sont bloqués au sein des organisations. En décrivant la manière dont les acteurs organisationnels bloquent les imaginaires, ce chapitre contribue à la fois à la littérature sur les imaginaires du changement climatique et à celle sur les activistes internes. Tout d'abord, il contribue à la littérature sur les imaginaires du changement climatique en montrant que les organisations ne négligent pas la dimension instituante comme on le prétend parfois (e.g., Bouilloud et al., 2020) ; au contraire, elles bloquent l'instituant en obstruant la capacité imaginaire de l'organisation. Dans le même ordre d'idées, ce chapitre contribue à montrer que les activistes internes sont bien placés pour débloquent l'instituant et l'institué. Ce chapitre contribue à la littérature sur les activistes internes en montrant que les tensions des activistes internes ne sont pas seulement dues à une position contradictoire d'équilibre entre les orientations commerciales et environnementales (e.g., Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Wright, Nyberg, & Grant, 2012). Du point

de vue de l'imaginaire, les militants internes sont soumis à des tensions légitimes et illégitimes issues de l'instituant et de l'institué. Les sources légitimes sont les tensions existant naturellement dans la création des imaginaires. Reconnaître les échecs d'un ancien imaginaire, s'engager dans la créativité, développer un nouvel imaginaire et le matérialiser, génère naturellement des tensions. Cependant, les activistes internes sont également soumis à des tensions illégitimes, causées par le blocage de l'institué et de l'instituant. En bloquant la capacité organisationnelle à imaginer, les activistes internes ressentent la tension illégitime de ne pas pouvoir aider l'organisation à créer des imaginaires ; en bloquant la possibilité de démanteler les anciens imaginaires et d'en matérialiser de nouveaux, les activistes internes ressentent les tensions illégitimes découlant du fait d'avoir un nouvel imaginaire et de ne pas pouvoir le matérialiser.

Le principal programme de recherche futur du chapitre 2 consiste à tester empiriquement ce qu'il propose théoriquement. Le chapitre théorise, à partir de la littérature, comment les organisations bloquent la création imaginaire de l'intérieur et comment les activistes internes la débloquent. À partir de là, il devient important d'étudier empiriquement le processus par lequel les acteurs organisationnels bloquent la création imaginaire et les processus par lesquels les activistes internes débloquent la création imaginaire. En outre, la recherche empirique pourrait examiner si les tactiques utilisées pour bloquer et débloquent les imaginaires ont une influence l'une sur l'autre ou non. Par exemple, certaines combinaisons tactiques pourraient offrir des probabilités accrues de débloquent la création d'imaginaires. Enfin, des études empiriques pourraient explorer le rôle d'autres acteurs dans les organisations. Le chapitre 2 a considéré principalement deux types d'acteurs : ceux qui bloquent les imaginaires et ceux qui les débloquent. Mais la réalité organisationnelle est plus complexe. Par exemple, il peut y avoir des acteurs qui ne bloquent que partiellement

les imaginaires ou qui permettent un blocage imaginaire ; du côté du déblocage, il peut y avoir des acteurs qui veulent changer les imaginaires, mais qui ne s'engagent pas dans l'action. Enfin, des études portant sur des organisations dont le processus de création d'imaginaire est déblocqué pourraient éclairer la manière dont cet état est maintenu dans le temps.

Le chapitre 3 — l'élaboration d'une méthodologie pour étudier la collaboration en matière de recherche avec des activistes internes — contribue à la littérature sur la collaboration en matière de recherche et à la littérature sur la GRH. Il contribue à la littérature sur la collaboration en matière de recherche en ouvrant une voie médiane entre les deux positions extrêmes que sont l'absence de collaboration (e.g., Kieser & Leiner, 2012) et la collaboration totale (e.g., Shani & Coghlan, 2014). Ce chapitre théorise également les étapes initiales de la collaboration (cf. Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009; McArdle, 2013), en montrant comment ces étapes permettent la construction d'espaces théorie-pratique où la collaboration se produit. Enfin, ce chapitre contribue à la théorisation de cet espace théorie-pratique — cet espace devient un « pont » pour le fossé recherche–pratique tant débattu (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Cohen, 2007). Ce chapitre contribue à la littérature sur la GRH en développant une approche collaborative de l'étude de l'activisme des employés. En outre, il élargit la compréhension de l'employé activiste d'agent de changement (Caldwell, 2001; Kirton, Greene, & Dean, 2007) à agent réflexif, permettant aux responsables des ressources humaines de soutenir le travail de ces employés, par exemple, par le biais d'une collaboration en matière de recherche.

Le principal programme de recherche futur du chapitre 3 consiste à développer la voie médiane proposée dans le débat sur la collaboration entre chercheurs et praticiens. Par exemple, il devient important d'explorer cette voie médiane dans d'autres contextes, car le

contexte de ce chapitre — une école de commerce — est peut-être trop propice à ce type de collaboration. Dans d'autres contextes, il se peut que la collaboration n'ait pas lieu du tout ou qu'elle ait lieu d'une manière différente (par exemple, par le biais de périodes de collaboration plus longues, d'un plus grand nombre de personnes impliquées, etc.). De même, il est important d'étudier comment d'autres acteurs que les activistes internes peuvent s'engager dans ce type de collaboration.

En conclusion, cette thèse contribue à la littérature sur les imaginaires du changement climatiques — et plus largement à la littérature sur le changement climatique — en approfondissant notre compréhension des imaginaires du changement climatiques : leurs différents types et relations, les types d'engagement des acteurs avec les imaginaires, le blocage et le déblocage des imaginaires dans les organisations, et comment les chercheurs peuvent-ils étudier la création d'imaginaires organisationnels en collaborant avec des activistes internes. L'urgence climatique (et plus généralement la crise écologique) exige que nous redoublions d'efforts en tant que chercheurs pour comprendre comment faire face au changement climatique — avant qu'il ne soit trop tard.

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Introduction

0.1 Climate change is here and getting worse

Climate change is already here (Anderson & Bows, 2011). Increased natural disasters like draughts, floods, fires are ravaging the planet, causing habitat loss, animal and human death, and the displacement of thousands of people (IPCC, 2018). Unfortunately, greenhouse gases—the main drivers behind climate change—continue to rise despite constant and clear scientific warnings (Anderson & Bows, 2011; IPCC, 2021). The climate crisis—which is only one of the environmental crises ravaging our planet that include among others loss of biodiversity, the disruption of the phosphorous and nitrogen cycle, and pollution (Rockström et al., 2009)—will get much worse if humanity doesn't take radical action (Banerjee, Jermier, Peredo, Perey, & Reichel, 2021).

Despite inter-governmental and citizen effort to curtail climate change (Banerjee, 2012; Islam, Ruling, & Schüßler, 2019; Schüssler, Ruling, & Wittneben, 2013), humanity is not acting fast enough (IPCC, 2018, 2021). Multiple research streams have been opened to understand why humanity is not changing course. Lack of action has been explained from different perspectives, including denial that climate change and the Anthropocene exist (Dunlap & McCright, 2011), the existence of an inherent and unsurmountable contradiction between market and climate change (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014), and a predominance of market forces that whittle down any effort, reverting any change of direction to business-as-usual (Nyberg, Spicer, & Wright, 2013; Nyberg & Wright, 2013; Wright & Nyberg, 2017). It seems that it is the system that needs to change if we want address climate change. While this system includes the political and the cultural

sphere, much attention has been given to the economic sphere as greenhouse gases are emitted to fulfil its mandates of growth and profit (Gilding, 2012; Jackson, 2009).

One of the central actors in the economic sphere are corporations, which both contribute heavily to climate change by their emissions and environmental destruction (Wright & Nyberg, 2014) and which also have the resources and power to change direction because of the resources concentrated in their hands (Piketty & Goldhammer, 2017), their productive capacity (Wright & Nyberg, 2015), and their ubiquitousness in today's global economy (Porta, Lopez-De-Silanes, & Shleifer, 1999). Unfortunately, corporations are taking only baby steps to diminish their greenhouse emissions, or some are not changing at all (Banerjee, 2003; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). If corporations don't change their actions soon, there is little hope to address climate change. However, some researchers have proposed that corporations are not changing their actions because they are stuck with an inadequate understanding of climate change and their role in it. Not changing direction may be related to a problem with their climate imaginaries (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Wright, Nyberg, De Cock, & Whiteman, 2013) which may be limiting their scope of action and blinding them to opportunities to change direction.

0.2 Climate imaginaries affect our climate actions

0.2.1 First, what is an imaginary?

An imaginary is a fundamental signification that guides understanding and action (Castoriadis, 1997; Jasanoff & Kim, 2009; Taylor, 2002). An imaginary is fundamental because from an imaginary perspective, meaning comes first and then comes thought and action (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 139). As such, imaginaries may be understood as “the unceasing and essentially undetermined (social-historical and psychical) creation of

figures/forms/images, based on which alone there can ever be a question of ‘something’. What we call ‘reality’ and ‘rationality’ are its works” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 3). This primordial position in human meaning-making and action puts significations at an ontological level—the principles of reality and the guide behind how we think, understand, and act. The main argument behind this position is that central imaginaries that guide society (the state, capitalism, God, etc.) can’t be explained either rationally or functionally (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 129). Castoriadis—a Greek–French philosopher, psychoanalyst and the main proponent behind this position—proposes several examples to explain imaginaries. First, an example to understand the imaginary source of significations. He speaks of the role of centaurs in Classic Greece (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 141). Centaurs were one of a plethora of mythical creatures that played an important cultural role. They were neither rational nor functional creations, and nobody ever provided solid evidence of centaurs existing. More interesting, the signification “centaur” gave rise to multiple subsequent significations, which later were represented in stories and sculptures. All these significations came from an imaginary source. As a second example, reification—seeing humans as things—is also described by Castoriadis as an “imaginary meaning” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 140). Rationally, humans are not things; functionally, they are not things either (they breath, they sleep, etc.). Reification is an imaginary signification—with terribly real implications. An interesting observation given by Castoriadis in respect to reification, is that reification existed much before we spoke of reification—it existed as a signification (not even put into words) which only later became rational and functional. As a final example, Castoriadis discusses the law (Castoriadis, 1997, pp. 119–121). While Western law seems like a rational and functional system that structures relations in society, it was born in Roman law as a system with several illogical practices and dysfunctionalities. It was only over centuries that law evolved and

became more rational and functional. However, in the beginning there was only the signification of law, and it is only in time that it becomes rational and functional. In sum, an imaginary perspective posits that significations come first and only later comes rationality and functionality. The main implication is that to change how humans think and act, they must change their fundamental significations—their imaginaries.

While an imaginary perspective is clear in positioning imaginaries at a fundamental level, it is less clear about how imaginaries are created, changed, and finally materialised. Castoriadis argues that imaginaries are born in two “places”: the individual psyche and the anonymous collective whole (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 369). This Thesis works mainly with the social development of imaginaries (for the individual source of imaginaries see also Adams, 2014, pp. 75–88). However, while pointing to the social creation of imaginaries, Castoriadis does not develop a clear theory about how imaginaries are socially created. While not developing in depth the birth of imaginaries, he does sketch the idea that there are different kinds of imaginaries—central and peripheral.

Castoriadis traces central imaginaries—imaginaries that are at the origin of important societal significations like state, capital, or God—to a collective unconscious construction. This he calls the instituting (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 369). The instituting constitutes the creative aspect of society that continually creates new significations. However, the instituting has “no flesh” (De Cock, 2013) and needs to be materialised to affect understanding and action. This is what Castoriadis call the instituted (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 369). On the one hand, the instituting imaginary is the creation of new significations through the creation of images and forms. It corresponds to “that which structures, institutes, materializes” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 108)—what “reveals the questionable, contingent and unfinished nature of any established order” (Bouilloud, Pérezts, Viale, & Schaepeynck,

2020, p. 159). On the other hand, the instituted imaginary may be understood as a materialised understanding of the World, based on society's imaginaries. It corresponds to "given structures, 'materialized' institutions and works" (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 108), such as "laws, norms and conventions" (Bouilloud et al., 2020, p. 159). Finally, it is the dynamic between the instituting and instituted imaginary that is at the root of the social-historical development of society. It is the unceasing creation, materialisation, and destruction of imaginaries, that constitute history. In Castoriadis's words, "we cannot understand a society outside of a unifying factor that provides a signified content and weaves it with the symbolic structures." (1997, p. 160).

In summary, imaginaries are the fundamental significations that guide understanding and action. They are more fundamental than rationality and functionality. To change how society works, its imaginaries need to change. To address climate change, we need to change humanity's climate imaginaries.

0.2.2 Climate imaginaries

Climate imaginaries are the significations created around climate change. They constitute how individuals and organisations understand climate change and are the fundamental guide to the actions we take to address or not climate change. To understand how climate imaginaries change, a first step has been to understand which climate imaginaries are currently held. Several studies have focused on climate imaginaries and described some of them. For instance, some researchers have studied the fossil fuels industry and discovered that they used four climate imaginaries: "'fossil fuels forever', 'climate apocalypse', 'techno-market' and 'sustainable lifestyles'" (Levy & Spicer, 2013, p. 660). In summary, 'fossil fuels forever' is the understanding that fossil fuels will always be available, that

climate change is an externality of fossil fuel usage, and that through the energy provided by fossil fuels this externality will be placated. ‘Climate apocalypse’ is the position that the damage to climate change is already irreversible, tipping points have been surpassed, and humanity should brace for the worse (cf. Campbell, McHugh, & Ennis, 2019). The ‘Techno-market’ imaginary sees climate change as a problem in need of a solution, which should be found and developed through technological innovation and the market forces. Finally, ‘sustainable lifestyles’ is the understanding that our current economic system is the problem leading to climate change and that addressing it passes through developing more sustainable ways of living. It is the adherence to one of these imaginaries that guides the actions that affect positively or negatively climate change. For instance, adhering to the ‘fossil fuels forever’ imaginary will lead people and organisations to keep things as they are, trusting that someone will address climate change using the same strategies used so far. People adhering to the ‘techno-market’ imaginary will favour innovation, entrepreneurship, and the market economy to develop solutions. These two have been the dominant imaginaries for the past decades—and climate change continues to worsen. However, these are only some of the possible climate imaginaries. Others have described climate imaginaries as “techno-optimism”, “ecological modernization”, “disruptive innovations”, and “system change” (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022, p. 629), which have some overlaps with Levy and Spicer’s (2013), but also significant differences; climate imaginaries surrounding geoengineering like “Human Hubris” (Augustine, Soderstrom, Milner, & Weber, 2019); and others that present permaculture imaginaries (Roux-Rosier, Azambuja, & Islam, 2018) or biodynamic agriculture imaginaries (Roquebert & Debucquet, 2022). This broad spectrum of imaginaries treated as coexisting at the same level is problematic, as it does not delve into the

relationships and different characteristics of these imaginaries. In other words, we have now a big list of imaginaries, but we do not understand well how they relate ones to the others.

A second step to understand how imaginaries change is to understand the macro dynamics of imaginary change. Some researchers have described the development of imaginaries as a hegemonical struggle (Levy & Spicer, 2013); others, as a dialectical development (Augustine et al., 2019); and others as a result that originate from practice (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018). Relevant to the problem of why corporations are not changing their imaginaries, the hegemonical struggle perspective offers some answers at the industrial level (see also imaginary lock-ins, Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022). Through the creation of ‘value regimes’ (Levy & Spicer, 2013), dominant actors develop economic, political, and cultural articulations to keep current imaginaries in place and in this way maintain their hegemonical position. This is important, as it shows how actors engage at a macro level to block the creation or changing of imaginaries. However, less is known in the literature about how organisations block imaginaries from within, i.e., we understand less the dynamics of imaginary creation and change at a micro level.

To understand how imaginaries change at the micro level, especially in the corporations that may block imaginaries at a macro level, it is important to understand how imaginaries relate to organisations. This is even more critical because researchers have shown the limits of inter-governmental efforts to curb the climate change (e.g., Banerjee, 2012; Islam et al., 2019; Schüssler et al., 2013) which means that if addressing climate change depends on changing climate imaginaries, much of this change will need to happen from within organisations. While Castoriadis theorised imaginaries at the individual and at the societal level, there has been less theorisation at the micro-organisational level.

Exploring how corporations change their own imaginaries is a promising research avenue. An important question becomes how organizational members engage in changing their organizational imaginaries. This may already be observed in some successful efforts done by internal activists (like sustainability managers (Daudigeos & Valiorgue, 2009)) in steering their corporations into more sustainable directions (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Daudigeos, 2013; Wright & Nyberg, 2012). This means that internal activists may be particularly well positioned to unblock the creation and development of climate imaginaries, although this has received little attention in the climate imaginaries literature. Additionally, methodological guidelines need to be developed to help researchers study how internal activists change imaginaries, as organisational imaginaries have not received much empirical research.

In conclusion, addressing climate change passes through changing climate imaginaries. However, little is known about the difference in kind among imaginaries, the relationships among types of engagement with imaginaries, how imaginaries are blocked from within organisations, how they are unblocked by internal activists, and how researchers may methodologically approach the study of imaginary change by internal activists. These are the questions that this thesis seeks to answer.

0.2.3 How to create and change climate imaginaries?

Given the urgent need to address the climate change, to understand the role of imaginaries in guiding understanding and action, and given the current state of the climate imaginaries literature, this thesis explores the question: how are climate imaginaries created and changed? This overall question is operationalised in three research objectives that are explored in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of this thesis.

The first objective is to clarify the different kinds of imaginaries that exist and clarify how actors engage with these imaginaries. This is summarised in the research question of Chapter 1: how do climate imaginaries differ in kind and how do actors engage with these different kinds of imaginaries? This question was approached empirically by studying how countries and NGOs presented and engaged with imaginaries at a global conference for climate change: the 26th U.N. Conference of the Parties.

The second objective is to understand how imaginaries are created and changed within organisations. Given that the climate imaginaries literature has developed a macro perspective but less a micro perspective of imaginary change and creation, I develop a conceptual paper in Chapter 2 that connects two theories. First, the imaginary theory of Castoriadis (1997) to explore how corporations are blocking change of their climate imaginaries, operationalised in a first research question: how is the creation of new imaginaries blocked within organizations? Second, to explore how these imaginaries are unblocked, I tap into the literature of internal activists (for a review see Briscoe & Gupta, 2016), also known as ‘tempered radicals’ (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) or as ‘activists in a suit’ (Carollo & Guerci, 2018). This perspective leads to the second research question of chapter 2: how may the creative imaginary process be unblocked within organizations by internal activists?

The third objective is to develop a methodology to study imaginaries. Given the theoretical potential of internal activists to unblock imaginaries from within organisations (the topic of Chapter 2), in Chapter 3 we develop a methodological approach that supports researchers that are working with internal activists to study how they change organisational imaginaries. This chapter considers the insider/ outsider positioning of internal activists (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016) and the insider/ outsider positioning of researchers (Cassell, Radcliffe, &

Malik, 2020; Islam, 2015; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012). This creates an interesting research configuration for the study of climate imaginaries, given that imaginaries also may be considered as having an “inside” position (they affect what happens in the organisation) and an “outside” position (they guide how society understands and acts on climate change).

0.3 A generative ontology, a social construction epistemology

This thesis’ theoretical approach to imaginaries is strongly influenced by the philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis (1997). As such, the thesis’ onto-epistemological position is aligned with the onto-epistemological assumptions in his work. As discussed in the Introduction, Castoriadis proposes that imaginaries constitute the fundamental level of reality. This reality is based on two elements. First, a “first natural stratum” (Castoriadis, 1997, pp. 342–343), a physical reality that does not determine but makes possible the organisational conditions that humans later developed into significations. The second element is signification which constitutes the social reality we live in, the world of “‘possibles’ and ‘impossibles’, in other words, [...] the imaginary positing of a reality” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 263). Castoriadis places signification at the ontological level to undermine deterministic views, especially the ones coming in his time from structuralism. While new ontological positions have appeared since that time (for instance, see the ontological turn in Anthropology, Viveiros de Castro, 2015), Castoriadis offers an interesting position which connects an organisable physical reality and an “imaginary” social reality based on signification. This ontological positioning seems suitable to this thesis, as its objective is to study a topic that connects physical and social phenomena: climate change. Epistemologically, this position is related to social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Social constructionism considers that people construct worlds in their actions and understandings of it and knowledge is derived from the engagement with these socially constructed worlds. The main implication of this position is

that knowledge is not the ultimate truth and there is no incontestable reality. Rather than explanation, it is understanding which is sought.

Castoriadis did not engage in empirical research, which left his theory without a methodological component on which social scientific studies could work on. However, the centrality of significations in the theory on imaginaries suggest that methods that may capture significations and meaning in social interactions would be appropriate. Fortunately, the organisation studies literature present several examples of the study of imaginaries from which methodological guidelines may be obtained. For instance, longitudinal studies on imaginaries highlight how imaginaries are reflected in the media (news, blogs, etc.) (e.g., Augustine et al., 2019; Levy & Spicer, 2013). More related to this thesis are the studies that focus on cross-sectional data, like the study of the influence of imaginaries on corporate actions (Lê, 2013), the studies on how ONGs develop fossil-free imaginaries (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022), and how imaginaries are influenced by the use of multimodal media (Davoudi & Machen, 2022; Garland, Huising, & Struben, 2013; Oliveira, Islam, & Toraldo, 2017). From these studies, methods that may capture the construction, development and sharing of significations will be useful for this thesis, as described below.

0.4 Methods

The main method used in this thesis is Ethnography. Ethnography is a method that was developed in Anthropology to describe and understand cultures (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). In time, ethnography extended outside of Anthropology and now is a commonly used method in Sociology and Management and Organisational studies (among others) (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009). Developing empirical material with ethnography is based on a deep engagement of the researcher in the field. Through participating in the studied

culture, the researcher starts to understand its fundamental significations, rites, rules, and in general how the target group lives. Observation plays a very important role in ethnography; moreover, the researcher uses all his senses to capture as much as possible how insiders live. The researcher—usually called fieldworker in ethnography—records all this empirical material using field-notes: quick notes that record significant events, more extensive notes to record conversations and thoughts, and finally long descriptions of the lived experience to build a thick description of the studied culture (Clifford, 1990; Geertz, 1973). To attain this deep understanding requires much time to get the trust of the informants, to learn their language (both literally and figuratively), and to understand culture from the perspective of the group itself. Recent developments in organisational ethnography have shown that less time is needed, as researchers share much of the culture of the observed group (e.g., their spoken language, sometimes their organisational language, etc.) (Ybema et al., 2009). In chapter 3, ethnography was used to study how a sustainable manager sought to change her business school's environmental imaginaries. From this three-month ethnographic study in a French business school, a methodology was constructed for studying how internal activists engage in changing organisational climate imaginaries. Sometimes, however, the researcher cannot stay enough time in the field to develop a full ethnography. Chapter 1 is based on a field study of the U.N. Conference of the Parties which only lasts two weeks. In this case, given that the duration of the event is short, one of the tools used in ethnography—participant observation—was used.

Participant observation may be used when the researcher wants to capture how insiders understand their world, but when not much time is available for doing so (Brannan & Oultram, 2012). In participant observation the researcher tries to participate in the field as much as possible to capture the insider's way of living and thinking. The use of field-notes

is also of critical importance, because through these the researcher not only records what is happening: in their making, the researcher makes sense of how he is understanding the field and reflecting on these may lead to aspects of the culture which he could have initially missed. Given the short time frame, usually participant observation is not enough to capture an insider's view of culture. Because of this, the researcher uses other methods to complement his observations: interviews and archival data.

Interviews are an adequate method to gain insights into how an insider understands his world (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012). In qualitative studies, semi-structured interviews (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012, p. 248) are normally used, as they mix the benefits of having some structure for asking questions (for example to make comparisons among certain topics) and the flexibility to explore deeply areas which could bring insights to the research purpose (Charmaz, 2014). Because of this, the interview guide usually changes during fieldwork, to reflect the researcher's understanding of the field. Moreover, the researcher may repeat interviews with certain key informants, to clarify parts of their previous interviews or help the researcher understand what he learnt from other interviewees. In this way, semi-structured interviews are a flexible tool that allows the researcher to find, expand, and deepen his investigations. However, several commentators have highlighted problems that could arise from interviews (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012). One of the most important is taking at face value what informants are saying as this may be influenced by several factors, like image management (how informants want to be seen by the researcher or the imagined audience), by trying to influence local politics (thinking that the researcher could influence the field), and by fears of retaliation if the informant distrusts that the researcher will keep the confidentiality of the interview. Additionally, the interview reflects the view of one person (the informant), even if he is talking about her own perceptions or

about how others think. Even though interviewing has these drawbacks, it remains a very valuable tool for the researcher specially to clarify issues from direct observation or other material. Because of this, interviewing is not used as a standalone method but rather as one of the research tools to create empirical materials. For instance, it is usual in qualitative research to couple interviewing with archival data.

Collecting written material, artefacts, or other media is usually called archival or documentary data collection (Lee, 2012). This empirical material may convey rich information about the language and symbols used in a field. A benefit of archival data, in comparison to interviews, is that the production of these artefacts is (usually) not done at the request of the researcher—they are a part of the observed culture. Considering the drawbacks in interviewing, the natural occurrence of archival data provides a good complement, giving the researcher access to unmediated material from the informant's life. However, archival data also has some problems that the researcher needs to be aware of. One is that archival data is usually fragmentary and incomplete—when looked from the perspective of the researcher's perspective—because the material was not developed for his study. Additionally, it may be difficult for the researcher, especially when he has not yet gained a deep understanding of the setting, to make sense of the role or the importance of archival data. For instance, he may read an e-mail that on face value describes only the topics of a meeting and miss several important points: why certain topics are being discussed and not others, why certain words or concepts are used and not others, and why only some organisational members were invited and not others. Considering the benefits and pitfalls of both interviews and archival data, it becomes clear why they are usually used together: the flexibility and possibility of going deep through interviewing is coupled with the natural occurrence of archival data. These two methods may be used dialectically, with interviews

giving hints on the importance of some documents and these documents creating questions that the researcher may seek to clarify in subsequent interviews. When coupled with the lived experience of participant observation, interviews and archival data provide a solid foundation for the development of empirical material.

Finally, the empirical material requires analysis. However, the ethnographic methods being used in this thesis do not make the usual strict separation between data collection and data analysis. Instead, analysis is done together with the construction of empirical material (Charmaz, 2014; Ybema et al., 2009, pp.41–42). In ethnography analysis happens in the same act of writing the field-notes—the researcher is already theorising (Clifford, 1990; Col & Graeber, 2011). And in the writing of the final piece, the thick description is itself enmeshed with theory (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973). This is how Chapter 3—the ethnography on the business school sustainability manager—was analysed and written. Chapter 1, the study of the pavilion area of the COP26, is somewhat different. The methods used to create the empirical material used in this chapter are participant observation, interviews, and archival data; consequently, the analysis deviates from how it is done in ethnography. In this case, I used a grounded approach that considers a social construction epistemology (Charmaz, 2014), as it fits well with the social construction epistemology of imaginaries used in this thesis; also, because it is a method of analysis that works well with different types of data (observation, interview, and documentary) (Charmaz, 2014). Hence, for chapter 1 a big part of the analysis was done in a similar way to ethnography: through writing multiple field notes and memos—especially after important encounters and at the end of each day—and through the continuous theorisation of what was found. After the event was finished, I transcribed all the material and iteratively coded it to develop the main themes and concepts used in the theorisation. Data analysis and theorisation for chapter 1 was done

during and after the event, which allowed to focus data collection methods and to later explore the empirical material in detail.

In sum, the empirical data creation and analysis of this thesis followed an ethnographical and a grounded theory approach that considers a social construction epistemology. Through these methods, theory was embedded in thick description to allow the reader to capture the rich significations of climate imaginaries.

0.5 Thesis argument

The main research question in this thesis is how are climate imaginaries created and changed. As explained in the introduction, the importance of asking this question is that it may open the possibility to change the actions that are currently fuelling climate change. This question is operationalised through three chapters. Chapter 1 empirically studies which are the different kinds of imaginaries and how do actors engage with them; Chapter 2 studies theoretically how are imaginaries blocked within corporations and how internal activists unblock the creation of new imaginaries; finally, Chapter 3 develops a methodological approach to study the creation of imaginaries by internal activists.

Chapter 1 problematises the characterisation of imaginaries in the climate imaginaries literature. It argues that imaginaries are treated at the same level, i.e., that imaginaries only differ in their content but not in kind. By comparing studies in the literature, I argue that imaginaries are not the same: they are not mutually exclusive but overlap and have dependencies. Additionally, I problematise how the actors' engagement with imaginaries has been theorised, showing that current theorisations—e.g., hegemonical, dialectical, and practice based—have not been considered together. By studying the pavilion area of the 26th UN Conference of the Parties, I argue that there are three kinds of imaginaries—trunk,

branch, and twig. They are named after the parts of a tree because this metaphor (Cornelissen, 2005) describes well how they relate to each other. *Trunks* are imaginaries that are shared by most people in a certain context, are usually unquestioned, and serve as a legitimising base for derived imaginaries. *Branch* imaginaries depend on trunks and have only a portion of the trunk's support base. Branches are usually in tension among other branches, which have differing—if not contradicting—significations. Finally, *twigs* are nascent imaginaries sprouting from a branch. They are open to critique, as they have only a few proponents.

Additionally, Chapter 1 argues that there are three types of actor engagement with imaginaries. *Reinforcing* consists of supporting either a trunk, branch, or twig imaginary and was the most common type of engagement at the COP26. Reinforcing a trunk is the most conservative position, while reinforcing a twig is the most risk-taking. *Branching off* is the presentation of a new imaginary, i.e., a twig. Because twigs are open to critique, actors engaging in branching off seek legitimisation by reinforcing a branch and/ or a trunk imaginary. Finally, *grafting* is the hybridisation of an imaginary by mixing two or more trunks, branches, or twigs. It is also open to critique as it presents a new imaginary without wide support. Pavilions that used this type of engagement are usually not comfortable with the current “tree” of imaginaries and try to create a position that is closer to how they understand climate change. With these new characterisations of kinds of imaginaries and types of actor engagement, I argue that researchers will be better equipped to understand which kinds of new imaginaries are being created and how.

