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# Studying Meta-organizations for Sustainability Transformations: Challenges, Concepts and Directions

Héloïse Berkowitz

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# Studying Meta-organizations for Sustainability Transformations: Challenges, Concepts and Directions

Mémoire en vue de l'obtention du diplôme d'Habilitation à Diriger des  
Recherches, soutenu par Dr Héloïse Berkowitz  
à Aix Marseille Université le 1er Juillet 2024

## Composition du jury

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ces opinions doivent être considérées comme propres à leur auteur.

Let us remember: one book,  
one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world

Malala Yousafzai

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# Table of content

- Table of content ..... 7
- Index of Figures ..... 11
- Index of Tables ..... 13
- Partial glossary of concepts ..... 14
- Summary..... 18
- Introduction ..... 25
  - 1) Context..... 25
  - 2) Motivations of my inquiries ..... 26
  - 3) General theoretical framing ..... 28
  - 4) A distinctive meta-organizational approach..... 31
    - An alternative theoretical view on organized collaboration among organizations..... 31
    - An alternative perspective on change towards sustainability ..... 32
  - 5) Objectives and organization of the dissertation ..... 34
- I. Meta-organizations as important empirical phenomena in contemporary societies ..... 36
  - Synthesis ..... 36
    - 1) Meta-organizations are everywhere and are numerous ..... 38
      - The qualitative importance of meta-organizations..... 38
      - How about quantitative evidence? ..... 39
    - 2) Diversity of meta-organizations ..... 44
      - Variations in types of member organizations and size ..... 45
      - Variations in membership composition..... 48
      - Perimeters of mandates: scale and scope ..... 50
      - Perimeters of issues: Specificity, specialization and sectoralization ..... 54
      - A variety of configurations ..... 56
    - 3) Roles and activities of meta-organizations ..... 57
      - Purposes of meta-organizations..... 57
      - Activities of meta-organizations..... 59

Logics of actions in meta-organizations .....	60
Conclusion .....	62
II. Meta-organization as a concept and the challenges of studying meta-organizations.....	63
Synthesis .....	63
1) Why meta-organizations matter as a dedicated concept?.....	66
The specificities of meta-organization .....	66
Defending meta-organization as a concept.....	67
What is the status of the concept exactly? .....	68
2) Methodological challenges of studying meta-organizations .....	69
3) How to apply the concept? Developing a meta-organizational analytical perspective.....	71
The development of meta-organizational attributes .....	72
Analysis of evolutionary dynamics .....	73
Functions of meta-organizations as intermediaries .....	74
Conclusion .....	79
III. Meta-organization as a theory centered on decision.....	80
Synthesis .....	80
1) Is it a theory? (and is it performative?) .....	83
Performative theories .....	83
Fragmentation of the communities .....	84
Meta-organizations as meta-level actors or as orchestrated systems.....	85
2) The decisional perspective and social orders.....	86
From partial organization.....	86
To decisional organization theory or decisionalism... ..	87
...And the integration of context and social orders.....	91
3) From infra- to (meta-)organizationality: An integrated framework .....	94
Meta-organizationality .....	94
Integrating all dimensions .....	96
Conclusion .....	98
IV. Meta-organizations as part of the problem: Decentering my knowledge production .....	99
Synthesis .....	99

1)	Shedding light on and conceptualizing the dark side of meta-organizations .....	101
	Meta-organizations as perpetuating or as resisting global orders? .....	101
	Conditions for meta-organizations as transformative agents and organizational consequences .	105
2)	Rethinking relations and social bonds: the ocean, nonhuman livings and non-livings, and organizations.....	107
	The importance of oceans.....	107
	The shift to ecosystems and territories.....	111
3)	Imagining alternatives? Rethinking (meta-)organizations in relation to democracy and governance .....	113
	Conclusion .....	116
V.	Projects for the future .....	117
	Synthesis .....	117
1)	Meta-organizing sustainability transitions in territories: A place-based approach .....	117
2)	The manifestations and consequences of meta-organizational proliferation .....	119
	What does meta-organizational proliferation look like and what are its effects? .....	119
	Comparing, contrasting, generalizing .....	120
3)	Decisional and alternative organizing among organizations.....	121
	Creating order among organizations .....	121
	Meta-organizing and macro-organizing for grand challenges.....	123
	Alternative (meta-)organizing .....	124
	Conclusion .....	125
VI.	My researcher identity.....	126
	Synthesis .....	126
1)	On being all things to all people .....	127
2)	Open science, slow science, engaged science .....	127
	Motivations for open science.....	128
	The M@n@gement and PCI experiences.....	129
	On writing and slow science.....	131
3)	Supervision and teaching.....	132
	My vision of research, teaching and supervision.....	134
4)	Research animation, pluridisciplinary collaborations, and coordination .....	135

Research animation .....	135
Organizing pluridisciplinarity and collaborations.....	136
<i>Interlude</i> The lab that did not exist. Immersion in a Californian research center.....	139
Coordination and institutional responsibilities.....	144
5) Broader dissemination and links to the socio-economic sphere.....	145
Conclusion .....	146
VII. Conclusion .....	148
The distinctiveness of meta-organizations .....	148
Why do meta-organizations exist? .....	149
From empirical phenomenon, to concept, to theory .....	150
Towards a more critical perspective.....	152
As a way of conclusion or opening.....	152
References.....	154
Appendix.....	178

# Index of Figures

Figure 1: Evolutions of my research as four interconnected building blocks ..... 19

Figure 2: Evolution of registrations by category (Source: the author)..... 42

Figure 3: Word cloud of fields of interest (Source: the author) ..... 43

Figure 4: Variations in meta-organizations’ membership’s segmentation (Berkowitz, 2019) ..... 48

Figure 5 : Area of responsibility of the meta-organization ‘Taula de co-gestio’ (in blue marine are, in green land area) (source: <https://participa.gencat.cat>) (see Berkowitz, 2023b) ..... 53

Figure 6: Variations in meta-organizations based on membership and perimeters of action (Berkowitz, 2019)..... 56

Figure 7: Main purposes of meta-organization and my contributions (Source: the author) ..... 58

Figure 8 : Activities of meta-organizations and my contributions (Source: the author)..... 59

Figure 9: Meta-organizations activities and logics of actions (Source: the author, updated from Berkowitz, 2019) ..... 61

Figure 10: Three different visualizations of meta-organization and member-organizations, as both internal and external to one another (Berkowitz, 2019) ..... 67

Figure 11: Evolutions of meta-organizations through trajectories of meta-organizational filiation (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024, p. 10)..... 74

Figure 12: Co-construction of the regulatory framework of crowdfunding in France and the meta-organization as a regulatory intermediary (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019, p. 972) ..... 76

Figure 13: Relations between meta-organizations as innovation intermediaries and their contributors (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024, p. 10)..... 77

Figure 14: Interrelations between successive innovations, governance gaps and meta-organizations as regulatory innovation intermediaries (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024, p. 11) ..... 78

Figure 15: Visualization of the meta-level actor and orchestrated system decision making process (Source: Coulombel & Berkowitz, Under review) ..... 86

Figure 16: Model of decisionalism in crowdfunding: decisions on organizational component by type of decision maker and target of decision (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019, p. 17) ..... 87

Figure 17: The three dimensions of temporality, territoriality and professionalism in relation with OD (Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming) ..... 92

Figure 18: Meta-organizationality (Source: Berkowitz & Bor, 2024) ..... 95

Figure 19: Tentative overarching model of decisionalism (Based on Berkowitz, 2024; Berkowitz & Bor 2024; Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming; Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024) ..... 98

Figure 20: Multi-directional system of decisions in macro-organization ..... 103

Figure 21: Resisting social order in macro-organization ..... 104

Figure 22 : Organizational conditions for transformative meta-organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2020, p.7)..... 106

<b>Figure 23: Tensions between meta-organizationality and sustainability transitions principles (Berkowitz &amp; Bor, 2024)</b> .....	107
<b>Figure 24: Map of ocean dead zones (Source: Wikipedia)</b> .....	108
<b>Figure 25: A fisherman on a beach in Temuco, Chile that is blanketed with dead sardines, a result of algal blooms that suck oxygen out of the water (source: photography of Felix Marquez/AP)</b> .....	109
<b>Figure 26: Categorization of ocean negative commons by origin and source (Source: Berkowitz, 2023)</b> .....	110
<b>Figure 27: Integrative model: from organizations as systems of ocean destruction to organizations as systems of ocean thriving (Berkowitz, 2023, p. 11)</b> .....	111
<b>Figure 28: Model of creating decided order among organizations, directionality, responsibility and relations among participating organizations (Based on Coulombel &amp; Berkowitz, Under review, and this dissertation)</b> .....	121
<b>Figure 29: “Puppy Therapy” (Source: the author)</b> .....	140
<b>Figure 30: “Dream, believe, Inspire”, at the entry of the lab (Source: the author)</b> .....	140
<b>Figure 31: So Cali! Stand Up Paddle board for lunch breaks (I did not get to try it much as it was a terribly cold summer) (Source: the author)</b> .....	142
<b>Figure 32: Relations between my work involvement and the various institutional bodies</b> .....	145

# Index of Tables

Table 1: Production by type and by year (Source: the author) .....	21
Table 2: Production by type post Phd (Source: the author) .....	21
Table 3: Language of published articles in refereed journals by period (Source: the author).....	22
Table 4: Dissemination of my research, by type (Source: the author) .....	22
Table 5: My key papers and contributions to Section I .....	37
Table 6: Category of registration to the Transparency Register (Source: the author).....	41
Table 7: Category of registration to the Transparency Register from 2008 to 2022 (Source: the author).....	41
Table 8: Category of registration as meta-organization (Source: the author) .....	42
Table 9: Number of meta-organizations registered (Source: the author).....	43
Table 10: Typology of sectoral or domain-based meta-organizations, i.e., with members from the same sector or domain of society (Source: the author) .....	47
Table 11: Classification of meta-organizations based on membership segmentation (Source: the author).....	49
Table 12: Scale and scope of meta-organizational mandate (Berkowitz, 2019).....	50
Table 13: Specialization and specificity of meta-organizational mandates and membership (Berkowitz, 2019).....	54
Table 14: Sectoralization of metaorganizational mandates (Berkowitz, 2019) .....	55
Table 15: My key papers and contributions to section II.....	64
Table 16: Examples of levels and units of analysis in my studies (not exhaustive) (Source: the author).....	70
Table 17: Attributes of meta-organizations as a device for sectoral governance (Berkowitz, 2018, p. 423).....	72
Table 18: Meta-organizational key common characteristics, implications, advantages and disadvantages (Berkowitz et al., 2020, p. 2).....	72
Table 19: My key papers and contributions to section III.....	81
Table 20: Structural, entitative and contextual organizationality (adapted from Grothe-Hammer, 2019; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming) .....	93
Table 21: Description of the properties of social order (adapted from Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024).....	94
Table 22: Dimensions of social orders: from infra-organizationality to meta-organizationality (Source: the author, adapted from on Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming; Berkowitz & Bor, 2024; Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024).....	97
Table 23: My key papers and contributions to section IV.....	99
Table 24 : My key papers and contributions to section VI.....	126

# Partial glossary of concepts

To facilitate the reading of this dissertation, I am listing and defining here key concepts I have contributed to or have developed through my work.

**Contextual organizational**: From a decisional perspective, contextual organizational describes specific contextual dimensions that simultaneously shape, are shaped by and are constitutive of organizations. This means that contextual organizational can be both affect organization and be itself organized. It involves three dimensions: temporality, territoriality and professionalism (Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming; Berkowitz, 2024).

**Decidability/non-decidability**: Decidability or changeability of social orders outlines the capacity of actors to reach collective decisions and change said social orders. Decidability implies the three key dimensions of decisions: potential immediateness, accountability and specificity. If these dimensions are lacking, social orders become non-decidable (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024; Berkowitz & Bor, 2024).

**Decidedness**: Decidedness refers to the fact that social orders can be explicitly and recursively determined through series of decision-making processes that are nested within each other. This process leads to the emergence of layered and interconnected decisions, across various levels (meta-level actors, members, individuals, and non-members). Decidedness also implies two facets: decisionality and decidability. "Multi-level decidedness" precisely captures the unique interconnected dimension of meta-organizations where decisions at one level produce more decisions at that level and at other levels, but also influence and are influenced by decisions at other levels (Berkowitz & Bor, 2024).

**Decisionalism, new decisionism, decisional organization theory or organization as decision theory**: This theory views organization as "an important phenomenon in modern society, i.e., that of de-paradoxifying decisions by creating decision-based social orders" (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022, p. 35). Decisionalism brings together various concepts and approaches that have in common to view decisions as a sub-communication event that is constitutive of organizations and of social orders. Decisionalism further translate in several aspects that are articulated together in this dissertation, i.e. infra-organizational, structural organizational, entitative organizational, contextual organizational and meta-organizational (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming, Berkowitz & Bor, 2024; Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024).

**Decisionality or density**: Decisionality, or density, describes the intensity or degree of decision-making in a social order about a dimension. For instance, there can much more or less decisions made about membership, hierarchy, rules, sanction, monitoring, collective identity, etc. in an organization. Decisionality could also apply to contextual organizational. Varying degrees of decisionality can lead to "thin" organizing (with low degrees of decisionality) or meta-organizing, or "thick" organizing/meta-

organizing (with high degrees of decisionality). Decisionality is also a facet of decidedness, along with decidability (Berkowitz & Bor, 2022; 2024; Berkowitz, 2024).

**Dialectical actorhood:** dialectical actorhood refers to the complex balance that meta-organizations must constantly find to gain, maintain or achieve meta-organizational actorhood, i.e. being acknowledged internally and externally as a social actor that can be addressed, can take decisions and can be held accountable for its decisions. Dialectical actorhood implies navigating tensions between autonomy, dependence and collective identity, accountability and responsibility of both members and meta-level actor. Dialectical actorhood has an internal dimension (negotiating between member autonomy and meta-level autonomy) and an external one (as meta-organizations become responsive to nonmembers and external parties) (Berkowitz & Bor, 2024).

**Entitative organizational:** Entitative organizational describes dimensions of the organization as a system or processual entity, i.e., interconnected decision-making, actorhood, and collective identity (as we defined in Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022, taking inspiration from Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015 and Grothe-Hammer, 2019b).

**Grassroot meta-organization:** Grassroot meta-organizations are those meta-organizations that emerge in a bottom-up process, from local members themselves (e.g. indigenous meta-organizations in the Amazonian forest) (Berkowitz & Fernandes, 2024).

**Infra-organizational:** Infra-organizational refers to the foundational and underlying parameters of social orders that affect their nature and dynamics: ontology, determination, changeability, acceptance, to which I added density/decisionality (Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024; Berkowitz, 2024).

**Layering of social orders:** Addition of new social orders (meta-organizations and more) alongside or on top of existing social orders (member organizations and more), without supplanting or substituting them (Grothe-Hammer et al, 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2024)

**Meta-organizational filiation:** Relations that are created between meta-organizations across a field, domain or sector when a meta-organization builds capacity of other meta-organizations and transmits knowledge, collective memories, social capital, inter-personal or inter-organizational networks and key individuals acting as boundary spanners. Meta-organizational filiation can occur through incubation, spin-offs, integration, mergers, and direct transfer (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024).

**Meta-organizational accountability:** In meta-organizations tackling grand challenges, meta-organizational accountability describes 1) the complex ties of accountability (understood both as taking responsibility for decisions and being held responsible by stakeholders) between the meta-organization and its members but also between the meta-organization, members, and external publics (including nonhuman publics) and 2) the various rules of transparency, reporting and other accountability mechanisms themselves that must be implemented at the meta-organizational level to ensure its effective accountability. Meta-organizational accountability constitutes one condition for responsible actorhood of transformative meta-organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022).