In Chapter 2 I start from the idea that imaginaries are blocked at a macro level (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022) and study how are imaginaries blocked inside organisations. Additionally, I explore how internal activists—who have showed

resourcefulness to change organisations from within (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020)—unblock the creation of imaginaries. I argue that organisations block the creation of new imaginaries by blocking both aspects of imaginary creation: the *instituting* (i.e., the creation of significations) and the *instituted* (i.e., the materialisation of significations). The *instituting* is blocked by restricting the imaginative capacity of the organisation, by co-opting the possibility of alternatives to the current imaginaries, and by direct coercion. The *instituted* is blocked by stifling critique and by obstructing access to the resources needed to materialise the new imaginaries.

In a second step, I argue that internal activists—although restricted by their dependence on the organization (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016, p. 20)—have multiple resources for pushing forward a social agenda (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016, pp. 21–24; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Scully & Segal, 2002). In relation to the blockages that organisations put on the development of new imaginaries, internal activists engage in multiple tactics to counter them. For instance, to unblock the *instituting*, internal activists create spaces for imagining, embed imagination into regular projects, develop new significations by using ambivalence, connect to external activists’ networks to learn best practices, and develop collective protection mechanisms. And to unblock the *instituted*, they reinterpret organisational history, create feedback channels, divide the opposition, and legitimate new imaginaries through multimodal means. In sum, I argue that the creation of imaginaries is not only blocked from the outside but also from the inside of organisations, and that imaginary creation may be unblocked by internal activists.

Finally, chapter 3 explores methodologically how researchers may collaborate with internal activists to research empirically how imaginaries are being created and developed inside organisations. Starting from studies of internal activists that have problematised their

position as insiders and outsiders (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020) and other studies that have also problematised the researcher's position as insider or outsider (Cassell et al., 2020; Islam, 2015; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012), we problematise how research collaboration between internal activists and researchers happen. This problematisation occurs in the context of the literature on researcher–practitioner collaboration, which is divided between researchers arguing that full collaboration is possible (e.g., Shani & Coghlan, 2014) and others claiming that collaboration is not possible (e.g., Kieser & Leiner, 2012). It is the conjunction of these three theoretical observations (researcher and internal activist insiderness/ outsiderness plus the possibility of collaboration) that are behind our research question: how are knowledge and practice shaped by the dynamics of researcher–practitioner collaborations, in contexts of employee activism? This co-authored empirical paper is based on an ethnography of how a sustainability manager in a French business school transformed the environmental imaginary of the school. By analysing our interactions, we argue that collaboration is developed in what we call a “critical encounter”. We argue that each participant of the collaboration resides in his “space”—the researcher in the theory space and the practitioner in the practice space. While initially they can't contribute directly to the other's space, through a long-term relationship, trust and understanding is developed between both parties and the boundary between the two spaces is blurred. This creates the possibility for each party to enter and contribute to the other's space, i.e., the practitioner contributing to theorising and the researcher contributing to practice. This means, methodologically, that a way to study how internal activists work to create and change organisational climate imaginaries is through a long-term relationship in which mutual understanding and trust is developed.

The rest of the thesis is structured as follows: each chapter consists of a full paper and is listed in consecutive order. The thesis ends with a summary of the thesis, a revision of the theoretical and methodological contributions, and the revision of some limitations and future research agenda.

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Chapter 1 — “Everyone is invited!”: Development and critique of climate imaginaries at the U.N. Conference of the Parties on climate change

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Abstract: Why are greenhouse emissions still growing and climate change getting worse? One answer is that humanity is not changing its dominant climate imaginaries—the fundamental significations that drives climate action. To change climate actions, climate imaginaries need to change. The climate imaginaries literature has described multiple imaginaries but considered them of the same kind, while some imaginaries depend on others. Even more, characterisations of actor engagement with imaginaries (e.g., hegemonical or dialectical) do not consider how they interrelate. To address these issues, this paper studies how do climate imaginaries differ in kind and how do actors engage with these different kinds of imaginaries. By studying the pavilion area of the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) using multiple qualitative methods, it finds that imaginaries may be separated into three kinds—*trunk*, *branch*, and *twig* imaginaries—which relate among as the parts of a tree. The paper also finds three types of actor engagement with imaginaries: *reinforcing*, *branching off*, and *grafting*. This paper contributes to the climate imaginaries literature by showing that imaginaries are not of the same kinds, relating among them in different ways; that macro imaginary dynamics are composed of different types of micro actor engagements; that the classification of imaginaries is relative to the research context; and that imaginaries are materialised using multimodal media.

Keywords: climate change, climate imaginaries, conference of the parties, kinds of imaginaries, engagement with imaginaries

1.1 Introduction

Why are greenhouse emissions still growing and climate change getting worse? This has been a question that has attracted more and more research in the recent decades. Several reasons have been proposed from a social science perspective. Initially, some actors put into doubt climate change (Dunlap & McCright, 2011), although this position is untenable now (IPCC, 2021). Others have cited a prioritization of the economic rationality over environmental concerns (Banerjee, 2003). Others argue that even though there are intentions to change, the market forces are too strong and curtail initiatives to change (Nyberg & Wright, 2013; Wright & Nyberg, 2017). Finally, in recent years a different explanation has been presented—climate imaginaries are preventing humanity from changing course (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Wright, Nyberg, De Cock, & Whiteman, 2013).

An imaginary is a fundamental signification that guides how people understand and act in the World (Castoriadis, 1997; Taylor, 2002). Climate imaginaries correspond to the significations associated with climate change. If humanity wants to change their actions regarding greenhouse emissions, dominant climate imaginaries need to be changed (Wright et al., 2013). Some researchers have describing climate imaginaries, for instance, the fossil fuels industry imaginaries of “‘fossil fuels forever’, ‘climate apocalypse’, ‘techno-market’ and ‘sustainable lifestyles’” (Levy & Spicer, 2013, p. 660); the imaginaries surrounding geoengineering like ‘Human Hubris’ (Augustine, Soderstrom, Milner, & Weber, 2019); and the imaginaries surrounding permaculture (Roux-Rosier, Azambuja, & Islam, 2018). However, some imaginaries seem like a subset of others—permaculture may be presented as a subset of sustainable living—but they are treated in the literature at the same level. Not

considering the different kinds of imaginaries obscures how to create new climate imaginaries. Additionally, different types of actor engagement with imaginaries have been proposed, like hegemonical struggles (Levy & Spicer, 2013) or dialectical development (Augustine et al., 2019). However, the relationship between these types of engagement and how these types of engagement vary when different kinds of imaginary are recognised, is not clear. To clarify these issues, this paper studies the following research question: how do climate imaginaries differ in kind and how do actors engage with these different kinds of imaginaries?

To study this question, I visited the 26th United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP26), a global conference dedicated to negotiating agreements to curb greenhouse emissions. In particular, I studied the pavilion area where countries and ONGs present their visions and proposed solutions to address the climate change. To identify the presented imaginaries I used participant observation, which is a good method to understand the “‘insiders’ world of meaning” (Brannan & Oultram, 2012, p. 301). I complemented participant observation with semi-structured interviews of pavilion organisers (Alvesson, 2010), photos and videos (Buchanan, 2001; Meyer, 1991), brochures and webpages, and by writing fieldnotes. All this empirical material was transcribed and coded iteratively (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). From the analysis of this material, I identified three kinds of imaginaries and used a metaphor (Cornelissen, 2005)—that of a tree—to highlight their characteristics, naming them *trunk*, *branch*, and *twig* imaginaries. *Trunk* imaginaries were widely accepted (e.g., climate change); *branches* sprouted from trunks, were usually in tension among them, and only had a portion of the trunk’s support; finally, *twigs* were nascent imaginaries. I also identified three types of actor engagement with these kinds of imaginaries—*reinforcing*, *branching off*, and *grafting*. *Reinforcing* corresponds to supporting a current imaginary—a

conservative position. This was the most common type of engagement with imaginaries at COP26. *Branching off* is the presentation of a new imaginary (a *twig*) and was used usually by ONG and country coalitions. Finally, *grafting* consists of hybridizing imaginaries. While branching off and grafting have open flanks to critique (as they are not widely supported), countries were the usual target of critique (rather than NGOs) because they are incumbents in the climate negotiations.

With these three kinds of imaginaries and three types of engagement I make several contributions to the literature on climate imaginaries. First, while imaginaries are usually treated at the same level in the climate imaginaries literature, this paper shows that they can be divided (at least) in three kinds—trunk, branch, and twig. These three kinds of imaginaries have different characteristics (social support, openness to critique, dependencies) and so should be understood differently in analysis and practice. Second, this paper adds a cross-sectional perspective to longitudinal studies of climate imaginaries. By adding this perspective, macro perspectives—like hegemonical (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022) or dialectical (Augustine et al., 2019)—are shown to be composed of a set of micro level engagements—reinforcing, branching off, and grafting. The cross-sectional perspective also gives visibility to imaginaries that may not reach a critical mass to appear in longitudinal studies and highlights how imaginaries may decay and die in time. This paper also contributes by recognising the importance of the research context to the classification of imaginaries. The three kinds of imaginaries—trunk, branch, and twig—have a *relative* position to the context. This means that while an imaginary may be considered in certain contexts a *branch* (e.g., climate change in a scientific conference), in other contexts the same imaginary should be considered a *trunk* (e.g., climate change at the COP). This relative characterisation increases sensitivity to imaginaries that may not be identified taking

a universal classification of imaginaries. Finally, this paper supports the idea that the medium affects how imaginaries are materialised and even created (Davoudi & Machen, 2022; Garland, Huising, & Struben, 2013; Oliveira, Islam, & Toraldo, 2017). Presenting how some pavilions materialised their imaginaries through “living walls”, scale models, and free perks, this paper supports the need of future studies focusing on the multimodal materialisation of imaginaries.

This paper is structured as follows. In the first section it argues that the climate imaginaries literature has considered imaginaries as being of the same kind, obscuring the relationships among them. Additionally, it argues that although the literature presents different ways in which actors engage with imaginaries (e.g., hegemonical struggle or dialectical development), their relationship is not well understood. The methods section presents the empirical setting—the pavilion area of the COP26—and the main methods used for creating empirical material and for their analysis. The Findings explores through multiple examples the three kinds of imaginaries—trunk, branch, and twig—and the three types of actor engagement (reinforcing, branching off, and grafting), ending with a theorisation of the relationship between them. Finally, the Discussion section presents the contributions to climate imaginaries: a characterisation of the three kinds of imaginaries, the relationship between actor engagement at the micro level with imaginary dynamics at the macro level, the importance of context in the study of imaginaries, and how imaginaries are materialised using multimodal media. All these contributions are complemented with ideas for future research.

1.2 Theoretical background

1.2.1 Climate imaginaries

While there are different definitions of imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1997; Jasanoff & Kim,

2009; Taylor, 2002), they broadly describe fundamental (or background) significations that orient human action. These fundamental significations (or meanings) are collective, in the sense that a broad group of people understand certain topics through them (consciously or unconsciously). In this way, shared imaginaries orient people's (political) actions as they are meaningful to the eyes of the group (Adams, Smith, & Straume, 2012). Additionally, imaginaries are generative in the sense that people create meaningful symbols and practices (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 369). As such, human groups and societies have developed imaginaries to explain the world that surrounds them, their own place in it, and depend on them for a shared understanding of what to do and how to act, for instance, when they face obstacles. One of these obstacles is climate change and people have engaged in developing climate imaginaries to give meaning to climate change (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Wright et al., 2013).

1.2.2 Kinds of climate imaginaries

Recent studies have described different climate imaginaries that guide organisations, nations, and the citizenship to act in relation to climate change. For instance, Levy and Spicer (2013) described four climate imaginaries based on the confrontations around fossil fuels among NGOs, states and businesses. Characterising different climate imaginaries is important, as it helps to understand why people follow take certain action and how they justify them. Levy and Spicer (2013) characterised these imaginaries as “‘fossil fuels forever’, ‘climate apocalypse’, ‘techno-market’ and ‘sustainable lifestyles’” (Levy & Spicer, 2013, p. 660). Succinctly, the ‘fossil fuels forever’ imaginary understands climate change as an externality that will be solved by the energy produced by the same abundant fossil fuels. ‘Climate apocalypse’ understands climate change as the end of the world as we know it through environmental destruction. ‘Techno-market’ understands climate change as a problem to be solved using human ingenuity and the power of technology and markets.

Finally, ‘sustainable lifestyles’ understands climate change as a call to change our ways of living to a more “simple, less materialistic life” (Levy & Spicer, 2013, p. 665). Each one of these imaginaries guide action because they present climate change in a different way. And it is human action, the way that we are living and emitting gases to the atmosphere, that is driving climate change (IPCC, 2021). However, extant research has also described climate imaginaries in different ways.

Some studies have presented other climate imaginaries that do not fit perfectly with the ones presented by Levy and Spicer (2013), raising the question about the differences among imaginaries or their characterisation. Although it could be expected that climate imaginaries differed around different topics like geo-engineering (Augustine et al., 2019), permaculture (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018), or biodynamic agriculture (Roquebert & Debucquet, 2022), we also find important resemblances to the imaginaries presented by Levy and Spicer (2013). For instance, a study on the imaginaries behind a project to make Sweden fossil free by 2045 found four climate imaginaries—“techno-optimism”, “ecological modernization”, “disruptive innovations”, and “system change” (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022, p. 629)—that differ in terms of their radicality and scope of change. These four imaginaries seem to map well over two of Levy and Spicer’s (Levy & Spicer, 2013) imaginaries, with “system change” seeming very similar to ‘sustainable lifestyles’ and “techno-optimism”, “ecological modernization”, and “disruptive innovations” being further developments or emphases of the ‘techno-market’ imaginary. ‘Fossil fuels forever’ and ‘climate apocalypse’ are not described in this study. Looking at the other papers mentioned above, the three permaculture imaginaries (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018) and the biodynamic imaginary (Roquebert & Debucquet, 2022) may be understood as a development of the ‘sustainable lifestyles’ imaginary. Are these studies describing the same imaginaries, different ones, or

developments of particular imaginaries?

Castoriadis (1997; De Cock, 2013) suggests theoretically that there are differences among types of imaginaries, separating them into two types: primary (or central) and secondary (or peripheral) imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 129). The primary imaginary would be “on the level of elementary symbols or of global meaning” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 131), while the secondary imaginaries are developments of the primary imaginary that enable its materialisation. For instance, “capitalism” would be a central imaginary and the “enterprise” a secondary imaginary (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 371). For the studies described above, this could imply that around certain central imaginaries (e.g., ‘techno-market’ or ‘sustainable lifestyles’ (Levy & Spicer, 2013), or climate change (Wright et al., 2013)), secondary imaginaries are developed (e.g., ecological modernization (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022) or biodynamic agriculture (Roquebert & Debucquet, 2022)). This means that imaginaries are not located at the same level. Nonetheless, this theorization does not completely explain the differences between imaginaries. What kind of imaginaries would be the ones described, for instance, in a new study that describes four more nuanced or extended imaginaries based on the ‘ecological modernization’ imaginary (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022)? Are these nascent peripheral imaginaries or do they work as “tertiary” imaginaries? This requires further theorisation. Moreover, how actors engage with these different kinds of climate imaginaries is also unclear from the extant literature.

1.2.3 Actor engagement with climate imaginaries

The literature on climate imaginaries theorises different kinds of actor engagement with climate imaginaries. For instance, some studies present imaginaries in a hegemonic struggle and as a result of contestation (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022). In these studies, the state, corporations, and civilian actors take different positions aligned with

different imaginaries, struggling to make their imaginary hegemonic. This struggle happens over time and the preponderance of a particular imaginary depends on the results of the struggle and on the “value regimes” (Levy & Spicer, 2013)—hegemonic structures that include the economic, political and cultural spheres—created by the different actors. Finally, actors may use or endorse a “mix” of imaginaries, showing that relationships among climate imaginaries are not only of exclusivity, i.e., imaginaries are not completely independent. For instance, the ‘climate apocalypse’ imaginary is sometimes supported by actors endorsing both the ‘techno-market’ or ‘sustainable lifestyle’ imaginaries when they want to emphasise the dire consequences of inaction (Levy & Spicer, 2013, p. 666).

A different type of actor engagement with imaginaries is given by Augustine et al. (2019) in their study on geo-engineering. They describe how imaginaries develop dialectically, i.e., how “actors work to propose alternatives, articulating new imaginaries in opposition to, or as proposed syntheses of, existing imaginaries” (Augustine et al., 2019, p. 1952; Seo & Creed, 2002). As such, climate imaginaries are developed by actors over time and maintain a dialectical relationship among them. For instance, the “technofix” imaginary (which maps well with the ‘techno-market imaginary’ seen before (Levy & Spicer, 2013)) opposes the “Human Hubris” imaginary (which is similar to ‘sustainable lifestyles’ imaginary (Levy & Spicer, 2013)). In this opposition, a new imaginary is dialectically developed—“Plan B”—which seems to synthesise elements from “Technofix” and “Human Hubris”: “Climate change is a technical *and* societal problem [emphasis added]” (Augustine et al., 2019, p. 1940). In a second step, “Plan B” relates dialectically with “Human Hubris” to develop a new imaginary (“Governance First”) and so on. While some studies describe imaginaries as a contestation between groups (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022), Augustine et al. (2019) describe imaginaries as dialectically forming new “ecologies” of

imaginaries—through opposition, synthesis, interpretation, and critique (Augustine et al., 2019, p. 1952). Both positions converge in showing that imaginaries exist in contests among each other. They differ, however, when explaining the overlap among imaginaries. While Levy and Spicer (2013) sees an agential use of imaginaries (a hegemonical articulation), Augustine et al. (2019) see actors developing a dialectical synthesis of imaginaries where newer imaginaries contain (at least parts) of its “parent” imaginaries. Another way of saying this is that a dialectical articulation describes actors bringing imaginaries “closer” over time (through synthesis), while the hegemonical articulation describes imaginaries as changing in dominance depending on how actors develop their ‘value regimes’. However, it remains unclear how these two positions relate to each other.

The tension between these two kinds of engagements with imaginaries may also be seen in a study on how permaculture imaginaries are put into practice. Roux-Rosier et al. (2018) characterise permaculture imaginaries as a ‘Set of Practices’, as a ‘Life Philosophy’, and as a ‘Social Movement’ (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018, p. 557). They posit that “these imaginaries may not always be in harmony” (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018, p. 556), pointing to the contest among imaginaries mentioned above. Also, while each of these imaginaries imply different “relations between social ideals and material co-habitation”, still “each kind of imaginary may be present in the others” (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018, p. 556), opening the possibility of overlap or mixing. In this understanding, actors engage with permaculture imaginaries creating tension and synthesis. However, given that permaculture endorses ‘sustainable living’ and it is still not a widely shared imaginary, it may be considered as part of a broader imaginary (like the ‘sustainable living’ imaginary (Levy & Spicer, 2013) or Human Hubris imaginary (Augustine et al., 2019)). This would imply that we are dealing with a secondary (or peripheral) type of imaginary (see above section). Additionally, that tensions and

synthesis not only occur between same level imaginaries, but also among secondary and primary types of imaginaries. As such, actors would be able to relate these permaculture imaginaries not only to a ‘sustainable living’ imaginary but could also relate with the other imaginaries mentioned in the other studies (e.g., “Plan B”, ‘climate apocalypse’, etc.). So, in addition to the difference between dialectical and hegemonic articulations, it remains unclear how actors engage and act on different types of imaginaries, i.e., central with secondary or tertiary imaginaries.

To further complicate things, some theoretical papers propose the radical creation of imaginaries, while others speak of a dialectical development. For instance, some literature focus on how imaginaries (and imagination) are better understood as creation *ex nihilo*, i.e., out of nothing (e.g., Castoriadis, 1997, p. 3; De Cock, Rehn, & Berry, 2013). Others endorse a dialectical relationship between the creation and the materialisation of imaginaries (e.g., Bouilloud, Pérezts, Viale, & Schaepelynck, 2020; Klein, 2015). And finally, Castoriadis rejects that imaginaries are developed dialectically: “we cannot give ourselves as a starting point a dialectic of any kind, for a dialectic postulates the rationality of the world and of history, and this rationality is a problem, both a theoretical and a practical problem” (Castoriadis, 1997, pp. 35–36). While empirical papers tend to emphasise a tension among imaginaries that may sediment in value regimes or evolve dialectically, theoretical papers are less aligned in how imaginaries relate to each other. Without understanding how imaginaries relate, it becomes difficult to understand how to develop new ways of imagining the climate change (Wright et al., 2013). Uncertainty of the kinds of imaginaries and how actors engage with them lead to this paper’s research question: how do climate imaginaries differ in kind and how do actors engage with these different kinds of imaginaries?

1.3 Methods

In this paper I study the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26), a yearly conference organized by the United Nations to negotiate climate change agreements among the World countries. I attended as an accredited observer, and I focused on the COP26 pavilion area to explore how global climate imaginaries are developed. The pavilion area is an ideal place to study climate imaginaries because it is open to any state or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attending the COP, there is no major restriction on what may be presented regarding climate change, and there is enough space for a big number of states and organizations to be present simultaneously. As such, the pavilion section of the COPs constitutes a microcosm of global climate imaginaries.

At the COP26 sixty-eight states and organizations presented a pavilion, where they presented their position regarding climate change. The allocated spaces—which were sold at approximately 1200€/square meter—ranged from approximately four-square meters to spaces with a ground floor of sixty square meters plus an additional second floor with similar dimensions. The pavilions play an important role at the COP, occupying the second largest space after the negotiation area. To have a pavilion, states and organizations need to request them six months before the COP. After the UN approval, they design the pavilion and schedule its activities (United Nations, 2023).

Studying the different kinds of climate imaginaries and their development requires studying meaning, which “appear only as they are carried by signifying structures” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 136). For this, I prioritized participant observation which allows the researcher to get “insight into the ‘insiders’ world of meaning” (Brannan & Oultram, 2012, p. 301). With this method I was able to capture the imaginaries that were presented at the different pavilions, the dynamics between observers and pavilion organisers, the subtleties, and significations in

the pavilions' design, and also experience the possibilities and complications in the development of new imaginaries. Although pavilions held different events each day, the pavilion itself (design, main messages, material used, etc.) didn't change much. Although I had access only to the first of two weeks, staying longer at the event would probably not have produced different information for the pavilion area. I complemented participant observation with taking pictures of the pavilions and the pavilion visitors (Buchanan, 2001; Meyer, 1991). I also selected from my fieldnotes some pavilions that were representative of different types of imaginaries and interviewed their organisers as a secondary means to better understand how imaginaries were presented: how the pavilions were designed, how did they planned the interactions with the visitors to happen, and how did they saw their role at the COP26 and in the climate change crisis in general. To conduct the interviews, I worked with four undergraduate research assistants who followed a semi-structured guide (Alvesson, 2010). We met at the end of every day to exchange notes, ideas, and prepare the following day's interviews. We conducted 11 interviews which were relatively short (15-30 minutes), as the informants were busy supervising the functioning of the pavilion and couldn't afford more time. I also collected flyers and booklets from the pavilions and studied their webpages to understand better their objectives and the imaginaries they were presenting. Finally, I took fieldnotes after every interaction with a pavilion and wrote my overall perceptions at the end of the day in order to capture more general thoughts. All this material was transcribed and organized, which amounted to approximately 300 pages of empirical material.

To analyse the data, I iteratively coded my experiences, observations, notes, interviews, web-material, and photographs (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). I was able to better grasp how the space was used and how the design varied significantly between pavilions, hinting to the disparity among the imaginaries presented by them. Through this exercise, I

realized that imaginaries were not of the same kind and that they were related to each other, as usually justifications included referring to more collectively accepted imaginaries. For example, the Methane moment pavilion presented the importance of addressing Methane emissions (and thus participating in a new imaginary around Methane) by arguing that “there’s no scenario where we can stay within the 1.5-degree target without aggressively cutting methane emissions”, thus, relating the new imaginary (methane) to a collectively shared imaginary (limiting warming to 1.5°C). By analysing and comparing the pavilions’ espoused imaginaries, I saw that they could be grouped into three kinds: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Additionally, because tertiary imaginaries were usually justified by primary and secondary imaginaries, and secondary imaginaries by primary imaginaries, I realized that a metaphor (Cornelissen, 2005) that captured the different imaginary kinds was that of a tree. To facilitate visualising these imaginary kinds and relationships I named the kinds of imaginaries: trunk (primary), branch (secondary), and twig (tertiary) (see Figure 1.1).

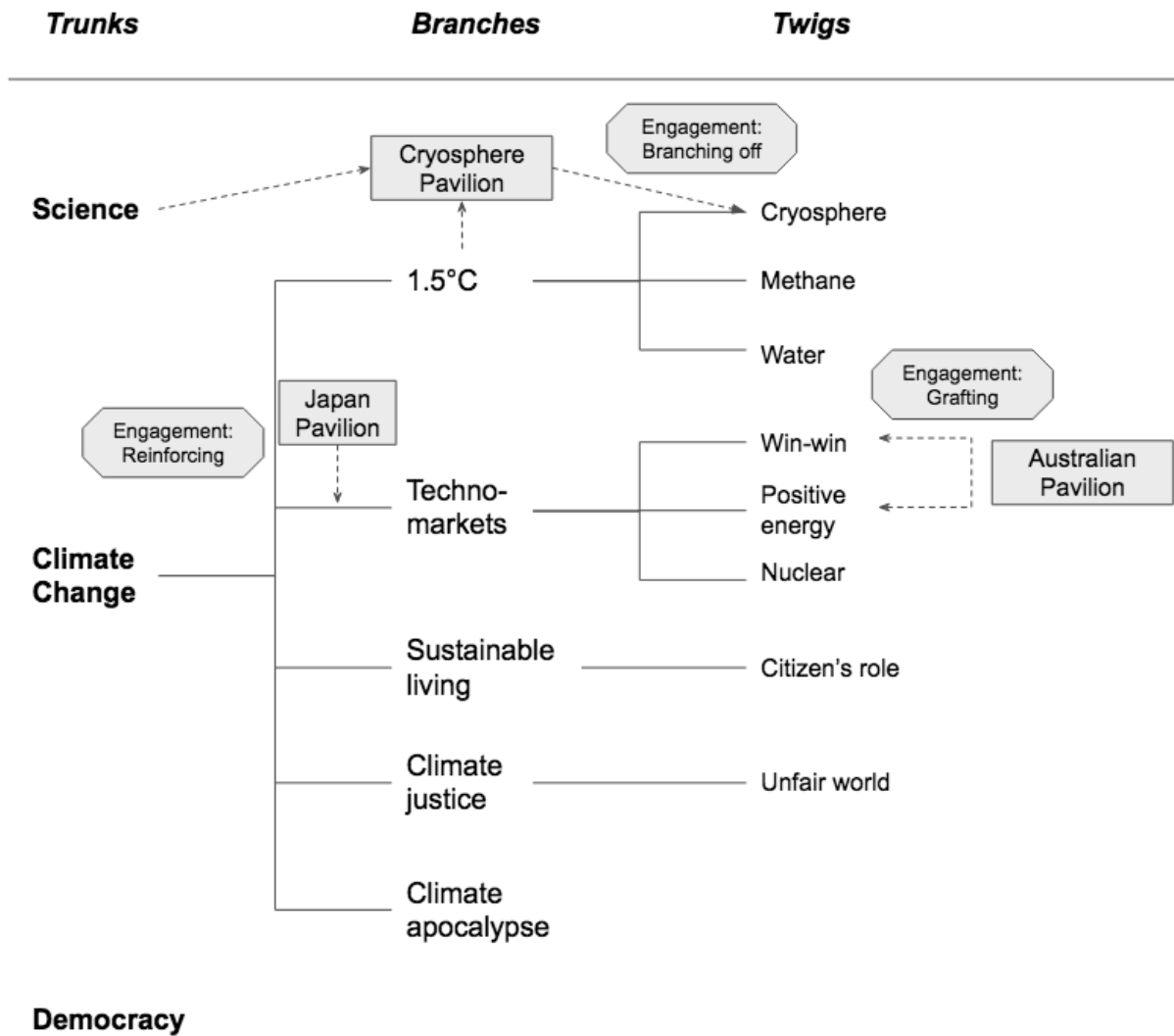


Figure 1.1. Kinds of climate imaginaries and types of actor engagement at COP26

Based also on my observations, I identified how certain imaginary developments were resisted by observers, for instance when I saw the discussion between an activist and an Australian minister just outside the Australian pavilion regarding the “real” Australian efforts to address climate change. This kind of observations hinted that some kinds of imaginaries (or their relations) created more resistance than others. Additionally, reading the interviews several times over and developing the coding helped me to understand how

pavilions presented and justified their imaginaries. For instance, the “Nuclear for Climate” pavilion argued that people needed to understand nuclear energy as a clean energy, thus, justifying nuclear energy with an imaginary of clean energy which is more widely shared. Starting from these observations of resistance and justification, the tree metaphor was also useful to represent the pavilions’ engagement with different types of imaginaries (see Figure 1.1). Some pavilions (e.g., the Business pavilion) “reinforced” a widely accepted branch imaginary (in their case, the centrality of limiting global warming to 1.5°C). Other pavilions supported the development of a new imaginary (like the “Methane Moment” pavilion mentioned above), in the same way as a twig grows from a branch (in this case, the 1.5°C imaginary). I termed this position “branching off”. Finally, other pavilions mixed and connected twigs or branches. For instance, the “Nuclear for Climate” pavilion related a clean energy imaginary with a nuclear energy imaginary. I called this imaginary relationship “grafting”, which is the agricultural technique of joining two plants to obtain an improved new plant. In this way, “reinforcing”, “branching off”, and “grafting” were identified as the ways in which actors engage with different kinds of climate imaginaries. The following section presents the kinds of imaginaries and the types of actor engagement that I found at the COP26.

1.4 Findings

At the COP26 I was able to identify three kinds of imaginaries—trunk, branch, and twig—and three kinds of actor engagement with them: reinforcing, branching off, and grafting. *Trunk* and *branch* correspond to the central and peripheral imaginary. The *twig* imaginary is a new concept and consists of a new imaginary. Regarding the actor engagements, *reinforcing* corresponds to supporting a current imaginary, *branching off* to supporting a new imaginary (a twig), and *grafting* to the hybridisation of imaginaries. These kinds of

imaginary and actor engagements with them are explained in detail below.