**Meta-organizationality:** The term meta-organizationality describes the specific attributes resulting from the nesting of social orders in meta-organizations (or meta-meta and more). This includes multi-referentiality, layering, dialectical actorhood, and multi-level decidedness (Berkowitz & Bor, 2024).

**Multi-referentiality:** Multi-referentiality in meta-organizations aims to capture the complexity, evaluativeness and recursivity of the diversity and multi-levelness of norms, values, expertise, knowledge, professionalities, perspectives that are brought together by the many member organizations in meta-organizations. These 'references' can be potentially conflicting or diverging. The recursive and evaluative dimension of multi-referentiality implies that members and meta-level actor may value and prioritize the meta-organization differently. Multi-referentiality is heightened in multi-stakeholder meta-organizations (Berkowitz, 2023; Berkowitz & Bor, 2024).

**Multi-stakeholder meta-organization:** Multi-stakeholder meta-organizations are those meta-organizations that gather members from different sphere or domains of society (different economic sectors, public administration, higher education and research, civil society, etc.), with therefore different references (Berkowitz et al., 2017, 2020; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015).

**Negotiated professional restructuring:** In transformative meta-organizations, negotiated professional restructuring describes the deliberative process through which members and meta-organizations contribute to renew and adapt professional and labour activities to technological or social ruptures. This restructuring implies meta-organizational accountability and transformative mediated reflexivity and constitutes a necessary condition for the development of transformative meta-organizations to address risks of labor resistance into labor adaptation to the new professions and sectors of the transition (Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022).

**Organizational affordances** (of the oceans): actionable characteristics that affect organizations' actions, and in return, their impacts on the ocean. This can be applied to other nonhuman livings or entities (rivers, earth, soils, space, forests and ecosystems, etc.). (Berkowitz, 2023).

**Place-based meta-organizations:** Place-based meta-organizations are meta-organizations that both shape their territories and are shaped by them. Place-based meta-organizations co-evolve with and even co-constitute their territories (Berkowitz, Fernandes, et al., 2023; Mazzilli et al., 2023).

**Regulatory Innovation Intermediary:** The term describes intermediaries playing a role in the regulation of innovation (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024). As regulatory innovation intermediaries, meta-organizations can fill technologically-induced governance gaps through co-regulation, capacity building and self-regulation.

**Responsible actorhood:** Responsible actorhood of meta-organizations puts the attention on what it means to achieve actorhood that is responsible towards Others. It can be viewed as the ability of an organization or meta-organization to take decisions on its own, while being externally acknowledged as a social actor, being held accountable for these decisions, but also making decisions with care for future generations and a commitment to enacting a sustainable future. Responsible actorhood in transformative

meta-organizations requires meta-organizational accountability, transformative mediated reflexivity and negotiated professional restructuring (Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022).

**Structural organizational**: Structural organizational has to do with the structural dimensions of a decided social order, that is to say its organizational components, i.e., characteristics of membership, authority, rules, monitoring and sanctions (Berkowitz & Bor, 2022; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022).

**Technologically-induced governance gaps**: The speed and multiplication of technological innovations create a rapid and repetitive disruption that accelerates the obsolescence of regulators and regulatory frameworks. This regulatory obsolescence creates specific governance gaps, which we called technologically induced governance gaps (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024).

**Total responsibility**: The principle of total responsibility across the value chain involves making visible and accounting for all invisible effects of organizations on humans and nonhumans and clarifying responsibility relations (Berkowitz, 2023).

**Transformative mediated reflexivity**: In meta-organizations tackling grand challenges and piloting sustainability transitions, transformative mediated reflexivity describes a continuous process happening at the meta-level and mediated by the meta-level actor. This process consists in identifying, anticipating, taking into account and mitigating negative impacts of decisions on all publics (including non-human ones). Engaging in transformative mediated reflexivity is essential for the development of transformative meta-organizations (Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022).

**Transformative meta-organizations**: Transformative meta-organizations are meta-organizations that act as local agents or intermediaries of transformative change, i.e., actively contributing to sustainability transitions (Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022).

# Summary

Meta-organizations, organizations made of other organizations, constitute an important and multifaceted phenomenon of contemporary and globalized societies. We can find meta-organizations everywhere, in all spheres of society, at all levels, in all contexts and countries, from international oil and gas business associations to national crowdfunding associations, local fisheries co-management committees in Catalunya and translocal indigenous communities associations in Amazonia.

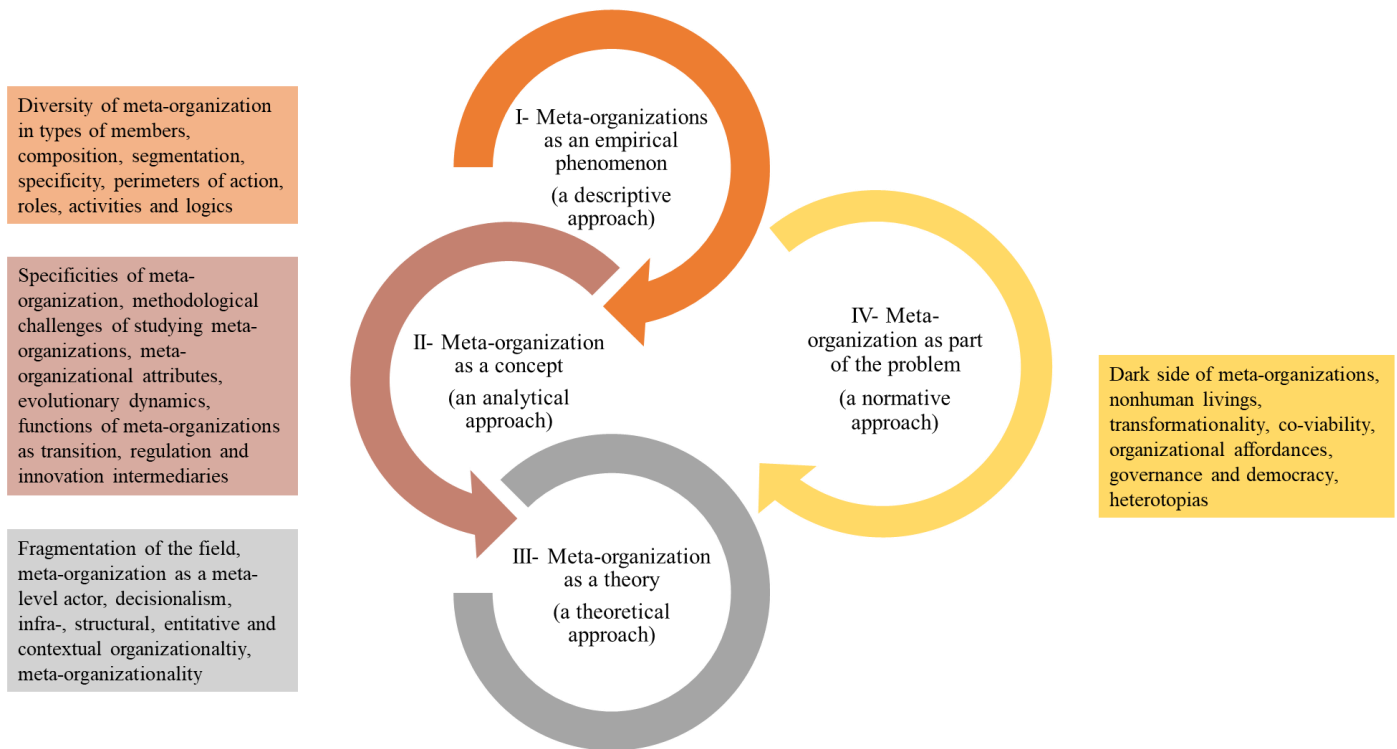
Meta-organizations differ both from organizations made of individuals, e.g., firms, associations or social movements, and from non-decided orders, e.g., networks or institutions. The specific nature of meta-organizations, i.e., being an organization, being made of other organizations, and being associative or collaborative, has key theoretical implications. Most conventional or dominant theoretical approaches do not fully account for these implications.

Meta-organizations are extremely diverse, something that no theory has been able to grasp so far, for a lack of an overarching approach. Meta-organizations fulfill different purposes, conduct various activities, and exhibit high variations in establishment, membership composition, segmentation, scale and scope, perimeter of action, mandate and issue specificity, and sectoralization.

In my research, I mostly draw from Ahrne and Brunsson's work. However, I noticed an evolution in my general framing. In Phd thesis, I started from a more strategic management and a collective strategies approach, using the lens of socio-technical analysis (Akrich, 1991; Akrich et al., 2006). I then shifted to a more organization studies and organizational sociological approach, with a focus on social orders. I drew from boundary disciplines or fields, like communication as constitutive of organizations (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015), system theory (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Luhmann, 2018), political science (Jordana, 2017; Mathieu et al., 2016), alternative organizations (Varman & Vijay, 2022b), or transition studies (Geels et al., 2016).

Concretely I am interested in why meta-organizations exist and what they can (and to a lesser extent cannot) do for sustainability transitions. In my Phd thesis, I asked whether meta-organizations made the idea of sustainable development performative. Then, I kept approaching this question of transformation towards more sustainable and just futures through different angles: sustainability transitions, grand challenges or complex problems, ocean governance, crowdfunding, biodiversity conservation, etc. Having this in mind, and as Figure 1 synthesizes, my research trajectory can be thought of as four interconnected building blocks: 1) meta-organizations as an important empirical phenomenon (i.e. a descriptive approach of what meta-organizations are, how diverse they are and what they do), 2) meta-organization as a concept (i.e., a more analytical approach), 3) meta-organization as a theory (i.e., a more theoretical approach), 4) meta-organizations as part of the problem (i.e., a more normative and critical approach). These building blocks constitute the backbone of my dissertation.

**Figure 1: Evolutions of my research as four interconnected building blocks and my contributions to each block<sup>1</sup>**



*Section I. Meta-organization as an empirical phenomenon: a descriptive approach*

Meta-organizations are a ubiquitous and multifaceted phenomenon of modern societies. There are some challenges in quantifying and understanding the full extent of meta-organizations, as they operate across various domains and sectors and often lack standardized information and reporting requirements. Studies of meta-organizations span across different fields, such as environmental issues, education, sports, and international relations. Overall, meta-organizations' presence is extensive in modern societies, and their diversity is much higher than the literature has truly accounted for. In this section, I attempt to showcase this diversity by describing sources of variety in meta-organizations: types of members, membership composition and segmentation, specificity, perimeters of actions, roles, activities and logics of action in meta-organizations, which constitute my contributions to the analysis of meta-organizations as an empirical phenomenon.

*Section II. Meta-organization as a concept: an analytical approach*

But meta-organization is more than an important empirical phenomenon, it is also a specific concept. In this section, I develop this argument and highlight the conceptual specificities of meta-organizations. I also describe some of the methodological challenges raised by meta-organizations and show how implementing analytical frameworks have helped me study a variety of contemporary phenomena through

<sup>1</sup> I am not thanking Word. Figures, titles of figures, and references to figures keep troubleshooting. Every single time I open my manuscript or make a change. Why you do this to me, Word?

the 'meta-organizational lens'. In several of my papers, I either used the same framework or changed it a little, adding dimensions here and there, changing the focus of the conceptual tool. The common thread was to look for an ontology of meta-organizations, or their specific attributes. I often used this to study meta-organizations' dynamics over the long term. This approach also enabled me to unravel the functions that meta-organizations can play as intermediaries (innovation intermediary, regulatory intermediary and transition intermediary).

### *Section III. Meta-organization as a theory: a theoretical approach based on decisions*

Here I propose an integrated approach based on decisions. Connecting Organization as Decision Theory, social order analysis and meta-organizations, I propose several dimensions of an overarching theoretical approach extending the concept of organizationality to decided attributes of social orders. Taken all together, these dimensions outline the backbone of 'decisionalism', i.e., a theoretical approach centered on decision as a communicative event: infra-organizationality, structural organizationality, entitative organizationality, contextual organizationality, and meta-organizationality<sup>2</sup>. Infra-organizationality describes the foundational and underlying parameters of social orders that affect their nature and dynamics. Infra-organizationality includes ontology, determination, changeability, acceptance and density of social orders. Structural organizationality has to do with structure or organizational components (membership, authority, rules, monitoring and sanctions)<sup>3</sup>. Then entitative organizationality deals with aspects of the system or processual entity: interconnected decision-making, actorhood, and collective identity. Contextual organizationality is about temporality, territoriality and professionalism. And then finally comes meta-organizationality that accounts for specific attributes resulting from the nesting of social orders in meta-organizations (or meta-meta and more): multi-referentiality, layering, dialectical actorhood, and multi-level decidedness.

### *Section IV. Meta-organizations as part of the problem: a more normative and critical approach*

There has been a bias in my research. By seeking to establish meta-organizations as transition intermediaries, I often focused on their positive contributions to sustainability, while neglecting negative aspects. But there is a dark side to meta-organizations, as creating and maintaining certain unfair global orders, as maintaining a paradigm of organizations as systems of ocean destruction. In this section, I focus more on this dark side of meta-organizations, but also macro-organizations, and discuss some of the conditions I have begun to analyze, for meta-organizations to act as transformative agents in just sustainability transitions. This is also where I question the relations between organizations, humans and nonhumans.

These are the first four key sections of my dissertation<sup>4</sup>.

### *Section V. Projects for the future*

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<sup>2</sup> Everything does not need to be about organizationality, but I like symmetries.

<sup>3</sup> The reader familiar with Ahrne and Brunsson's work will recognize partial organization.

<sup>4</sup> My most sincere thanks to Dominique Seigne for helping me through the complex HDR application process!

In the next section, I discuss plans for future research, including the ANRJCJC I just started on place-based meta-organizations as territorial transition intermediaries, and several other projects around meta-organization, decisionalism and alternative organizing, in particular around the issue of creating decided order around organizations (through orchestrated order, collectively decided order and multi-directional decided order).

*Section VI. Research identity*

In that section, I describe what is important to me as a researcher and how this has driven my work: open science, slow science and engaged science, pluridisciplinary and collaborative work, supervision and teaching, research animation and coordination, dissemination and links with society, and I discuss the difficulties of “being all things to all people”.

And in the final section (VII) I conclude this dissertation.

*Scientific production*

After this brief summary of my dissertation, and for the purpose of the assessment of this Habilitation, I now provide a quantified summary of my scientific production, my supervision experience and my funded projects.

I have identified **103 outputs** in my scientific production (see Table 1 and

**Table 2**), including publications in refereed journals (28), chapters (8), refereed conferences with call for papers (36), non-refereed journals, other conferences and workshops with call for papers (not including invitations), technical reports, others publications (reports and a working paper published in a series), my Phd Thesis. In total, they have received more than **900 citations**.

**Table 1: Production by type and by year (Source: the author)**

Type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Publication in refereed journals			2	3	2	3	3	2		6	3	4	28
Chapter					1	2				3	2		8
Refereed conferences			4		8	8	4	3		2	7		36
Paper in a non-refereed journal	1	2	2	2		1							8
Other conferences		2	1			3	4	1	4	3			18
Thesis				1									1
Other				1	1		1	1					4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>103</b>

**Table 2: Production by type post Phd (Source: the author)**

Type	Post Phd
Publication in Refereed Journals	23
Chapter	8
Refereed conferences	32

Paper in a non-refereed journal	1
Other conferences and workshops with call for papers	15
Others	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>

I have published **28 papers in refereed journals**, of which 5 during the Phd thesis and **23 since the Phd**. In the post Phd period, 17 were in English (against 2 in the Phd period), 5 in French (against 3) and 1 in Portuguese (Table 3).