1.4.1 Reinforcing

1.4.1.1 Trunk reinforcing

A trunk is a widely shared imaginary (a primary or central imaginary). Trunk reinforcing corresponds to the most straightforward action by pavilions—supporting a widely shared imaginary. For instance, the GEF/GCF pavilion is a pavilion composed of two organizations that coordinate the funding of climate initiatives. On the one hand, the Global Environment Facility pavilion (GEF) serves as a financial mechanism for several environmental conventions (e.g., United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), etc.) by providing “funding to assist developing countries in meeting the objectives of international environmental conventions”¹. On the other hand, “the Green Climate Fund (GCF) – a critical element of the historic Paris Agreement - is the world’s largest climate fund, mandated to support developing countries raise and realize their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) ambitions towards low-emissions, climate-resilient pathways”². In these definitions, the words environmental, low-emissions, and climate are the main ones related to climate change. There is no mentioning of any new imaginary (like Methane) nor any mixing of imaginaries (like Clean Nuclear Energy). Instead, the emphasis is on a trunk imaginary—climate change. Similarly, the COP pavilions usually have short messages on their walls which relate to their main imaginary. In this case, the GEF/GNC messages were also around nature and climate: # TogetherForOurPlanet and # Investing in *our planet*. Additionally, more action-oriented messages were found in the interior walls: # Raising ambition and #

¹ <https://www.thegef.org/partners/conventions>

² <https://www.greenclimate.fund/about>

Empowering *action*. For the COP participants these aren't provocative messages: for several years one of the main ideas being discussed at the COP has been raising ambition and getting into action. The conveyed imaginary is direct and widely shared—climate change needs to be addressed now—hence reinforcing a trunk imaginary. This positioning makes sense for the GEF/GCF pavilion since both organizations are technical coordinators of investment solutions for climate change. Their interest is not in creating new significations but rather to pursue their mandate by attracting potential partners: investing for climate change. Reinforcing a trunk imaginary does not seek to develop it; instead, the objective is to obtain legitimacy and traction from its wide acceptance.

The British Council pavilion presents a somewhat different example of trunk reinforcement. The British Council is a charity focused on linking UK's culture with the World and improving UK's international standing. At the COP26, they were presenting a project called Climate Connection that connects research and actions regarding climate change. The British Council's main mission is not climate change but being at the COP creates a big opportunity to expand their activities to organizations and countries fighting the climate change. Their objective was clearly expressed on their walls and stools: "Let's tackle climate change together", "Connect. Collaborate. Create", "Talk. Listen. Unite.". These messages are oriented towards climate change but with an emphasis on the British Council's main objective: collaboration, connection, and unity. Like the GEF/GCF pavilion described above, this pavilion is not proposing a new imaginary but is embracing the trunk imaginary of climate change. Their difference is that the British Council's main mission is not climate change; instead, they are expanding their work to climate change. With this objective, it makes sense to reinforce a trunk imaginary.

While pavilions would most probably embrace the COP's trunk imaginary—climate

change—they could also support other trunk imaginaries. This is the case of the Science pavilion. Their objective was to reinforce the role of science in addressing climate change. While there is a strong connection between the two, a pavilion organiser confirmed in interview that the main idea behind the pavilion was putting science at the centre: “The pavilion design is centred around science: the central activity is dialogue”. This was reflected on the message-empty pavilion walls except for “Science pavilion”. The pavilion design also showed the centrality of science: the presentation space was the centre of the pavilion (an auditorium behind glass walls) “to share scientific knowledge with the citizenship and the decision-makers”. Science, in this case, is embraced as an imaginary in itself. It is science as truth, science as something that anchors climate change in reality, that focuses actions, and that grounds endless discussions into facts. It could be argued that at the COP science may be considered a branch of climate change—a method for structuring and analysing climate change. However, it could similarly be argued that climate change is a branch of science: a scientific construction based on graphs, data, and calculations. In this case, I think it is better to place science as a second trunk—one which stands side-by-side climate change (at least in the context of the COP)³. Consequently, pavilions may reinforce the main trunk imaginary (e.g., Climate change at COP26) or reinforce other trunk imaginaries that are important to the context (e.g., Science).

The previous illustrations show that pavilions reinforce trunk imaginaries for three reasons. First, when their objective is to orient action (e.g., technical solutions). By reinforcing a trunk imaginary these pavilions rally organizations and actors around broadly accepted meanings. Second, pavilions reinforce trunk imaginaries when their main mission is not

³As an additional argument about science and climate change being trunk imaginaries at the COP, there are some commentators that critique science’s construction of climate change, pointing to the fact that climate change is independent from science (for instance see Wright et al., 2013)

climate change (e.g., the British council) but they want to connect their activities to a trunk imaginary. Finally, pavilions reinforce other trunk imaginaries which relate to climate change, establishing themselves as a different but related trunk (e.g., Science pavilion). For all these objectives, pavilions do not need to create new imaginaries—they need to reinforce widely shared ones. Nevertheless, while pavilions may reinforce trunks, I also observed the reinforcement of branch and twig imaginaries.

1.4.1.2 Branch reinforcing

Similar to how pavilions reinforce trunk imaginaries, they may also reinforce branch or twig imaginaries (see Figure 1.1). A branch is a secondary imaginary that stems from a trunk imaginary. For instance, a branch stemming from the climate change trunk imaginary is the techno-market imaginary (see Figure 1.1), which posits that climate change may be solved through developing technology and markets (see Theoretical Background section). At the COP26, the techno-market branch imaginary was reinforced by the Japan pavilion. Its design was eloquent enough: the first floor of the pavilion (the ground floor) was composed of a welcome booth in a corner and all the rest (approx. 40 square meters) was given to at least ten companies who, using multimodal mediums (videos, posters, models) and company representatives, presented different solutions to climate change. One could observe models for carbon capture and storage, for producing and storing hydrogen, and solar energy solutions for small farms. Additionally, the pavilion had no messages on the walls (except “Japan”) suggesting that they were not introducing a new imaginary—they were reinforcing. One of the pavilion organisers confirmed that they were reinforcing a branch by explaining that “climate change is a problem that need technological solutions and Japan brought their companies to meet potential customers and/or partners at the COP”. This pavilion was not seeking to create new meanings; however, they wanted to go further than reinforcing a trunk.

This was achieved by reinforcing a branch imaginary, i.e., an imaginary that is not shared by all. Embracing a branch imaginary makes a claim: the pavilion endorses a certain approach to climate change and bands together with other pavilions that also believe in this climate imaginary. To reinforce the branch imaginary, they use multimodal mediums; in this case, Japan put at the front row their companies and their solutions to climate change.

The UK pavilion provides another example of branch reinforcing. For the COP26 the UK held the conference presidency, and this was visible in their big and colourful pavilion at the centre of the pavilion area. Like the previous reinforcing examples, their only message on the wall was “UK presidency pavilion”, hinting that they were reinforcing an imaginary. A pavilion organiser explained: “so the biggest challenge that we’re tackling is just keeping 1.5 alive, so for us, it’s really important that we had this year a really clear strong message about keeping 1.5 alive”. The UK pavilion was reinforcing a branch imaginary—the need to maintain global warming below 1.5°C. This is a branch because the 1.5°C significations depend on the climate change trunk imaginary and because 1.5°C is only one form in which global warming and what needs to be done may be understood. Given UK’s central position for this COP due to holding its presidency, it was important for them to reinforce a shared imaginary (to not risk critique) and at the same time not to be too conservative in their ambitions (to show leadership): “we want to make sure that we had a really big impact on site and that we could really use our influencing skills as much as possible as presidency”. Choosing to reinforce the 1.5°C branch imaginary seems like a reasonable selection for the UK given their objectives as president of the COP26.

Contrary to what one could imagine, the Business pavilion did not take a conservative position by supporting a trunk imaginary. Instead, they chose to support the 1.5°C branch imaginary. This is interesting because choosing a branch is riskier than supporting a trunk

(it is not a widely shared imaginary) and businesses have been strongly critiqued for their impact on climate change. This branch reinforcement was present on their walls—“All in for 1.5°C”—and in the wording of the pavilion webpage: “[The pavilion] showcased the latest private sector ambition, action and advocacy at COP26”⁴. These messages indicate a commitment to the 1.5°C branch imaginary and there are several reasons why they may have done so. First, the Business pavilion is organized by NGOs and it is possible that they need to show leadership in their area (similar to the UK’s presidency). Second, the Business pavilion receives support from companies that want to be seen as pioneers (at least in respect to other companies) in addressing climate change (e.g., Google). Finally, businesses usually look for ways to differentiate from their competition and the ones that do so through sustainability may be more willing to embrace a 1.5°C branch imaginary. Consequently, it doesn’t seem too extravagant for the Business Pavilion to choose a riskier position than embracing a trunk position. From the overall business relation to climate change, it is also expected that they were not at the vanguard presenting a new imaginary.

Finally, a different way of embracing a branch imaginary is presented by the Nordic countries’ pavilion. They choose to reinforce a branch imaginary which is not dominant at the COPs—that of sustainable lifestyle. As one pavilion organiser explained, “we want to lead by example. The Nordic countries want to be the most sustainable region in the world”. Given that this is not an often-shared branch imaginary at the COP (like 1.5°C), their position is more exposed to critique (for examples of critique, see “Grafting” section below). This could explain why they positioned themselves differently (“lead by example”) than other pavilions. They reinforced this alternative positioning by reinforcing a second trunk: Democracy. As an organization member said: “we’re trying to provide a back door to COP26

⁴ <https://www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/cop26/>

for the public [...] so they can ask questions, and that's also a way to open and democratise the COP". Given that branch imaginaries are riskier than trunk imaginaries, it makes sense that secondary branches have an additional support in another trunk (and not, for instance, in another branch). Accordingly, it is understandable that the Nordic countries sought to reinforce the sustainability branch imaginary with the Democracy trunk imaginary.

1.4.1.3 Twig reinforcing

Twigs are a new concept and correspond to new imaginaries. Starting from the metaphor of the tree, they are considered as new tree sprouts—twigs. Given their newness, they are currently not supported by an important group of people; given their fragility, they are open to critique. In twig reinforcing pavilions are not presenting a new twig; instead, they are reinforcing a twig that already exists but has not achieved critical mass support (see “Branching off” section for the presentation of new imaginaries).

Reinforcing a twig—a new (or tertiary) imaginary sprouting from a branch—was a rare engagement at the COP26. For instance, while Turkey's pavilion may be seen as reinforcing the climate change trunk imaginary, they invited observers for an open activity which called for a different imaginary: that of the role of the citizen in sustainable living. On a pavilion wall it could be read “I want to be PART of the SOLUTION to TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE [original emphasis]. I will _____”. The observer was asked to take a thread (a similar kind of colourful thread which made the walls of the pavilion) and tie knots around several nails on a wall that represented commitments around solving climate change (e.g., “Reduce plastic use”). In the end, the threads accumulated and a pattern began to appear on the wall. The activity itself reinforced the role of the citizen (“I want to be part”), which was further highlighted in the types of commitments (e.g., “Consume

responsibly”). Reinforcing a twig is a risky engagement because twigs are not shared by the majority; additionally, in this case the twig sprouts from a secondary branch (sustainable lifestyles), exposing even more the pavilion to criticism. While I didn’t observe criticisms around Turkey’s activity, there are some open flanks. For instance, a critique could be that citizens are “herded” into certain actions (the ones on the wall) and subjected to peer pressure for tying knots (every observer was looking at you). More than an invitation, the activity could be interpreted as coercion. Additionally, it would be easy to critique how the country is managing climate change while asking citizens to commit to sustainable actions. In sum, reinforcing a twig is a risky position because it is wide open to critique, even if it is only an activity in the pavilion. This opens a big question on how to push more radical ecological agendas in global conferences spaces like the COP.

I observed another example of twig reinforcement in an ONG shared pavilion. The walls were white and every ONG that used it brought their own posters and materials to use and share. One of those ONGs was a Buddhist ONG which explained that they were inviting citizens to engage in the fight against climate change, which is like Turkey’s twig reinforcement. She gifted me a recycled pen from plastic bottles and invited me to contribute as a citizen to address the climate change. Like Turkey’s case, this twig reinforcement is open to critique. For instance, the impact of using plastic bottles to create disposable pens may be a good first step, but it is evident from the state of the planet that we need other much radical measures (like not using plastic bottles at all).

In conclusion, the majority of the COP26 pavilions took the position of reinforcing either a trunk, branch or twig imaginary. Pavilions who were not directly involved in climate change or played technical roles usually chose to support a trunk imaginary, avoiding as much risk as possible while prioritising engaging with their activities. Most COP26 pavilions chose to

reinforce a branch imaginary to show that they were “progressive” regarding climate change, as branch reinforcing didn’t expose them too much (and choosing a main branch (like 1.5°C) lowered even more their risk). Reinforcing a twig was less common as it is open to critique. However, while reinforcing a twig was not too common, presenting a new twig—what I call *branching off*—was more common, as evidenced in the next section.

1.4.2 Branching off

Branching off is the presentation of new twig imaginaries. Not many pavilions engaged in branching off, possibly because it is a risky position (in a similar way to twig reinforcing) and the “return over investing” is not assured (they may not reach a critical mass). As an example of branching off, the Cryosphere pavilion argued that the cryosphere—the icy parts of the world (ice caps, glaciers, polar caps, etc.)—is key to understanding and addressing climate change. The pavilion—organised by a coalition of ONGs and countries with an important icy geography—explained on its walls that the cryosphere is key to the climate change because ice is central for the thermo-regulation of the climate. When asked about the pavilion design an organiser explained, “so for us, it was all about the science. What is the minimum amount of stuff we need to share the science.” For this goal, the pavilion presented their position with totems and scientific-conference-like posters (e.g., Title “Arctic Sea ice” and below scientific data) where they explained the current cryosphere situation and the dangers that ensued if not considered in negotiations. “Past 1.5 degrees, we will have irreversible consequences connected to the cryosphere, to the loss of cryosphere” explained one of the organisers. “And so, for us, it’s very clear we have one very simple message here: it’s 1.5°C or nothing”. When interpreted from an imaginary perspective, it is possible to see how the pavilion is sustaining the creation of a new imaginary. First, they made a simple and direct call: the branch is incomplete and will fail without the Cryosphere twig. Second, they

strongly reinforced the branch imaginary (1.5°C), by claiming that “it’s 1.5°C or nothing”. Thirdly, they also sought extra reinforcement in a trunk imaginary: Science. Finally, the made an existential claim: either embrace this new cryosphere twig imaginary or fail to restrict global warming to 1.5°C. In summary and going back to the tree metaphor (see Figure 1.1), in this pavilion branching off is done by strongly reinforcing a commonly shared trunk and branch imaginaries, while arguing that the new twig is necessary for the branch to continue developing—and possibly for the health of the whole “tree” (i.e., addressing climate change).

The Methane Moment pavilion also engaged in branching off in similar ways to the Cryosphere pavilion. They claimed that this was the Methane Moment, i.e., that without considering methane in the gas reduction agreements we would not be able to limit warming to 1.5°C. As an organiser explained: “There’s no scenario where we can stay within the 1.5-degree target without aggressively cutting methane emissions”. Additionally, they strongly supported the science imaginary when inviting experts to the pavilion: “[We invite] scientists in the tech and innovation types of experts [to share] the data that they collect on methane emissions and why that data is so important to be able to actually make reductions.” The wall messages were also clear about their positioning “Most powerful way to slow warming now”. While similar to the cryosphere engagement, the organisers described an interesting difference. For them, “the Methane Moment pavilion is really just a pavilion space”. They meant that while the Methane Moment represented a host of organisations, “we’re not a coalition, a formal coalition of groups in any way. Outside of COP we all work on methane as an issue in our own respective, you know, ways: as singular organisations.” This is interesting because it speaks about how new twig imaginaries may arise from separate organisations working on the same (or similar) topic. In sum, the Methane Pavilion

branching off positioning is very similar to the Cryosphere pavilion: make a strong call for the necessity of a new twig imaginary (“aggressively cutting methane emissions”) by strongly reinforcing its current branch (1.5°C) and a trunk imaginary (Science). The Methane pavilion adds the perspective that new imaginaries don’t need to be sustained by coalitions or united groups; instead, they may arise from disparate organisations working on a same topic.

The Water pavilion offers a final example of branching off. They engaged with the Water twig imaginary in a similar way to the previous examples: a call for a key new twig imaginary (“we want to prove with this pavilion [...] that water really needs to be at the heart of the climate talks”), the twig’s unrecognised centrality (“the water community has for a long time been excluded from the general climate talks”), and a conglomerate of actors backing up this pavilion (“we have basically collected these 32 different organisations... so we have five governments and 32 NGOs”). The main difference with the previous pavilions is that the Water pavilion reinforced only a main trunk (climate change), not a branch. As an organiser explained, “we can’t talk about water without talking about climate because water resources are going to be the way that we feel climate change”. On their walls could be read “Water for climate”. These messages focus on the climate change trunk imaginary and not on a branch (like 1.5°C). While a different kind of data would be needed to evaluate the impact of using less support (a trunk and not a branch), it is possible to theorise that having less support may lead observers and decision-makers to see the claim for a new twig somewhat weaker than the other pavilions as the argument could seem too general. The claim that climate change can’t be addressed without considering water begs the question: what part of climate change? The social aspect? The warming? The emissions? Answering “all” to these questions weakens the specificity of the claim.

In summary, *branching off* is the development of a new twig imaginary. The previous examples highlight several commonalities: presenting one main twig imaginary (e.g., Methane); getting support from trunks and/ or branches (e.g., Climate change and/ or 1.5°C); and calling for the recognition of their centrality to the branch or trunk (e.g., Methane as key to achieving 1.5°C). Two differences arose between the pavilions: being a conglomerate or not and getting support from a branch or not. Branching off is the development of a new imaginary; however, there is another way of presenting a new imaginary: grafting.

1.4.3 Grafting

Grafting is an agricultural technique in which two different parts of plants are joined (e.g., the roots of a plum tree and the trunk and branches of an apple tree) to gain some advantages from each species (e.g., strong roots and high yield). Similarly, I observed at the COP26 that some pavilions connected two twigs, a branch and a twig (from another branch), or multiple branches, which resulted in the presentation of a hybrid imaginary.

The Australian Pavilion represents an example of grafting two twig imaginaries. The first twig consisted of showing how climate change is a problem that may be addressed by working with companies: “a whole range of businesses that are working in the sorts of areas that the Australian government is prioritising, so reducing the cost of hydrogen and reducing the cost of grain, steel, and aluminium. Investing in soil carbon. Big batteries. This type of thing”, explained a pavilion organiser. The main idea behind working with companies is to create a win-win situation: “Some people [are interested in] agricultural or sustainable food systems. We have companies here that are investing in how to measure soil carbon, which both helps from a productivity point of view, but also from a climate benefit”. This twig imaginary presents technological solutions as a win-win strategy and is part of the techno-market branch (see Figure 1.1). The second twig imaginary could be read on their walls—

“Positive energy”. This was understood as the development of clean energy and clean technology,

“So a really big focus in the running government is to reduce the cost of cleaner tech. So we call this: ‘reducing the green premium’. We want to get the cost down. Now that’s good for Australia because that’s good for any country. But we would like to then make that technology available to other countries so that they can use it as well.”

In addition, positive energy also relates to positive feelings: good, fun, and joy,

“People are having a good time, you can hear... You can hear our friends in the Pacific are having a good... are enjoying themselves. We’ve got lots of people here from different parts of Australia and beyond. And so I think there’s a good vibe here. You know, there’s good energy. It’s fun. And you know, this is part of who we are as a people as well.”

By presenting these two twig imaginaries together (win-win techno-solutions and positive energy), the Australian pavilion was engaged in *grafting* imaginaries. Grafting is creating a new hybrid imaginary by connecting two twig imaginaries. They stamped the uniqueness of their imaginary in front of their pavilion: “The Australian way”. However, given that Australia is an incumbent player in the climate negotiations (a different position from the NGOs presented in branching off) and that new imaginaries are by definition not widely shared, grafting opens pavilions to critique. Critique arises because countries are called to take climate action and differing imaginaries raise suspicions around action. I observed several critiques at the Australian pavilion. First, an Australian ONG representative engaged in a heated discussion with a person just outside the Australian pavilion, who I later

discovered was an Australian minister. They were arguing about how true Australia's claims were: the activist argued that Australia was not doing enough for the climate and the minister that they were doing much. After the discussion, I approached the ONG member and she further explained that she was continually under surveillance in the pavilion: "everyone working in the pavilion knows my name even though I have not presented myself to them". In contrast, an organiser explained "we have some environmental activists that are sitting around [in the pavilion]. We have some businesspeople, you can see, right? [...] Everyone is invited!" The ONG member, by arguing with the minister, was critiquing the two twigs: the reality of techno-solutions (i.e., concrete results) and the reality of a positive and fun energy (i.e., being under surveillance). A second example occurred on the first days of the COP26. Initially, the Australian pavilion had in its front a scale model of a Carbon Capture and Storage device⁵. The Guardian newspaper soon released a news article critiquing Australia for presenting at their front an untested technology financed by fossil fuel companies⁶. The next day, there was no model in sight. One of the organisers explained "those businesses are changing through the course of the programme. So they're not the same businesses all of the time, we might have one here for one or two days, but then they will go and then another business will come". Additionally, an organiser commented that having a pavilion allowed them to speak directly with the observers and not through media: "if people come here and they can talk to us and see what we're doing and get a different story than maybe what they're reading in various publications. And that can maybe round out their perceptions". Critique was again pointed to both aspects of the hybrid imaginary: the reality of win-win (critique of funding companies) and of positive energy (critique of

⁵A technology that captures CO₂ from the air and store it underground. It has not yet been shown that it is a scalable solution (Nyberg & Wright, 2013)

⁶<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/03/australia-puts-fossil-fuel-company-front-and-centre-at-cop26>

untested technology). As a response, the pavilion answered with control (surveillance and taking out the Carbon Capture and Storage model). In sum, Australia presents how two twig imaginaries may be grafted. The newness of the hybrid imaginary and the fact that Australia is an incumbent actor in the negotiations, led the pavilion to suffer strong critiques. While riskiness in this example could be attributed to grafting twigs, grafting is risky even between trunks and twigs, as seen in the next illustration.

The Brazil pavilion provides an example of how grafting may be done between a branch and a twig imaginary. Brazil was grafting two imaginaries in their pavilion. The first twig is their claim that they were suffering a climate injustice: “the situation is that Brazil is told to use 20% of their territory, while other countries (like Denmark), may use 80-90%. It’s the same as asking a person to only use 20% of their house. That is unfair and it should be monetised”. This constitutes a twig imaginary that grows from a social justice branch. The second branch is the techno-market imaginary, which was also reflected in the Brazilian pavilion’s construction—it had live plants on their walls. “With the pavilion we want to show that Brazil cares for its forests and in all the COPs we have live walls to show it”, explained one of the pavilion organisers. They wanted to “showcase what Brazil is doing to tackle climate change, in particular the protection of forests and efficient agriculture”. In their pavilion, Brazil grafted the climate injustice twig imaginary with the techno-market branch and claimed their own way, as read on their walls “The green future is in Brazil”. Like the case with Australia, grafting open flanks for critique: “People come here sometimes because they like what we’re doing, and others because they don’t agree”. And like the Australian pavilion, critique triggers an impulse to control “For them [dissenters], we have a team with technical knowledge that can talk with them”. To synthesise, the Brazilian pavilion grafting is like the Australian pavilion, with the difference of grafting a branch with a twig which did

not protect it from critique.

Grafting is not only open to countries, nor only possible between two imaginaries—grafting may be done by NGOs and combine multiple imaginaries. The Climate Action Hub was organised by a conglomerate of Brazilian NGOs (independent from the Brazil pavilion) and sought to create “a home for Brazilian society”. As one of the organisers explained, “it has become a space to welcome different perspectives, points of view, projects and concrete plans drawn up by people and organizations committed to building a diverse, inclusive, sustainable and fair Brazil”. This pavilion welcomed groups and projects from all sectors of Brazilian society, “even the federal government”. This is a very particular kind of grafting, which may be understood as a crucible—a space where all imaginaries are welcome, mixed, and shared. This kind of branching corresponds to multiple trunk, branch, and twig grafting. They do not want to show “only success cases of climate solutions, but also the diversity of the climate action in Brazil.” Diversity, in this kind of grafting, is the key. By allowing extreme grafting between imaginaries, they become a space for radical creation. “The most relevant is to have diversity, and we are not planning to be like an opposition pavilion to anyone. It’s a space for any person to, from Brazilian society, to bring here their ideas and to show this to other people.” Interestingly, the created space is not only for grafting imaginaries—it is also a space to relax, a home. “People can go here, go there and feel like, OK, it’s a space for me to relax and meet other people, so it’s not an auditorium, a theatre.” To reinforce this idea of a home, the walls were decorated with photographs of Brazil’s forests and indigenous people. “You can see that we are not using the flag or things that are... [we] just represent Brazil as forests for example. And so our interest was to provide another view of Brazil, like we are diverse, we are cold headed”. However, radical openness may backfire. As an illustration I’ll present my experience of interviewing. After trying hard

to get an interview with a pavilion organiser (they usually asked me to come later), they accepted. Once in the interview and before we started, I was asked for my LinkedIn. After checking that I was who I said I was, the organiser allowed me to start the interview. Why would a space that is open to society, which emphasised diversity, a space to relax, a home, needed to check my identity and put several obstacles for an interview? I learnt about this when speaking with other observers and reading the news. At the COP25 in Madrid, Brazil was charged with spying on their citizens present at the COP and intimidated them to stay within the federal discourse⁷. Taking this information into account, it is understandable why the pavilion was checking the identity of someone who claimed being a researcher. More important to grafting, this event shows how divergent views and diversity draws critique. Their multiple grafting engagement—a crucible for imaginaries—is dangerous because it permits the development of new imaginaries, unaligned with official or widely shared imaginaries. Critique appears not as a critique of content (because there was no supporting of a particular imaginary) but of form—the critique of full grafting. In sum, the Climate Action Hub presents a special kind of grafting which connects many (if not all) climate imaginaries; a space where everyone could present their views, engage in debate, and possibly break “imaginary stalemates”, i.e., when the current tree does not offer useful solutions for climate change. This radical openness, however, draws critique because of the potential for new imaginaries that may not be compatible with hegemonic ones.

In short, grafting is the hybridisation of twigs and/ or branches. While creating the opportunity for the pavilion to show an imaginary well suited to their interests, it also puts pavilions in a precarious position open to critique. *Reinforcing, branching off, and grafting*

⁷See <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/10/14/brazilian-spies-intimidated-governments-delegates-climate-talks/> and <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/brazil-spies-climate-conference-madrid-un-bolsonaro-amazon-b1045158.html>

appear as the ways in which actors engage with the three types of imaginaries—trunk, branch, and twig.

1.4.4 Theorisation

1.4.4.1 Three imaginary types: trunk, branch, and twig

At the COP26 I identified three types of imaginaries—*trunk*, *branch* and *twig*. A *trunk* corresponds to a central imaginary; one that is shared by most people in a certain context. For instance, climate change is a central imaginary at the COP26. A *branch* corresponds to an outshoot of a trunk which is shared by sector of the people that share the parent trunk imaginary; as such, branches are in tension with other branches. For instance, a 1.5°C global warming limit branch imaginary could be in tension with a sustainable living branch imaginary (which could, for instance, propose a much lower limit). A *twig* is a recent outshoot of a branch. It is a nascent imaginary held by a small group of people; for instance, the importance of addressing methane emissions for limiting global warming to 1.5°C. These imaginaries differ in kind in two ways. First, the dependence on each other. Trunk imaginaries appear as independent imaginaries (for a particular context), while branches depend on a trunk imaginary, and twigs on a particular branch. Second, their level of acceptance. For a certain context, trunks are widely shared imaginaries, branches are significantly shared, and twigs are minimally shared. This also means that each kind of imaginary differs in the amount of risk it creates for actors engaging with it. Trunks are the less open to critique, as they are widely shared and usually not put in doubt. Branches exist in tension with each other and are open to critique. Twigs are the most open to critique because they have few adherents and because they may be considered as threatening new imaginaries to hegemonical positions. For instance, other countries may find threatening that

the Brazilian pavilion considers their right to decide how much of the Amazon Forest they will keep.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, context plays an important role in the characterisation of imaginaries. For instance, seen from a broad societal perspective, it is possible to argue that climate change is a branch compared to science or democracy. However, at the COP, climate change is a central imaginary—a trunk at the same level of science and democracy. This difference depends on the support it has in relation to the context in which it is being presented. Imaginaries need to be categorised in relation to the context in which they are studied.

1.4.4.2 Three types of engagement with imaginaries: reinforcing, branching off, and grafting

Actors engage with trunk, branch, and twig imaginaries in three different ways: *reinforcing*, *branching off*, and *grafting*. At the COP26, pavilions were the actors engaging with imaginaries; in other contexts, other groups would be the ones making these relationships (e.g., corporations).

Reinforcing is directly supporting a trunk, branch, or twig imaginary. For instance, at the COP26 some pavilions reinforced trunk imaginaries (e.g., Climate change), a majority reinforced branch imaginaries (e.g., 1.5°C maximum global warming), and some supported twigs (e.g., the role of the citizen for attaining a sustainable lifestyle). Reinforcing maintains the current imaginaries as they are—it is a conservative engagement. However, there is a difference in risk depending on which kind of imaginary is reinforced. Trunks are the safest from being critiqued, as they are shared by the majority; however, they show a lack of leadership from the actor. Branches are a compromise between conservatism and

progressivism; by being shared by an important group, critique is possible but countered easily. Twigs are the imaginaries most open to critique; however, they offer the biggest potential to create breakthroughs in our understanding of climate change.

Branching off corresponds to supporting the development of a new imaginary. For instance, the Cryosphere pavilion supported the twig imaginary of the cryosphere as a key element in global warming. While there are some differences among the pavilions engaged in branching off (e.g., if they were conglomerates or not), it was surprising to find several similarities among them: being ONGs, focusing on one twig imaginary, claiming that their twig imaginary was key for the parent branch (or trunk), and getting legitimacy for their twig by reinforcing a branch or trunk. Branching off of branch imaginaries was not observed at the COP26. Theoretically, it doesn't seem possible either. Instead, what is observed as new branch imaginaries are in fact the historical process of merging or separation of branches in hegemonical contestation and/ or dialectical development (see Discussion).

Grafting is the hybridization of imaginaries. For instance, Australia created a hybrid imaginary when combining a win-win techno-market imaginary with a “positive energy” imaginary into what they called “The Australian Way”. At the COP26 I observed grafting among twigs and branches, but theoretically it is possible to include trunks in the grafting (e.g., to graft a democracy trunk imaginary with a water twig imaginary: a “democratic access to water” imaginary). I observed that when grafting was done by countries, they became the target of strong critiques because they were seen as deviating from what the majority thought was meaningful.

Grafting also allowed to create an “extreme” space—the crucible. The Climate Action Hub is an example of extreme grafting in which multiple (or all) trunks, branches, and twigs are open to be grafted. They created an open space in which everyone (from Brazilian society)

was invited to present their perspective on climate change and open it to debate. Turning back to the tree metaphor, extreme grafting could be seen as the role of bees that cross-pollinate flowers and mix their DNAs, creating enough mutations in its seeds to make imaginaries significantly different from the current tree. To give a historical example, philosophy was considered equivalent to knowledge seeking for centuries until a new imaginary—science—separated from it, connected several fields (physics, biology, chemistry, etc.), and became its own trunk with multiple branches and twigs.

1.5 Discussion

This paper seeks to answer the question “how do climate imaginaries differ in kind and how do actors engage with these different kinds of imaginaries?”. Empirically, I studied the kinds of imaginaries observed at the 26th United Nations Conference of the Parties for Climate Change (COP26) and how the country and ONG pavilions engaged with them (see Figure 1.1). I found three kinds of imaginaries—trunk, branch, and twig imaginaries—naming them using the metaphor of a tree, as they closely resembled its parts and the differences among them. *Trunk* imaginaries correspond to central (or primary) imaginaries—imaginaries that are widely accepted in a particular context (e.g., climate change at COP26). *Branch* (or secondary) imaginaries have a good acceptance and are usually in tension with other branch imaginaries. An example of a branch imaginary at the COP26 is the limit of 1.5°C of global warming. A *twig* is a new imaginary. However, this doesn’t mean that the twig imaginary was created at the COP26; rather, that it was considered new in this context. Additionally, three kinds of relationships were described—reinforcing, branching off, and grafting—connecting the metaphor of the tree to the farmers that help it grow, as pavilions engaged with imaginaries to develop them. *Reinforcing* happened when a pavilion supported a trunk, branch, or twig that already existed at the COP26. *Branching off* consisted of the presentation

and protection of a new imaginary (a new twig). *Grafting* was the hybridisation of trunk, branch, or twig imaginaries and, in extreme cases, the openness to hybridise any climate imaginary. This paper contributes to the climate imaginary literature, and more generally to the imaginaries literature, by describing three kinds of climate imaginaries and three types of engagement with them as described below.

1.5.1 Kinds of imaginaries

This paper contributes to the literature on climate imaginaries by characterising climate imaginaries from a cross-sectional perspective (the COP26). Studies focusing on the relationships among imaginaries have engaged in longitudinal studies that have found they relate in hegemonical struggles (Levy & Spicer, 2013) or dialectically (Augustine et al., 2019). In this paper I show how climate imaginaries differ in kind—trunk, branch, and twig—and are developed by pavilions through reinforcing, branching off and grafting. From this cross-sectional perspective, the idea of a same kind of climate imaginary is put into question. Following the tree metaphor, it would be incorrect to give the same name to a part of a tree that develops in time. What appears as a sprout could later become a branch or a trunk. The longitudinal perspective describes the development in time of imaginaries, from twigs to trunks, so they are describing an imaginary (e.g., Plan B (Augustine et al., 2019)) during all its development. A cross-sectional imaginary perspective highlights that imaginaries differ in kind among them and that they change in time. While twigs are new fragile imaginaries, open to critique and requiring support from its branch and trunk; branches, instead, are in tension with each other, having secured a base, but requiring more support to become a trunk. A cross-sectional perspective like the one presented in this paper, also contributes by showing that climate imaginaries not only relate among themselves as tensions or hegemonical struggles (Levy & Spicer, 2013). Trunks (for a given context) work

as supports for branch imaginaries, i.e., are usually not called into question and may be used for legitimisation processes (e.g., Democracy for the Nordic Pavilion). Twigs depend on a certain branch and are usually not in tension from other twigs; instead, they are vying for support and for that seek legitimisation through its own branch and trunk. The cross-sectional perspective suggests that future studies should be methodologically aware when describing imaginaries and consider if they differ in kind. Also, while together the longitudinal studies and this cross-sectional study present how different kinds of imaginaries change and struggle in time, they do not focus on the birth (before materialising) nor the degradation or death of imaginaries (the loss of support), so future research could be developed to understand the whole life cycle of climate imaginaries.

More broadly, this paper contributes to the theoretical work on societal level imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1997). This work developed the concept of central imaginaries—imaginaries (like State, or Capitalism) around which significations are developed (Arnason, 2014)—and secondary imaginaries, that are needed to sustain and materialise central imaginaries (e.g., Money is needed to materialise a Capitalist central imaginary (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 356)). However, the differences between primary and secondary imaginary were not fully developed in this theoretical work (Arnason, 2014, p. 104). This paper contributes by showing that there are (at least) three types of imaginaries: *trunk* (primary), *branch* (secondary), and *twig* (tertiary). The twig is a new theorisation that conceptualises newly created imaginaries. Additionally, while the primary-secondary relationship (Castoriadis, 1997) still holds in the “tree” perspective as branches “concretise” the trunk imaginary (e.g., achieving 1.5°C is a concretisation of the climate change imaginary), incorporating twigs show that imaginaries change in time, and what is now a branch, may become a trunk in the future (for a certain context, see below).

Theorists have also studied the relationship between the instituting and instituted aspect of imaginaries (Bouilloud et al., 2020; Castoriadis, 1997, p. 108). The *instituting* corresponds to what “reveals the questionable, contingent and unfinished nature of any established order” (Bouilloud et al., 2020, p. 159), i.e., the ex-nihilo creation of imaginaries; the *instituted* are imaginaries materialised as “laws, norms and conventions” (Bouilloud et al., 2020, p. 159). This paper focuses on materialised imaginaries (the *instituted*), as studying the *instituting* probably requires some methodological adaptations as imaginaries are not yet materialised (Klein, 2015; Komporozos-Athanasiou & Fotaki, 2015). This study contributes by showing that within the materialisation of imaginaries there are different “phases” through which imaginaries go through (twig, branch and trunk) and that only some of the twigs get to become branches, and branches become trunks. These phases indicate there is a lifecycle process in the development of imaginaries and not only a “direct” materialisation of imaginaries.

1.5.2 Actor engagement with different kinds of imaginaries

Considering both the cross-sectional and the longitudinal perspective, the relationships among imaginaries become more complex. While a macro perspective may describe an imaginary development as dialectical (e.g., Augustine et al., 2019) or hegemonical (e.g., Levy & Spicer, 2013), a micro level shows that different imaginary relationships took place in time—some grafting, some reinforcement, some branching off. What longitudinally is observed as the development of imaginaries include only *some* of the imaginaries that have been created—those that survived and became branches or trunks. For instance, in the Findings three twigs are shown as illustrations of branching off: Methane, Cryosphere, and Water. We could imagine that in the future only some (or one) of these twigs will become a branch; for instance, Methane has been gaining traction because of the signing of global gas

emissions agreements and could become a branch. Seen from a larger and longitudinal view, we would only describe the development of the Methane imaginary (the others would be lost to time) and how this imaginary relates dialectically to other imaginaries (e.g., technomarkets) to create a new imaginary (for instance, a call for technology to capture methane). In a similar way, this perspective shows that the value-regimes that may create hegemonies at a macro level (Levy & Spicer, 2013), at a more micro level are composed of a series of *reinforcing* actions, the appearance of new imaginaries (*branching off*), and the creation of hybrid imaginaries (*grafting*). Furthermore, these actions not only happen at the branch level, but also at the trunk and branch level. Finally, regarding the problematic of how to create new climate imaginaries (Wright et al., 2013), this paper shows that while effectively some actors are reinforcing the current climate imaginaries, there are many new climate imaginaries being presented in instances like the COP, taking the form of twigs and imaginary hybrids. This paper contributes by adding a cross-sectional view to the longitudinal view of climate imaginary relationships: how from moment-to-moment imaginaries stand in different relationships among each other, how macro dynamics are composed of a series of micro engagements, and how while from a longitudinal view many nascent imaginaries may not be captured, from a micro perspective many climate imaginaries are being created, although not all of them become branches or trunks.

1.5.3 Importance of the research context for studying climate imaginaries

Being aware of the context in which imaginaries develop is another contribution from this paper. The “context” has a double meaning here: the “topic” around which imaginaries are developed (e.g., fossil fuels (Levy & Spicer, 2013), geo-engineering (Augustine et al., 2019), biodynamic agriculture (Roquebert & Debucquet, 2022), etc.) and the “location” where these imaginaries develop (e.g., in mass media, rural communities, conferences, etc.). The

“topic” is important because it will affect how imaginaries are classified—which are trunks, branches, and twigs—and the “location” will affect what actions and resources are available to actors. As an example, studying the climate imaginaries of permaculture (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018) will place some imaginaries as trunks (e.g., sustainable living) which at the COP26 may be considered as a branch. The context highlights that the climate imaginaries classification is relative to the “topic” under study.

Relatedly, the “location” affects the resources available to actors to develop climate imaginaries. For instance, several pavilions mentioned that the COP was a “world stage”, highlighting how it worked as a platform to get their supported imaginary legitimised and shared widely. The context’s “location” will also affect what possible actions are available to actors. For example, studying the climate imaginaries of fossil fuels corporations at the industry level (e.g., Levy & Spicer, 2013) gives corporations access to cultural, economic, and political means to engage with climate imaginaries. At other locations like the COP, the possible actions between actors change. In the pavilion area there is a mixture of democratic structure and market dynamics. While all countries and NGOs are invited to present their perspective on climate change and possible solutions, access is limited mainly through a market mechanism: the space is very expensive (see Methods section). Also, rules limit how pavilions may build their pavilions. In this sense the location affects the available means open to actors to engage with imaginaries. While a global context could be theorised, empirically this would be somewhat fallacious, because in Europe certain imaginaries could be considered as trunks while in Latin America they could be branches or twigs (or vice versa). As such, context—topic and location—affects the classification of imaginaries and how actors engage in their development.

Finally, “topic” and “location” are not separate: considering the context’s “topic” shows that

climate imaginaries are being developed at different “locations”. Despite the importance of the COP for developing climate imaginaries, it is not the only “location” where this is happening. In fact, only looking at the other conferences organised by the UN on different “topics” (e.g., regarding Marine life, Biodiversity, etc.) show that climate imaginaries are developed at different “locations”. This insight helps to expand the research field to other “locations”, like academic conferences where climate change is discussed, World Forums where citizens meet to discuss ways of addressing the climate change, and young activist meetings (e.g., like the YOUNGO⁸) seem all fruitful spaces for the creation of new climate imaginaries. Even closer to our field, organisations could be the “location” where the buds of new climate imaginaries are sprouting.

1.5.4 The impact of the medium on imaginaries

Research on climate imaginaries have also explored how the medium (text, images, etc.) affects the creation and materialisation of imaginaries (Davoudi & Machen, 2022; Garland et al., 2013; Oliveira et al., 2017). This paper contributes to this line of research by showing how pavilions use multimodal mediums (see also Davoudi & Machen, 2022) to convey their imaginary and inviting people to co-create significations (Garland et al., 2013). The use of multimodal mediums has a double function: they materialise imaginaries—providing a “flesh” to imaginaries (De Cock, 2013, p. 407)—and also, they are a way of luring-in people to share the imaginary. At the COP26 I observed that multiple mediums were used. While images and messages were the minimum (even in the smallest and simplest pavilions), but more elaborate forms were also visible: live plant walls (that conveyed care and advanced agriculture), free coffee (that conveyed good energy), and models (that materialised imagined distant futures (Augustine et al., 2019)). Studying these multimodal ways of

⁸ <https://youngoclimate.org/>

conveying imaginaries was not the focus of this paper, but it confirms that there is an interesting space for research as indicated by others (Davoudi & Machen, 2022; Garland et al., 2013; Oliveira et al., 2017). As a future research agenda, it would be interesting to study how these multimodal mediums differ with different kinds of imaginaries, how actors use mediums for different kinds of engagement (reinforcing, branching off, and grafting), and how the context (conferences like the COP or advertising (Garland et al., 2013)) influences which multimodal mediums are used (see also Gross & Zilber, 2020).

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Chapter 2 — Liberating creative imagination: How internal activists change climate imaginaries within organizations

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Abstract: Addressing climate change requires that corporations, states, and the citizenship diminish drastically their greenhouse emissions. However, emissions are not diminishing fast enough. This inaction indicates that these actors' current imaginaries, the social significations underlying what is deemed possible or not in society, are incompatible with a warming world. In this theoretical paper, I present how organizations maintain the status quo by internally blocking the creation of new imaginaries and how internal activists may unblock this creation through tactics that dismantle unsustainable imaginaries and foster creative imagination. I demonstrate some of the internal activists' tactics in action with an illustration of a sustainability manager working to change an imaginary in a French business school. This paper makes two contributions. First, to the imaginaries literature with a more explicit operationalization of how imaginaries may be blocked from within organizations and how they may be liberated by internal activists. Second, to the literature on internal activism by showing how internal activists may use tactics to change imaginaries and, in the process, emancipate themselves from the tensions arising from business–environment contradictions. I close the paper by proposing a future research agenda around exploring how imaginaries may be unblocked at the political economy level and, within organizations, around exploring how the creation of new imaginaries may remain unblocked.

Keywords: climate change, imaginaries, internal activists, creative imaginary process, Castoriadis

2.1 Introduction

Addressing climate change requires drastically diminishing greenhouse emissions (IPCC, 2018). But while some powerful groups (corporations, states, associations) are driving the environmental crisis (Heede, 2014; Wright & Nyberg, 2014), they also actively engage in maintaining the status quo (Banerjee, 2001; Nyberg, Spicer, & Wright, 2013). This is achieved in different ways, for instance by denying the existence of climate change (Dunlap & McCright, 2011), by whittling down initiatives to keep business as usual (Wright & Nyberg, 2017), and by prioritizing the economic rationality of the business case (Kaplan, 2019). The result is that greenhouse gases continue to rise and the safe space for life on the planet continues to shrink (IPCC, 2021; Steffen et al., 2015), making it increasingly urgent to find new alternatives to break this impasse.

Recent research suggests that the lack of new alternatives to address the climate change may be due to the current climate imaginaries (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Wright, Nyberg, De Cock, & Whiteman, 2013). Imaginaries are the shared human understandings of what is society and the meaning of the surrounding world (Adams, 2014, p. 24; Castoriadis, 1997). Imaginaries guide organizational actions because they constitute the “‘possibles’ and ‘impossibles’” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 263), delineating, supporting, and limiting organizational actions (Lê, 2013). If new imaginaries were created and adopted, new alternatives aligned with the Earth’s safe operation space could be envisioned (Wright et al., 2013; Wright, Nyberg, Rickards, & Freund, 2018). Imaginaries are created in the dynamic relationship between the collective potential to create meanings (called the instituting (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 108)) and the current materialized

imaginary (called the instituted (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 108)), a process which in this paper is termed the creative imaginary process. From this perspective, some powerful groups are not changing their actions because their climate imaginaries are not changing—they are blocked. These unsustainable imaginaries are blocked “outside” organizations (in value regimes (Levy & Spicer, 2013) or imaginary lock-ins (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2021)) and “within” organizations. Some researchers have explored how imaginaries are blocked within organizations by focusing on the instituted and neglecting the instituting (Bouilloud, Pérezts, Viale, & Schaepelynck, 2020; Klein, 2015) and by studying the role of narratives and discourses in blocking imaginaries (Perey, 2013). But these perspectives have not been theorized together and the role of materiality in blocking the creative imaginary process is under-explored. This leads to the paper’s first research question: how is the creation of new imaginaries blocked within organizations?

While many climate imaginaries are not changing, some do change (e.g., the realization that fossil fuels will not save us from climate change). Social movements have had some success in changing societal imaginaries (Fotaki & Foroughi, 2021) but they have had less success in changing what happens within organizations because of their limited impact on what happens within organizations (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Buchter, 2021). However, internal activists—organizational members that engage in aligning the organization with social and ecological values (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Meyerson & Scully, 1995)—have succeeded in changing organizations from within (Daudigeos, 2013; Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2021; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020). Given the internal activists’ access to and knowledge about decision makers (Daudigeos, 2013), their know-how about how to repurpose organizational processes and routines (Kellogg, 2009), and their links to external networks that may give them access to new activist tactics (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016), it is probable that internal activists are in a good

position to unblock the creative imaginary process. This leads to the paper's second research question: how may the creative imaginary process be unblocked by internal activists?

To answer the first research question, this paper posits that new imaginaries are blocked within organizations because the creative imaginary process—the dynamic relationship between instituting and instituted—is blocked. First, the instituting may become blocked by discouraging creative imagination. This is achieved by restricting the organizational capacity to imagine (Skoglund & Böhm, 2020), co-opting alternative views (Komporozos-Athanasiou & Fotaki, 2015), and by direct coercion (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Zald & Berger, 1978). Second, the instituted may become blocked by reinforcing too strongly the current materialized imaginary. This is achieved by stifling critique (e.g., through denial Dunlap & McCright, 2011) and by blocking the necessary resources to materialize new imaginaries (Banerjee, 2001, 2011). If both the instituting and instituted are blocked, then few (or no) new imaginaries will be created and organizations will not change their actions even in face of catastrophe (Campbell, McHugh, & Ennis, 2019; Leahy, Bowden, & Threadgold, 2010; Norgaard, 2006). However, internal activists may be in a good position to liberate the creative imaginary process.

To answer the second research question, this paper posits that internal activists need a range of tactics to liberate both the instituting and the instituted. The instituting may be liberated by protecting the capacity to imagine through regaining time and space to imagine (Girschik, 2020; Husted & Plesner, 2017), developing and grounding ambivalent and ambiguous significations (Elmholdt, Elmholdt, & Haahr, 2020; Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020; Meyerson & Scully, 1995), and while protecting organizational members from coercion (Connolly, Marino, & Martinez Lucio, 2017; Yousfi, 2021). The instituted may be liberated by critiquing the old imaginary through creating alternative histories (De Cock, Nyberg, & Wright, 2019) and counter stories (Gayá Wicks & Phillips, 2016), dividing the opposing decision-makers and creating new alliances (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Weber, Rao, & Thomas, 2009), and obtaining the resources

and legitimacy to materialize the new imaginary (Daudigeos, 2013; Vaujany & Vaast, 2016). By liberating the creative imaginary process, organizations may open themselves to imagining the climate change differently, while empowering them to engage in new (and radical) actions. This paper makes two contributions. First, to the climate imaginaries literature (e.g., Levy & Spicer, 2013; Roux-Rosier, Azambuja, & Islam, 2018) by theorizing how the creative imaginary process is blocked and how this process may be unblocked by internal activists using tactics that consider the symbolic and material dimensions. Second, to the literature on internal activism (e.g., Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020), this paper adds new direct and indirect effects (related to the liberation of the creative imaginary process). Additionally, the paper shows that the tensions internal activists feel in relation to business–environment contradictions (e.g., Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Wright, Nyberg, & Grant, 2012) may be overcome (at least partially) by liberating the creative imaginary process.

2.2 Changing imaginaries to address the climate change

Organizations are not addressing climate change fast enough because few new climate imaginaries are being created (Wright et al., 2013). Imaginaries are “the unceasing and essentially undetermined [...] creation of figures/forms/images, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question of ‘something’.” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 3). In this sense, an imaginary may be thought of as a set of imagined social significations establishing a shared understanding of ourselves, our surroundings, and even reality, in the form of images that confer meaning (Arnason, 2014). These imaginaries, by supporting what meaning is given to the world, delimit the possible thoughts and actions of individuals, organizations, and society in general—imaginaries delimit the possible and the impossible (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 263). For instance, some imaginaries restrict action to address climate change by denying its existence (e.g., a “fossil fuels forever imaginary” that claims that fossil fuels will solve climate change, see Levy

& Spicer, 2013), while others maintain that more technology will solve the ecological crisis (e.g., the techno-market imaginary Levy & Spicer, 2013). Given their collective reach, imaginaries differ from other perspectives like sense-making (Weick, 1988; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). In contrast to sense-making understood as a “retrospective development of plausible images” (Weick, 2008, p. 1403), imaginaries develop the base for image creation and consist of the whole symbolic and material structure that sustain meaning—they support a “wider grasp [that] has no clear limits” (C. Taylor, 2004, p. 25).

Imaginaries are not static; rather, they are continually changing. This is captured in the concepts of instituted and instituting (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 108; De Cock, Rehn, & Berry, 2013). The instituting imaginary is what “reveals the questionable, contingent and unfinished nature of any established order” (Bouilloud et al., 2020, p. 159) while the instituted imaginary is the materialization of meaning in “laws, norms and conventions” (Bouilloud et al., 2020, p. 159). The instituted imaginary is observed in organizations and institutions, and the instituting imaginary is observed in their change—an undetermined change based on creation *ex nihilo* (Castoriadis, 2016, p. 149), i.e., “conditioned to various degrees by being but never determined by it” (emphasis in the original Mouzakis, 2014, p. 62). Imaginaries thus bring a fresh dynamic perspective to the creation of institutions, differing from perspectives like neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) which in general equates the institution to the instituted while neglecting the instituting (Bouilloud et al., 2020, pp. 164–165). Some perspectives focusing on institutional change, like institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006) and institutional work (Thomas B. Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; T. B. Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009), usually take a more deterministic view of change (Klein, 2015) compared to that of imaginaries. The indeterminacy in the creation of new imaginaries arises from the dynamic tension between the instituted and the instituting—what I term the creative imaginary process.

The creative imaginary process is the dynamic relationship between the instituting imaginary and the instituted imaginary (see Figure 2.1). It may be represented as a simultaneous interaction between the overdetermined instituted imaginary—“given structures, ‘materialized’ institutions and works” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 108)—(represented as the outer solid walls in Figure 2.1) and the instituting imaginary—“that which structures, institutes, materializes” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 108)—, a creative force residing within it (represented as the waving line in the middle). In this representation, the creation of a new imaginary is shown by the increasing undulation of the instituting imaginary. As it approaches the current instituted imaginary, it is ready to be materialized into a new instituted imaginary. As the new imaginary becomes materialized (or instituted), the instituting imaginary continues to develop a newer imaginary (represented as the new waving line in the middle of the Figure 2.1) and this meaning-making process continues ad eternum. Under this perspective, imaginaries should be continually created and changing; however, climate change shows that this is not so.

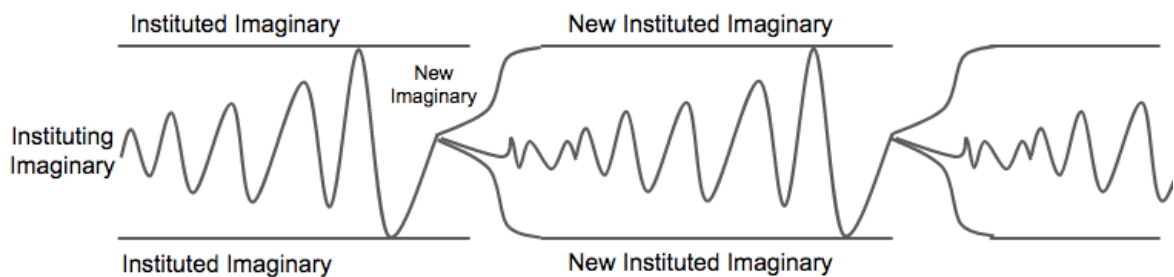


Figure 2.1. Representation of the creative imaginary process

Organizations are not addressing climate change fast enough because unsustainable imaginaries (like the fossil fuels forever imaginary Levy & Spicer, 2013) are being kept in place—blocked—by powerful groups (certain corporations, states, and/or associations). These unsustainable imaginaries are blocked “outside” organizations (in the economy, politics, culture) as well as “within” organizations. Outside, they are blocked by denying the existence of climate change (Dunlap & McCright, 2011), by corporate strategies that neutralize change into business-as-

usual (Lê, 2013; Wright & Nyberg, 2017), and through lobby to curtail regulation changes (Nyberg, 2021). In general, these groups seek to create value regimes (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Wissman-Weber & Levy, 2018) or imaginary lock-ins (Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2021) that, to maintain power, articulate obstacles in the economy, politics and cultural spheres impeding the creation and materialization of new imaginaries. Additionally, to block new imaginaries from arising, these groups need to ensure that their organizations block these unsustainable imaginaries also within them.

But how imaginaries are blocked within organizations is sub-theorized. A first approximation is proposed by Castoriadis' concept of heteronomy (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 103), by which the creators of institutions and organizations “forget” that they created them and instead become “ruled” by them. Within organizations, this is done by equating the organization to the instituted (i.e., what is already there) (Bouilloud et al., 2020) and by this means obstructing the instituting (i.e., what could be) (Klein, 2015). A second approximation explores the means through which imaginaries may be held in place in the organization. This may be done by controlling narratives and discourses (Perey, 2013)—the organizational symbolic dimension. However, these two perspectives have not yet been theorized together and moreover, the material aspect of blocking imaginaries in organizations is currently not well understood. This leads to the paper's first research question: how is the creation of new imaginaries blocked within organizations?

Although interest groups try hard to block the creation of new climate imaginaries, some social movements have succeeded in creating new social imaginary significations that may change climate change imaginaries (e.g., extinction rebellion Fotaki & Foroughi, 2021), but these social movements have had less success in changing what happens within organizations (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Buchter, 2021). On the contrary, organizational members taking the role of internal activists have had better results in changing organizations from within (Daudigeos,

2013; Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2021; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020) and may hold the key to unblocking the hold of unsustainable imaginaries from within organizations.

2.3 Changing imaginaries from within organizations

Internal activists are organizational members that strive to materialize social and environmental ideals in their organization (for a review see Briscoe & Gupta, 2016). For instance, sustainability managers (Daudigeos & Valiorgue, 2009; Strand, 2014) are usually internal activists that are both mandated by the organization to make their processes and products more sustainable, and have their values aligned with this mission. Similarly, organizational “champions” and concerned organizational members (Howard-Grenville, 2007) engage in changing corporate actions towards social and environmental good. These internal activists succeed in changing their organizations (e.g., by developing green products (Garland, Huising, & Struben, 2013), reducing waste (Brydges, 2021; Pitcher, 2010), or encouraging “green” investments (Goncalves, Robinot, & Michel, 2016)) because they have access to processes and actors in the organization that are usually unavailable to external actors like the government or social movements. Their insider position gives them deep knowledge about the decision-makers’ values, the organizational politics, and how the organizational processes work (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016). By tapping onto these resources, internal activists successfully exert organizational changes that may be oriented to unblock the creation of imaginaries.

Given their direct influence in the organization, internal activists are well placed to liberate the creative imaginary process. First, their access to decisions-makers, resources, and processes puts them in the ideal location to dismantle an unsustainable instituted imaginary, i.e., soften the grip of rules, structures, and processes that keep the current imaginary in place. Second, this same access to decision-makers, other organizational members, and additionally to external activist

networks (Daudigeos & Valiorgue, 2009; Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2021), position them well to foster creative imagination, supporting the liberation of the instituting imaginary.

However, internal activists are not always successful in their endeavours. They are usually co-opted by traditional views within the organization (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), they are attacked and harassed for their dual role as activists and organizational members (Scully & Segal, 2002), they work in a contradictory position that makes them question their actions and themselves (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Wright et al., 2012), and often the emotional toll of these continual struggles becomes unbearable and drives them to quit (Wright & Nyberg, 2012). While being in a position where they may affect directly the creative imaginary process, internal activists often fail in their endeavours because of this same positioning.

This contradictory position has been attributed to the internal activists' ambivalent position as being loyal to an organization and simultaneously wanting to change it (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). From an imaginary perspective, this ambivalence in the internal activists' position is understood as the conflict between the call to develop the instituting and disrupt the instituted, while being heavily opposed by the inertia of what is already instituted—the persistence of organizations and institutions. Moreover, internal activists—like sustainability managers—fall prey to the contradictions existing between businesses and the environment, being mandated to resolve an “irreconcilable” contradiction (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Wright et al., 2012). From an imaginary perspective, this contradiction between business and the environment is reinterpreted as the blocking of the creative imaginary process, by which the organizational decision-makers hold in place an unsustainable imaginary. By taking this imaginary perspective, the internal activists' tensions are understood as having a legitimate and an illegitimate source. The legitimate source is the tension existing between the instituted and the instituting. For example, if an internal activist is developing a green project (for instance Total Recycling, see Illustration below) and even if the whole organization is fully committed to this change, the

internal activist will still feel the difficulties of changing organizational processes, habits, and culture, i.e., feel the opposing force of the organizational inertia. However, the imaginary perspective also illustrates an illegitimate source of tensions—the blocking of the creative imaginary process. The contradiction between business and environment is understood as a resistance from decision-makers embracing unsustainable imaginaries for their own gain or that of the shareholders. Thus, taking an imaginary perspective gives hope to internal activists by showing that the tensions they feel may be ameliorated (but not eliminated). The contradictions between businesses and environment—the illegitimate source of the internal activists’ tensions—may be overcome by liberating the creative imagination, i.e., by letting new imaginaries emerge and become instituted. While perspective locates internal activists in an ideal position both to diminish the tensions they feel and to change organizational unsustainable imaginaries, how to do so is less understood, leading to this paper’s second research question: how may the creative imaginary process be unblocked within organizations by internal activists?

2.4 Blocking the creative imaginary process

This section addresses the first research question: how is the creation of new imaginaries blocked within organizations? Starting from the idea that new imaginaries are created in the tension between the instituting and the instituted—what I called the creative imaginary process—, new imaginaries are blocked when this relationship is disturbed. This may be done by obstructing the instituting and/ or the instituted imaginary. Blocking the instituting requires obstructing the conditions that foster creative imagination, like restricting the collective capacity to imagine, co-opting new significations, and coercing internal activists; blocking the instituted requires strengthening the current laws, norms, and structures by stifling critique and negating the needed resources and legitimacy to materialize a new imaginary.

Blocking the instituting denies or restricts the conditions for creating imaginaries by discouraging creative imagination in the organization (see Figure 2.2). First, this is done by restricting the collective capacity to imagine, for instance by limiting the time or space to think, try, or share new ideas (Skoglund & Böhm, 2020). Second, this could happen through co-opting new alternatives to the old imaginary (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018) to return to business-as-usual (Wright & Nyberg, 2017). These alternatives may be co-opted by re-signifying the new imaginary significations, subjecting them to old ones (Komporozos-Athanasiou & Fotaki, 2015, p. 327). Finally, organizational thinking may be restricted by claiming an exclusive “way” of doing things (e.g., the “McKinsey way” dictating how things are done in “the Firm” (Rasiel, 1999)) and organizational members may be coerced by isolation (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) and punishment (Zald & Berger, 1978). Figure 2.2 portrays the blocking of the instituting imaginary as arrows limiting the central undulating wave.