**Table 3: Language of published articles in refereed journals by period (Source: the author)**

Language	Post Phd
English	17
French	5
Portuguese	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>

**100% of my publications are in open access** in HAL (minimally as a preprint version).

In addition, including invitations to seminars and academic conferences, which I consider part of dissemination, I also counted **110 outputs related to dissemination** (invitations, general press article, interviews, citations in the press, other media, public conferences or artistic events) (See Table 4).

**Table 4: Dissemination of my research, by type (Source: the author)**

Type	Number
Invitations in seminars or conferences	50
General press articles	35
Interviews	13
Citation in the press	4
Other media and blogs	2
Public conferences and artistic events	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>

#### *Supervision experience*

I am currently supervising **one Phd candidate (2<sup>nd</sup> year) and one postdoctoral researcher** (Since 2023, ANR MetaOrgtrans).

I am currently involved in **four thesis committees**, I have been a jury member in **two Phd theses Defenses**, and was a pre-examiner for **two Phd theses** (to allow the viva).

I have supervised **five Research Master Theses and one research internship** (ANR MetaOrgTrans).

#### *Funded research projects and grants*

I have received several research grants for coordinating international research projects, research stays abroad and organizing workshops.

I am currently the principal investigator (PI) for two major international projects: an **ANRJCJC 2022 (286k€)** and **A\*midex Pépinière d'excellence 2021 (24k€)**. I have also been co-PI for the **Alliance Europa 2021 Grant (10k€)**.

I have received five grants for research stays (**Asgard Program 2022** grant recipient, visiting scholar, NTNU, Trondheim; **Commerce and Industry Fund 2018**, "Visiting International Faculty" grant, Hanken School of Economics; Conférence des Grandes Ecoles, **Prix 'Bernard Sutter'2016** Mobility Scholarship 2016-2017 (One of the first three scholarships to be awarded in France by the Conférence across all disciplines); **France-Stanford Center for Interdisciplinary Studies Fellowship 2015**; **FNEGE 2014** Visiting Scholar Grant for Columbia SIPA 2015)

I have received **two grants to organize international workshops** (Aix Marseille Univ, ALLSH 2021 Workshop Grant, Co-PI, 2021 MetaOrgTrans workshop; Toulouse MSH AAP 2019 Workshop grant: "Workshop Meta-, Macro-, Partial organization")

### *Key achievements*

In my everyday professional activities, I have engaged in extensive conversations regarding the avoidance of quantitative metrics, offering critiques of rankings, and challenging the tendency to commodify higher education and science (Berkowitz & Delacour, 2020, 2022).

While my HAL profile page<sup>5</sup> and google scholar profile page<sup>6</sup> may provide numerical insights, I wanted here to also emphasize certain accomplishments that go beyond metrics and enable a more qualitative assessment:

- Co-manager of the Standing Working Group (SWG) on Meta-Organizations and Meta-Organizing at the European Group on Organization Studies (EGOS) (2024-2027)
- Co-founder of Peer Community in (PCI) Organization Studies (since 2023)
- Co-founder of the MATIN Network and animator of the TransitionS Seminar Series (since 2021)
- Coordinator of the ANRJCJC MetaOrgTrans (2023-2026) and A\*Midex project (2022-2024)
- CNRS Bronze medal recipient (2022) and Prize of the Recherche Départementale en Provence (2023)
- Guest co-editor of a special issue on meta-organizations in *M@n@gement* (2022) and co-editor of an edited volume project on meta-organizations (Project - Elgar), guest co-editor of a special issue on grand challenges in *M@n@gement* (2024)
- Former co-editor in chief of *M@n@gement*, first diamond open access journal in management and organization studies, and co-author of the first open data policy in a management journal in France (*M@n@gement*, 2022)
- Leading the digitalization of the AIMS conference during COVID-19 (2020)

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<sup>5</sup> <https://cv.hal.science/heloise-berkowitz>

<sup>6</sup> <https://scholar.google.fr/citations?user=r0X9HokAAAAJ&hl>

- Attracting attention to the oceans as an important object of research (Berkowitz et al., 2019; Berkowitz, 2023a)
- Paying attention to bibliodiversity (journal articles, book chapters, reports, etc) and multilingualism (with publications in French, English and Portuguese)
- Contributing to the literature on meta-organization and actively helping the community to grow
- Contributing to the lab's collective and new quinquennial shared project, co-responsible for axis COT (Change, Organizations, Transitions), preparing a research handbook on transitions & work
- Collaborating with many colleagues from Lest and beyond, from various institutions, countries, disciplines, and experience, as well as with practitioners and socio-economic actors
- Managing tensions and (often contradictory) injunctions of professional life, family life, personal life and specifically childcare.

# Introduction

## 1) Context

In 2012, Catalunya experimented with a new form of governance of fisheries in the North of the Costa Brava. Various actors from different domains came together and tested the first co-management committee, with the objective of jointly managing fishing of sand eels. In 2013, the sand eels' co-management committee received the WWF Award for conservation because of the successful recovery and protection of the species. After a few years and seeing its successful outcomes, the government of Catalunya tested this form of governance in other harbors and for other species (Berkowitz et al., 2018; Berkowitz, 2023b). In 2018, the Catalan model was also awarded by the United Nations Food Organization Administration. In 2018 finally, this model became the norm for fishing in all Catalunya, and was even extended beyond the fishing sector, through a decree by the government – the 2020 Catalan Maritime Directive. What is so special about Catalan co-management committees? They bring together different types of constituencies: economic players, represented by the “cofradía”, an association of fishers and ship-owners; local scientific organizations specialized in marine biology such as the Institut Ciències Marines (ICM); nongovernmental organizations representing civil society, e.g., WWF and Greenpeace, and regional public administrations like the General Direction of Fisheries. Each participant has equal voting power in the committee. While this may raise difficulties in making joint decisions, once members reach consensus, management plans benefit from much more legitimacy and strength than when imposed from top-down, central players.

Now zooming out, the International Whaling Commission (IWC), set up in 1946, is an international organization whose primary aim was to regulate and manage the whaling industry around the world. Thus, the IWC role was actually to enable this exploitation of whales. The IWC brings together governments and scientific actors. It conducts scientific research on whale populations, sets quotas and regulations for whaling, and generally works to address conservation and management issues related to cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises). This organization also focuses on several environmental and human-related threats to cetaceans. However, its mission evolved over the years from promoting the whaling industry to conserving and protecting whale populations, thus concretely preventing whaling (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). In 2018, when members voted to change its main mandate, which officially became to restore marine mammal population to pre-industrial levels, the decision in effect made it impossible to hunt cetaceans and led to the highly mediatized exit of Japan, a pro-whaling country. Japan then resumed commercial whaling.

Next, Finance Participative France (FPF) is a multi-stakeholder association that was set up in 2012 to promote and support an alternative financing system, i.e. crowdfunding, in France. FPF played a key role in the development and regulation of crowdfunding platforms as alternatives to the dominant banking system (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2017, 2019c, 2024). FPF continuously works to foster the development

of crowdlending, crowdequity and crowdgiving, facilitating access to these funding options for small businesses in particular. This association brings together different players from the sector but also civil society organizations, law firms and other stakeholders interested in the development of crowdfunding. FPF offers a variety of activities for members and nonmembers in the country or abroad, from capacity-building workshops, to outreach events, self-regulation and co-regulation activities, etc. FPF was created with the hope to embody a more sustainable and humane model of financing.

Lastly, la Vía Campesina was founded in 1993 as an international peasant movement. This organization aims to defend the interests and rights of millions of small-scale farmers and rural communities worldwide. La Vía Campesina brings together organizations and movements from many countries and regions, especially from the Global Souths. Its objectives are to ensure food sovereignty, land rights, sustainable agriculture, and social justice (Desmarais, 2012). Notably, this organization seeks to address a variety of ecological and social issues faced by rural populations, from land dispossession to access to non-polluted water. By defending alternative local food systems and rights of rural communities, la Vía Campesina embodies an alternative to the dominant capitalistic order of industrialized corporatized and globalized agriculture (Desmarais, 2008).

What do these very different organizations have in common? They are all meta-organizations, that is to say, organizations constituted of other organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; 2008). These meta-organizations are not mergers because member organizations maintain their autonomy, with their own identities, objectives, strategies and resources. All meta-organizations seek to create social orders beyond single organizations. These specific examples of meta-organizations (co-management fisheries, IWC, FPF, Vía Campesina) seek to create orders that are more just and more socio-ecologically sustainable<sup>7</sup>. This has been the object of most of my research since 2013 when I started my Phd.

## **2) Motivations of my inquiries**

I became interested in meta-organizations and their roles in sustainability transformations during my Phd thesis at Ecole Polytechnique. From the beginning, I was driven by an interest for understanding how to change society for more sustainability. I tend to use sustainability in a broad, ambiguous and somewhat overused, sense. Using different concepts and literatures (sustainable development, sustainability transitions, grand challenges, human nonhuman co-viability, etc.), my Phd work, and my ongoing work, explored and still explores what 'sustainability' means, where it comes from and where it is going.

In western social sciences, sustainability often refers to the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and therefore implies limits to growth (Berkowitz, 2018, 2023a; Meadows et al., 1972).

Most common views of sustainability or sustainable development encompass three primary dimensions, or the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997): environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic

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<sup>7</sup> But it is not the objective of all meta-organizations.

sustainability. I started my Phd thinking these three dimensions were reconcilable<sup>8</sup>. I explored where this dominant view of sustainability might take inspiration from, and in particular focused on two sources: 1) a technico-economic origin based on Carl von Carlowitz's concept of "Nachhaltigkeit" (sustainability in resources uses), and 2) a constitutional and political origin, based on Thomas Jefferson "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living" (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2014b). These early ideas deeply resonate with modern conceptualizations of sustainable development.

My view of sustainability was also informed by the reading of *Organiser le développement durable* (Aggeri et al., 2005). This book defines sustainable development as a strategic field, which development can be broken down into three stages: the construction of managerial discourse, institutionalization through the "instrumentation" of sustainable development, and the realization of sustainable development in practices. This involves in particular the emergence of new actors, new knowledge and new identities. Aggeri et al. (2005) book sees the enactment of sustainable development in managerial practices as occurring selectively, depending on sector-specific issues and even individual company's problematization. It is accompanied by a reconfiguration of areas of strategic action and the cross-cutting nature of practices, whether they involve internal managerial initiatives or external exploratory partnerships (see my book review Berkowitz, 2014b).

In 2015, I attended a seminar at Columbia University where Jeffrey Sachs presented his book *The Age of Sustainable Development* (See my review Berkowitz, 2015b; Sachs, 2015). The book underscored the importance of collective action, investment in clean technologies, poverty reduction, and the pursuit of global cooperation to overcome the challenges of the 21st century and create a more sustainable and prosperous world, therefore seeing here again economic, social and environmental dimensions as reconcilable.

These various perspectives have in common to see sustainable development first and foremost as economic development. They already hint at a key issue that I have explored in my later work: the domination and exploitation of nature, i.e. human and non-human livings, by organizations to achieve economic growth (Berkowitz, 2023a).

A red thread of my view of sustainability however is seeing 'sustainability' through the lens of societal problems (whether they are viewed as wicked, sticky or grand) that must be tackled and solved. I have used in the particular the latest born, 'Grand challenges', anchored in pragmatist thinking (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022), even though I remain critical of it. What has changed recently however, is a shift in my emphasis from sustainability as enabling economic development in a context of finding autonomous limits, to sustainability as alternative organizing and economic models, that respect heteronomous limits, i.e. planetary boundaries, human non-human co-viability, etc. (Berkowitz, 2023a; Berkowitz & Guérineau, 2022).

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<sup>8</sup> Spoiler alert, I no longer believe it.

Studying and working on sustainability, whatever its meaning, implies looking at a great variety of policy instruments, innovations, metaphors, tools, devices, forms of organizing, visions, imaginaries, rules, etc. I focus on the roles of meta-organizations, organizations which members are themselves organizations, in these multi-level and multi-player processes. I found this type of organization both interesting and bizarre. I liked Ahrne and Brunsson's elegant and simple definition. It gives right away an understanding of all the implications of what being a meta-organization means. And yet I could not understand why there was so little theorizing works about it, especially on the link between meta-organizations and sustainability. Meta-organizations seemed to me so important for sustainability that I dedicated my Phd thesis to analyzing why we could say that meta-organizations made sustainable development performative. One could say that my choice of sector, oil and gas, was far from ideal<sup>9</sup>, but it took me quite some time to understand that. The sector still provided much insights about meta-organizations and sustainability issues. So how do I articulate these aspects?

### 3) General theoretical framing

Let's take a step back. As academics, when we attempt to reflect upon how to address complex global and contemporary challenges like the climate crisis or biodiversity loss, we are confronted with a paradox. A paradox that is multifold and that I will try to unravel here.

Existing social orders, i.e. temporarily fixed meanings that lend the world a degree of expectability and enable interactions among actors (Hechter & Horne, 2003), in other words contemporary organizations, our systems of consumption and production, are precisely the root cause of our problems: they are causing the destructions that threaten our safe operating space, our habitability on earth (Berkowitz, 2023a; O'Neill et al., 2018). Shrivastava already argued in 1994 that organizations are the primary tool with which humans affect nature (Shrivastava, 1994). Even further, "corporations as they exist today are *exploitative, sociopathic, predatory* organizations" (Clegg & Starbuck, 2009). Being at the root of the problem means that social orders - organizations - are responsible and must as such be held responsible for these problems. I will call this the 'responsibility' imperative of social orders.

It follows that we need to change said social orders in order to counter their very effects. It seems obvious that we need new social orders, new forms of organizations to address grand challenges (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Gümüşay et al., 2022), otherwise we are bound to produce the same results. But this means that socio-ecological transitions and other transformations towards sustainability cannot be implemented without rethinking and changing the very foundational social orders on which societies function. This is the 'transformation' imperative: we need to change social orders if we are to solve current problems.

And yet, at the same time, social orders are needed precisely because they give order to the world, they provide the basic context and make it therefore possible to tackle and develop solutions to grand

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<sup>9</sup> And let's be honest, it is just all greenwashing there

challenges (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022). This is the 'enabling' imperative of social orders: we need social orders because they enable us to jointly tackle problems.

And if we go one step further, social orders are also what enable us, as society and as scholars, to construct and give value(s) to these problems. For instance, we use mathematical modeling to understand, predict and take decisions about climate change (Dahan-Dalmédico, 2007). This is the 'cognitive' imperative: we need social orders to think about these problems. So, this requires from us, "students of organizations" as Ahrne and Brunsson often put it, to not only provide tools for understanding and changing social orders, but also to question our very own frameworks.

To re-articulate these ideas, social orders are at the root of the problems (responsibility imperative), they are also needed both to think of the problems (cognitive imperative) but also to address them (enabling imperative) and at the same time must change or be changed (transformation imperative) to solve the problems. It may not be exactly the same definition of social orders I am using here at each step, but still, there is a common question. How do we transform social orders to tackle complex societal problems and to achieve more sustainability? This is the underlying and big question that I have been trying to explore since my Phd thesis (Berkowitz, 2016a).

And as if this complexity was not enough, this question becomes even more complex when we take into account some features of modern society. Modern society is increasingly decided and organized (Apelt et al., 2017; Borraz, 2022; Bromley & Meyer, 2015; Luhmann, 2018). And in particular modern society increasingly relies on an intertwining and layering of social orders in these meta-organizations, organizations whose members are themselves organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Meta-organizations populate our worlds and attend to many issues (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2022). Meta-organizations have been around for a long time and keep being created under varying form, as I showed in my Phd (Berkowitz, 2016a). They are active in all spheres of society, from industries like the oil and gas sector (Berkowitz et al., 2017), to higher education (Brankovic, 2018; Zapp et al., 2020), public administrations (Zyzak & Jacobsen, 2019), social movements and civil society (Karlberg & Jacobsson, 2015; Laurent et al., 2020), to health partnerships (Cropper & Bor, 2018) or innovation projects (Webb, 2017). They are part of modern society, have evolved with it and even enable it. In a sense meta-organizations and modern society are co-constituting one another.