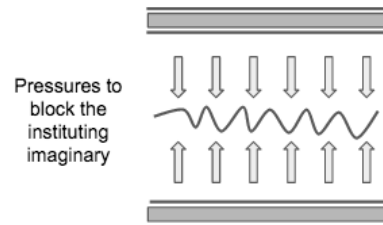


Figure 2.2. *The blocked instituting imaginary*

Blocking the instituted (see Figure 2.3) has two aspects: reinforcing too vigorously the current materialized imaginary by stifling critique and by denying the establishment of the new imaginary by obstructing its materialization. First, stifling critique may be accomplished by arguing that there is no need for a new imaginary (e.g., climate change denial Dunlap & McCright, 2011) and covering the ensuing contradictions with myths (Wright & Nyberg, 2014), and by obstructing free speech (Jack, 2004). Stifling critique is also achieved by being hypocritical about the actions taken by the organization, for instance by “window-dressing” or

“greening” them (Crane, 2000; Jermier, Forbes, Benn, & Orsato, 2006), rendering the importance of a new imaginary less urgent. Coupled to hypocrisy, cynicism from organizational members—i.e., decoupling what they think about the organization from what they say and do (Fleming & Spicer, 2003)—undermines dismantling old imaginaries because they will not critique the organization. Second, even if critique was successful and a new imaginary was created, decision-makers could still obstruct the materialization of this new imaginary. This is done by negating the required resources and legitimacy needed (Banerjee, 2001, 2011), as imaginaries are both symbolic and material (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 132; Klein, 2015). Figure 2.3 represents the blocking of the instituted imaginary by the thick walls on either side of the image.

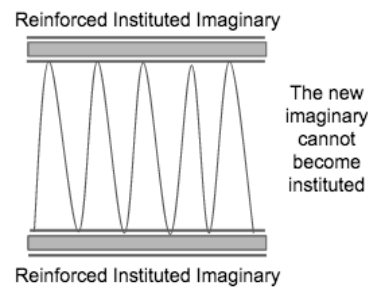


Figure 2.3. *Representation of the creative imaginary process*

Organizations keep in place unsustainable imaginaries by blocking the creative imaginary process through tactics that target both the instituting and the instituted (see Table 2.1 for a summary). The instituting is blocked by obstructing creative imagination through restricting the collective capacity to imagine, co-opting new significations, and direct coercion. The instituted is blocked by opposing the dismantling of the unsustainable imaginary through stifling critique and negating the resources and legitimacy to materialize the new imaginary. To unblock the creative imaginary process, internal activists need to liberate both aspects of the creative imaginary process—the instituting and the instituted.

Table 2.1 - Tactics used to block and to liberate the creative imaginary process

Creative imaginary process	How to block	Tactics to block	Internal activists tactics to unblock	
<i>Instituting</i> — creative imagination	Restricting the collective capacity to imagine	Restricting space to imagine	Using space differently Constructing "meeting arenas" for collective imagination	
		Restricting time to imagine	Embedding climate projects into regular projects Redefining roles to include imagination	
	Co-opting alternatives	Subjecting new to old significations	Developing ambivalent and ambiguous significations Grounding through affect and embodiment	
	Coercing	Claiming an exclusive way of acting	Connecting to activists networks and other organizations Becoming part of professional associations	
		Isolating and punishing the individual	Learning to be politically savvy Tapping into collective protective mechanisms	
<i>Instituted</i> — materialized imaginary	Stifling critique	Denying the problem	Reinterpreting history	
		Obstructing free speech	Creating material arrangements for creativity	
		Being hypocritical about actions	Developing counter stories	
		Being cynical about contradictions	Learning from other networks that success is possible Creating feedback channels	
	Obstructing materialization	Negating the required resources	Dividing the opposition Creating alliances with some decision-makers	
		Negating legitimacy	Creating visual objects and text documents Articulating the new significations through narratives	

2.5 Liberating the creative imaginary process

Liberating the creative imaginary process within an organization requires removing the blockages that obstruct the creation and materialization of new imaginaries. The creative imaginary process (see Figure 2.1) is blocked by discouraging creative imagination—blocking the instituting—(see Figure 2.2) and by reinforcing too vigorously the materialized imaginary (see Figure 2.3)—blocking the instituted. Both aspects—the instituting and the instituted—need to be liberated to unblock the creative imaginary process. Liberating the instituting imaginary requires stimulating the organizational capacity to imagine, defending new significations, and protecting organizational members from coercion. Liberating the instituted imaginary requires critiquing the current imaginary and getting the necessary resources and legitimacy to materialize the new imaginary (see Table A.1 for a summary). Additionally, liberating the creative imaginary process requires mobilizing other organizational members, as the creation of new imaginaries is a collective activity and not the task of a heroic individual. Internal activists are well placed to engage in these actions (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Buchter, 2021), as they are

motivated (and sometimes mandated) to achieve social and environmental goals and have access to key processes and actors within the organization.

2.5.1 Liberating the instituting — Fostering creative imagination

Creative imagination—the instituting—becomes blocked when creativity is discouraged, alternatives co-opted, and people coerced. Internal activists who want to change the organizational imaginary may dissolve these blocks by protecting and stimulating the organizational capacity to imagine, by defending and grounding the new imaginary significations, and by protecting the organization and its members from coercion.

2.5.1.1 Protecting and stimulating space and time for imagination

The organizational capacity to imagine may protected and stimulated by creating free spaces and regaining time for imagining. Free spaces are important for collective imagination as they support the meeting of like-minded people, arouse intense emotions, and reinforce a collective identity—important conditions to “engage in costly collective action” (Rao & Dutta, 2012, p. 625). While creating new spaces in an organization may be challenging, current space may be used “differently” by confronting restricting significations attached to them (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011). For example, current organizational spaces may be repurposed to function as open-sourced spaces that sustain political organization (Husted & Plesner, 2017). Once some spaces have been repurposed, they may serve as “meeting arenas” (Haug, 2013), where internal activists and organization members may imagine together and synchronize their activities. These regained spaces also support democratic dialog (McBride, 2001; L. K. Taylor, 2008) and the cultivation of alternative ideas and voices (Rothschild-Whitt, 1976; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020). And by engaging in democratic dialog, new images and forms may be created collectively that could serve to develop new imaginaries. However, these spaces are of no use if organizational members do not have time to imagine.

Time may be recaptured—and focused on creating new imaginaries—by embedding the need to imagine into regular projects and by redefining roles to include creative imagination. First, the need for creative imagination may be embedded into regular projects, for instance, by including an environmental (or social) aspect into a project (Daudigeos, 2013; Walley & Stubbs, 1999) or by suggesting the inclusion of creative sessions. By infiltrating regular projects, existing time is repurposed and opened for imagining. Second, organizational member roles may be redefined to include time for creation and imagination and time may be reserved in commissions or working groups to include creative moments (Briscoe & Safford, 2010). While this type of change usually needs management support, internal activists are well placed to pitch for these changes in the organization (Howard-Grenville, 2007; Wickert & Bakker, 2018).

After repurposing spaces and recapturing time, internal activists may connect these two arguing for the positive reinforcement existing between democratic dialog and imagination (Rothschild-Whitt, 1976; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020). This articulation of repurposed spaces and recaptured time as creative assemblages (Duff & Sumartojo, 2017) may then lead to the creation of new significations. However, parties wanting to maintain the old imaginary may try to co-opt these new significations, requiring that internal activists deploy different tactics to defend them.

2.5.1.2 Defending new significations through ambivalence and grounding them through the body

Certain parties may try to co-opt alternative significations to maintain old imaginaries in place. To counter this action, internal activists need to defend new significations by establishing an ambivalent and ambiguous relationship between these new significations and the old imaginaries. By not being easily recognized as different, ambivalent significations are less prone to co-optation (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) by supporting a dual interpretation. Additionally, ambiguity creates an uncomfortable situation that drives people to create new significations to

restore stability (Elmholdt et al., 2020; Huxham & Vangen, 2000) and these new significations may be used to create the new imaginary. Ambivalent and ambiguous significations may be nurtured in hybrid forums (Gond & Nyberg, 2017) which include different stakeholders interested in a topic. In the contact and exchange between traditional and alternative perspectives, the possibility for new imaginaries opens as recognized ambiguities. But ambivalence and ambiguity doesn't directly prevent co-optation; what is needed, is to simultaneously ground useful new significations.

Internal activists may seek to ground new significations to prevent co-optation by tapping into affect and the body (Kajzer Mitchell & Walinga, 2017; Komporozos-Athanasiou & Fotaki, 2015). The body links the new significations to the organizational members' experience, grounding these significations in corporeal situations (Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020). The body plays the role of the first materialized aspect of the new instituted imaginary, materializing the created imaginary from the ground up and preventing co-optation. For instance, similarly to how architects may collectively create and embody imagination (Murphy, 2004; Thompson, 2018), a collective session for imagining a more sustainable organization could create shared significations grounded in the experience of the participants. However, an imaginary embodied in the organizational members also creates a more distinct target for groups opposing the new imaginary.

2.5.1.3 Countering coercion through activist networks and collective protective mechanisms

The instituting imaginary may also be blocked through coercion, both by closing the organization to new ideas by claiming a unique way of doing things, and by isolating and punishing individuals. First, the organization may become closed to new ideas, restricting the access to new imaginaries. This is done, for instance, by claiming that the organization has a "unique" way of doing things (e.g., the "McKinsey Way" Rasiel, 1999). One alternative for

breaking organizational closure is by connecting to activist networks (DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed, 2020; Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2021). These networks may offer internal activist new angles for critique, new tactics for recuperating space/ time (as seen in the previous section), and access to new imaginaries created externally. For instance, Scully and Segal (2002) explored how activists in one organization connected with other activists fighting inequality in their organizations, sharing their know-how on driving change in their organization. A second alternative is contacting similar organizations, creating the opportunity to see how things are done in other places and giving access to new imaginaries. For instance, the Erasmus project in Europe (European-Commission, 2016) connects organizational members to learn new practices through “shadowing” (participating in the daily work of a person), which could serve as a “door” to new imaginaries. Finally, organizational associations may directly or indirectly develop new imaginaries, as they connect organizations that have similar interests or objectives. For instance, CIRSES (CIRSES, 2021) is a French association that unites sustainability managers from higher education. In their periodic meetings—held in one of the participating organizations—participants have direct access to new imaginaries which they may bring back to their home organizations.

Second, internal activists need to protect themselves and the other members from isolation and punishment. Being easily identified and targeted (Zald & Berger, 1978), internal activists need to be politically savvy (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) to evade harassment, but this is not always enough. Hence, internal activists and other organizational members usually require tapping into collective protective mechanisms—like unions—and articulate them into activist agendas (Connolly et al., 2017; Yousfi, 2021).

Through protecting and stimulating the organizational capacity to imagine, by protecting new significations from co-optation, and by allowing new imaginaries to enter the organization and defending organizational members from coercion, the instituting is liberated, and the

organization recovers the capacity to create new imaginaries. But this new imaginary cannot materialize unless the old imaginary gives way to the new. For this to happen, internal activists require to dismantle the current materialized imaginary and give support to the materialization of the new imaginary—i.e., liberate the instituted imaginary.

2.5.2 Liberating the instituted — dismantling old imaginaries and supporting the new

Liberating the instituted imaginary requires both dismantling the old imaginary and supporting the materialization of the new ones. First, the old imaginary may be dismantled through critique, using tactics like creating counter histories against denial, supporting free speech through different media, reinterpreting history to counter hypocrisy, and learning from other networks to weaken cynicism. Second, the new imaginary is materialized by acquiring resources through breaking oppositional coalitions and creating alliances with some decision-makers, and legitimized by creating public objects and the use of meaning-making practices. Liberating the instituted starts by dismantling the old imaginary through critique.

2.3.2.1 Critiquing the current materialized imaginary

To dismantle the current materialized imaginary, internal activists need to show its inadequacy to address climate change through critique. First, critique is supported by “exposing the cracks” of the current imaginary (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 155; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2011, p. 504). By using alternative histories (De Cock et al., 2019), internal activists may reinterpret what happened in the past to show how the present and future may be different. Alternative histories show how the current materialization is one of multiple possibilities, undermining imaginaries that deny climate change (e.g., fossil fuels forever (Levy & Spicer, 2013)) or that present themselves as the only alternative. Second, critique is based on free speech, without which it is not possible. Material arrangements for creativity may strengthen the possibility of free speech through different communication media (Duff & Sumartojo, 2017), like image composition

arranged in improvised “art galleries” (Alcadipani & Islam, 2017) (see also the creation of free spaces in the above section). Having a base for critique, hypocrisy and cynicism need to be combatted.

Organizations engage in hypocrisy when they falsely claim that their actions solve a problem (e.g., “window dressing” and greenwashing Crane, 2000; Jermier et al., 2006). Counter stories (Gayá Wicks & Phillips, 2016) problematize current organizational narratives by showing their emptiness and exposing hypocrisy. A second issue to be addressed is organizational members’ cynicism, as contradictions in the organization may push members to become cynical to cope with tensions (Costas & Kärreman, 2013; Fleming & Spicer, 2003). One way of addressing cynicism is to contact internal activists from other organizations to realize that change is possible and to learn new activist tactics that may boost self- and collective confidence (DeJordy et al., 2020; Scully & Segal, 2002). Additionally, cynicism may be challenged by creating feedback channels that give voice to critique, making visible how other people in the organization are also engaging in changing the imaginary. For example, Kellogg (2009) demonstrates how medical interns used feedback channels to report how senior doctors were exploiting them, demystifying that their medical service was working well and uniting interns.

Creating alternative histories and arrangements for creativity, as well as calling out hypocrisy and cynicism, weakens the unsustainable instituted imaginary: organizational contradictions become apparent (Seo & Creed, 2002), lose legitimacy, and the instituted becomes a target for change. If internal activists need to dematerialize unsustainable imaginaries, they also need to materialize new imaginaries, and this requires resources and legitimacy.

2.5.2.2 Getting the necessary resources and legitimacy to materialize the new imaginary

After unblocking the instituting and dismantling the current imaginary, internal activists need the resources and legitimacy to materialize the new imaginary. Organizational decision-makers

will withhold resources if they disagree with the new imaginary. But rarely are decision-makers completely aligned with each other. Knowledge about the decision-makers' values allow internal activists to detect disputes among political coalitions and "open wedges" in the power groups (Weber et al., 2009), weakening their resistance. Internal activists may then use tailored framing (Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002; Girschik, 2020), which consists in framing an issue so that different stakeholders may agree with it, to find allies in the divided group of decision-makers. For instance, internal activists pushing forward an LGBTQ inclusion policy that previously was not adopted, gathered support by framing their objective with the decision-makers' values, creating new coalitions (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). With a fragmented opposition and new allies, internal activists should get access to resources by creating new power coalitions with the decision-makers. For this end, internal activists may tap on their knowledge of the decision-makers values to make their case (Briscoe, Chin, & Hambrick, 2014; Van Dyke, Soule, & Taylor, 2004). By dividing opposition, gathering allies, and creating new power coalitions, internal activists may get access to the resources they need; to legitimize the new imaginary, other tactics and resources are needed.

The new materialized imaginary requires to be legitimized to prevent decision-makers from reinstalling the old imaginary. One way is by creating visual objects and text documents (Lefsrud, Graves, & Phillips, 2020; Vaujany & Vaast, 2016) that embody the new imaginary and is sanctioned by decision-makers and organizational members. For instance, creating a sustainability chart that is signed by decision-makers or a big number of organizational members, give weight and credence to the imaginary that it materializes. Legitimacy through object embodiment may be complemented by meaning-making practices, by which the internal activists adapt the new meanings to the organizational culture (Sonenshein, 2016). These meanings may then be articulated into the organization (Daudigeos, 2013) through narratives

that “reconcile different interpretations and meanings [...] and help members to accept [the] future changes” brought by the new imaginary (Landau, Drori, & Terjesen, 2014, p. 1323).

In sum, to materialize the new imaginary, internal activists may gather the necessary resources through breaking the opposition, finding allies, and building coalitions, and legitimize the change through objects and meaning-making practices. By unblocking the instituting and the instituted imaginary, the creative imaginary process is liberated, and new imaginaries may be created. In practice, though, this is not easy. In the next section I illustrate the process of changing an imaginary by presenting a conversation with a sustainability manager of a French business school, in which she shows some of the possibilities and limitations of this approach.

2.6 Illustration: Changing an environmental imaginary in Louvre Business School

Louvre Business School is one of the top business schools in France, with approximately 7000 students and 500 professors. It offers baccalaureate, master’s, MBA, and PhD programs, all with a strong international orientation. Louvre Business School started in 2009 to develop CSR projects. One of their first actions was to hire a sustainability manager, Claire, who took the post in that same year. Claire has been developing multiple projects since then, but they had continually been whittled down by the administration and the organization in general, for instance, by restricting her resources (only in 2021 she was allowed to hire a person to support her work). Claire described the period from 2009 to 2017 as “a desert period”. However, in the past 4 years the top management team decided to take a more radical turn and announced in the media that they were becoming a “Total Recycling” school, which meant that they were going to recycle all the trash they generated. This announcement was not followed by a definite plan and instead was given as a “task” to be developed by Claire. Seeing that this was an opportunity to create a new imaginary in the school, Claire used this project to develop multiple activities (commissions, seminars, courses, student events, etc.) to materialize a Total Recycling

imaginary. The project's latest result was that in 2021 the top management team announced that they decided to integrate environmental, social, and economic goals into the school's mission statement.

The illustration consists of an interview with Claire (in English) shortly after this announcement. The interview is part of a broader 6-month ethnographic project about how sustainable imaginaries changed within a French business school. As this illustration is about a school who has already started developing a new imaginary (the Total Recycling school), this section of the interview first focused on the materializing of the new imaginary and later on the effect of this new imaginary on the school.

In the first part of the dialog, Claire explains how Matthieu (the CEO) tried to change the wording of the mission statement, which drove her "insane" because it would have undermined the new imaginary. In the second part, she explains how this change eventually failed and how the new mission statement opened different kinds of avenues for new imaginaries and their materializations.

Claire: And this is why... this is a really funny anecdote. We talked about this new mission statement, about how we have to write our new objectives. I don't know if you've read that statement, because it goes into our legal status. It's supposed to be the prism through which we make every decision that we take in the school. And the phrase, I don't know if I have it all memorized, but it's like: "give an answer through research and teaching to the environmental, social, and economic transition into a more sustainable, just, peaceful, and responsible World" [originally in French, author's translation]. That last part is kind of blah... But those three words [point to] solutions to the ecological, social and economic problems. And so when we did this huge conference, press conference, the thing was voted on. The committee accepted this mission statement. So

there's nothing in it that wasn't made for the strategy. And so when Matthieu [the CEO] went to prepare his slides, he himself changed the mission statement. This is like your sacred sentence! You can't change it, just like in the Bible. And he changed it. And I was sitting there as they were doing this presentation and watching the slide... and I started going insane! I started sending texts to everybody, like, "what did he just do! He can't do that!" It's like, you know, he took out economics...

In this first section of the interview, Claire presents how after much work by her and other internal activists, the new school's mission statement included environmental, social, and economic objectives. Linking to the tactics presented in the previous section (see Table A.1), the meeting Claire refers to pertains to the last step in materializing an imaginary—the legitimation by the decision makers of the school (“the thing was voted on. The committee accepted this mission statement”). But it was in this precise moment that a decision-maker (in this case, the CEO), still holding on to the old imaginary, tried to modify the wording to keep at least something of the previous imaginary (“he took out economics”). This kind of action belongs to the tactics that co-opt significations to block the instituting imaginary. The importance and criticality of this moment is well emphasized by Claire, when she mentions that the text which materializes the imaginary is “sacred [...] just like in the Bible”. She also highlights the importance of creating coalitions (“the committee accepted this mission statement”), as in the last moment reactionary decision-makers may resort to extreme measures to maintain the status quo. Fortunately for Claire, this last-minute change came too late.

Claire: He took out the “economic” word, which I always say is the elephant in the room in CSR. Nobody wants to treat the economic problem, which is THE root of the problem. Yeah. And he said “for a technological, ecologic, and social transition”. And I just went insane! I went insane. So he had to change it because it was already... it was already in the law. He had to change his own statement back. And he went back on his LinkedIn

page and took it all out because I was like, “you’re going to get in big trouble... You saw what happened to Danone? This is even worse. We haven’t even started. And you’re already changing the words.” He was like “Oops, I didn’t know... it just sounded more relevant”. And I’m like, “No, because YOU are in denial of what the real problem is!” No, I didn’t say that to him because with that he would... He gets really angry at me when I challenge him.

The central struggle between the old and the new imaginary becomes clear in this section. A crucial aspect of the new imaginary was articulating the business school’s economic aspect to a sustainable transition. Taking it away was ignoring the “elephant in the room” and by a simple wave of the pen, hypocritically obscuring a central signification while still claiming the benefits of an “ecological” declaration. But this modification came in too late. “It was already in the law”, a law created by the text object signed by the whole committee, which legitimized the new imaginary. But Claire clearly was afraid that something extraordinary could happen. Fortunately for her, she and her team managed to tie up all the stages to shield the new imaginary against last minute changes of mind.

The final dialog between Claire and Matthieu showcase one of the main complications for internal activists: the power asymmetry between them and decision makers. The CEO has the leeway to say “Oops”, while if the situation was the inverse, Claire would have probably been in much trouble from trying to change that word (“he really gets angry at me when I challenge him”). It is in this asymmetry that reside the importance of creating spaces and time for change, networks, and coalitions (with decision makers and activist networks), and legitimizing objects. The blocking action was unsuccessful and with a new materialized imaginary, Claire started exploring the possibilities it created inside the organization.

Claire: And so [the new mission statement] has had an impact on the way... even the

way researchers are thinking about this. Because we had a meeting around the Louvre Business School's Sustainable Gathering [a public sustainability event organized by Louvre Business School]. Yeah. And we've been able to mobilize all the research chairs around that for the first time. So this is real interdisciplinary work within the school. And we were in this one meeting and I was hearing all these researchers talk about the mission statement, so we can talk... It kind of empowered them and liberated them to go even more clearly on the topic now. And so I wondered how many... how many researchers were just sitting back going, "I have to respect the norm, because that's what the norm is and I can't be more radical in my thinking." So I think that that will help our researchers feel a little more... for those who are not stuck in that mindset.

In this final section, Claire presents the impact of materializing a new imaginary in the business school. The first effect is how organizational members think differently with a new imaginary ("the way researchers are thinking about his"). As described in this paper's theoretical section, imaginaries underlie how people understand, act, and think. So, by changing the imaginary, people in the organization could started thinking differently. A second effect was how the new imaginary enabled connections between previously disconnected school chairs "for the first time", supporting the creation of previously non-existent networks—the creation of "real interdisciplinary work". As a third effect, it created a new medium and object for communication, "so we can talk". By materializing a signification into a tangible text, discussions can be focused and aligned in a same direction, in this case towards a more sustainable world. Finally, this section shows how a new imaginary modifies the organizational actions. By presenting how researchers were probably "sitting back" and respecting "the norm" because they couldn't be more "radical" in their thinking, Claire directly connects the new imaginary to the actions taken by the researchers.

In this short illustration, it is possible to observe both the end phase of a materialization process and the effects that a new imaginary has on the thinking, communicating, and acting in an organization. As a final thought, the new imaginary not only changed the present thinking and actions, but possibly became itself a springboard for the development of new imaginaries, based on new ways of thinking, communicating, and acting.

2.7 Discussion and future research agenda

The lack of alternatives to address the climate change is explored in the first research question of this paper—how is the creation of new imaginaries blocked within organizations? This question is addressed theoretically by showing how organizations block the creative imaginary process—the dynamic relationship between the instituting and the instituted imaginary—. They block the instituted by reinforcing too vigorously the current materialized imaginary and the instituting by discouraging creative imagination. Additionally, the paper identifies internal activists—organizational members vested in changing their organization based on social and ecological values—as internal actors that may help to overcome this blocking, as they have access to people and resources that external actors (like social movements) do not.

How may the creative imaginary process be unblocked within organizations by internal activists? This second research question is addressed by demonstrating that internal activists need to liberate both the instituting and the instituted imaginary. Internal activists unblock the instituting by fostering creative imagination and unblock the instituted imaginary by dismantling the current imaginary and gathering the resources to materialize a new imaginary. Internal activists may foster creative imagination by protecting the organizational capacity to imagine, defending new significations, and safeguarding organizational members from coercion. Internal activists may dismantle the materialized imaginary through critique and materialize the new imaginary by getting the necessary resources and legitimacy. The internal

activist tactics and their effects are examined with an illustration, which shows how a sustainability manager in a French business school legitimized a new sustainable imaginary and how in turn this new imaginary supported new ways of organizational thinking, communicating, and acting. This paper makes two contributions. First, to the climate imaginaries literature by showing how unsustainable imaginaries are held from within organizations by blocking the creative imaginary process. Additionally, by showing how internal activists may unblock the creative imaginary process through a range of tactics. Second, this paper contributes to the internal activists literature by adding new direct effects (the unblocking of the creative imaginary process) and indirect effects (the possibility of creating new climate imaginaries). Additionally, it contributes by showing how internal activists, by liberating the creative imaginary process, may overcome some of the tensions felt in their position.

2.7.1 Contributions to the climate imaginaries literature

Regarding the climate imaginaries literature, this paper responds to the question of how to imagine new alternatives to address climate change (Wright et al., 2013, p. 649), by theorizing how organizations hold unsustainable imaginaries in organizations by blocking the creative imaginary process. This perspective complements the idea of how unsustainable imaginaries are held in place in the economic, political, and cultural sphere through value regimes and imaginary lock-ins (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2021). While this research stream focuses mainly on how imaginaries are held in place, this paper contributes by showing how internal activists may free the hold that unsustainable imaginaries have within organizations. This opens a future research agenda for exploring how value regimes and imaginary lock-ins may be unblocked by social movements or other actors.

The imaginaries literature considers the lack of new imaginaries as a reduction of the institution to the instituted and as a neglect of the instituting imaginary (Bouilloud et al., 2020; Klein,

2015). Also, this literature proposes that unsustainable imaginaries are kept in place by means of narratives and discourses (Perey, 2013). This paper develops the idea of a reduction to the instituted and shows how this is done by an overly vigorous reinforcement of the instituted imaginary through stifling critique and obstructing the materialization of the new imaginary. Additionally, the paper expands the idea of a neglect of the instituting by showing how the instituting is blocked by means of restricting the collective capacity to imagine, by co-opting alternative significations, and by coercion of organizational members. Finally, this paper shows that while narratives and discourses may be used to hold an old imaginary in place, they may also be used by internal activists to support critique (e.g., through alternative histories (De Cock et al., 2019) and counter stories (Gayá Wicks & Phillips, 2016)) and to legitimize new imaginaries (Daudigeos, 2013; Landau et al., 2014; Sonenshein, 2016).

Finally, in the climate imaginaries literature researchers have shown how different imaginaries give rise to different types of organizations and organizational actions (Lê, 2013; Roux-Rosier et al., 2018). For instance, different understandings of permaculture as an ecological imaginary may lead to a set of practices for local ecological living, to a life philosophy leading to a global community, and to a social movement fighting for environmental justice (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018). Different climate imaginaries may also create different organizational responses, ranging from “no response” to “lobbying” to change these imaginaries (Lê, 2013). This paper presents the relationship between imaginaries and organizations in the opposite direction: how certain organizational actions (e.g., coercion and stifling critique) obstruct the creation of new imaginaries and how other organizational actions (e.g., connecting to activist networks and developing counter stories) liberate the creation of new imaginaries. This perspective opens the research agenda to study which additional organizational actions may support (or not) the creation of new imaginaries.

2.7.2 Contributions to the internal activists literature

The internal activists literature (for a review see Briscoe & Gupta, 2016) has been engaged for a time in discussing the direct and indirect effects of internal activism to achieve social (Kellogg, 2011; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Scully & Segal, 2002) and environmental goals (Rothenberg & Levy, 2012; Wright et al., 2012). This paper contributes to this literature by showing how internal activists may directly impact the organization by unblocking the creative imaginary process. Through an interplay of symbolic and material tactics, internal activists are able to liberate the creative imaginary process (a direct effect) and loosen the hold of unsustainable imaginaries within organizations (an indirect effect).

This literature also explores how internal activists are usually subject to difficult, contradictory, and emotionally charged tensions (e.g., Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Wright et al., 2012). This is usually attributed to internal activists having “two hats”, i.e., endorsing an organization while also wanting to change it (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Meyerson & Scully, 1995), and to the contradictions existing between business and the environment (Daudigeos & Valiorgue, 2009; Wright et al., 2012). On the one hand, this paper uses the literature on imaginaries to show that the tensions felt by internal activists arise from the dynamic between the instituting and instituted imaginary and the efforts required to counter the inertia of the current instituted imaginary. This means that from an imaginary perspective, it is not that internal activists “gained” a second hat; rather, that organizational members seeing organizations as static “lost” a hat. The contribution of taking an imaginary perspective is to recover the dynamic constitution of organizations and institutions by reinstating the dynamic between instituting and instituted (see also Bouilloud et al., 2020; Klein, 2015). On the other hand, this paper shows that the internal activists’ tensions also arise from the struggle between groups wanting to keep old imaginaries in place (blocking the creative imaginary process) and the internal activists wanting to facilitate the creation of new imaginaries. Taking an imaginary

perspective contributes by differentiating legitimate from illegitimate internal activist tensions. While the first source of tensions (i.e., that of having “two hats”) is to be expected from the tensions inherent in creating new imaginaries, the second source (i.e., the business–environment contradiction) is illegitimate because the creative imaginary process is artificially blocked to keep an old imaginary in place. As such, the tensions felt by internal activists may be diminished by unblocking the creative imaginary process, although the degree is limited by the power asymmetry in organizations that favour decision-makers to block the creative imaginary process. Nevertheless, this paper shows that internal activists have in their hand the tools and tactics (e.g., to divide the opposition) to emancipate themselves from these tensions, at least temporarily or until the organizational power distribution changes. This emancipatory possibility could lead to future research on how to maintain a creative imaginary process unblocked, for instance through an opening/closing dynamic (Gond & Nyberg, 2017, p. 1137), through digital and physical spaces (Husted & Plesner, 2017, p. 663), or by sharing internal activist tactics through critical performativity engines (Leca, Gond, & Barin Cruz, 2014).