To repeat, meta-organizations are organizations with organizations as members. This simple definition has interesting implications. Indeed, it follows from it that meta-organizations are complex, layered social orders, coming on top of, and constituted of other social orders, those of organization members (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). And at the same time, meta-organizations contribute to the ordering of the world, by themselves producing social order, through decisions, norms, self-regulation, lobbying, standardization, etc. (Berkowitz et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022).

Back to the paradox I discussed earlier in this section. We can argue that meta-organizations are both at the root cause of all our problems (the responsibility imperative), are needed to solve complex social problems (the enabling imperative), constitute alternative forms of organizations (the transformation

imperative) for transitions (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Gümüşay et al., 2022) and at the same time, enable us to think of and frame these problems (cognitive imperative) (Berkowitz, 2018, 2023b).

Indeed, consider the responsibility imperative, many international organizations are contributing to the diffusion of neoliberal capitalism, pursuing economic growth through human and nonhuman exploitation. Many of these players are actually meta-organizations: the World Bank, the IMF, etc. Going further, some meta-organizations are very conventional organizations reproducing and perpetuating social orders that have negative effects on our habitability on earth – a self-evident example is the powerful American Petroleum Institute. Such meta-organizations create social orders by designing global standards (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Carmagnac et al., 2022), by setting laws and regulatory frameworks, by shaping or influencing public policies and organizing states (Ahrne et al., 2019; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Kerwer, 2013). In essence, understanding globalization cannot happen without a thorough understanding of the role played by meta-organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2022).

However, others meta-organizations, like place-based multi-stakeholder meta-organizations, can be viewed as social innovations needed for sustainability transitions. This aspect relates to the transformation imperative (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz, 2023b; Berkowitz, Fernandes, et al., 2023). Their innovative organizational dimensions include multi-referential membership with different spheres of society represented, joint decision-making processes, collaborative visioning for the future, accountability mechanisms towards broader publics including civil society, etc. (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Bor, 2024; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022).

These innovative meta-organizations also produce (alternative) social orders for sustainability transitions. This is the enabling imperative. Meta-organizations can produce social orders by creating and diffusing norms and forms of self-regulation, by building members and non-member's capacity (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c, 2024) especially for sustainable innovation (Berkowitz, 2018), and by filling governance gaps (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2017, 2024).

Under certain conditions, meta-organizations can therefore be thought of as transformative agents. Being transformative means that meta-organizations take active steps towards transitions and produce positive transformations (Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022). These conditions might include: being embedded in territories or places in order to be more adaptive and responsive to local realities; having actorhood, that is to say being recognized externally and internally as a social actor able to take decisions and to be held accountable for them (Berkowitz et al., 2020); or being reflexive about the collective's impacts on human and nonhuman beings, and enabling sustainability transformations of labor and professionalities, that is to say collective work identities, practices and norms in a profession (Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022).

And lastly meta-organizations are also devices or arenas where societal problems are themselves constructed and framed, where values are discussed and given priority, and where innovative solutions can be invented (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz, 2023b; Berkowitz, Guérineau, et al., 2023). This is the cognitive imperative.

For various reasons, recent works, even though implicitly, including my own, have overwhelmingly promoted meta-organizations as promising devices for organizing, contributing to and ensuring sustainability transitions (Alo & Arslan, 2023; Berkowitz, 2016a, 2018; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022; Bor & O'Shea, 2022; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019; Chaudhury et al., 2016; Fernandes & Lopes, 2022; Lupova-Henry & Dotti, 2022; Saniossian et al., 2022; Valente & Oliver, 2018).

However, a caveat is order here. Owing to their very nature, i.e., being organizations, being constituted of other organizations, and being associative (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), meta-organizations are both powerful yet potentially weak organizations when it comes to producing and maintaining social orders, especially ones that can be considered transformative, i.e. leading to broader changes towards sustainability, instead of maintaining status quo. The very nature of meta-organizations has implications on the way these collective functions, but also on the very dynamics of social orders as I will describe in this dissertation.

#### **4) A distinctive meta-organizational approach**

But what value does it bring to use a meta-organizational approach? How does this approach distinguish itself from others? The meta-organizational perspective introduces two primary distinctions. First, it provides an alternative theoretical framework for examining a specific phenomenon, i.e. organized collaboration among organizations, or creating decided order beyond single organizations. And second, it represents an alternative perspective on the driving forces and mechanisms of change towards sustainability.

##### *An alternative theoretical view on organized collaboration among organizations*

This is the key argument of Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008). The meta-organizational approach offers some distinctive insights that other approaches have either missed or neglected. I will not spend too much time here, as this will be explored more in depth in a dedicated chapter.

But to summarize quickly the arguments, for close to twenty years, the concept of meta-organization, as introduced by Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008) has represented a major break from several dominant theories and approaches, which usually exhibit one of two tendencies : 1) considering meta-organizations as if they were similar to individual-based organizations, and 2) considering meta-organizations as if they were similar to non-decided social orders, that is to say networks or institutions (Berkowitz et al., 2022).

However, the concept of meta-organization brings the attention to some constitutive dimensions. First, meta-organizations are made of other organizations, and this has significant implications on their functioning, dynamics, etc. (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008). Second, meta-organizations are themselves organizations, or decided orders, and consequently, this has important theoretical effects (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008). Decided orders rely primarily on decisions (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, 2011; Luhmann, 2018; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022). Decision here does not describe a psychological choice, nor a social event. On the contrary, decision is understood as a type of communication that selects a particular alternative, while implicitly or explicitly communicating discarded alternatives (Ahrne &

Brunsson, 2008). Decisions are therefore always as paradoxical and always attempts (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), because they simultaneously close and open meaning (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022).

So, what do we mean when we talk about meta-organizations? As I will discuss later in a dedicated section (section I), meta-organizations cover a broad range of empirical phenomena (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016). From trade and business associations, to cooperatives, associations of universities, federations, international organizations, the world is fraught with meta-organizations. They have been largely studied across a variety of fields of research, including strategy and management, public policy, regulatory governance, sociology of organizations, etc. However, since Ahrne and Brunsson's pioneer work, they have started to be treated as a specific concept, differing from other conventional organizations or networks and institutions.

#### *An alternative perspective on change towards sustainability*

Then, meta-organization theory or rather here more generally decisionalism, breaks from other dominant approaches by providing a different perspective on social transformation. This is particularly useful for understanding sustainability transitions.

Let's revisit the core concern of promoting sustainability transitions and achieving enduring change toward a more sustainable society. The fundamental question is: How can we effectively transform society for sustainability? To schematize, many prevailing perspectives on effecting change tend to fall within two main categories. The first category of works underscores the importance of institutions, institutional logics, and legislation (the regulatory perspective), while the second accentuates the role of markets, businesses, and innovation (the innovation perspective).

The 'regulatory perspective' underscores the critical role played by institutions, states, global governance, legislative bodies, public policies, and regulatory frameworks as essential drivers of sustainable transformation (Biermann et al., 2012; Campbell Gemmill & Marian Scott, 2013). It operates under the assumption that change needs to be mandated or imposed upon society, particularly economic actors, to ensure responsible behavior. This means that institutions must give directions through public policy or procurement, or that they must foster innovation – in relation to the second main perspective (Mazzucato, 2013; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018). I connect this perspective with a view of society as fraught with inherent risks that require mitigation. Consumers must be protected from businesses as new business models or technological innovations raise ethical concerns (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019). This has been largely analyzed, for instance, in the development of the sharing economy, with many scholars calling for more regulation of platforms to protect consumers (Brescia, 2016; Hildebrand et al., 2016; Rauch & Schleicher, 2015; Zrenner, 2015). This focus on institutions and regulation also naturally comes with an emphasis from organization and management scholars on neo-institutional theory, institutional logics and institutional work (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), i.e. how institutions change, and how to change said institutions, including to address grand challenges (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Taupin, 2019).

But this regulatory perspective raises at least two important problems: a theoretical one and a practical one. The theoretical problem is that organizational and management scholars have tended to view everything from the institutional lens<sup>10</sup>, with this theory becoming dominant and negating all other more minor approaches (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016; Apelt et al., 2017; Grothe-Hammer & Kohl, 2020). The practical problem is that regulations and institutions are often centralized, national or transnational, developed by decision-makers distanced from local realities, resulting in legislation being imposed in a descendant manner and therefore, creating regulatory misfits, especially in territories (Berkowitz, 2023a; Finkbeiner et al., 2017). Regulatory misfits refer to situations where existing regulations, policies, or governance structures are inadequate, inappropriate, or ill-suited to address emerging challenges, specific contexts or territories, or changing circumstances. In these cases, the existing regulatory framework can become obsolete or fails to effectively regulate or manage the issues it was originally designed for, resulting in gaps, inefficiencies, or unintended consequences. Regulatory misfits and regulatory obsolescence can occur when the pace of change is faster than the ability of regulators and regulations to adapt or when regulatory frameworks were not designed to accommodate specific developments or innovations. This is where meta-organizations can provide valuable alternatives (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024).

The innovation perspective, on the other hand, places a significant emphasis on innovation, entrepreneurial activities, and market-driven growth. This is anchored in the view that self-interest, even cupidity, will drive change (Smith, 1776). This view perceives the economy as a primary force propelling change and anticipates that (technological) innovations will drive progress, making the underlying assumption that progress is always desirable and that innovations can solve all ecological issues (Berkowitz & Guerineau, 2022). I am not including here social innovation and the social and solidarity sector though, as this community has a different understanding of innovation (Pansera & Fressoli, 2021; Petrella et al., 2021, 2023; Richez-Battesti et al., 2012; Ziegler et al., 2022). However, in its most common and dominant sense, innovation refers to creating new products, processes, or market structures. This traditional view sees innovation as the key to long-term societal development through continuous internal economic growth, which goes against principles heteronomous limits (Berkowitz & Guerineau, 2022; Kallis, 2019). Innovation has dynamic and organizational aspects, encapsulated in the concept of 'creative destruction' (Schumpeter, 1996). This concept is crucial as it underlines innovation's capacity to replace, disrupt, renew, and reorganize. It serves as a survival mechanism for businesses and economies, holding a central role in selecting successful entities and guiding economies and institutions. This means that innovation goes beyond producing new products to become a central driver of systemic transformation.

First of all, this perspective sets the ground for the development of sustainability as business opportunities (the 'business case' of sustainability). This leads to approaches like green growth or blue growth. It encourages competition, quest for profit and selfishness. Second, it also puts the responsibility and possibility for change on economic players, entrepreneurs, innovators, including through the concept of

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<sup>10</sup> I am very much aware of the irony of this sentence since I tend to do the same with meta-organizations, organizationality or decisionalism.

corporate social responsibility (Cai et al., 2012), and market or corporate strategies like nudge (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Third, and most importantly, this perpetuates an exploitative paradigm of organizations as systems of destruction (Berkowitz, 2023a), a view that is centered on (human and nonhuman) resources to be exploited to achieve growth for companies, for states or even for territories (Mazzilli & Pichault, 2018; Mendez & Mercier, 2006).

Similar to the regulation perspective, I see at least two problems in this innovation perspective, a theoretical one and a practical one. The theoretical one is that it fails to account for the dark side of innovations, their unintended and unattended consequences (Sveiby, 2017). There is thus a major bias in favor of innovation in most literatures, preventing them from being truly critical of (technological) innovation as a driver of change (Berkowitz & Guérineau, 2022). The more practical problem is that the innovation perspective perpetuates a paradigm of economic growth in a world with finite resources, and can therefore only lead to further overshooting planetary boundaries and resulting in global collapses (Berkowitz, 2023a; Berkowitz & Guérineau, 2022; Pansera & Owen, 2018). This has led some scholars to suggest bringing together in the same “basket” corporations, as the most effective tool for impact, and governments that can counteract corporations nasty effects, as Starbuck suggests in an interview for M@n@gement (Clegg & Starbuck, 2009)

This connects with a broader need for alternative form of collaborations among organizations, to bring solutions that individuals, conventional organizations, states, markets cannot develop. This entails a shift away from markets and competition, to collaborations solidarity (Eynaud & Carvalho De França Filho, 2023; Fotaki, 2022; Vijay et al., 2021, 2023) and imagining alternatives (Barin Cruz et al., 2017; Varman & Vijay, 2022b), taking inspiration from cooperation and community for instance in global peasant movements (Desmarais, 2002, 2012). More generally this also involves a shift away from market strategies and destruction of the livings, to “symbiosis” and co-viability (Berkowitz, 2023a). This, of course, questions the place of the State, of the common good, if meta-organizations and other forms of organizing fill in the gaps of governance and slowly bear all the responsibility for creating solidarity, for pooling efforts and ultimately, for tackling complex societal problems. What I have observed in multi-stakeholder meta-organizations including the State or public actors, is that the latter are very much needed. However, their roles are changing from legislators and experts making decisions imposed in a top down manner, to mediators and negotiators helping stakeholders take joint decisions (Berkowitz, 2023b).

## **5) Objectives and organization of the dissertation**

In this dissertation, I take a step back and look at my past and current works since my Phd dissertation. I explore the evolutions of my theoretical and empirical approaches as well as my own evolutions as a researcher. I review my key contributions to the field and describe some questions that remain open and that I wish to investigate in the upcoming years.

Some of the big answers I am directly or peripherally addressing are: why are meta-organizations here? Can they, and if so how, contribute to solving complex societal problems?

This dissertation is organized as follows.

**In section I**, I will first review the body of work that demonstrates the importance of meta-organizations as a multifaceted and ubiquitous empirical phenomenon and will highlight my own contributions related to this aspect.

Then **in section II**, I will develop a more conceptual approach and review works demonstrating that meta-organization is a valuable concept. I also describe some methodological challenges and the development of my analytical approach.

**In section III**, I will show how I began to work on meta-organization as a theory and especially on decisionalism, thus going beyond meta-organizations.

Then, in a more critical section (**Section IV**), I will discuss organizations and meta-organizations as systems of domination, and how we need to rethink our relation to the living and nonliving if we want to truly change social orders.

**In section V**, I will present some of the key questions I would like to investigate in the future.

**In Section VI**, I will develop a more reflexive part on my researcher identity. Note the interlude in this section. Finally, I will conclude in the last section (**Section VII**).

# I. Meta-organizations as important empirical phenomena in contemporary societies

## Synthesis

Meta-organizations are a constitutive phenomenon of modern society. They are everywhere and take multiple forms. Assessing their importance, quantifying and understanding the full extent of meta-organizations' presence and variety is challenging as they operate across various domains and sectors and are often not required to produce reporting information. Studies of meta-organizations span within and across many different fields. Overall, meta-organizations' presence is extensive in modern societies, and their diversity is much higher than the literature has truly accounted for, this is what I attempted to show in many of my works (as **Table 5**).

Ahrne and Brunsson argue that meta-organizations are more varied than traditional organizations due to the wide range of member organizations they encompass. In this section, I describe various efforts to categorize and understand the diversity, similarities and dissimilarities of meta-organizations. In particular, I highlight variations around members and size, membership composition and segmentation, scale and scope, specificity and specialization of mandate, and sectoralization. In doing so, I highlight the varying levels and orientations of their mandates. This section illustrates the rich possibilities of configurations of meta-organizations.

Then, I begin to address why meta-organizations hold such a pivotal role in the society, mainly due to their capacity to undertake important and diverse joint actions. First and foremost, meta-organizations serve a multitude of distinct purposes (facilitating interactions among their members, fostering joint actions toward nonmembers, managing the identity and status of members, and handling common tasks that have been outsourced to them). Combined to their generally low-cost structure, this makes them valuable tools for coordination but also easy devices to set up and maintain.

In fulfilling their purposes, meta-organizations engage in different categories of activities. These activities include governance and co-management, which allow them to regulate behaviors, act as regulatory intermediaries, and play a crucial role in defining, diffusing, and adapting rules at both national and international levels. In particular, meta-organizations contribute to shaping laws and organize and reorganize markets, often focusing on issues connected to socio-ecological transitions.

Next, meta-organizations often conduct advocacy activities, representing their members and defending their interests. Through negotiations, they address matters such as pricing, contracts, and regulations, contributing to organizing their industries. Their outreach strategies and efforts may play an important role in creating awareness and influencing members and nonmembers alike.

Meta-organizations also engage in boundary and category work, which is essential in shaping the identity and status of their members. They establish organizational boundaries and define categories, helping create collective identities and protect reputations.

Lastly, meta-organizations provide a wide range of services to their members, including information production, knowledge sharing, and capacity building. These services help enhance the capabilities and competencies of members organizations. Not all meta-organizations conduct all these activities, depending on their predominant logic.

**Table 5: My key papers and contributions to Section I**

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Key questioning relevant to the section</b>	<b>Key contributions to this section</b>
(Berkowitz, 2015a) <i>Gérer et comprendre</i>	Forms of meta-organizations in sustainability transitions	Importance of meta-organizations Preliminary categories of meta-organizations in the oil and gas
(Berkowitz, 2016a) <i>Phd dissertation</i>	Roles of meta-organizations in sustainability transitions  Forms and natures of meta-organizations in the oil and gas sector	First database of meta-organizations Showing the diversity, breadth and scope of meta-organizations in the oil and gas sector Showing the diversity of forms and activities Showing the survival of meta-organizations and the constant multiplication of new ones
(Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015) <i>Année Sociologique</i>	What do meta-organizations do in the oil and gas sector?	Diversity of forms and activities
(Berkowitz et al., 2017) <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	How do meta-organizations co-construct CSR practices?	Diversity of forms and activities  Co-construction of CSR
(Berkowitz, 2018) <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>	What are the activities and categories of meta-organizations?	Identifying key parameters and varying categories
(Azzam & Berkowitz, 2018) <i>Routledge Companion to Coopetition Strategies</i>	Type of coopetitive meta-organizations	Patent pools as meta-organizations
(Berkowitz, 2019) <i>OSF preprint</i>	Ontology of meta-organizations	Reviewing dimensions of meta-organizations and great categories
(Berkowitz et al., 2020) <i>Marine Policy</i>	Importance of meta-organizations for transitions	Multi-stakeholder meta-organizations Governing meta-organizations
(Berkowitz et al., 2022) <i>M@n@gement</i>	Purposes and activities of meta-organizations	Categorizing activities in particular

## 1) Meta-organizations are everywhere and are numerous

In this section, I want to support and substantiate Ahrne and Brunsson's (2005, 2008) argument that meta-organizations constitute a significant and multifaceted social phenomenon in modern society. Many important works since Ahrne and Brunsson's pioneer article and book have contributed to show this, in many different fields and sectors, from higher education (Brankovic, 2018; Zapp et al., 2020), to public administration (Zyzak & Jacobsen, 2019), health partnerships (Cropper & Bor, 2018), industries, business associations and other professional associations (Laviolette et al., 2022; Renou, 2021), international organizations (Kerwer, 2013), clusters (Gadille et al., 2013; Lupova-Henry & Dotti, 2022), social and solidarity sector (Maisonnasse et al., 2013) or cooperatives (Roux & Lecocq, 2022) among others.

### *The qualitative importance of meta-organizations*

Since my Phd thesis, I investigated very different meta-organizations and different sectors, from the oil and gas industry to marine industries and underwater noise pollution, ocean governance and crowdfunding among others. During my Phd, my primary objective was to show that meta-organizations mattered for sustainability transformations in the oil and gas industry (Berkowitz, 2015a, 2016a). I constituted the first database of meta-organizations gathering at least one member of the oil and gas sector. I showed the diversity, scope and importance of meta-organizations. Ninety-six (96) meta-organizations were established between 1917 and 2014 in the oil and gas sector, either exclusively in this industry or across multiple sectors, but including at least one oil company, on a global scale.

These meta-organizations, as I analyzed, emerged in three historical waves. The first phase, 1917-1962 witnessed the development of 'traditional' meta-organizations, aiming to represent the industry and defend its interests against states (typical trade associations). From 1963 to 1999, 'business thematic meta-organizations' started to emerge, alongside traditional meta-organizations. Business thematic meta-organizations still brought together only business players but focused on some specific environmental issues. This was the case for instance of CONCAWE, an association doing research on air pollution among other issues. And lastly, the period from 2000 to the present day has seen the apparition of new forms of multi-stakeholder meta-organizations, reflecting the need for collaboration on certain complex problems and the fact that, alongside states, NGOs and other constituents can both contribute to piloting sustainability transitions and may want to participate in meta-organizational governance.

In my Phd dissertation, I showed that these meta-organizations operated at national levels, especially traditional ones, and international or transnational levels, particularly in the case of thematic meta-organizations and multi-stakeholder meta-organizations. Depending on their levels, mandates, and specificity, meta-organizations conducted many different activities, important for sustainability transformations – to a varying degree. Interestingly, it also appeared that meta-organizations kept being created, and remained there even when they were no longer active, i.e. when they became empty shells, dormant or zombie meta-organizations (Berkowitz, 2016a). More recently, I started to look at territorialized (Gadille et al., 2013) or place-based meta-organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2023) that act at a more local level.

### *How about quantitative evidence?*

Meta-organizations are simply everywhere and yet we rarely think of them as such. This empirical importance of meta-organizations should start with sheer numbers, beyond the sole oil and gas sector. Yet, it is challenging to provide a specific estimate for the total number of meta-organizations, either in a national context like France, or internationally. Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) argue that there would be thousands of thousands of meta-organizations. They are everywhere in modern society, in all domains and sectors, in all sphere, gathering all types of members.

And indeed, as mentioned earlier, meta-organizations encompass international organizations, national trade associations, cooperatives, federations and confederations, some organized clusters, associations of public administrations or of universities, etc. The landscapes of such meta-organizations are not only vast and dynamic, they are also somewhat of a black box. There is little standardized, consistent information about meta-organizations. There is generally no obligation of reporting for them. There is no global database or index of meta-organizations.

In trying to quantitatively assess their importance, I looked at the Transparency Register of the European Commission (<https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/>). This can provide both a quantitative understanding of meta-organizations but help better understand why it is so hard to show their significance empirically and quantitatively.

#### **Transparency Register**

The Transparency Register of the European Commission is a database that provides information about lobbies in Europe. It is a voluntary system registering organizations and individuals that seek to gain access to institutions and conduct advocacy activities, i.e. to influence the decision-making processes of European Union institutions. The Register covers the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Council of the EU.

The objective of this database is to enhance the transparency of the EU decision-making process. It provides citizens with information about the interests represented, and creates a more open and accountable system. By voluntarily registering, organizations and individuals commit to following a set of common principles and a code of conduct.

#### ***Guidelines and principles:***

**Voluntary Registration:** Organizations and representatives who are engaged in activities with the potential to influence EU decision-making processes are encouraged to register voluntarily.

**Information Disclosure:** Registrants are encouraged to provide structured and up-to-date information about their objectives, funding sources, activities, and the number of staff engaged in EU-related activities.

**Lobbying Activities:** The register covers various forms of interest representation, including lobbying activities, advocacy, and public affairs.

**Code of Conduct:** Registrants commit to adhering to a common code of conduct that includes ethical standards and rules for integrity and transparency. Any breach to the code can be reported.

**Access to EU Institutions:** Registering in the Transparency Register is what allows organizations to gain access to EU officials and decision-makers. Representatives must be registered in order to be invited to hearings, to participate in intergroups and other unofficial activities, to meet with high profiles EU decision-makers, to participate in briefings and public events, to meet commissioners and joint commission expert groups.

It is important to note that the Transparency Register is voluntary and self-compiled. While it is clearly a tool for transparency, its effectiveness depends on the willingness of organizations and individuals to participate and provide accurate and comprehensive information, as I have been able to observe myself. Information is not homogeneous at all, and sometimes difficult to use.

Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/staticPage/displayStaticPage.do;TRPUBLIC-ID-prod=OUY2UMMPI-Jn27YzpHPZ\\_odZo5dsT0KsF1qOxJ4wl9gB\\_Zfn3DgK!479519574?locale=en&reference=GUIDELINES](https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/staticPage/displayStaticPage.do;TRPUBLIC-ID-prod=OUY2UMMPI-Jn27YzpHPZ_odZo5dsT0KsF1qOxJ4wl9gB_Zfn3DgK!479519574?locale=en&reference=GUIDELINES)

There were 12,435 registered organizations as of January 2023 (Source: Transparency Register). On this basis, I attempted to distinguish between meta-organizations and non-meta-organizations. One should keep in mind that this database only concerns organizations and individuals that seek to lobby EU institutions. There are much more meta-organizations worldwide, and many are not concerned with lobbying the EU.

I downloaded and edited the database in order to identify meta-organizations (available in open access, Berkowitz, 2024a). There are 13 different categories of organizations or individuals that can be registered: 1) "Academic institutions", 2) "Associations and networks of public authorities", 3) "Companies & groups", 4), "Entities, offices or networks established by third countries", 5) "Law firms", 6) "Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and similar", 7) "Organisations representing churches and religious communities", 8) "Other organisations, public or mixed entities", 9) "Professional consultancies", 10) "Self-employed individuals", 11) "Think tanks and research institutions", 12) "Trade and business associations", 13) "Trade unions and professional associations".

Table 6 shows the repartition of registration for each category and Table 7, the new registrations per year for each category, visualized in a graph (Figure 2).

**Table 6: Category of registration to the Transparency Register (Source: the author)**

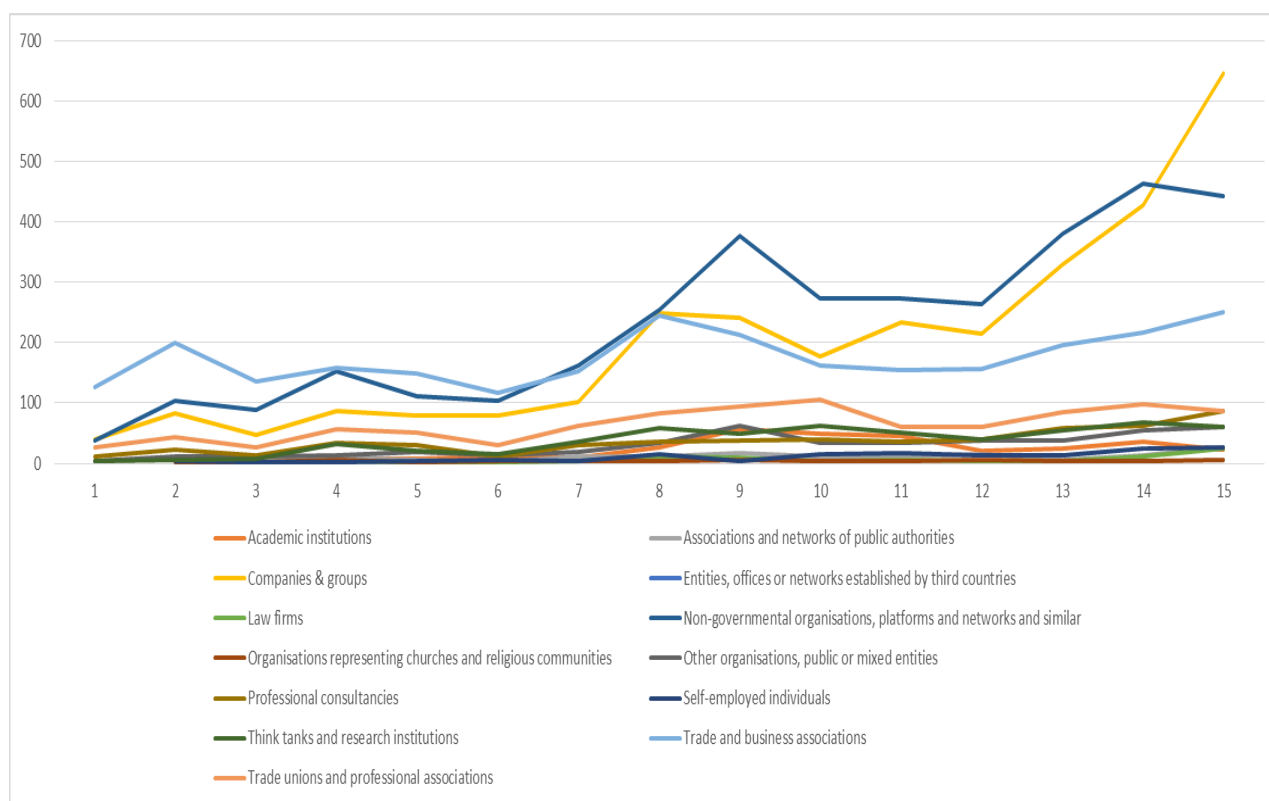
Category of registration	Total
Academic institutions	317
Associations and networks of public authorities	160
Companies & groups	3,035
Entities, offices or networks established by third countries	5
Law firms	84
<i>Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and similar</i>	3,488
Organisations representing churches and religious communities	52
Other organisations, public or mixed entities	443
Professional consultancies	547
Self-employed individuals	146
Think tanks and research institutions	561
<i>Trade and business associations</i>	2,628
<i>Trade unions and professional associations</i>	969
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,435</b>

N.B.: In italics, obvious meta-organizations

**Table 7: Category of registration to the Transparency Register from 2008 to 2022 (Source: the author)**

Category of registration	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Academic institutions				7	7	11	10	27	57	49	45	21	25	35	23	317
Associations and networks of public authorities	4	7	7	10	5	2	11	12	17	11	12	16	6	13	27	160
Companies & groups	39	83	47	86	80	80	101	249	242	177	233	214	330	428	646	3,035
Entities, offices or networks established by third countries				1			1		1		1		1			5
Law firms				3	2	1	3	12	10	4	6	4	4	11	24	84
<i>Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and similar</i>	37	104	89	153	112	103	162	254	377	273	274	263	380	464	443	3,488
Organisations representing churches and religious communities		1	1	6	2	4	4	4	6	4	4	5	3	3	5	52
Other organisations, public or mixed entities	3	11	11	13	18	14	19	33	63	33	34	38	37	55	61	443
Professional consultancies	11	22	13	33	30	12	31	35	37	40	36	39	59	63	86	547
Self-employed individuals		3	2	2	3	5	3	15	4	15	17	14	13	24	26	146
Think tanks and research institutions	3	5	7	32	20	16	36	59	49	63	50	39	55	67	60	561
<i>Trade and business associations</i>	126	200	136	159	148	116	152	244	212	162	155	156	195	216	251	2,628
<i>Trade unions and professional associations</i>	27	43	27	57	50	30	62	83	95	105	60	61	84	98	87	969
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>1,027</b>	<b>1,170</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>1,192</b>	<b>1,477</b>	<b>1,739</b>	<b>12,435</b>

**Figure 2: Evolution of registrations by category (Source: the author)**



Some categories are obviously constituted of meta-organizations, like trade and business associations. Other are obviously not meta-organizations, like self-employed individuals, law firms, etc. But then, when investigating a bit more, I found that some categories may or may not include meta-organizations: this is the case of Academic institutions, Associations and networks of public authorities, Entities, offices or networks established by third countries, non-governmental organizations, platforms and networks and similar, Organizations representing churches and religious communities, other organizations, public or mixed entities, Think Tanks and research institutions (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Category of registration as meta-organization (Source: the author)**

Category of registration	Meta-organization?	Total
Academic institutions	Maybe	317
Associations and networks of public authorities	Yes	160
Companies & groups	No	3,035
Entities, offices or networks established by third countries	Maybe	5
Law firms	No	84
Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and similar	Yes	3,488
Organisations representing churches and religious communities	Maybe	52
Other organisations, public or mixed entities	Maybe	443
Professional consultancies	No	547
Self-employed individuals	No	146
Think tanks and research institutions	Maybe	561
Trade and business associations	Yes	2,628
Trade unions and professional associations	Yes	969
<b>Total</b>		<b>12,435</b>

So, without heavy retreatment of the information (i.e., checking for each of the thousands of lines of organizations which one is a meta-organization and which one is not), one can evaluate the number of meta-organizations registered as a lobbying organization between at least 7.245 (categories that are clearly identified as meta-organizations) to a maximum of 8.623 (adding the “maybe” category) (Table 9).