In sum, this paper posits that even in the face of a deep environmental crisis, internal activists may help to stop organizational actions that damage the environment by liberating the creative imaginary process, leading to the creation of new imaginaries that may establish a healthier relationship with our planet.

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Chapter 3 — "Important for You to be There": Employee Activism and the Dialectics of Researcher–Practitioner Collaborations

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This paper is published. Please cite as: Ramirez, M. F. & Islam, G. (2022). "Important for you to be there": Employee activism and the dialectics of researcher--practitioner collaborations. *Human Resource Management Journal*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12474>

Abstract: The current study examines researcher–practitioner collaborations in the context of employee activism, a context in which the role of reflexivity and theorization relate in unique ways. Specifically, we examine the collaboration between researchers and a practitioner sustainability manager, in the context of an ongoing organizational sustainability campaign at a French business school. Within the context of an ethnographic, participant observer study, we

examine how the roles of “theory” and “practice” are distributed in dynamic ways, and how, across the study, roles are challenged and inverted, oscillating in dialectical moments which we term “praxis encounters”. We contribute to growing debates around academic–practitioner collaborations by showing how the roles of researchers and practitioners evolve dialectically over the course of a project, how employee activism may be studied using collaborative approaches, and how HR managers may support employee activism. We call for future research about the variety of such dynamics across diverse contexts.

Keywords: business schools, employee engagement, organisational change, qualitative research methods, researcher–practitioner collaboration, role clarity, sustainability

3.1 Introduction

Author 2: If you take me into the mix I’m gonna have a weird position, like... what do I get to say here... it’s like a Russian doll of analytical levels...

Atalanta: Yeah, totally! So, how are you gonna write a paper about that? It would be a paper just defining the difficulty around defining what we mean.

Increasing scholarly attention has been given to employees’ engagements with social activism from within their organizations (e.g., Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Alternatively termed “employee activism” (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016) “tempered radicalism” (Meyerson, 2001; Meyerson & Scully, 1995) or “embedded activism” (Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2021), employees’ social-change initiatives confront myriad obstacles within organizations, from resource limitations to political opposition. The challenges of employee activism can lead employees to adopt a double consciousness, alternatively described as wearing “two hats” (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016) and being “activists in a suit” (Carollo

& Guerci, 2018); that is, organizational insiders looking beyond the organization toward wider social purposes.

Employee activism is an important, if understudied, issue within human resources. As Briscoe and Gupta (2016) describe in their review of activism in organizations, human resource managers' activities shape (promoting or deflecting) activist practices in organizations, and relations of hierarchy and internal organization shape how activism unfolds (Morril, Zald, & Rao, 2003). Schifeling and Soderstrom (2021) note how internal activists can be instrumental in mobilizing organizational members vis-à-vis social challenges, and Carrington, Zwick and Neville (2019) note that the everyday activist practices of employees and managers are an underexplored source of social responsibility within organizations. Despite these promising avenues, Briscoe and Gupta's (2016, p. 46) review notes that research on internal activism is rare and emergent, posing significant opportunities to "better understand insider activists".

Specifically, promoting human resources scholarship around employee activism can benefit from methodological developments in scholar-practitioner collaborations (see Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, Chapter 3) where researchers "work closely with" engaged practitioners within organizations (Reedy & King, 2019, p. 564). Problematizing the "inside-outside" boundary between researchers and practitioners, such developments have largely focused on researchers that occupy (or can attain) "insider" access (e.g., Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012), bringing them closer to practitioners. More relevant to internal activism, however, some argue that the increased reflexivity of knowledge-worker populations and their exposure to academic theory has effectively turned practitioners into theorists of themselves, conferring an outsider status to the inside (Cassell, Radcliffe, & Malik, 2020; Islam, 2015). Despite this reconceptualized role of the practitioners' reflexivity, as Bartunek and Rynes (2014, p. 1194) note, "There has been very little empirical study of dialectics associated with academic-practitioner relationships".

Applied to employee activism, this methodological point takes particular nuances as researchers encounter practitioners who task themselves with shaping the organization's social relevance or impact. "Co-operative" methodologies such as participative action research (e.g., Reason & Bradbury, 2001), where practitioners "participate actively [...] throughout the research process" (Whyte, 1991, p. 20), complicate the lines between insider and outsider, as well as those between theory and practice. This potential blurring raises conceptual questions (around how to change an organization from the "inside" or how internal actors can shape the "outside") and methodological questions (around the relation between theory and empirics). It has been discussed, for instance, in ethnographic embedding of researchers within reflexive (or "para-ethnographic") settings where participants reflexively theorize and critique their contexts (Hill et al, 2021; Islam, 2015). Such para-ethnographic settings involve moments in which practitioners engage in critical reflection on their practice, while researchers study the lived experience of on-the-ground struggles, giving rise to complex boundary negotiations and surprising role reversals. To begin to understand the challenges and opportunities of the overlapping and dialectical processes that mark such situations, we ask "how are knowledge and practice shaped by the dynamics of researcher–practitioner collaborations, in contexts of employee activism"?

To explore this question, we examine a case study of activism around environmental sustainability involving a sustainability manager within a private business school. The first author engaged in an ethnographic field study of the sustainability program, where the line between researcher and practitioner was constantly put into question by the researcher's support for the practitioner's activism and by the practitioner's academic knowledge and ongoing theorization of the collaboration. In this context, a dialectic of theory and practice persistently punctuated the research–activism boundary, resulting in shifts to both the academic and practical projects of each actor. Drawing lessons from this case, we theorize how researcher–

practitioner collaborations can go beyond simply “instrumentalizing” research for practical impact, to rethink dominant concepts of both theory and practice.

The remainder of this paper will unfold as follows. First, after a brief review of research on employee activism and HRM, we explore some of the methodological dilemmas that result from collaboration with a problematized researcher–practitioner boundary. Next, exploring our case, we examine how these dilemmas were worked out in practice, and to what effects for the organization and the research process. Finally, we discuss the implications of this reshuffling of researcher and practitioner roles, laying out an agenda for researcher–practitioner collaborations in which both theory and practice are challenged through boundary-crossing “praxis encounters”.

3.1.1 Employee Activism and HRM

Organizational scholars have increasingly examined how employees and other organizational members engage in activism within their organizations (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Girschik, 2020; Meyerson, 2001; Wright, Nyberg, & Grant, 2012). Sometimes referred to as “insider activists” (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Girschik, 2020) or “tempered radicals” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), organizational members must negotiate the position of being insiders while challenging the status quo. The resulting tensions create paradoxical situations in which different and possible clashing demands make it difficult for such individuals to situate themselves unproblematically within their organizations (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Carollo & Guerci, 2018). Both members and critics, such individuals challenge the insider-outsider distinction, leading to a variety of individual and organizational consequences that have come under increased scrutiny (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016).

Recent employee activism scholarship has examined diverse contexts, from those involving unsanctioned or extra-organizational activities to those in which activism is built into the

organizational role. Classical studies such as Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) study of the New York Port Authority show how employees insisted on socially beneficial activity outside of their mandates, to cultivate a sense of ethical identity. Similarly, Creed's (2003) study of gay and lesbian Protestant ministers explored members' voice around organizationally stigmatized topics. By contrast, recent work around corporate sustainability managers (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Wright et al., 2012) involve organizationally mandated activists, whose job roles include contradictory aspects or who are located at the fault lines of different organizational or institutional arrangements (e.g., Battilana & Dorado, 2010).

The HRM literature contains diverse concepts that resonate with employee activism although the term itself appears infrequently. For instance, discussion of HR managers as change agents has been common since Ulrich's (1997) classical study on the topic. Subsequent literature has developed this notion into the study of change agents as "champions", "adapters", and "synergists" (Caldwell, 2001). Employee activism characterizes roles related to organizational social change, such as diversity managers (Jewson & Mason, 1986; Kirton, Greene, & Dean, 2007). Despite an increasing awareness of HRM's role in organizational change, however, and despite recent literature acknowledging activism as legitimate protest against injustices (Kelloway, Francis, Prosser, & Cameron, 2010), employee activism has often been framed in terms of counterproductive or disruptive behavior (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

One exception to this negative framing may be found in the emerging literature on HRM and sustainability (e.g., Karatas-Ozkan et al, 2022), which has emphasized the activist role of HR managers and employees as change agents from within (Blazejewski, Gräf, Buhl, & Dittmer, 2018; Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). Such scholarship suggests that rather than suppressing employee activism, HR managers can improve their organizations by developing employees' activist motivations and talents. In this capacity, how can HR managers work with activist researchers to further their social missions provides a promising avenue of exploration.

At present, despite the growing recognition of the activist roles of organizational insiders, there has been less research addressing the potential role of collaborations around activism and the methodological challenges around studying activism in the workplace.

3.1.2 Employee Activism as a Methodological Issue

Given the increasing interest in employee activism and its potential role in organizations' social missions, it is intuitive that managing employee activists would be an emerging topic in HRM. Less obvious, however, are the methodological implications of employee activism and the questions it raises for qualitative research design and analysis. Specifically, while qualitative researchers have increasingly attended to issues around practitioner reflexivity as a source of theoretical insight (e.g., Cassell et al., 2020; Islam, 2015), the fact that practitioners may have histories of struggle from within their own organizations or carry mandates to change the very structures that employ them, are rarely considered in their impacts on the qualitative research process.

Specifically, the tendency to consider organizational members as belonging to a "sample" representing an organization or as informants within an organization's "culture" may obscure internal struggles within organizations and overestimate the cohesion of organizational cultures. It may also reinforce a false dichotomy between those who are inside the organization (practitioners) and those who are outside (researchers), an epistemically marked distinction through which the perspectives of each party are interpreted and analyzed. Regarding employee activism as a methodological issue within HRM research raises the possibility of revisiting this distinction and reframing it in new ways.

Recent literature in contemporary ethnography has focused on revising conceptions of researchers and participants to account for the critical and political positions of insiders (for a review see Islam, 2015). Referred to as "para-ethnography" (Holmes & Marcus, 2006; Islam,

2015) such research integrates the informant's reflexivity, particularly where, immersed in the knowledge society, informants are steeped in formalized theory and anecdotal evidence and can develop sophisticated conceptions of their social systems (for related developments around collaborative ethnography see Bath, 2009; Sykes & Treleaven, 2009; van Marrewijk, Veenswijk, & Clegg, 2010). Participants' ability to partially adopt an ethnographic position (thus the term "para-ethnography") arises from the "pockets of reflexivity" generated by the displacement between the practitioner's position and the organizational culture (Islam, 2015, p. 239). Para-ethnography finds its ideal model in internal activism, as members engage in reflexivity to analyze their organization to promote change (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Studying internal activism involves working with this enhanced reflexivity and thus changes the relative positions of researcher and informant.

The issue of researcher-participant boundaries resonates well with literature around researcher-practitioner collaboration, including collaborative management research (Adler, Shani, & Styhre, 2004; Shani, Mohrman, Pasmore, Stymne, & Adler, 2008), action research (Coghlan, 2011; Zhang, Levenson, & Crossley, 2015), mode 2 research (Guerci, Radaelli, & Shani, 2019), insider-outsider research (Bartunek & Louis, 1996) and clinical inquiry/research (Schein, 2013). Each of these research streams involves researcher-practitioner collaborations to develop practical and theoretical knowledge. Despite its diversity, these streams converge on the goal of connecting practitioners and researchers, often involving researchers embedding themselves in practice and practitioners in the research process (Guerci et al., 2019; Mohrman & Shani, 2008). But given the distinct backgrounds, expertise, and professional discourses of researchers and participants (Kieser & Leiner, 2012), collaboration is fraught with dilemmas (e.g., Pedersen & Olesen, 2008) and failure (e.g., Phillips, Olesen, Scheffmann-Petersen, & Nordentoft, 2018). This has led some authors to declare that "the success or failure of an action research venture often depends on what happens at the beginning of the inquiry process" (Gayá

Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 243). In particular, creating a collaborative space and establishing a relational dynamic are important factors for subsequent collaboration (Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009; Guerci et al., 2019).

How researchers and practitioners define themselves against each other, weigh up each other's positions, and decide where they can and cannot share ground are important yet understudied aspects of collaborative research. More pointedly, how each position is created dialectically in relation to the other (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014), that is, how each is positioned in a "struggle among discourses and practices" (Mumby, 2005, p. 19), and how their relation can create new possibilities for either side, are important issues for exploration. This is the concern that motivates our research question, "how are knowledge and practice shaped by the dynamics of researcher–practitioner collaborations, in contexts of employee activism"?

Research on employee activists provides an ideal place to examine the dynamics of researcher–practitioner collaborations, precisely because it is a point at which practitioners are struggling against their own organizational limitations, and in which researchers are trying to understand grounded attempts at change, resistance, or critique, while supporting these actions but without being directly involved in them. In these moments, researchers and practitioners may come to see themselves reflected in each other's concerns; what happens in such encounters may illuminate the relationship between research and practice in new ways.

3.2 Materials & Methods

3.2.1 Site, Background and Data Collection

Our study took place at Olympia Business School, a French business school founded in the 1980's with around 8,000 students and 600 faculty. Olympia began to prioritize sustainability around 2010, including its current "No Pollution" project and a series of sustainability-oriented actions such as reducing waste, providing eco-friendly transport and creating faculty working

groups around sustainability in pedagogy and research. Sustainability initiatives include staff, faculty and students, and some of them are channeled through research chairs focused on the environmental crisis.

The current business school context was ideal for our research question, given that practice and theory are located literally in the same building, with administrative practice and faculty-led theory crossing at multiple points. The current paper is part of a broader project which sought to study how business schools translate the environmental crisis into action. One part of this project studied sustainability managers' struggles to make their business schools more sustainable. Having to mobilize the whole organization to align the sustainability and traditional business discourses, these actors work across different discourses and interests (cf. Battilana & Lee, 2014). In our context, the negotiation between economic and sustainable performance, and theoretical and empirical knowledge production, presented a fertile context for studying the dynamics between theory and practice. As such, studying the relationship between the fieldworker and sustainability manager offers the opportunity to examine the relationship between researchers and practitioners.

We focus on a series of encounters with Atalanta, Olympia Business School's sustainability manager. She began working in the quality department of the school until she decided to focus on Olympia's sustainability issues and has subsequently been the main protagonist of the projects described above, working in conjunction with voluntary members of the organization and recently with a full-time collaborator. The second author introduced the fieldworker to Atalanta in 2019, in the context of a beginning-of-year sustainability project. Atalanta agreed to collaborate in a study of about 3 months of intensive fieldworking, including shadowing, meetings participation and interviews (which later continued in the form of informal discussions, committee participation and more general common involvement in the sustainability programs). During this time, Atalanta also served as a key informant in orienting

the fieldworker to the school's projects and in introducing the fieldworker to a broader network of actors, both within and outside the school, who were involved in sustainability projects.

During the data collection period, the first author (hereafter termed "fieldworker"), collected ethnographic data arising from shadowing, formal and informal conversations (Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach, & Cunliffe, 2014), and participation in organizational events and meetings (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). As described below, a more passive observation role was soon replaced by a more active and interactive participation in the sustainability programs. The early meetings revolved around understanding the particularities of the school's management of the programs, their history and challenges. They also provided a forum to build rapport and trust between the fieldworker and practitioner, through sharing experiences and informal conversations in between meetings (Humphreys, Brown, & Hatch, 2003). The shadowing was done mainly in meetings between Atalanta and other organizational members, related to projects on pedagogy and research, the development of new initiatives (e.g., a sustainability think tank) and the coordination of work groups (e.g., focusing on recycling, mobility, etc.). Finally, Atalanta's interaction with external stakeholders was observed during a seminar of higher education sustainability managers. The different characteristics of these meetings allowed the authors to attain varying perspectives about Atalanta's role at Olympia Business School, to talk about different projects of the school and to discuss their ongoing collaboration.

In the context of the current research question around collaborations, we foregrounded the interactions between the fieldworker and sustainability manager, placing in the background the specificities of the sustainability program and its dynamics. We thus include data in the form of dialogues about the process itself, in which the parties reflexively make sense of their own projects, their roles and their collaboration. All data were recorded and transcribed using automated software, and the first author manually verified the accuracy of the transcription. All the personal meetings with Atalanta were in English, although French terms or expressions

were often scattered throughout the conversation. Field notes were also taken during and after the meetings, to capture the fieldworker's thoughts and insights and to inform the interpretation of these interviews.

3.2.2 Analytical Strategy

While our broader data analysis was aimed at understanding the work of sustainability managers more generally, for the purposes of the current study we focused on the researcher–practitioner relationship. To understand this relationship, we drew upon the history of encounters between the first author and the practitioner. These were analyzed in concert with the second author, who provided critical questioning and theoretical interpretation at a “distance” (Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009), and with the practitioner, with whom the encounters were compared and interpreted. This three-way analytical strategy positioned the fieldwork in-between the spheres of theoretical construction and practical interpretation, such that the resulting findings emerged out of an ongoing negotiation with both the practitioner and the academic co-author.

The resulting framing of researcher–practitioner encounters involved examining different moments of contact—which we term “praxis encounter”—in which both parties were faced with open questions about their respective roles, their relation to the work of sustainability, and the production of new ideas. By referring to these as “praxis”, we emphasize both their critical aspect in the perception of structural contradictions and tensions, and their practical aspect in working to address those tensions (for an elaboration of the praxis concept in management see Foster & Wiebe, 2010). Moreover, by referring to “moments” we mean to highlight both the temporal flow of interactions between the researcher and practitioner, which involved early, middle and later stages of encounter, and the notion of “moments” as described within critical theory as instantiations of an unfolding dialectic (see Adorno, 1990). Such moments involve

critical points at which conceptual and practical impasses are uncovered, tensions are revealed, and new questions become apparent (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018). By emphasizing moments of encounter and their unfolding over the collaboration process, i.e., the praxis encounter, we aim to contribute to a dialectical view of researcher–practitioner encounter in which the empirical and the conceptual aspects of collaboration appear as intertwined. The three moments revealed in our analysis— collaboration in the practice space, collaboration in the theory space, and collaboration in the theory–practice space—are illustrated and discussed below.

3.3 Results

As noted above, the practitioner–researcher relationship emerged out of a series of interactions, which may be understood as an ongoing dialectic around three progressive collaboration moments which we term the praxis encounter. We illustrate these moments in Figure 3.1 below.

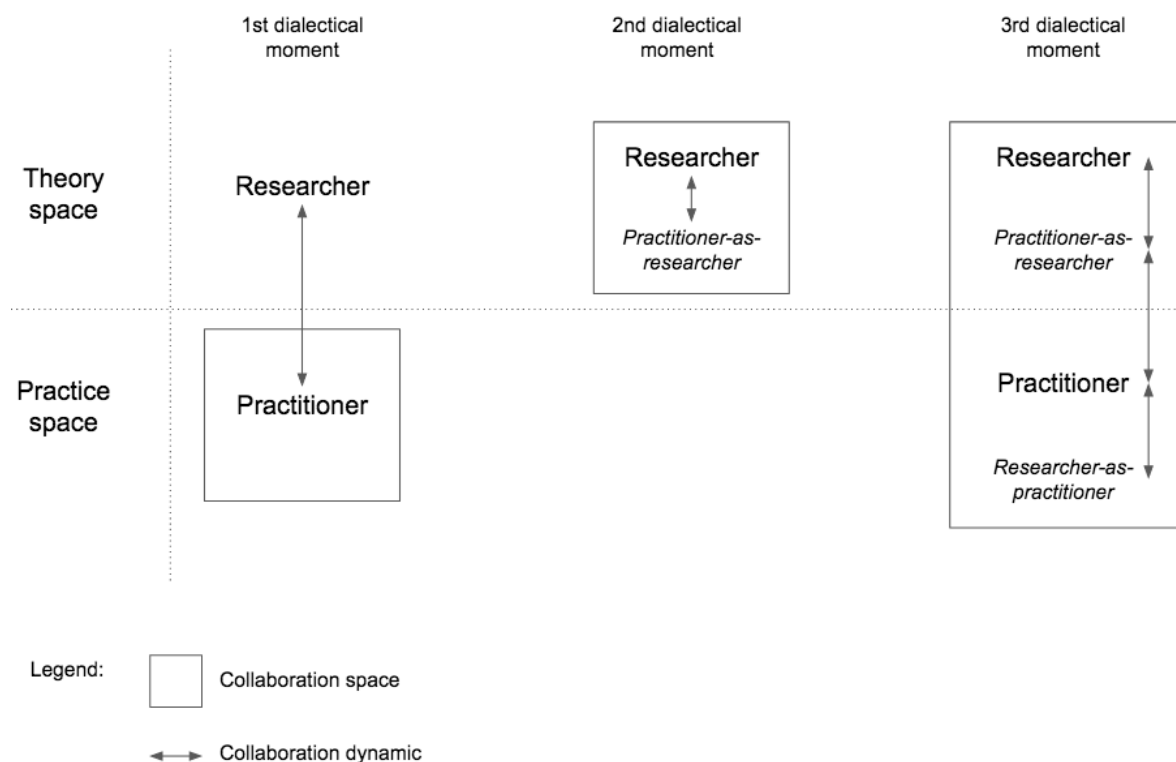


Figure 3.1. *The praxis encounter—The development of collaboration spaces and dynamics in*

three dialectical moments.

3.3.1 First Dialectical Moment—Collaboration in the Practice Space

Atalanta (0:10): Okay, tell me what do you want to do, how you want us to proceed, I need you to give me kind of a framework.

Author 1 (0:17): Okay, so I thought of... [two] points. One was what you offered: review your calendar. So I can know who you work with, with which groups. At the same time, it'd be nice for me to get... an overview of how you are framing your role.

The initial fieldworker-practitioner encounter took place in a meeting room at Olympia Business School, with the intent of defining the terms around which the fieldworker (Author 1) and the practitioner (Atalanta) would collaborate over approximately three months. These terms involved a collaboration dynamic (i.e., defining how they would relate to each other) as well as the creation of the collaborative space delimiting what will be the topics for discussion. Discussions on what would be the collaboration dynamics and the collaboration space thus provided the framework for the initial fieldworker–practitioner encounter.

The collaboration dynamic was invoked by the practitioner asking “what do you want to do?”, “how to proceed?”, “give me a kind of framework”. These questions configured the permissible actions in the collaboration, the process of unfolding of these actions, and the characteristics and limits of the relationship. In the above excerpt, the practitioner offers the fieldworker the opportunity to set the collaboration dynamic; instead, he engages in defining the collaboration space.

The collaboration space was configured by the fieldworker as a practitioner space. This was done by asking how Atalanta used her time, who she worked with, and how she saw her organizational role. Positioning the space in terms of these issues, the fieldworker framed what

would constitute an overall understanding of the actions, actors, and structure in which Atalanta operated, establishing that the collaboration would be located “there”.

While not planned as such, this initial short dialog set into motion a particular way of exploring the theory–practice relationship. The fieldworker’s theory work is represented as applied externally over the practitioner field, while the collaboration dynamic remains largely undefined (see Figure 3.1: 1st dialectical moment). This was addressed subsequently in a dialogue in which the practitioner suggested “therapy” as the collaboration dynamic.

Author 1: So when should we meet?

Atalanta: Yeah, every day, every day, and we should have a timekeeper; we should have something.

Author 1: I’ll try to keep time...

Atalanta: It’s fine. It’s because I look... Like I said, it’s my form of therapy. I don’t see shrinks anymore. I just talk to people about what I do.

The therapist–patient metaphor opened unexpected possibilities for collaboration. On the one hand, the therapist is expected to help the patient make sense of her experiences (echoing the previous dialog: “give me a framework”) and take responsibility for the relationship (“I’ll try to keep time”). Moreover, the patient commits to open her experiences (“talk [...] about what I do”). A therapeutic frame sets the collaboration dynamic.

Given the busy schedule and high-pressure environment of the practitioner’s role, the insistence on meeting “every day” surprised the fieldworker, as did the apparent contradiction of combining this request with time limits (“have a timekeeper”). The therapeutic frame resolved this apparent contradiction, expressing a wish to keep an ongoing therapeutical relationship with periodical meetings. Yet the therapeutic dynamic loses its *raison d’être* absent an external

(and subjectively challenging) experience to discuss within the session. The fieldworker and practitioner were thus committed by this collaboration dynamic to maintain a contradictory relationship: a short-term escape from a challenging reality and the perturbation of traditional ethnographic fieldwork, illustrated in the next dialog where the researcher shared his intention of studying the surrounding stakeholders.

Author 1: I would like to see all the stakeholders around you and how you're relating to them.

Atalanta: I don't know...It's gonna be insane! Yeah, no, no, no, it's...

Author 1: I'm sensing that! So I think it would be cool. It would be cool for you to see it, to see how...

Atalanta: That is totally what I've been trying to...sometimes I'll sit down and I'll start them. I have a few of them. But they never go anywhere because I just get...

Author 1: Depressed?

Atalanta: Pulled out...well I kind of get depressed because, oh my God there's just too... I feel like I'm doing too much and...so I stop looking at it and just go back to what I was doing.

Here, the “therapy” collaboration dynamic shows its limits, as the fieldworker presents an expansionist vision for data collection and theoretical construction (“map all the stakeholders”). What seemed intuitive from the lens of fieldwork—including multiple informants to avoid missing information—appeared as a source of stress from the practitioner’s perspective (“it’s gonna be insane!”). As she explained, the problem was not that mapping multiple stakeholders was impossible, but that seeing herself within a multiplicity of “stakeholders” reminded the practitioner that she was “doing too much”, triggering the sense of being “pulled out”. The

dynamic thus poses expansion versus selection and detachment versus involvement, as choices within the early moments of collaboration.

The collaboration dynamic is also evident in this dialog, as the researcher assumes the role of “therapist” and the practitioner as “patient”. The fieldworker seeks uncommon situations to allow the “patient” to explore new possibilities (mapping all the stakeholders would be “cool for you to see it”). The practitioner reveals her experiences with stakeholder-exploration (“I’ve been trying too”), reflecting on her experiences (“I just get [...] pulled out” “I feel like I’m doing too much”). This collaboration dynamic allowed the fieldworker to learn about the practitioner’s experiences while the latter received support and a sounding board in return.

An interesting result of the therapeutic dynamic were the ambiguities around bias and sense-making it introduced. For instance, the fieldworkers’ unwitting projection of emotions onto the practitioner (“depressed?”), which slipped out in the flow of conversation, both suggests a “bias” and also a stimulus that opened a sense-making process by the practitioner. Putting a name on ambiguous feelings led to ongoing work by the practitioner to adapt or refute this interpretation, creating a reflexive process that aided in interpreting the employee activism.

In sum, in an initial dialectical moment, the how of collaboration was defined as “therapy” while the what of the study structured the content of the collaboration space. The apparent lack of interactional tensions at this point, as we will see, was not to last, although the collaborative space tensions were already apparent, arising between the fieldworkers’ desire for an expansive field of study and the practitioner’s desire to keep the scope small to avoid over-commitment, which configured this first dialectical moment. The increasing of these tensions would lead to the second dialectical moment.

3.3.2 Second Dialectical Moment—Collaboration in the Theory Space

As the tensions of the defined collaboration space arrangement became more apparent, a restructuring of the arrangement was triggered. In a subsequent meeting, involving both researchers and the practitioner, the context changed to an informal meeting outside of the Olympia Business School:

Atalanta: But I'm curious how [the Author 1] is going to turn this into...how he's going to delimit the research, how he's going to...identify the indicators...that things are integrated or not, what are they going to be, words? Are they going to be...Is it going to be an example of practice? Process? People? What what what what's your framework?

Author 1: Yeah, so I'm just thinking about it..."

In this brief interaction, the practitioner returns to the earlier tensions, highlighted in questions about how to “delimit the research” and “identify the indicators”. At this point, however, the questions extend into the ontology of theory and practice, about their status (“Words?”, “Practice?”, “Process? People?”) and integration.

Interestingly, these issues, which had previously been approached within the practice space, are displaced toward the theory space. This is done by interrogating the study design (“identify the indicators”), the theory–practice relation (“things are integrated or not”), and the construction of the theory space (“what are they going to be”). The final question (“what is your framework?”) shifted its meaning from the first dialectical moment—what was a framework for practice is now discussed as a framework for theory. In these interrogations, the research approach emerged as the object of definition and the practitioner shifted collaboration into that space (See Figure 3.1, 2nd dialectical moment).

Facing the creation of the theory space and of the practitioner's action within it (acting as a practitioner-as-researcher), the fieldworker was puzzled by the deviation from traditional qualitative research practices, in which theory arises in and after empirical encounters. He thus evades the interrogation ("I'm just thinking about it"), but the practitioner insists, and after a few unrelated exchanges, she returns to the topic.

Atalanta: So how are you going to define this study? What your... what word are you going to use, to identify how schools integrate sustainability?

Author 2: Well, that's for you to say because you're the truth in this study, right? [The Author 1] just has to reflect what you do.

Atalanta: (Laughs)

Author 2: You're the one that's generating the reality here.

Atalanta: But am I, really?

Author 2: I don't know!

Atalanta: A single voice in the mass of discourse

Atalanta restarts the conversation by recalling the tensions in the theory space: the research–practice limits (how to “define this study”) and its ontology (“what word are you going to use?”). More importantly, she reinforces the creation of the theory space. This time, the second author challenges this move by trying to shift the epistemic weight back to the practitioner space (“you’re the truth in this study, right?”). This statement re-establishes the classical research structure: the empirical field as source of truth and the researcher as reflection and interpretation.

The practitioner responds by laughing, after which the second author pushes the point (“you’re the one that’s generating the reality here”). Undaunted, the practitioner challenges this position

by taking the position of the questioner (“am I, really?”), eliciting an epistemic refusal by the researcher (“I don’t know!”). The proposed solution of “ontologizing” reality in the practitioner space failed as well and the tensions remain unresolved.

At this point, the practitioner’s intriguing response to this ongoing tension (“a single voice in the mass of discourse”) closes the exchange. As a problem of practice, this might be interpreted as highlighting the impossibility of shaping reality with only a single voice in a “mass of discourse”. As an epistemological issue, however, it highlights that establishing “reality” may not be possible from the single point of view (that of the practitioner). In the context of the dialogue, Atalanta seems to be insisting that the researcher take responsibility in contributing to reality and not watching aloof from the sidelines. A dilemma arose at this point. If both “reality” and its “discourses” depended on both sides of the theory–practice collaboration, the researchers were suddenly recast as actors and the practitioner as a theorist and ethnographer of her own (and the others’) experience. Worried by these implications, the second author continued with a revised strategy: changing the method.

Author 2: We’ll have to use some kind of haiku or something. Some alternative format or you know, I think this is what you study anyway. That’s the irony of it. It comes full circle. Yeah. Because you’re actually the theory...

Atalanta: Now I’m embodying it as we would say.

Author 2: Oddly. And that’s somehow very pertinent. That’s like the perfect performativity theory, which will then get passed through like different levels.

Atalanta: I wonder what the, the, the end result will be...

Author 2: A revolution

Atalanta: Right... or suicide.

Author 2: Yeah, I guess it depends on which tradition you're in...

Confronted with the theoretical and practical consequences of a jointly created reality (see also opening quotation of this paper) in the theory space, the second author jokingly suggests changing the research approach to “some kind of haiku”, i.e., a short, poetical, ambivalent statement to accommodate the practice–theory tensions. But in the middle of the sentence, Author 2 acknowledges the full extent of the contradiction: “you’re actually the theory”. The practitioner confirms that she is “embodying” theory. At this point, the initial theory–practice arrangement is acknowledged as a contradiction—in this new moment the roles are reversed, and by striving to maintain theory and practice separated the underlying tensions are laid bare. Finally, the second author attempts to transform the contradiction into an opportunity (“somehow very pertinent”), retaining a pathway to a more alternative researcher position by invoking avant-garde social theory (“like the perfect performativity theory”). But this attempt runs up against the bluntness of the practitioner response (“I wonder what [...] the end result will be”). Exaggerating ironically the practical consequences (“revolution”), he runs up against the equally ironic lack of practical success (“right... or suicide”). The method-reframing gambit fails and the theory–practice contradiction remains active.

As neither classical nor “alternative” methods seemed to address this theory–practice impasse, this second dialectical moment presents the “negative” of the first. In the previous moment and following the dialectical unfolding of thesis (positive)–antithesis (negative)–synthesis (new element), a “positive” collaboration was attempted, while the second moment acknowledged its contradictions, opening possibilities for a new arrangement. More than just an obstacle, the “negative” collaboration was marked by openness and the first joint interaction to resolve the contradiction. More importantly, it created the basis for the resolution of the contradiction in the third dialectical moment.

3.3.3. Third Dialectical Moment—Collaboration in the Theory–Practice space

The third dialectical moment corresponds to the encounter of theory and practice within an overlapping space, in which the division between the two has been replaced by what we term a “theory–practice space”. In this encounter, each actor oscillates between theorizing and practical application, maintaining the tension between the two, but adapting to it “dynamically” by alternating roles within the encounter. This third dialectical moment became apparent in a meeting between Atalanta and the first author one month later in Atalanta’s office, in the presence of her assistant and another staff member. This arrangement challenged the previous interaction routine, given that the conversation was in the presence of other colleagues in the context of the broader project of sustainability in Business Schools. The discussion revolved around “raising awareness”, a concept appearing throughout the broader sustainability project.

Atalanta: We’re in these discourse wars that are already doing damage to this...this fragile free space that we try to keep free, but it does...it does disservice...to our raising awareness. We’re not saying “this is what we’re talking about!”. “This is what...

Author 1: You invited me to a meeting, yes? Where you want to talk about some definitions? That’s next week.

Atalanta: Yeah, and that’s what I really want us to do: that we come up with some sort of common definition that not...that I didn’t create, that it’s not Atalanta again saying, you know...Because I have a global definition of something that I think could work, the one that we can just start hammering and sharing with the faculty especially: what is our definition of what are we doing in these work groups. What is sustainability. Are we going to use...what, what terms are we going to use. So I think it is really important for you to be there.

Author 1: Yeah, I’ll be there.

This dialog opened the practice space to include the fieldworker, establishing a new dialectical moment. Initially framing the situation as a war, it foregrounded the sense of urgency, the need to collaborate, and the possibility of alliances (“space we try to keep free”). Framed as an internal activist, it emphasized the struggle to raise awareness and change the current situation. But the first author intuited a second, less direct meaning, related to the fact that the “we” being affirmed included him.

The researcher remembered that Atalanta had invited him to a meeting to talk about “definitions” and sensing that he was being pulled into this “war”, into the practitioner space, he asked for further clarifications. Atalanta elaborated her intentions: she wanted the first author to enter the struggle and constitute a common “front”: “What I really want us to do is that we come up with [...] a common definition” (emphasis added). The movement toward the first personal plural “we” collectivizes the action and draws the researcher into it, after which she interpellates the researcher directly (“it is really important that you be there”). This move constituted a transformed collaboration: the theory, “embodied” in the researcher, entered the practitioner space as a practitioner, what may be termed a researcher-as-practitioner (see Figure 3.1, 3rd dialectical moment).

The creation of “reality”, initially discussed in the second dialectical moment, was now going to be constructed by theory–practice. The researcher, having in mind their previous conversations, the inherent contradictions of their previous space arrangements, and also attracted by the prospect of linking theory to practice, affirms his inclusion in the theory–practice space (“I’ll be there”). This new arrangement promised the possibility of moving beyond the previous impasse.

3.3.3.1 The Creation of the Theory–Practice Space

The theory–practice space was created and tested in the subsequent meeting, where the first author was invited to create a “common definition”. Two other faculty members were invited to discuss the topic of the language used around sustainability, one of whom was able to attend. The title of the meeting was eloquent enough: *De quoi parle t’on?* (What are we talking about?). The three-person meeting was held in Olympia School’s cafeteria, and Atalanta began by highlighting the dark side of the “therapy” collaboration dynamic.

Atalanta: You keep recording, you keep recording me! I just imagine you at home listening to me at night, you know, as you’re going to sleep...Oh, my God, what a nightmare.

The dark side of the “therapy” collaboration dynamic was expressed by Atalanta as of being surveyed (“recorded”), losing control (“you at home listening...”), and the difficulty of escape (“a nightmare”). The openness of therapy revealed a dark side of intrusiveness, the challenges of mutual trust as control is lost for both parties, and the necessity of maintaining escape valves to avoid being overwhelmed. The intensification of the new dialectical moment was perceptible at this moment, aligned with a realization of the experimental and precarious quality of the “therapy” collaboration dynamic.

After deciding on English as the language for the meeting and discussing the difficulties of translation, Atalanta explained her objective for this meeting, kickstarting the collaboration in the theory–practice space.

Atalanta: So every time you try and lay a brick, it sort of undoes itself. And I am fully and painfully aware of this problem. So the objective of this first, you know, kind of our kickoff meeting around...creating a common definition that will help us move forward. This is probably a very philosophical discussion to have, that I’ve been having myself...by myself, for too many years. And I want and I’m so grateful and thrilled to

start...to share this now internally; that people are actually, you know, are not only interested but feel like they can. So I don't have any ordre du jour [agenda] for today. I kind of wanted to have a conversation and maybe take some notes and... and see if you had any ideas on how we can move forward or if it's already impossible. Maybe we can't come up with a common defining paragraph...

Atalanta highlights three important characteristics of the emergent theory–practice space: the importance of common ground, the blurring of the practice–theory boundaries, and the experimental/ risky nature of the dialectical moment. First, reinforcing the need for ongoing construction of common ground in the face of fragmentation (“lay a brick, it undoes itself”), she stressed the need to establish a new way (“kind of [...] kickoff”) of relating theory–practice—a “common definition” in order to “move forward”.

Second, the problematization of the theory–practice boundaries was characterized as among them and within each of them. Atalanta acknowledges that the challenging of theory–practice boundaries happened in herself (a “philosophical discussion [...] that I’ve been having myself...by myself”)—captured in the concept of practitioner-as-researcher—and that it required perseverance, as she has been having this conversation “for too many years”. Nevertheless, the contact between theory and practice generated a sense of relief (“I’m so grateful and thrilled”) and of empowerment, allowing them to move from “interest” to action (“can”). Practice–theory boundary relations dialectically maintained each space while showing that the necessity of the other for each, while empowering, didn’t collapse both spaces; instead, the researcher and the practitioner were now free to act in both the theory and the practice space.

Finally, the experimental nature of the practice–theory space is acknowledged by not having an “ordre du jour” [agenda]. Instead, a conversation and “maybe take some notes” marked a beginning that was new, “fragile” and maybe risky. The imperative was to not rush to interpret

or decide on a course of action, but “see if you had any ideas”. The collaboration between researcher and practitioner was expressed as entering uncharted waters.

Re-examining the “therapy” collaboration dynamic in this meeting revealed the dark side of the interaction mode, while the establishment of the theory–practice collaboration space was based on the need to build common ground. The end of the meeting was the affirmation for a hopeful, yet risky, attempt to build a new way of working together.

3.3.3.2 Collaboration in the Theory–Practice Space: Two Illustrations

The following dialogue illustrates an early moment of integration of theory and practice, with the researcher-as-practitioner trying to apply theory to practice, and the practitioner analyzing the effect of this implementation. We termed this dynamic collaboration in the theory–practice space because it focused on the contact of theory with concrete action through partially blurred boundaries (see Figure 3.2).

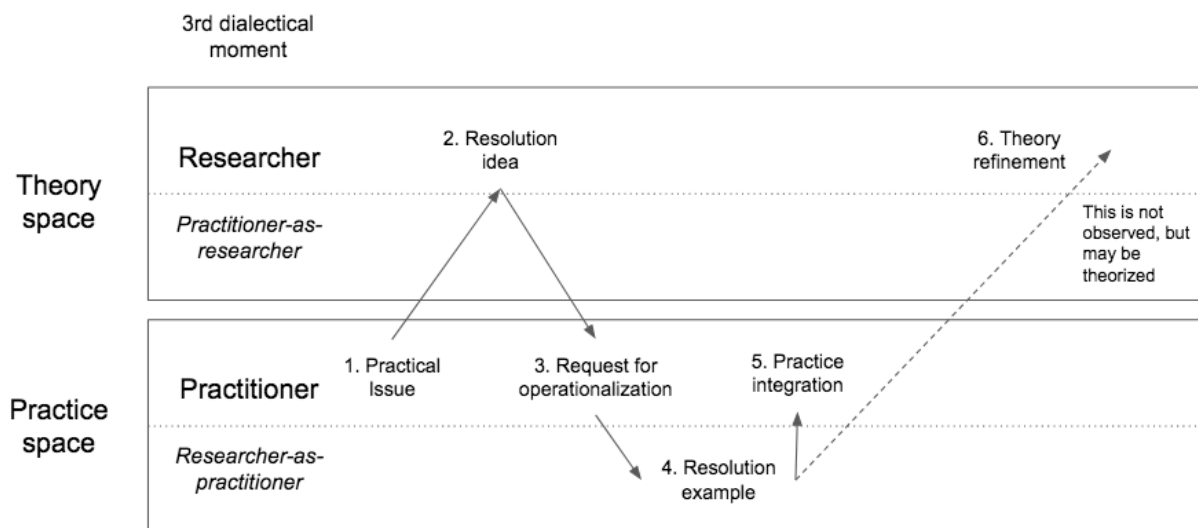


Figure 3.2. *Illustration 1—The dialogic relationship between theory and practice in the theory–practice space*

The fieldworker–practitioner conversation had shifted towards how democratic ways of decision making were used in the business school. Atalanta shared her worries about how sometimes this decision-making mode resulted in slow, conservative decisions, impeding more radical changes. The fieldworker replied by invoking social theoretic concepts about radical democracy taken from recent academic discussions:

Author 1: In this radical democracy, the thing is that all the differences are exalted. Groups are made within the...it's not like individualism to the extreme. It's groups to the extreme...many groups [is the ideal]. And [society advances] when different groups are articulated. This is just one idea of how...how democracy could be radicalized.

Atalanta: You operationalize that, please, give me a concrete example of how it would look here?

Author 1: The comité de pilotage RSE [CSR steering committee] is a good...is a good example of radical democracy. Because there you're making groups. And maybe a good idea is to continue making more groups.

Atalanta: That was the question in the last meeting, should we create more groups? That's funny that you bring that up.

Author 1: I was going to say something, but then I thought...

Atalanta: Why didn't you?

Author 1: Maybe I will keep being a researcher still...

Atalanta: Argh...

Author 1: I will, I will, I will sometimes... like right now. But I do prefer to know when...when to interact.

This conversation is interesting in that it illustrates collaboration as a dialogue between theory and practice, while showing the simultaneous overlap and tension between researcher and practitioner positions. Moreover, these tensions remain even in the mutual appreciation of the other's views and involve an ongoing set of role negotiations. Each of these aspects merits deeper elaboration.

First, the conversation exemplifies a new dialogic relationship between theory and practice (see Figure 3.2). The researcher invokes theory to ground an approach to a practical problem that had been elaborated by the practitioner. When the practitioner asks for an operationalization of that theory, the researcher points to an example in the organization, allowing the practitioner to connect theory to practice (“That was the question in the last meeting, should we create more groups?”). Second, the simultaneous overlap and tension between the positions is evident from their dialogue. As the researcher takes his first steps into the unknown territory of practice (“this is just one idea”), the practitioner challenges this step with a request for rapid action (“you operationalize that”), a demand for directness (“concrete example”), and contextualization (“how it would look here”). In the situation of the researcher-as-practitioner, inhabiting the practice space involves confronting its rules and considerations, making evident the tension with an overly abstract theoretical stance. Third, from this dialogue we note the persistence of tensions in the theory–practice space: the researcher hesitates about when to take the position of a researcher-as-practitioner (“Maybe I will keep being a researcher still” and “I do prefer to know when...when to interact”), while the practitioner shows impatience (“Argh”) with the continued distancing from practice.

In this example, the researcher and the practitioner test the new theory–practice space and reveal its dialectical aspect, involving both common concerns and an enduring separation. Attempting to bring theory into practice, the researcher does not neutralize the theory–practice contradiction

and the tension persists. Future interactions between the researcher and practitioner could require new dialectical moments to deal with these tensions.

As a second example, we draw from the “What are we talking about” (“De quoi parle t’on?”) meeting to illustrate the researcher–practitioner collaboration dynamic across theory and practice spaces (see Figure 3.3):

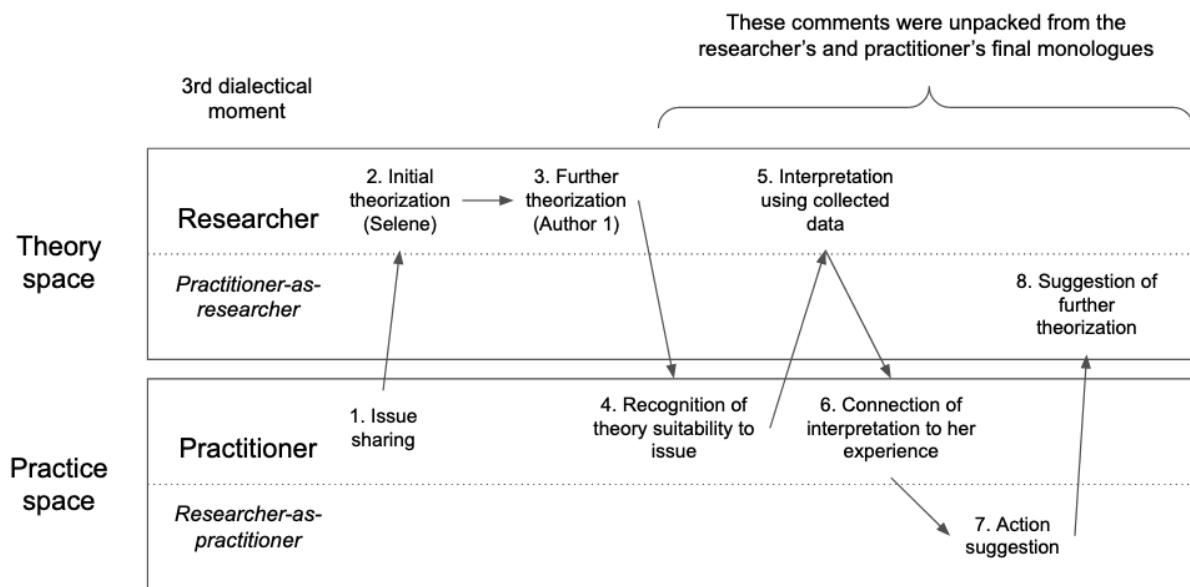


Figure 3.3. Illustration 2—Example of collaboration within the theory–practice space including role inversion

Atalanta: When [the top management team] started tweeting that they wanted to be a ‘No pollution’ school and I started having... I didn’t know how to grapple with that. “I’m not doing this”, “I’m quitting” or I have to do something that will allow me to stay engaged radically... on all the spheres of CSR, sustainability, whatever. And so, this was the document that I presented to him. I said, “I’ll go if we can approach the ‘No Pollution’ [level]”.

Selene: Yeah, I find it very funny because it’s really clever actually. You use like this ‘No Pollution’ thing that can be like an empty shell completely and then you put everything

in there like...

Author 1: Yes, Laclau is also about that. So he has the empty signifiers... An empty signifier is this: an empty bag where you put everything you want. And it's everything to everyone. So it's very easy to [connect] people here. Maybe this is a good chance, because ['No pollution'] won't be opposed. The [top management team] already said "we want to be 'No pollution'". Okay, let's be 'No Pollution'. And this I may advance from my other interviews. When I asked about "No Pollution", people always comes to: "But what does it mean to be 'No Pollution'?" There's always that. They all have the same answer. But I think that's good. Because there's an opportunity to start opening and working with them, and making everyone make, in a way, their own definition. So they can get engaged into this big tent. So you don't have to fight that.

Atalanta: But that's literally what happened. And that's why I went, "Oh, maybe this really is an opportunity" instead of going "My life is hell". People automatically started saying: "Atalanta, what are we doing around 'No Pollution'?" And I'm like, "Well, I don't know, what do you want to do?" People started saying "I can do this" and started taking over things that they should have been taking over already. And moving forward on it. It was kind of audacious... I don't even know. I want to put some terms. I don't want to say that, you know... Either [the top management team] was brilliant and knew exactly what they were doing. Or I was brilliant and I was able to recuperate a potential disaster.

This conversation illustrates a theory–practice dialogue, including an inversion of roles where the researcher proposes practical strategy and the practitioner theorizes (see Figure 3.3). The researcher attempts to apply theory (Laclau) to practice, following the cue of the other faculty present at the meeting (Selene). The researcher uses information “advanced from other

interviews”, using empirical data to apply theory to practice (“there’s an opportunity to start opening and working with them”). The practitioner confirms this attempt (“that’s literally what happened”), but in contrast to the earlier example, she shows her intention to return to theory (“I want to put some terms”), entering the theory space as a practitioner-as-researcher. We interpret this conversation as an example of the dialogic relationship between theory and practice and vice versa, with the added element of a movement from the practice space to the researcher space and an inversion of traditional roles, with the researcher-as-practitioner strategizing for practice and the practitioner-as-researcher seeking to develop theory.

The final moments of the conversation involve a mutual elaboration of each actor’s contributions to the ongoing movement between theory and practice. Conceived as an oscillation (see Figure 3.3), this involves the practitioner sharing a practical issue (“I have to do something that will allow me to stay engaged radically”), followed by the other faculty member offering a conceptualization (“‘No pollution’ [...] can be like an empty shell”). This is further elaborated by the researcher as linked to a theoretical tradition (“Laclau is also [theorizing] about that”). At this point, the dialectical collaboration begins as the practitioner recognizes the salience of the theoretical move (“that’s literally what happened”) and the researcher confirms and populates the idea with empirical data (“advanced from the other interviews”). The practitioner then connects the data sample with her own experience (“People automatically started saying: ‘Atalanta, what are we doing around ‘No Pollution?’””). By that point, the earlier roles had inverted, with the researcher-as-practitioner making practical suggestions (“let’s be ‘No pollution’”; “there’s an opportunity to start opening and working with them”; “you don’t have to fight that”) and the practitioner-as-researcher seeking conceptual clarity (“I don’t even know, I want to put some terms”).

3.4 Discussion

We began our study by asking how researcher–practitioner collaborations take unique shapes in the context of employee activism, an area in which, on one hand, employees must reflexively analyze and critique their organizations, and where researchers are often (implicitly or explicitly) implicated in the processes of change sought by practitioners. Given that such situations stimulate rethinking the practical and epistemic roles of researchers and practitioners, our study sought to examine how this rethinking unfolds in the process we term “praxis encounter”.

The three dialectical moments described above show different arrangements in the research collaboration between practitioner and researcher (see Figure 3.1). In the first moment, the collaboration dynamic (“therapy”) and the collaboration space (practice space) were defined and tested. Tensions arose subsequently when theory was applied to the practice space. These tensions were explored in the second dialectical moment, when the practitioner attempted to solve them by demanding the creation of the theory space and entering it as a practitioner-as-researcher. Faced with the researchers’ resistance, both parties confronted their contradiction. In the third dialectical moment a new type of space was created (the practice–theory space) with a different dynamic involving a dialogical relationship between theory and practice and the inclusion of the researcher as “embodying” theory (the researcher-as-practitioner). Through these three dialectical moments the researcher and the practitioner explored the relationship between theory and practice, which finally became integrated into a theory–practice space.

Our contributions with this paper are twofold. First, we contribute to the research collaboration literature by presenting an empirically based theorization of the initial stages of a research collaboration. Concretely, we present the initial creation of a theory–practice space and the collaborations that unfold within it, using the notion of a praxis encounter to describe the

reflexive and dialectical aspects of those collaborations. Second, we contribute to the HRM literature by presenting a collaborative approach for studying employee activism, while expanding the role of the employee activist from change agent to reflexive agent. Moreover, we contribute to HRM practice by showing how HR managers may support activist employees while integrating academic approaches in their practice.

3.4.1 Praxis Encounter: Researcher–Practitioner Collaboration in the Context of Employee Activism

The concept of the praxis encounter contributes to the theory–relevance debate (Cohen, 2007; Kieser & Leiner, 2012; Shani & Coghlan, 2014) by showing how practitioners and researchers shape a collaboration space and dynamic. The praxis encounter involves the build-up of a dialectical theory–practice space, where researchers and practitioners collaborate dynamically. When entering the other’s space (e.g., the practitioner entering the theory space), each “embodies” a disciplinary position (e.g., practitioner-as-researcher) which allows direct interaction from the position of the other (e.g., theorizing done by the practitioner-as-researcher). This dialectical moment neither creates a new space nor dissolves the distinct positions of theory and practice; instead, it allows a rapprochement and a mutual positioning (Mohrman & Shani, 2008). It blurs the limits between the two spaces (Islam, 2015, p. 236), while the collaborators participate in the other space and its logic (cf. Kieser & Leiner, 2012, p. 20), even as such moments of crossing simultaneously reaffirm the respective projects as distinct. Following Bartunek and Rynes’ (2014) call for a more dialectical approach to collaborations, we elaborate such an approach, which is distinct from the development of a new collaborative logic (Kieser & Leiner, 2012) and moves beyond a direct research collaboration (Shani & Coghlan, 2014). By elaborating on the dialectical moments worked out through the praxis-encounter between researcher and practitioner, our study extends and develops the dialectical project called for by Bartunek and Rynes (2014).

The current study also contributes specifically to understanding the initial stages of researcher–practitioner collaborations (Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009; McArdle, 2013; Phillips et al., 2018). Gayá Wicks et al. (2009) note the conditions of inclusion, control, and intimacy at the initial stages of action research. In the praxis encounter, inclusion is conceived as a partial blurring of theory–practice boundaries, intimacy as a collaboration dynamic (“therapy” in the current case), and control as the eventual reaffirmation of theory and practice spaces and their mutual relationship. Our study, by empirically grounding the initial stages of exploring together and designing collaborative spaces and research mechanisms, informs the “double-loop” research processes delineated in Mode 2 (Guerci et al., 2019). We show how distinct collaboration spaces and dynamics (see Figure 3.1) emerge, giving rise to hybrid roles (practitioner-as-researcher and researcher-as-practitioner) that enable cross-participation (see Figure 3.2 and 3.3). In the context of debates about how academic and practice loops overlap in collaborative research (Guerci et al., 2019, p. 2), employee activism provides a case in which each sphere contributes to but remains distinct from the other. Tracing these ongoing moments of relational work provides a tool to understand the quality of relationships within research collaborations (Mohrman & Shani, 2008).

What this dialectical perspective contributes to literature on collaborations involves their dynamic and shifting aspects. Most researcher–practitioner collaboration literature questions role independence and advocates greater cross-communication (e.g., Karra & Phillips, 2008; Reedy & King, 2019). By contrast, we locate both independence and interdependence as shifting positions within an ongoing relationship, where both serve different purposes at different moments. Rather than making research “practical” in the sense of recent impact literature (for a critique see Rhodes, Wright, & Pullen, 2018), or making practice “evidence-based” or scientific (e.g., Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Rousseau & Barends, 2011), we describe an ongoing tension in which neither theory nor practice are subsumed in the other but continue to

challenge from a distance while recognizing their mutual interdependence. The combination of a processual-dynamic view with a relational interdependence view means that the ideal relation between theory and practice at a given moment cannot be pre-determined, but must be worked out in praxis encounters, resulting in a pragmatic yet reflexive and ongoing relationship.

3.4.2 Studying and Supporting Activist Employees as Reflexive Agents

This paper's second contribution is to the HRM literature, especially to studies of HR managers as change agents (Caldwell, 2001; Jewson & Mason, 1986; Kirton et al., 2007; Ulrich, 1997) and to HR's role in environmental activism (Blazejewski et al., 2018; Renwick et al., 2013), by examining collaborative approaches to researching employee activism. Activists' organizational change goals imply reflexivity in thinking about the roles of actors in society. Taking cues from para-ethnography (Holmes & Marcus, 2006; Islam, 2015), such reflexivity reflects practitioner proto-theories that can inform and dialogue with academic researchers. While researchers can help in developing such proto-theories, they can also use these "epistemic fragments" (Islam, 2015, p. 239) to develop a better understanding of their own theories, including those about employee activists themselves.

By taking a para-ethnographical perspective, we contribute to understanding HRM practice by conceiving of activist employees as reflexive agents (Cassell, Radcliffe, & Malik, 2020; Islam, 2015). HR managers can support the effort of these employees by recognizing this reflexivity, and in some cases these roles may be located within HR itself (e.g., diversity officers). Promoting collaborations with researchers can give emotional and intellectual support to activist employees, who often experience intense paradoxical tensions (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Wright et al., 2012). HR managers should be aware of the internal tensions and subjective experiences of employee activists, which, among other implications, may have effects on organizational commitment, motivation, and well-being. HR managers can

be instrumental in promoting worker well-being, and furthering the social missions of organizations, by promoting such collaborations and taking a proactive role in employee activism.

Reframing internal activists as reflexive agents reveals them as a source of organizational value, whom HR managers may support in their attempts to improve the social value of organizations, while bringing in researchers to support this goal (for reference, see the Practitioner Account accompanying this article). From the researcher side, we can recognize our own enhanced understanding of employee activism through our collaborative research as well as the relationships (and contradictions) between theory and practice in trying to achieve the social goals of organizations. Understanding practitioners as reflexively positioned between competing demands, struggling to find their own positions, and weighing ethical, social and practical goals allows us to build a new perspective for practice as complex idea-work, with activists often bringing theoretical and empirical study to their areas of concern.

In the case of collaborations around employee activism, such crossovers between theory and practice are particularly acute. Because researchers are often concerned with the social or environmental themes of activism, and activists are often highly theoretically aware and informed around their areas of concern (e.g., Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Reedy & King, 2019), there is a natural mingling between researcher and practitioner in these kinds of settings. Caught in the tensions arising from multiple logics or norms, leading to identity and value struggles (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doldor, Sealy, & Vinnicombe, 2016), activists are likely to adopt a critical distance toward their organizations that makes them ideal informants for academic researchers. In the moments of “praxis encounters”, these mutually shared aspects must be worked out between researchers and practitioners.

In such situations, researcher–practitioner collaborations are likely to have unique qualities and potentials as compared to those outlined in current literature (Islam, 2015; Reedy & King, 2019). Rather than applying theoretical or evidence-based solutions to pre-existing organizational problems, researchers may provide ways of reframing or theorizing problems, or provide a safe sounding board for practitioners who may not agree with their organization’s framing of a given issue. Collaboration with a researcher may thus provide a useful ally and legitimating force for ongoing activist work in a practice setting marked by tensions or struggle. By the same token, practitioners’ everyday coping activities constitute proto-theories that meet the researcher halfway between data and academic theory. Engaging in such collaborations requires ongoing negotiation between two (or more) parties whose boundaries would otherwise have been clear, but which in such contexts are deeply porous. In the current setting, these negotiations involved constructions of the collaboration space, tensions over the respective roles of the parties involved and creative remaking of relations to address those tensions. The result was to recast the practitioner as a reflexive producer of theory and the researcher as a collaborative strategist with a critical perspective on action.

3.5 Conclusion

Given the previous discussion, several directions may be highlighted for a future research agenda around the dynamics and complexities of researcher–practitioner collaborations. The current study involved an in-depth ethnographic immersion with a key informant, who occupied a position of organizational authority. Thus, the theory–practice relationship could be modeled as a dyadic exchange between the fieldworker and the sustainability manager, and the complications occurring from within this relationship. However, many practice contexts involve multiple actors with diverse interests (for research collaboration in complex networks see Huzzard, Ahlberg, & Ekman, 2010; Shani et al., 2008) including different intentions as to the goals and extent of academic study (Alcadipani & Hodgson, 2009). We thus present a

simplified case of praxis encounters, and future research should consider this plurality and the possibly contested nature of practical settings themselves. How this plurality shapes the “dialectic” into something more like a “multi-lectic” situation requires further study.

Similarly, the context we studied—a sustainability program within a business school—is a particularly rich setting for theory–practice hybrids. To the extent that one of the defining features of business schools is to straddle academic and applied spheres (Murillo & Vallentin, 2016), researcher–practitioner overlaps may be particularly appropriate in such settings. In this respect, the current case may be paradigmatic, and research should examine settings where academic work (or conversely, applied practice) is not built into the constitution of the organization. In such settings, one would expect a more acute struggle, perhaps with less mutual understanding, than in the current context.

Finally, employee activism is inherently related to contestation within organizational settings (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016), while also related to social scientific (and especially critical) research (e.g., Reedy & King, 2019). Activists may draw on social theories and research to develop and ground their opinions, in a way that may not apply to all kinds of practitioners. Thus, in the current study, there may have been an affinity between the employee activist and the activist ethnographer (Reedy & King, 2019) facilitating their dialectical exchange. Situations in which alignment of social or political visions does not exist pose distinct challenges. For instance, how employee activists could mobilize results or evidence from non-activist researchers, or how critical researchers could bring an activist agenda to indifferent or hostile practitioners, are likely common situations that need exploration.