**Table 9: Number of meta-organizations registered (Source: the author)**

Is it a meta-organization?	Total
Maybe It is	1,378
Yes It is	7,245
No It is not	3,812

What we see from this is that meta-organizations may represent between 60 and 70% of all organizations seeking to influence the EU decision making processes, which is incredibly high and yet not very surprising given advocacy is an important activity of meta-organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2022).

Out of curiosity, I had a look at the key topics emerging in the column “fields of interest”. Top topics are the environment, development, research and innovation, climate, digitalization, industry, energy topics and single markets among many (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Word cloud of fields of interest (Source: the author)**



Beyond this quick attempt at a quantitative overview of meta-organizations, what we can see from the literature is that meta-organizations span absolutely all fields, from churches (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), to cultural industries (Duprat et al., 2023), from civil society (Laurent et al., 2020) to social movements (Karlberg & Jacobsson, 2015), from cooperatives (Roux & Lecocq, 2022), to global agreements (Garaudel, 2020), from business associations (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015; Dumez & Renou, 2020) to multi-stakeholder ones (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c), from local co-management committees to international organizations in ocean governance (Berkowitz et al.,

2020), from Amazonian forest indigenous communities meta-organizations (Fernandes & Berkowitz, 2023) to the UN Global Compact and the Global Business Initiative (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015), from European contexts (Kerwer, 2013) to African ones (Alo & Arslan, 2023) and Latin American ones (Fernandes et al., 2023), from sports (Malcourant et al., 2015) to higher education (Brankovic, 2018), for profit and not-for-profit sectors alike (Karlberg & Jacobsson, 2015; Laurent et al., 2020). Meta-organizations even organize into meta-meta-organizations or further. We have argued that FIFA is even a meta-meta-meta-meta-organization although I am getting a bit lost there (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022). What we see from this anyway is the incredible empirical diversity of meta-organizations.

## **2) Diversity of meta-organizations**

Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) argue that meta-organizations are much more diverse compared to traditional organizations. This great diversity can be attributed to the wide array of organizations that can create and be members of meta-organizations (and the resulting diversity of it), from corporations, whether large multinationals or small and medium-sized companies, start-ups or family businesses, to hospitals, governments, public agencies, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, associations, indigenous communities, social movements, federations, etc. The diversity is all the more increased because meta-organizations can have heterogeneous membership compositions (one or more class of members as I will delve into later). Interestingly enough, various literatures, associations, conferences, and related academic journals are dedicated to almost each type of organizations: family businesses, international organizations, public administrations, international businesses, and so on. And yet there is no single association, conference and journal specifically dedicated to meta-organizations, despite their diversity.

Meta-organizations come in various colors, shapes and sizes. They can have more or less large membership, aiming to include all an industry or just a selected group of organizations (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015). They can have different governance forms, with or without secretariat. In my Phd thesis, I studied some meta-organizations who outsourced the secretariat activities to a law firm (the VPSHR), other did not have a secretariat at all and took turns at playing this role. FPF on the other hand as one person recruited by the meta-organization to act as a general secretariat. Meta-organizations can have members from the same sector or from various. They can have one objective or several. Their scale and scope can vary. They can conduct one activity or many. They can be old or new. They can be set up bottom up or top down. They can have little or many resources. They can meet regularly or seldom. Their decision-making processes can be very organized or not.

Various attempts have been made to categorize these meta-organizations in order to account for their extensive empirical diversity. If we take a step back from Ahrne and Brunsson's work, Astley and Fombrun (1983), for instance, suggested a classification of what could be empirically understood as meta-organizations at the time, even though it was far from holistic and lacked Ahrne and Brunsson's theoretical bases. Their classification was based on types of association (direct/indirect) and forms of interdependence (commensalistic/symbiotic). They made a distinction between confederate,

agglomerate, conjugate, and organic collectives. However, their classification primarily focuses on strategic management and overlooks the diversity of member types, such as NGOs, firms, associations, and the emergence of new organizational forms addressing significant global challenges.

In another effort, Gulati et al. (2012) proposed a taxonomy of “meta-organizations” based on stratification and membership boundaries. The authors suggest four types of meta-organizational designs involving closed or open boundaries/membership, and low or high stratification: closed communities, open communities, extended enterprises, and managed ecosystems. However, this definition tends to shift away from the core understanding of what meta-organizations represent, as I will discuss in the next section.

Within the realm of meta-organization studies, Garaudel (2020) argues that the diversity of meta-organizations can be attributed to two critical dimensions: (1) the alignment between the goals of meta-organization secretariats and the objectives pursued by member organizations, and (2) the extent and nature of the asymmetrical interdependences between the meta-organization and members. Moreover, Bor and Cropper (2023) shed light on the variations within meta-organizations, indicating that some of these differences are rooted in the flow of resources. They categorize these resources into four types: member resourcing, associational resourcing, contributed resourcing, and generated resourcing.

However, it is important to note that these works tend to be highly theoretical and still leave us wanting for a comprehensive classification of meta-organizations as empirical phenomena, much like we understand that firms for instance come in various sizes, forms, mandates, and sectors. The commonalities and distinctions among these diverse meta-organization forms remain insufficiently explored, and there may still be unknown forms of meta-organizations.

In my research, starting from my Ph.D. and continuing through my subsequent work, I have strived to provide evidence for the vast diversity and range of meta-organizations. I have focused on identifying the sources of these variations and have explored the overarching categories or significant groups within which meta-organizations can be classified: membership, scope, specificity, and sector as I look at hereafter. This focus is largely inspired by my primary focus on these dimensions during my Phd (Berkowitz, 2016a).

#### *Variations in types of member organizations and size*

My initial focus was on members and membership. By creating a database of meta-organizations in the oil and gas industry, I observed the dynamics of membership within these entities. This work allowed me to identify several families of meta-organizations. In particular, I distinguished between two primary categories: business-only meta-organizations, encompassing meta-organizations made of businesses (in the form of trade associations, industry associations, business groups, and similar entities), and multi-stakeholder meta-organizations, which bring together constituents of various domains or sectors (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015). This distinction added nuance to Ahrne and Brunsson's assertion that meta-organizations tend to have homogeneous memberships. However, their central

argument that membership plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of meta-organizations remains valid. Indeed, within meta-organizations, I have observed in various field works that membership often influences critical organizational elements like rules and sanctions, primarily through the threat of exit (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c).

In this context, the concept of membership can aid in classifying meta-organizations along two key dimensions: types of members and segmentation. First, in types of members, we consider the class or category of organizations to which the members belong (e.g., businesses, universities, civil society entities, etc.) (refer to Table 10). And then, in the segmentation of membership, we consider the number of distinct types of members within a given meta-organization (refer to Table 11).

These categories are not exhaustive and do not fully account for meta-organizations with more complex or overlapping membership or contributorship structures (Apelt et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024; Grothe-Hammer, 2019a). Nonetheless, identifying these foundational membership bases serves as a starting point.

As Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) postulate, there can be as many types of meta-organizations as there are types of organizations. This categorization of meta-organizations can be called 'sectoral meta-organizations' or 'domain-based meta-organizations', as they gather members from a specific sector or domain. There can be for instance business (only) meta-organizations. These are composed only of business entities, i.e. corporations, economic players etc. (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015). Examples of this category include trade associations, professional associations, franchising networks, and business groups (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Gulati et al., 2012; Renou, 2021; Spillman, 2018). Civil society meta-organizations on the other hand consist of non-governmental organizations and other representatives of civil society or not-for-profit sectors (Karlberg & Jacobsson, 2015; Laurent et al., 2020). Higher education meta-organizations, science meta-organizations and research meta-organizations bring together universities, schools, higher education institutions, or research centers (see for instance Bor, 2014; Brankovic, 2018; Zapp et al., 2020). Governmental meta-organizations are comprised of governments, states, or entire countries, with the European Union being a notable example (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Kerwer, 2013). Such meta-organizations can also include public administrations, such as cities in initiatives like the Fab City Global Initiative (Berkowitz, 2018), or municipalities (Zyzak & Jacobsen, 2019). This is to be distinguished from the category I proposed in my paper on ocean governance (i.e., governing meta-organizations, those that aim to organize governance of common problems) (Berkowitz et al., 2020). This is confusing, I know.

International meta-organizations can be considered specific governmental meta-organizations at the international level, consisting of national governments, as seen with the European Union (again!) or the International Whaling Commission (Ahrne et al., 2019; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Kerwer, 2013). Sports Meta-Organizations can be applied to FIFA, UEFA, World Anti-Doping Agency, all cases of meta-organizations dedicated to sports (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Malcourant et al., 2015). The realm of national and international sports is particularly complex, featuring meta-organizations, meta-meta-

organizations, and even meta-meta-meta-organizations that play significant roles within this domain. Then we could also add food and agriculture meta-organizations. These can be viewed either as a subset of business meta-organizations, focusing on actors in the food and agriculture sector, or as a separate category of meta-organizations with potential roles in piloting food system transitions (Lapoutte, 2021).

Additionally, there are other possible categories of meta-organizations, including those made of hospitals, or other health organizations such as partners in pediatrics (Cropper & Bor, 2018), of start-ups or fab labs (Berkowitz, 2018). Patent meta-organizations organize patent pools (Azzam & Berkowitz, 2018), and so on so forth. The list is not exhaustive, as meta-organizations can emerge in various domains and sectors, reflecting the vast diversity and adaptability of this organizational form. In that respect, this long list makes me wonder whether it makes sense at all to try and categorize something so vast and diverse.

The general idea here is to add a qualifier to meta-organizations, based on their membership, as the following **Table 10** summarizes.

**Table 10: Typology of sectoral or domain-based meta-organizations, i.e., with members from the same sector or domain of society (Source: the author)**

Type of meta-organization	Type of members	Examples
Business meta-organizations	Businesses only	Business groups; cooperatives; producer organizations; trade associations; franchising networks...
Civil society meta-organizations	Civil society representatives only	NGO associations; federations
Higher education and science meta-organizations	Universities, business schools, higher education organizations or research centers	League of European Research Universities; some R&D consortia (those only made of scientific organizations)
Governmental or public administration meta-organizations	National or local governments, municipalities and other public administrations (e.g., harbors, authorities and regulatory agencies)	European Union; United Nations; Fab City Global initiative; etc.
International meta-organizations	National governments or representatives of countries	European Union; World; United Nations; World Health Organization, etc.
Food and agriculture meta-organizations	Food and agriculture sector	Producer organizations; food and agriculture cooperatives

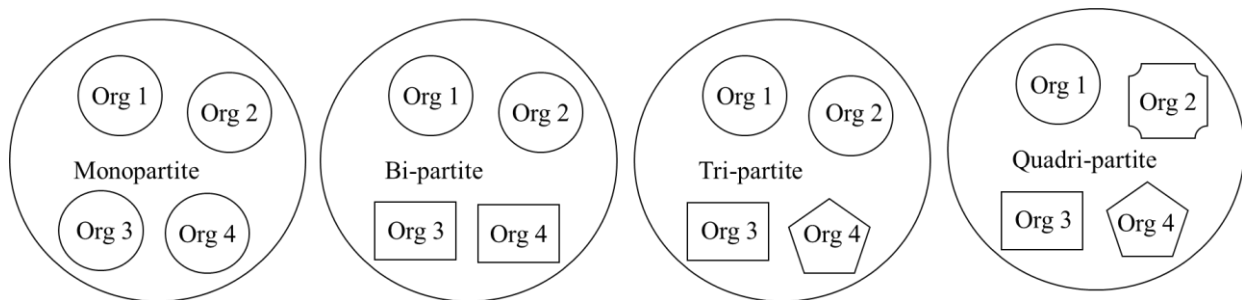
Sports meta-organizations	Sports clubs, associations or federations	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)
Health meta-organizations	Hospitals, public health organizations, etc.	Partners in pediatrics

Then size is also a source of variation. Some meta-organizations gather thousands of members, like the UN Global Compact, while others only a handful, like the Global Business Initiatives for Human Rights (Berkowitz, 2016a). And in between these two extremes, there is a wide range of possibilities.

*Variations in membership composition*

Then, there can be meta-organizations with more or less ‘segmented’ memberships (See Figure 4). I am using the term segmented to describe a composition of membership, that is to say one, two or more distinct classes or types of members (See Table 11). Building on my thesis, empirical observations, and the growing body of academic research, there is a discernible trend toward the emergence of segmented meta-organizations. This phenomenon is exemplified by multi-stakeholder meta-organizations, as initially explored in my thesis and subsequently examined by other researchers (Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019; Sanioossian et al., 2022; Valente & Oliver, 2018).

**Figure 4: Variations in meta-organizations’ membership’s segmentation (Berkowitz, 2019)**



Single-class meta-organizations are most likely the dominant form of meta-organizations. This category includes business meta-organizations, civil society meta-organizations, higher education and science meta-organizations, governmental meta-organizations, sports meta-organizations, and food and agriculture meta-organizations. Federations of associations or syndicates also fall within this single-class category. Historically, single-class meta-organizations appear to be among the oldest type, as observed in my earlier work in the oil and gas industry (Berkowitz, 2016a).

Conversely, other meta-organizations qualify as multi-stakeholder, bringing together two or more distinct types of stakeholders (see figure 4). Bi-partite meta-organizations involve two different classes of

members. For example, some R&D consortia consist of both firms and research centers (Bor, 2014). Tri-partite meta-organizations gather three classes of organizations from among corporations, universities, civil society, governments, or public administrations. In my thesis, I studied in particular the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). This meta-organization brings together corporations from the mining and oil and gas industries, local civil society NGOs, and governments (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz et al., 2017). The Fair Labor Association (FLA), which gathers universities, civil society, and corporations in the retail sector is another example (Berkowitz, 2018). I also studied quadri-partite meta-organizations, which in this case gather four distinct types of players, in most instances economic players, universities, civil society, and public administration. Examples include Catalan fisheries co-management committees (Berkowitz, 2023b; Berkowitz et al., 2020) and the UN Global Compact (Kell, 2013). We could even consider quintuple class meta-organizations (with territories as stakeholders) or more. This configuration has been explored in the context of quintuple helix innovation, particularly in cases like living labs or innovation ecosystems (Baccarne et al., 2016; Carayannis et al., 2018).

**Table 11: Classification of meta-organizations based on membership segmentation (Source: the author)**

Type	Segmentation	Examples
Single class or mono-partite meta-organization	A single class of members such as firms, NGOS, hospitals, universities, etc.	Business groups; cooperatives; producer organizations; trade associations; NGO associations; League of European Research Universities; franchising networks
Bi-partite meta-organization	Two types of members (e.g. firms and universities)	Some R&D consortia
Tri-partite meta-organization	Three types of members among for instance corporations, universities, civil society and public sphere	EITI (corporations, civil society NGOs and governments) Fair Labour association (universities, civil society and corporations)
Quadri-partite meta-organization	Four types of members (including for instance corporations, universities, civil society and public sphere)	Fisheries co-management committees in Catalunya (fishing associations, public administration, civil society and universities) UN Global Compact (several actors from the public sphere, civil society, economic and scientific worlds)
Quinque-partite meta-organization	All of the above in addition to “territories”, regions or local ecosystems as a local stakeholder participating to the meta-organization	Rural living labs, urban living labs, co-management Table in Catalunya

Highly segmented meta-organizations could be expected to be less frequent due to the complexity of aligning organizations with diverse and potentially conflicting interests. However, they can have a significant impact on their members and society, particularly in addressing grand challenges that demand the integration of public, private, civil, and scientific interests (Petes et al., 2014)

The implications of this variety in membership compositions have yet to be fully understood. What is evident is that meta-organizations exhibit remarkably high diversity and are not necessarily as homogenous as initially anticipated by Ahrne and Brunsson in 2008. While monopartite meta-organizations are relatively homogenous, bi-partite and other multi-stakeholder meta-organizations may encompass highly heterogeneous and segmented memberships. This is particularly the case of the Co-Management tools that I studied in Catalunya and that I will discuss in more details later (See Berkowitz et al., (2020) and Berkowitz, (2023). This segmentation of membership reflects the needs of contemporary societies, the evolving and increasingly complex nature of not only interests involved but also problems to tackle.

*Perimeters of mandates: scale and scope*

This diversity of membership within meta-organizations can be complemented by varying levels or scales and scopes of meta-organizational mandates, which is the official authority to carry out activities on behalf of their members, which connects with membership scale, as illustrated in Table 12. In relation to scale and scope of mandate, the establishment of the meta-organization may also be a source of variation<sup>11</sup>: whether emerging in a bottom up manner, as a grass-root meta-organization, or established more in a top down manner (including with incentives from national or transnational institutions like the EU (see for instance Karlberg & Jacobsson, 2015)).

**Table 12: Scale and scope of meta-organizational mandate (Berkowitz, 2019)**

Reach level/scope	Membership scale	Examples
Local	Locally embedded	Catalan fisheries co-management committee
Translocal	Locally embedded but across national boundaries	Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon Basin (COICA)
National	At the level of a country, nation wide	National trade associations
Supra-national/transnational	Across national or geopolitical frontiers, within a spatially bounded region	Association of Supervisors of Banks of Americas (ASBA), Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI)
International	Global scale	United Nations Global Compact

<sup>11</sup> Thank you to Marella Lewandowski for attracting my attention to this point.

Meta-organizations can be established to operate at different levels. Some may be highly spatialized, serving as highly local meta-organizations, such as the Catalan fisheries co-management committees or the Taula de Co-gestio del Baix Emporda, located on a small zone of the Costa Brava (See

**Figure 5).** These committees bring together fishing associations, public administrations, universities, and NGOs, with the primary objective of defining sustainable fishing plans at the level of a specific harbor, like Rosas on the Costa Brava (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Lleonart et al., 2014). Some meta-organizations may be translocal, like the COICA, the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (Fernandes & Lopes, 2022). Many meta-organizations have a national scope, that is the case for instance of most country-level trade associations (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015; Rajwani et al., 2015; Spillman, 2018).

Figure 5 : Area of responsibility of the meta-organization 'Taula de co-gestio' (in blue marine area, in green land area) (source: <https://participa.gencat.cat>) (see Berkowitz, 2023b)



*Perimeters of issues: Specificity, specialization and sectoralization*

Meta-organizations can also be categorized based on the specificity of the issues they address. This is what I have analyzed in the oil and gas industry, distinguishing between issues that are specific to a particular industry or those that are common to multiple industries (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz, 2019; Berkowitz 2023). In the oil and gas industry, I distinguished between high and low specificity (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Here, in Table 13, I propose variations in what I refer to as "mandate specificity" within meta-organizations, distinguishing between industry-specific (or sector-specific) and non-industry-specific (or non-sector-specific). To this we can add the specialization, i.e., specialist and generalist mandates. Specialist mandates present high specificity around a well framed issue, which may come with a specialization of the membership, i.e., addressing a specific problem, like environmental performances or respect of human rights in the procurement, with a closed membership and a given set of activities like services or lobbying only. A generalist mandate on the other hand may come with open category membership, general issues (i.e., addressing several problems and conducting various activities). Thematic meta-organizations, which I studied in the oil and gas industry, have specialist mandates, closed membership but can be industry-specific or not. Once again, the specificity of a mandate is likely to impact the activities and structure of a meta-organization. This is what Coron et al. (Under review) show in feminist movements, where universalist or intersectional collectives with specific vs generalist "orientations" present different activities (service or lobbying).

**Table 13: Specialization and specificity of meta-organizational mandates and membership (Berkowitz, 2019)**

<b>Specialization / specificity</b>	<b>Industry/sector specific (specific problem within a sector)</b>	<b>Non-industry/sector specific (transversal issues)</b>
<b>Specialist mandate: Framed issue or specialization of the membership</b>	Thematic meta-organizations like IPIECA, the global oil and gas association for sustainability issues (Berkowitz et al., 2017), or the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) (Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019) Thematic Multi-stakeholder meta-organizations like fisheries co-management committees (Berkowitz et al., 2020)	Thematic business-only meta-organizations like the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights (Berkowitz, 2016)
<b>Generalist mandate Open category membership, general issues</b>	Cooperatives (Roux & Lecocq, 2022), trade associations (Spillman, 2018), University associations like European University Association (Brankovic, 2018)	UN Global Compact  World Business Council for Sustainable Development (Berkowitz et al., 2017)

*Sectoralization.* Meta-organizations also vary greatly depending on their sectoral level and degree of sectoralization, i.e., the boundaries of sectors represented or not in the membership. Indeed, their mandate can be undertaken at different sector levels, from a high sectoralization, i.e., bounded within a given sector, to a low sectoralization, i.e., across two or more sectors, as Table 14 summarizes it.

**Table 14: Sectoralization of metaorganizational mandates (Berkowitz, 2019)**

Level	Sectoralization	Definition	Examples
Infra-sectoral, intra-sectoral	High sectoralization	Within a sector, but not encompassing the whole sector	IOGP International Oil and Gas Producers associations (only upstream businesses) League of European Research Universities
Sectoral	High sectoralization	At the sector level, encompassing the whole sector or domain	IPIECA (oil and gas, upstream, midstream, downstream) International Association of Universities
Supra-sectoral, inter-sectoral	Low sectoralization	Across two or more sectors with similar characteristics Or across supply chains	Supra sector of extractive industries (EITI) Supra sector of marine industries (World Ocean Council) Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)
Cross-sectoral, pluri-sectoral, pan-sectoral	Low sectoralization	More than two industries that share no attributes in common	UN Global Compact, World Business Council for Sustainable Development

Infra-sectoral or intra-sectoral meta-organizations operate within a specific sector but do not integrate the entire sector. For example, the International Oil and Gas Producers associations (IOGP) concentrate solely on upstream businesses. The League of European Research Universities also falls into this category (Brankovic, 2018). Sectoral meta-organizations have a sector-wide scope, encompassing the entire industry or domain. Examples include the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA), which focuses on the oil and gas sector, spanning upstream, midstream, and downstream activities (Berkowitz, 2016a). The International Association of Universities is another illustration (Brankovic, 2018; Zapp et al., 2020).

Supra-sectoral or inter-sectoral meta-organizations extend their boundaries across two or more sectors with similar characteristics or even across supply chains. Notable instances are the Supra-sector of extractive industries (for the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative, EITI) (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz et al., 2017), the Supra-sector of marine industries (World Ocean Council) (Berkowitz et al., 2017, 2020), and the value chain of palm oil with the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)

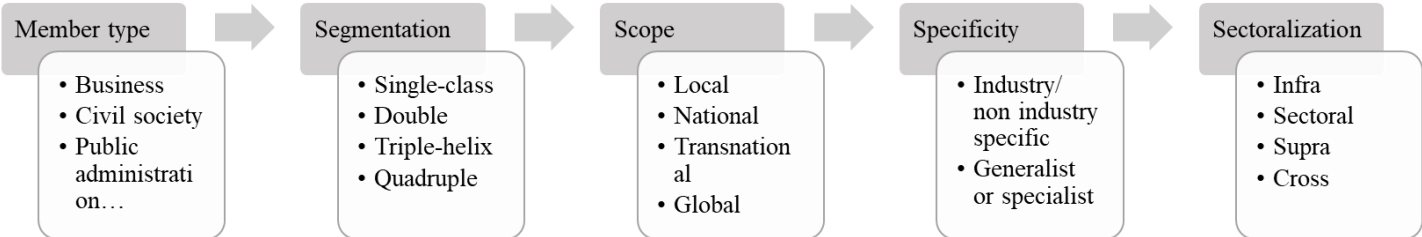
(Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019). Cross-sectoral, pluri-sectoral, or pan-sectoral meta-organizations transcend traditional sector boundaries and involve more than two industries that do not share any common attributes. Examples include the UN Global Compact and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz et al., 2017).

These classifications help clarify the diverse scopes and orientations of meta-organizations in relation to the sectors they engage with and provide a comprehensive understanding of their mandates. These categories have been re-used by other colleagues (Alo & Arslan, 2023; Garaudel, 2020; Sanioossian et al., 2022).

*A variety of configurations*

These categories of membership and perimeters of action can be combined, resulting in a rich array of possibilities and configurations, as illustrated in Figure 6. For instance, business meta-organizations and civil society meta-organizations have the flexibility to assume roles at both ends of the specificity and sectoralization spectrum, ranging from infra-sectoral engagements to cross-sectoral involvements.

**Figure 6: Variations in meta-organizations based on membership and perimeters of action (Berkowitz, 2019)**



Furthermore, when we consider Higher Education meta-organizations, their scope can span across various geographic dimensions. Some can be confined to national borders, some on the contrary extending to transnational spheres, or even fully global, depending on the nature and objectives of their initiatives. In France, many of them are actually local: this is the case of "Communautés d'Universités et Établissements" (COMUEs), which translates to "Communities of Universities and Institutions," and which can be understood as meta-organizations. These entities were established by the Law on Higher Education and Research in July 2013, replacing the previous administrative structure known as "Pôle de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur" (PRES), which had been in place from 2007 to 2013<sup>12</sup>. COMUEs can be conceived as meta-organizations that bring together multiple universities and higher education institutions under a common administrative and collaborative framework. It is interesting to note that the higher education field, just like sports, seems fraught with meta-organizations (Brankovic, 2018; Zapp et

<sup>12</sup> In a sense, a form of meta-organization replaced by another one. Their different structures, objectives and legislation could be worth analyzing and comparing to better understand meta-organizations legal backgrounds, in the context of evolutions of the meso-level governance of higher education (Musselin, 2021)

al., 2020), and that the higher education field seems to become increasingly more integrated via meta-organizations.

Multi-stakeholder or multi-class meta-organizations can also present such variations in specificity, levels and sectoralization. They may bring together very local and infra-sectoral organizations, addressing specific localized concerns. Or alternatively, they can take on a global mandate, global, multi-stakeholder open membership, yielding influence across multiple sectors in a supra-sectoral capacity.

This inherent flexibility in combining membership categories with diverse operational perimeters can be linked to the low-cost structure of meta-organizations, which make them easy to establish and operate (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015, 2016). And it results in a complex, dynamic and expanding landscape of meta-organizations, each tailored to the unique requirements of their mission and context. The configurations and possibilities are infinite. But resources and cognitive attention are not, so this infinity of configurations and proliferation of meta-organizations raise important questions (See Section V on projects). What we can observe at this stage is that this flexibility seems to enable meta-organizations to navigate and address a wide spectrum of issues and challenges, through a great variety of configurations, and we understand relatively little about the effects and efficiencies of these varieties. In particular, how does this affect and relate to the way meta-organizations conduct activities?

In our introduction to the special issue on meta-organizations in *M@n@gement* (Berkowitz et al., 2022), we have identified other parameters for variations in meta-organizations, such size of membership, absence or presence of a secretariat and its size and strength, resources (see also Bor & Cropper, 2023) in terms of financial resources or number of employees, but also existing or absence of conflict resolution mechanisms, etc. We have also argued that meta-organizations serve a variety of purposes, which relate to the next section: the importance of what meta-organizations do.

### **3) Roles and activities of meta-organizations**

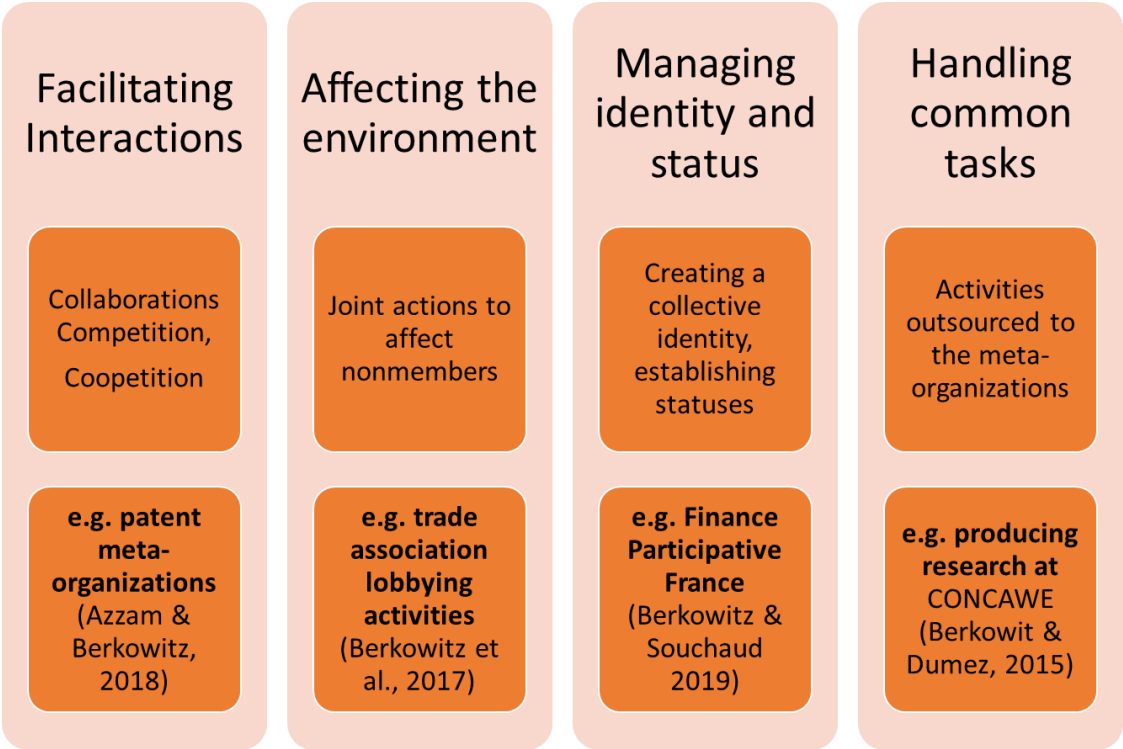
Meta-organizations hold a pivotal role in society. They are relatively easy to set up and maintain, they come in many forms and shapes. And they have the capacity to undertake important and diverse responsibilities.