In conclusion, focusing on researcher–practitioner collaborations as praxis encounters, we recognize the epistemic capacities of practitioners while recognizing the action potentials of researchers, arguing that their dialectical interaction can provide ongoing insights on both sides.

The goal of this process is to build reflexivity around practice while building activism around theory, avoiding the colonization of one by the other. While the delicate balance remains more of a goal than an achievement, it provides a horizon against which to measure the increasing rapprochement of academics and their publics. As with many things, it is the struggle rather than the outcome which may make such attempts most valuable.

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3.A Appendix — Illustration of Theory–Practice Collaboration in which Theory is shaped by Practice

Extract from the conversation taking place during the “What are we talking about” (“De quoi parle t’on?”) meeting:

Author 1: I was going to mention two things. Last two things, maybe. One is about personal work time, because I think that... So, what do you want to tackle? Do you want to [tap onto] more of people’s free will? Or free... free personal time? Do you want to integrate this into their work responsibilities? So I think that there’s... there’s something to think about..., because there’s so much that people can do in their personal time. Something, but not enough.

Atalanta: This has, you know, I’ll send you... I don’t think I’ve sent this to you. I created this tragedy... I created a tragedy in 2015 (laughs)! [I created a plan] with key strategic axis. That has been my priority. That people have, in negotiation with their manager... a percentage of their mission dedicated to sustainability issues. It’s already in their job descriptions, in their annual evaluations. And I really think that it’s important that we do that. So I’ve had a discussion with the new human resources person. But at the same time you [need to] institutionalize it. I’ve worked with people since 2009 on this, and it hasn’t been in their mission, and I see that they stopped doing it after a while when it’s not recognized by the institution.

Author 1: But here you could... For example, and this is the other comment, it’s about... So one is about personal work time, and willingness and dedication; and the other one is about incentives: how much are people incentivized and in which way... to do things.

In this dialog, we illustrate the movement between theory and practice as well as its limits: the ambivalence of the attempts to classify theory and practice into theory or practice spaces (see

Figure 3.4). The Author 1 presents a question about practice (“Do you want to [tap onto] more of people’s free will? Or free... free personal time?”) and its implication (“there’s so much that people can do in their personal time”). Atalanta replies by recognizing the issue and sharing her past solutions (“That has been my priority. That people have [...] a percentage of their mission dedicated to sustainability issues”), together with the limitations she has faced (“they stopped doing it after a while when it’s not recognized by the institution”). The Author 1 finalizes the dialogue by sharing his second question about practice (“how much are people incentivized and in which way... to do things.”).

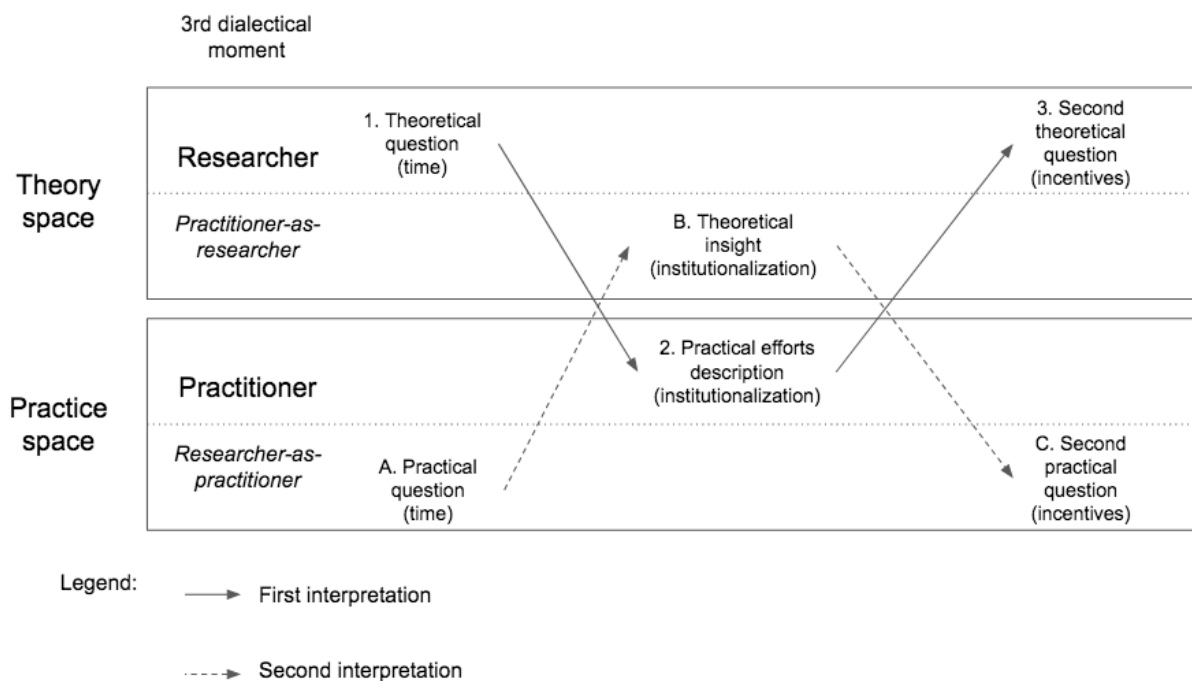


Figure 3.4. Example of oscillation within the theory–practice space, presenting ambivalence in researcher and practitioner positions.

There are two possible interpretations here. The researcher’s comments may be read as emanating from theory, reflecting his interests in understanding the relationship between employee’s time and sustainability challenges. He finally presents a second theoretical doubt,

regarding incentives and people's engagement with the sustainability projects. However, his comments may be interpreted also from the point of view of practice: he refers to the practical strategies and tactics to liberate Olympia employee time for sustainability projects, as well as how to incentivize action. The same ambivalence may be observed in Atalanta's response. On the one hand, she is describing her practical efforts to liberate time and the challenges posed by a lack of institutional support. Yet, she theoretically examines the use of institutionalization to harness time ("at the same time you [need to] institutionalize it"). In both cases, both "theory" and "practice" interpretations seem plausible.

Conclusion

This thesis answers the overarching research question: how are climate imaginaries created and changed? In Chapter 1, the current conceptualisation of climate imaginaries is problematised. In the literature, climate imaginaries are usually considered as being of the same kind, differing only in their main significations (cf. Levy & Spicer, 2013; Marquardt & Nasiritousi, 2022). However, when these imaginaries are compared, they seem to operate and relate in different ways. Additionally, the literature theorises actor engagement with imaginaries separately (cf. Augustine, Soderstrom, Milner, & Weber, 2019; Levy & Spicer, 2013), obscuring how these theorisations overlap. To study the different kinds of imaginaries and how actors engage with them, I studied the pavilion area of the 26th U.N. Conference of the Parties for climate change. I found three kinds of imaginary named after the parts of a tree: trunk, branch, and twig. Additionally, I found that actors engaged with imaginaries through three different types of engagement: reinforcing, branching off, and grafting.

Chapter 2 is a theoretical paper that studies how the creation of new climate imaginaries is blocked from within organisations. Using Castoriadis' (1997, p. 369) theorisation of instituting (the creation of significations) and instituted (the materialisation of significations), I show how imaginaries are blocked by obstructing these two aspects of imaginary creation. The instituting is blocked when imagining is obstructed in the organisation; the instituted is blocked when the new imaginary cannot be materialised because of a lack of resources. Chapter 2 also theorises how internal activists (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Meyerson & Scully, 1995) unblock the creation and development of imaginaries from within the organisations. The chapter presents how internal activists recover spaces and conditions for imagining and how they counter the organisational opposition that obstruct the resources necessary to materialise new imaginaries.

Chapter 3 is a co-authored paper which develops a methodology to study internal activism through research collaborations. The chapter problematises researcher–practitioner collaboration (e.g., Adler, Shani, & Styhre, 2004; Bartunek & Rynes, 2014) by arguing that there is a middle way between full collaboration (e.g., Shani & Coghlan, 2014) and non-collaboration (e.g., Kieser & Leiner, 2012) based on the dual state of insidersness and outsidersness of researchers and internal activists (Cassell, Radcliffe, & Malik, 2020; Islam, 2015). Based on an ethnography that follows a business school sustainability manager, we develop the concept of “critical encounters” to show the creation of a collaborative space between researchers and practitioners. By building a long-term trustful relationship, both parties may enter the other’s “space” to participate in it: theorising by the practitioner and practicing by the researcher. This paper develops a method to study how new imaginaries are unblocked by internal activists in organisations.

In sum, this thesis answers the question “how are climate imaginaries created and changed?” by positing that different kinds of climate imaginaries are reinforced and created by climate actors; that these actors may obstruct imaginary creation by blocking the instituting and instituted from within their organisations; and that researchers may collaborate with internal activists in praxis encounters to study how they unblock imaginary creation.

4.1 Contributions to the literature and future research agenda by chapter

This thesis makes several contributions to the literature and opens several avenues for future research. Chapter 1 contributes to the climate imaginaries literature by describing three types of imaginaries—trunk, branch, and twig. This characterisation clarifies the relationships and functioning of climate imaginaries and shows that imaginaries have a life cycle: they are created (twigs), they gain social support and conflict with other imaginaries (branches), and sometimes evolve into trunk imaginaries which organise climate action. If addressing climate change

requires changing imaginaries (Wright, Nyberg, De Cock, & Whiteman, 2013), this paper argues that understanding which kind of imaginary needs changing is important. Additionally, this paper contributes by conceptualising three types of actor engagement with imaginaries—reinforcing, branching off, and grafting—and by linking these to macro imaginary developments (e.g., hegemonical (Levy & Spicer, 2013) and dialectical (Augustine et al., 2019)). Finally, this chapter contributes by showing that the characterisation of imaginaries is relative to their context and that different multimodal media is used by actors to materialise imaginaries.

As a future research agenda, Chapter 1 highlights the potential of studying the lifecycle of imaginaries. It highlights that the actual birth of imaginaries has not received attention through empirical studies. This birth most probably happens in places where people meet and discuss, places like organisations, meetings, and online meeting places, and less so in places where imaginaries are presented (conferences, news media, etc.). It also highlights that the “death” of imaginaries is also not well understood, which could illuminate how climate imaginaries survive and how (and why) they wither and disappear. Similarly, new studies could connect how the micro level engagements with imaginaries constitute macro configurations like those described as hegemonical struggles or dialectical developments. This would clarify in which ways actors develop or not imaginaries. Regarding the importance of context to the study of imaginaries, future research could also study how the context affects the distribution of types of engagement. For instance, in less mediatised contexts it is possible that actors engage less in reinforcing imaginaries and more in branching off and hybridizing. In this case, researchers could explore if this affects the lifecycle of imaginaries (e.g., do more twigs transform into branches?).

Chapter 2 theorises how imaginaries are blocked within organisations. By describing the ways in which organisational actors block imaginaries, this chapter contributes to both the climate

imaginaries and the internal activists literature. First, to the climate imaginaries literature it contributes by showing that organisations don't neglect the instituting dimension as is sometimes argued (e.g., Bouilloud, Pérezts, Viale, & Schaepeynck, 2020); rather, it blocks the instituting by obstructing the imaginative capacity of the organisation. Relatedly, this chapter contributes by showing that internal activists are in a good position to unblock the instituting and instituted. To the internal activists literature, this chapter contributes by showing that the internal activists' tensions are not only due to a contradictory position of balancing business and environmental orientations (e.g., Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Wright, Nyberg, & Grant, 2012). From the imaginary perspective, internal activists are subject to legitimate and illegitimate tensions arising from the instituting and instituted. The legitimate sources are the tensions naturally existing in the creation of imaginaries. Recognising the failures of an old imaginary, engaging in creativity, developing a new imaginary, and materialising it, naturally generate tensions. However, internal activists are also subject to illegitimate tensions, which are caused by blocking the instituted and the instituting. By blocking the organisational capacity to imagine, internal activists feel the illegitimate tension of not being able to help the organisation to create imaginaries; by blocking the possibility of dismantling old imaginaries and of materialising new ones, internal activists feel the illegitimate tensions arising from having a new imaginary and not being able to materialise it.

The main future research agenda for chapter 2 is to empirically test what it theoretically proposes. The chapter theorises from the literature how organisations block imaginary creation from the inside and how internal activists unblock it. From here, it becomes important to empirically study the process through which organisational actors block imaginary creation and the processes by which internal activists unblock imaginary creation. Additionally, empirical research could investigate if the tactics used to block and unblock imaginaries have influence on each other or not. For instance, certain tactical combinations could offer increased

probabilities of unblocking the creation of imaginaries. Finally, empirical studies could explore the role of other actors in organisations. Chapter 2 considered mainly two types of actors: the ones that block imaginaries and those that unblock them. But organisational reality is more complex. For instance, there could be actors that only partially block imaginaries or that enable imaginary blocking; on the unblocking side, there could be actors wanting to change imaginaries, but not engaging in action. Finally, studies of organisations with unblocked process of imaginary creation could illuminate how this state is maintained in time.

Chapter 3—the development of a methodology to study research collaboration with internal activists—contributes to the research collaboration literature and the HRM literature. To the research collaboration literature, it contributes by opening a middle ground between the two extreme positions of no-collaboration (e.g., Kieser & Leiner, 2012) and full collaboration (e.g., Shani & Coghlan, 2014). This chapter also theorises the initial stages of collaboration (cf. Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009; McArdle, 2013), showing how these stages enable the construction of theory–practice spaces where collaboration happen. Finally, this chapter contributes to the theorisation of this theory–practice space—this space becomes a “bridge” for the much-debated research–practice gap (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Cohen, 2007). To the HRM literature, this chapter contributes by developing a collaborative approach to the study of employee activism. Additionally, it expands the understanding of the employee activist from change agent (Caldwell, 2001; Kirton, Greene, & Dean, 2007) to reflexive agent, enabling HR managers to support the work of these employees, for instance, through research collaboration.

The main future research agenda from chapter 3 is to develop the proposed middle way in the researcher–practitioner collaboration debate. For instance, it becomes important to explore this middle way in other contexts because the context of this chapter—a business school—may be too conducive to this kind of collaboration. In other settings, collaboration may not happen at all or may happen in a different way (e.g., through longer collaboration periods, more people

involved, etc.). Relatedly, it becomes important to study how other actors that are not internal activists could engage in this type of collaboration.

4.2 Thesis' future research agenda

Given that this is a thesis composed of three papers, it is also useful to reflect on how they contribute theoretically to each other as this enlightens a future research agenda for this thesis. Chapter 1 and chapter 2 focus on different stages of the imaginary creation and development. Chapter 1 focuses on the inter-organisational presentation of imaginaries, their discussion, and their acceptance (or not). Chapter 2 focuses on how imaginaries are created and developed within organisations and how this process may be blocked and unblocked. Because they focus on different stages and analytical levels of climate imaginaries' creation and development, insights from one paper may illuminate the other's theorisation.

Grafting (i.e., the mixing of imaginaries) from chapter 1 (see section 1.4.3), sheds new light on the creative imaginary process (see sections 2.4 and 2.5). In fact, grafting suggests a different way of understanding the creative imaginary process. Instead of focusing on the creation of a new imaginary *ex nihilo* (see section 2.2), grafting is the mixing of imaginaries that seeks to reconfigure the current imaginary tree. This perspective leads to the question, how does grafting look from within an organisation? The answer goes beyond what chapter 2 developed and opens up a new research avenue. For example, researchers could follow at the United Nations Conference of the Parties (U.N. COPs) the debates and processes within organisations or governmental agencies that decided to graft a new imaginary. One could theorise that the internal process was fraught with tensions between blocking and unblocking and, even more interesting, neither "blockers" nor "unblockers" were able to hold an upper hand and compromised by joining forces to change socially shared imaginaries.

Chapter 1 also suggests that the process of materialising an imaginary (the “instituted”, see section 2.2) goes beyond what is observed within organisations. For instance, chapter 1 showed that there are pavilions which rather than present new imaginaries, endeavoured to materialise them (like the Green Climate Fund, etc. (see section 1.4.1.1)). In fact, the observed problems within organisations regarding blocking the materialisation of imaginaries (see section 2.4), may be similar to the problems faced by organisations tasked in materialising shared trunk imaginaries at the inter-organisational level. Are the tactics to block (and unblock) imaginary materialisation within organisations similar to what is observed among organisations? Answering this question requires further research. In a similar fashion, the creation of imaginaries (the instituting (see section 2.2)) could also be related to the presentation of new twig imaginaries publicly (see section 1.4.2). Are there efforts to block these new imaginaries? And how does this happen?

In chapter 2, an unblocked creative imaginary process passes through a phase of a materialised imaginary (the instituted, see section 2.2). It is this phase which allows the presentation of a stable trunk or branch imaginary at the inter-organisational level (see chapter 1, section 1.4.1). But how is this stability maintained within organisations long enough to be presented publicly? And how is this achieved without blocking the creative imaginary process? On the one hand, one could hypothesise that branch imaginaries require an active struggle not to be changed by a new imaginary within an organisation and could possibly degrade into blocking the creative imaginary process. On the other hand, trunk imaginaries could probably be maintained without much struggle (with a tacit consensus). Future empirical research could focus on organisations that reinforce branch or trunk imaginaries and explore how stability is achieved within them. Chapter 2 also highlights that what is presented publicly as a climate imaginary (e.g., a branch imaginary) is the final result of a *successful* process of imaginary creation. This could imply that there are probably many other organisations working on creating or developing climate

imaginaries that could not succeed on materialising an imaginary to present publicly (for instance at a U.N. COP). Why did the creative imaginary process fail? Further research could explore this question.

Chapter 3 relates to the other two chapters not theoretically but methodologically. Its main contribution to chapters 1 and 2 is regarding the methods to study imaginaries and could suggest how to approach the new research avenues outlined above. For instance, chapter 3 suggests that a long-term research collaboration would support studying which organisational processes lead to grafting and how imaginaries are maintained stable in organisations during their public presentation. Additionally, chapter 3 shows how the theory developed in chapter 2 (i.e., blocking and unblocking of the creative imaginary process) may be studied empirically through researcher–practitioner collaborations and what elements are important to have in consideration (see sections 3.4.1 and Appendix A).

Finally, chapters 1 and 2 contribute to chapter 3 by showing that there are multiple phenomena related to imaginaries that could require methodological developments. For instance, future research could develop different methods to study imaginaries based on different contexts (e.g., green-activists demonstrations) and using different kind of data (e.g., historical). In sum, chapters 1, 2 and 3 may cross-pollinate to generate diverse future research avenues, for instance by analysing the interrelation between analytical levels and by expanding the methods repertoire.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to the climate imaginaries literature—and more broadly to the climate change literature—by deepening our understanding around climate imaginaries: their different kinds and relations, the types of actor engagement with imaginaries, the blocking and unblocking of imaginaries in organisations, and how can researchers study the creation of organisational imaginaries by collaborating with internal activists. The urgency of the climate

emergency (and more generally, the ecological crisis) requires that we redouble our efforts as researchers to understand how to address climate change—before it is too late.

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Appendix A — Additional Methodological Note for Chapter 3

The current study stresses the dynamic nature of researcher–practitioner relations, and their dialectical tensions over theory and action. The methodological correlate of this dynamic focus is to concentrate not on a single ideal interactional form, but on appropriately understanding the affordances of different dialectical moments and their requirements for a given research project. The below suggestions are meant as heuristic guidelines that can be adapted to various project types; however, in the spirit of a dialectic relational approach, these should not be understood as a priori “rules”; the latter should emerge from within the researcher–practitioner encounter and demand on-the-ground responsiveness and resourcefulness from the interactants.

The length of the collaboration is critical in determining what to expect, as different dialectical moments require more time and the development of a closer relationship between researcher and practitioner. Because of this, we separated our methodological considerations and practical advice into three periods: short-term collaboration (e.g., 1–2 weeks with 2–4 encounters with practitioner), medium-term collaboration (from 1–4 weeks), and long-term collaboration (from 1–3 months onwards). Each of these lengths of study allows for the discussion of the collaboration space, collaboration dynamic, or both, and require different activities by the researcher before the meetings with the practitioner (see Table A.1). The following practical suggestions are cumulative, i.e., the short-term collaboration practical suggestions may also be used in the medium- and long-term collaborations, but we suggest avoiding the opposite (use long-term collaboration suggestions in short- or medium-term collaborations).

Table A.1. *Practical recommendations for choosing the collaboration space and dynamic, in short-, medium- and long-term projects*

	Short collaboration	Medium collaboration	Long collaboration
Duration	1–2 weeks	1–4 weeks	1–3 months and more
Dialectical moments	1st	1st & 2nd	1st, 2nd, & 3rd
Focus	Dynamic	Space and Dynamic	Space and Dynamic
Practical recommendations	Recognize researcher’s role in the study	Reflect on space construction	Use the dynamic to support the space discussion
	Share expectations	Choose space based on shared expectations	Dedicate a meeting to discuss tensions
	Use metaphors	Discuss results of chosen dynamic	Build a trusting relationship

A.1 Short-term collaboration

Short-term collaborations (e.g., 1–2 weeks with 2–4 encounters with the practitioner) should focus on agreeing about the collaboration dynamic. This will shape the form of the conversations that develop. Sometimes, the selection of the collaboration dynamic is tacit, and the traditional roles of researcher and practitioner are acceptable to both parties. This tacit adoption of roles, however, risks obscuring the dialectical stakes felt by the parties, leading them to adopt static roles and possibly ending in a theory–practice impasse. Instead, we propose that the parties discuss their respective roles explicitly, while recognizing that these may (and perhaps should) change over time. This means discussing what both the researcher and the practitioner want to take out of the meeting. We propose some practical suggestions for a short-term collaboration.

A.1.1 Short-term collaboration – Practical suggestions

- Before the meeting
 - Recognize the role of the researcher in the study: Following discussions on how the empirical data is affected by the researcher and may be thought of as a co-construction with the practitioner (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000), the researcher should have in mind that she is affecting the field of study. By embracing this idea, the discussion does not become a probing or questioning of a subject but rather a dialog (Beech, MacIntosh, & MacLean, 2010), in which both participants share their perspectives on a certain issue. Having said this, it is important that the researcher tries to give enough space and time for the practitioner to share experiences, thoughts and feelings; if not, the study may turn into an auto-ethnographic reflection of the fieldworker's own experiences and the loss of relational dialogue.

- During the meetings
 - Share expectations: Sharing the expectations about the collaboration in general and about each meeting, allows for the practitioner and researcher to identify common ground. It also builds trust to discuss how they will interact (the collaboration dynamic), which will open doors to certain aspects of the practitioner's (and researcher's) experience not available otherwise.
 - Use metaphors: Metaphors and other figurative language may be useful in shaping the collaboration dynamic, as they communicate while leaving exact meanings open to negotiation. Such language can create shared images that last across the project. For instance, in the current project "therapy" became an operative metaphor for discussing and motivating the collaboration. Other

possible metaphors are coaching, sounding board, medical consultation, executive presentation, debate, and so on. The idea is not to force the use of a metaphor, but rather to get an agreement of the position of both researcher and practitioner, so they may collaborate throughout this interview or short set of interviews.

- Note: For a single interview the collaboration dynamic definition is tacit because there's not enough time to discuss it directly in the meeting. Instead of being explicit, it usually comes embedded in the interview guide as well as in the rapport generated between researcher and practitioner (cf. Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020).

A.2 Medium-term collaboration

For a medium-term collaboration (from 1–4 weeks), both the collaboration space and dynamic become relevant and should be discussed. Because there will be multiple interactions between the parties, the tensions of the selected spaces and dynamics should become evident and the necessity to address them more pressing, risking the alienation or frustration of the parties. To avoid relational crises at this point, we suggest explicitly discussing the selection of the collaboration space. Also, if the collaboration dynamic is not working, we propose changing it through mutual agreement. We recommend the following practical suggestions for medium-term collaborations.

A.2.1 Medium-term collaboration – Practical suggestions

- Before the meetings

- The researcher should reflect about her positioning in the research: Does the researcher want to maintain an external position to the field? In this case, working on the practice space seems suitable, although some tensions—analyzed in the paper—are tied to this dialectical moment. The researcher, knowing these tensions, may discuss them openly with the practitioner if they become an issue, offering support and understanding about them, and inquiring whether there is any kind of “resolution” given the time frame. If the practitioner wants to become more involved in the cooperative construction of theory (and practice), she may embark on the “theory space” or “theory–practice space” as described below.
- During the meetings
 - The researcher should suggest the collaboration space based on shared expectations: building on previous discussions (see short-term collaboration) and mutual understanding, the collaboration space arises as a point of discussion.
 - If it is comfortable for the practitioner to create a space based on her experience, where theory is “applied” by the researcher from the “exterior” (i.e., without necessary practical implications), the creation of a “practice space” is possible. This creates tensions on the practitioner’s side (see paper for the effect of theory being too “expansionist” and the practitioner’s desire to restrict involvement with practical tensions).
 - If the practitioner wants to participate actively in theory construction, the researcher should welcome this and collaborate in theory construction while providing critical and constructive commentary and avoiding

cooptation or instrumentalization. The creation of a “theory space” may lead to tensions felt by the researcher, whose theorizing may be questioned by the practitioner, requiring ongoing negotiation between different background conceptions of theory.

- If the tensions of the previous arrangements are not accepted by either party, or if they want to collaborate more closely on the development of theory–practice (i.e., the application of theory to practice and the development of theory by practice) then a “theory–practice space” may develop. Nevertheless, this dialectical moment requires the development of more trust between the parties and more time for experimentation, so this is recommended for longer collaborations (see below).
- The researcher should discuss the results of the chosen collaboration dynamic: The discussion about the collaboration dynamic is similar to that of short-term studies, although a medium-term study allows for changes if the dynamic selected at the beginning is not functioning as expected (e.g., if “medical consultation” was chosen initially as a metaphor, perhaps “coaching” seems more appropriate later on). In sum, a medium-term collaboration permits an accommodation of the parties into a collaboration dynamic that better suits both and a discussion about the collaboration space.

A.3 Long-term collaboration

For long-term collaborations (1–3 months onwards), it is possible to create a ‘theory–practice’ space that supports the co-construction of theory and practice by both practitioner and researcher. This would require a meeting dedicated just to this discussion. This meeting should happen around the end of the first third of the project, so the initial arrangement has been tried,

the tensions perceived and some ideas on how to solve them have been devised. Because of the intensity of the theory–practice space, it’s important that both parties feel comfortable with the selected collaboration dynamic (if not, they have the chance to change it) and developed a trusting relationship. Following are practical suggestions to engage in the ‘theory–practice’ space.

A.3.1 Long-term collaboration – Practical suggestions

- Before the meetings
 - The researcher should use the collaboration dynamic to support the collaboration space discussion: as may be seen in the article, the chosen dynamic supports the researcher and practitioner in their joint exploration of the collaboration space. For instance, in the main article “therapy” allowed for the researcher to take the role of framing the discussion and sharing insights, while for the practitioner it allowed her to become more open about her feelings and to freely apply the researcher’s insights into practice. When discussing the collaboration space (see 2nd and 3rd dialectical moments in main article), the “therapy” dynamic supported direct sharing of the tensions felt by the practitioner, the opening of their previous frameworks into exploring the theory–practice space arrangement and the joint exploration of potentially risky ways of collaborating (e.g., the researcher making bad practical suggestions and/or the practitioner making theory construction more confusing).
- During the meetings
 - Dedicate a meeting to discuss the tensions: In that meeting, both the researcher and practitioner should share the tensions they perceive and explore different

configurations to approach the tensions. In the main article, we presented three possible dialectical moments (see also Table 1).

- Build a trusting relationship: Creating the theory–practice space requires openness from both sides, time (for experimentation) and trust built over time. Meetings outside of work may facilitate such interactions, allowing for more free discussion. This trust is essential in a dynamic relational model given the likelihood of unforeseen tensions arising from the theory–practice space, as well as challenges due to the mutual development of theory and practice.

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Appendix B —Practitioner Account for Chapter 3 — If we can't imagine our way out of this together, we're doomed!

Being a sustainability manager of a business school is inherently paradoxical; it requires me to disrupt the norms of the organization while simultaneously serving them. How does one radically interact with an organization in opposition to one's value system and still benefit from that organization? Interacting directly with researchers has allowed me to explore this paradox and hold up a mirror to the stories I tell about my work. Reading how somebody else perceived me and analyzed my work was disturbing. I sounded crazy! Nonetheless, the outcomes of these "critical encounters" have been so overwhelmingly positive.

B.1 Empowerment & Credibility: Cultivating networks and allies

Being an "object of study" has given more credibility and visibility to my role internally, creating an innovative dynamic between myself and faculty members. Historically, I had struggled to get faculty actively involved in sustainability projects, perceived as operational problems. Researchers research and practitioners practice. This study's transformation is very empowering.

My professional networks and reputation benefitted directly. For example, the study's researchers participated in a seminar organized for higher education sustainability managers sharing the outcomes of our collaboration. It demonstrated the synergy happening within the school, where researchers were actively taking a role in the organizational transformation – stepping out of the traditional paradigms and divisions between staff and faculty. My peers were impressed and this boosted my credibility and confidence in what I was doing and in turn enabled scholars to interact with a diverse pool of practitioners.

B.2 Reflexivity & Impact: Transforming professions through links to research

Being an “object of study” obliged me to take the time, tell my story and get feedback. I realized that my “profession” was of interest to scholars, that my work was novel and worthy of study. This process gives more meaning and value to the work you do, makes you feel heard and less alone. Practitioners also often become obsessed with operational blockages or failures and why they are not working or how they fall short of objectives. Collaborating with researchers shifts the practitioner perspective and helps to engage in deep reflexivity, to think deeper and more radically about the way I work.

The exercise in self-reflexivity was surprisingly therapeutic and was clearly the most impactful for me. It made me think about what was happening subconsciously and how I expressed it. Raising questions like: What really is my mission? Have I the institutional means and the support needed? I realized that I was giving myself too much responsibility for things that were out of my control. This process is relevant and impactful because it forces you to step out of your active practitioner role and reflect on it in a form of dialogue, so you are not thinking about it alone. For me, this innovative collaboration could be a model for the best annual evaluation that anybody could have. We could call it the “annual reflection”, removing the power paradigm and pressure from annual performance evaluations.

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