#### *Purposes of meta-organizations*

Meta-organizations are also extremely diverse in their very purposes and engage in various activities to fulfill these purposes (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2022). There are four main purposes meta-organizations may serve (

**Figure 7**Figure 7).

Figure 7: Main purposes of meta-organization and my contributions (Source: the author)



First, meta-organizations are established to facilitate interactions among members. This can mean collaboration, cooperation, competition, or a combination, i.e. coopetition, the combined advantages of cooperation and competition, as I have been arguing in my past works. For instance, the Global Business Initiative fosters collaboration (Berkowitz, 2015a, 2016a; Berkowitz et al., 2017). Sports organizations may encourage competition. Patent pools and other governance meta-organizations may facilitate coopetition (Azzam & Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020).

Second, meta-organizations are set up to affect and shape their environment, i.e., nonmembers, through joint actions. Meta-organizations may aim to facilitate joint actions to represent the interests of the sector, as in trade associations, or to issue public statements in debates. This role is often adopted by civil society organizations and business associations (Berkowitz et al., 2022; Laurent et al., 2020; Rajwani et al., 2015; Spillman, 2018)

Next, meta-organizations contribute to managing identity and status. Meta-organizations are indeed involved in shaping identity and status. This may involve creating a collective identity at the meta-level, shaping members’ identities, or establishing a status order among members, as observed in meta-organizations for universities and sports associations (Brankovic, 2018).

Finally, meta-organizations’ key purpose is to handle common tasks. Some meta-organizations are in particular responsible for managing tasks that members have outsourced to it for greater efficiency. These

tasks are not necessarily required to be handled collectively, but the meta-organization's capabilities make them more effective in doing so, it enables members to pool resources and reduce costs and risks.

These purposes make them useful for sustainability transitions, yet at the same time may create specific tensions, as I will discuss later.

*Activities of meta-organizations*

These four purposes involve specific activities of meta-organizations: governance activities, advocacy activities, boundary and category work, and service provision (Berkowitz, 2019; Berkowitz et al., 2022) as synthesized in **Figure 8**.

**Figure 8 : Activities of meta-organizations and my contributions (Source: the author)**

Governance and co-management activities	Advocacy activities	Boundary and category work	Services to members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating norms and regulatory frameworks</li> <li>• Self-regulation and shaping members' behaviors</li> <li>• (e.g. crowdfunding, Berkowitz &amp; Souchaud, 2019 or ocean governance Berkowitz et al., 2020))</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lobbying, representation of interests</li> <li>• Outreach activities</li> <li>• (e.g. oil and gas, Berkowitz, 2015; Berkowitz &amp; Dumez, 2015; crowdfunding Berkowitz &amp; Souchaud, 2019)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating new products, new markets, new identities, managing reputation</li> <li>• (e.g. crowdfunding, Berkowitz &amp; Souchaud 2019, oil and gas Berkowitz &amp; Dumez, 2015)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information production</li> <li>• Training, knowledge sharing and capacity building</li> <li>• Infrastructures and joint resources</li> <li>• (e.g. cofradias in Catalunya, Berkowitz et al., 2018; oil and gas Berkowitz et al., 2017; crowdfunding Berkowitz &amp; Souchaud, 2019)</li> </ul>

First of all, meta-organizations often engage in governance and co-management activities (Berkowitz et al., 2017, 2020, 2022). They shape, regulate and manage members' behaviors, by defining, translating, and/or adapting rules at various levels, from the local, to the national, transnational and international level (i.e., creating social order). Through these activities, meta-organizations contribute to shaping legal frameworks or even markets, especially, but not only, in the context of socio-ecological socio-ecological transitions (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019; Peixoto & Temmes, 2019). I have argued that multi-stakeholder meta-organizations in particular play an important in self-regulating members through consensus and jointly taken decisions (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz, 2023b; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015).

Then, meta-organizations also conduct advocacy activities (meaning lobbying), through which they represent their members and defend their interests (Berkowitz et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2017; Rajwani et al., 2015; Spillman, 2018). These activities include negotiations related to prices, contracts, and regulations, but also raising awareness and influencing stakeholders on specific issues. Owing to reduced resources and partial organizing, 'outreach' activities or strategies, where meta-level actors or members raise awareness and nudge members and nonmembers, are used to promote a jointly decided agenda (Berkowitz, 2015a; Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015).

To fulfill their purpose of creating identity and status orders, but also to facilitate interactions and joint actions, meta-organizations engage in boundary and category work (Berkowitz et al., 2022). This involves setting organizational boundaries and defining categories for members, taking decisions and communicating internally and externally to establish a collective identity or family name (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Laviolette et al., 2022). Meta-organizations may need to reinforce their collective identity and manage reputation by addressing poor member behaviors, protecting the collective from 'black sheeps' (Berkowitz, 2016; Berkowitz et al., 2017). Meta-organizations may also help construct new categories of markets as we showed in the crowdfunding sector, where the meta-organization itself (Finance Participative France) prefigured the market, which was not yet legal (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c).

Finally, meta-organizations provide services to their members (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016), which include producing and sharing information, statistics, research, and organizing training and capacity-building. Some meta-organizations generate revenues by selling information or services to their members, and the nature of these services can vary widely based on the needs and characteristics of the members. They may offer concrete benefits such as joint resource production, infrastructures, or auction houses as it is the case in fisheries *cofradies* in Catalunya. These *cofradies*, gathering fishing companies and ship-owners, provide all services necessary to collect, store and sell fish, including reverse auction houses (Berkowitz et al., 2018). The services meta-organizations provide also encompass knowledge sharing, capacity building, workshops, and best practices diffusion among members, but also nonmembers and even other meta-organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024). While most works argue that these services are provided to members, I have shown in my later work that these services and especially capacity-building can occur between meta-organizations, across the FinTech sector (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024).

Meta-organizations exhibit a range of purposes and activities that align with their specific goals, which can encompass governance, advocacy, boundary work, and service provision.

#### *Logics of actions in meta-organizations*

In an old preprint, I developed an idea of logics or dimensions that could produce some categories of meta-organizations. I think they are still relevant to some extent and would like to get back to this idea and where it came from. In my Phd dissertation, I investigated the work of Schmitter and Streeck and drew on it (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015).

Following Schmitter and Streeck (1999) arguments, meta-organizations' actions could be further analyzed through two primary logics, a logic of membership and a logic of influence. Meta-organizations must indeed provide enough services and must adequately structure membership to survive, i.e., to attract and retain members from whom the meta-organizations will be extracting resources. Schmitter and Streeck (1999) label this the logic of membership. On the other hand, the logic of influence describes the necessity for meta-organizations to structure themselves in a way that allows them to influence non-members, like governments, and extract further resources.



## **Conclusion**

Meta-organizations are an important empirical phenomenon. They are qualitatively and quantitatively important. They are also extremely varied, depending on their size, governance form, their types of members, their membership segmentation, perimeters of mandate, but also purposes, activities and logics. The categories I have highlighted in this section, either from other works, or from my own reflection, only begin to show this diversity. What appears clearly is that meta-organizations, beyond their incredibly high diversity (and therefore dissimilarities) also present some commonalities or similarities. This hints at the theoretical value of meta-organization as a concept, the topic of the next section.

## II. Meta-organization as a concept and the challenges of studying meta-organizations

### Synthesis

Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008) main argument about the need for the concept of meta-organization was that most conventional approaches such as organization theory, institutional theory, and network theory, while valuable, may fall short in understanding some specific aspects of meta-organizations. Notably, being a meta-organization has significant implications on the functioning of the meta-level actors and the interactions between members and meta-level actors. In this section, I focus more on meta-organizations as a concept and the resulting methodological difficulties it creates (See Table 15).

Meta-organizations are decided orders, meaning that they are social orders primarily based on decisions – they are established and maintained through decisions (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, 2011). As such, meta-organizations differ from network and institutions, which both constitute non-decided social orders that emerge more organically through repeated interactions or through taken-for-grantedness (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, 2011). This has implications on decision-making processes, layering and multi-levelness of social orders in meta-organizations (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018, 2022, 2024, etc.).

The second important characteristic is that members of meta-organizations are themselves organizations, rather than individuals. This makes meta-organizations intrinsically different from individual-based organizations like associations, firms, clubs, social movements, communities or bureaucracies. This has implications as mentioned earlier on the functioning of the meta-level actor and relations between members and meta-level actor.

The third characteristic is that meta-organization are generally voluntary association, this means that members chose to come together and to collaborate. This has two implications: it enables members to internalize the environment of organizations in an overarching actor (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), and it shifts the emphasis from competition to collaboration, or at least co-competition (i.e. combined advantages of cooperation and competition), sometimes displacing the center of gravity of competition from members to meta-organizations themselves (Azzam & Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020).

In my work, I have been particularly interested in how this specific nature of meta-organizations affects the functioning and organizing of the meta-level actor (see among others, Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2022; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022). Members, whether firms, nongovernmental organizations, hospitals, states, among others, possess their own collective identities, specific resources, strategies, logics, values, norms, autonomy and organizational actorhood (or not), all of which exert an influence on the meta-organization, and vice versa. Indeed, the fact that members are themselves

organizations affects the meta-organization's constitution, its ability to attract, renew and retain members, to take collective decisions and be held accountable for them, to create and develop a cohesive meta-level identity (referred to as the family name by Ahrne and Brunsson (2008)), and effectively make sense of diverse interests while externally representing its members, but also to affect members in return.

These dimensions raise specific methodological challenges. How does one study meta-organizations? Whom do we speak to? How do we actually get the collective identities, the strategies, the decisions of the meta-level actor, and how do we unravel the intertwining of social orders in meta-organizations? As mentioned previously, meta-organizations are a black box, there is no standardized obligation of reporting. So how do we access them, and when we access a meta-organization, what is it we are getting access to exactly? In my Phd thesis, I addressed these issues by creating a database and by conducting interviews at different levels and with different members/meta-level actors. I then kept doing qualitative research via in-depth case studies (crowdfunding, whaling, fisheries) or comparative cases (ocean governance).

I developed a specific meta-organizational lens as a methodological approach to study the evolutionary dynamics of meta-organizations. Through this lens, I showed that meta-organizations serve as intermediaries (i.e. regulatory intermediaries, innovation intermediaries, and transition intermediaries). Their importance in society cannot be overstated. Although they can be instruments of regime resistance, precisely for all the activities they conduct, their multifaceted roles still make them invaluable social actors in driving transformative change for sustainability.

**Table 15: My key papers and contributions to section II**

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Key questioning relevant to the section</b>	<b>Key contributions to the section</b>
(Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016) <i>European Management Review</i>	Is meta-organization a concept?	Reviewing Ahrne and Brunsson's arguments
(Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2017) <i>Politique et Management Public</i>	Constitution of the meta-organization	From a network of individuals to a meta-organization
(Berkowitz & Bor, 2018) <i>Journal of Management Inquiry</i>	Why are meta-organizations important?	Showing the anteriority of Ahrne and Brunsson's work, defending the value of the concept, identifying different schools of thoughts
(Berkowitz, 2018) <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>	Attributes of meta-organizations for sustainable innovation	Developing an analytical framework
(Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c) <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	Partial meta-organizing	Studying the dynamics of partial meta-organizing and self-regulation
(Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019b)	Partial organization	Developing an analytical framework
(Berkowitz, 2019) <i>Preprint OSF</i>	Ontology of meta-organizations	Developing a complete analytical framework with metrics

(Berkowitz et al., 2020) <i>Marine Policy</i>	Attributes of meta-organizations for ocean governance	Continuing the framework
(Berkowitz et al., 2022) <i>M@n@gement</i>	What are meta-organizations exactly?	Clarifying the concept in organization studies
(Berkowitz & Bor, 2022) In <i>Clusters and Sustainable Regional Development</i>	Partial meta-organization	Developing an analytical framework to study meta-organizations
(Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024) <i>Technovation</i>	How do meta-organizations evolve in response to governance gaps	Trajectories of meta-organizations and dynamics
(Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming) <i>International Journal of Management Reviews</i>	Systematic review of meta-organizations	Contrasting meta-organization as a meta-level actor and as an orchestrated system

## 1) Why meta-organizations matter as a dedicated concept?

What is the value of meta-organization as a concept? With this question, I will try and summarize arguments developed by Ahrne and Brunsson in their pioneer works – arguments I have myself used either in papers or when talking to people who are not familiar with this concept.

A small caveat here. I always assume that Ahrne and Brunsson coined the term meta-organization. They clearly were the first to theorize about meta-organization, first in an article (2005) and then a book (2008). However, there were previous uses of the term. I came across it in Ciborra (1996) paper that says that platform organizations are meta-organizations (which I used in some of my work, to argue the other way around, that meta-organizations are platforms for discussions (Berkowitz, 2018)). I recently came across a symposium paper defining the association of said symposium, the Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts, as a meta-organization, an organization of organizations (van der Plas, 1995). And then to my surprise, I discovered a whole book written in French about meta-organization in 2000, and titled “Mét@-organisation”<sup>13</sup> (Ettighoffer & Beneden, 2000). Needless to say, I went through a wide range of emotions, from despair and anger at finding this out only now, to curiosity, and then finally a mild deception when I finally held the book and discovered that this was basically about networks of companies, cooperating thanks to new technologies to enhance their performance. However, an interesting question they ask and that we have also asked ourselves is whether this proliferation of meta-organization is a new form of modern society or a transitory phase of society towards something else (see Géniaux & Mira-Bonnardel, 2003). Nevertheless, Ahrne and Brunsson still hold the pioneer position of coining and conceptualizing the broader phenomenon of organized actions among organizations.

### *The specificities of meta-organization*

A meta-organization is an organization which members are themselves organizations. For nearly two decades now, the concept of meta-organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008) has represented a major break from several dominant discourses, which usually exhibit one of two tendencies : 1) treating meta-organizations as if they were individual-based organizations, and 2) treating meta-organizations as if they were non-decided social orders, that is to say networks or institutions (Berkowitz et al., 2022). Non decided (or emergent) social orders are those that emerge spontaneously through unplanned interactions, i.e. networks (Goffman, 1966), or emerge slowly through time and a taken for granted reproduction of behaviors that are unquestioned, i.e. institutions (Jepperson, 1991).

One first tendency in dominant approaches in management, economics, sociology of organizations, political science and international relations, among other disciplines, consists in treating meta-organizations like their “conventional”, individual-based counterparts. In doing so, academics have looked at meta-organizations through theories developed for organizations made of individuals (often focusing on the secretariat of meta-organizations). This is the central initial argument of Ahrne and Brunsson. While

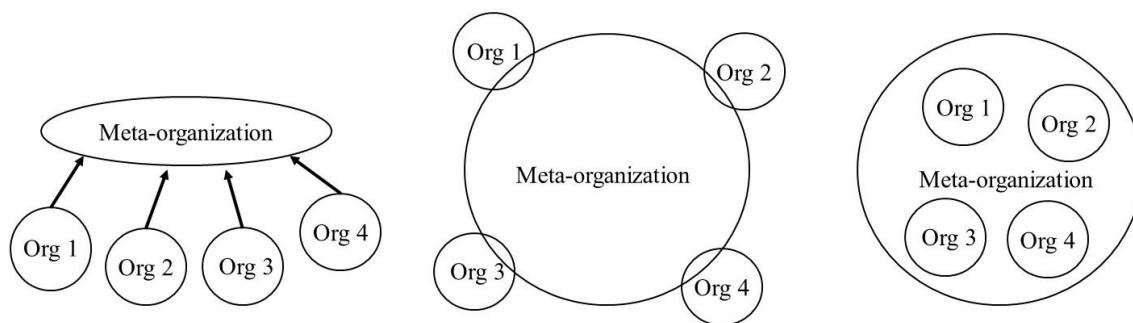
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<sup>13</sup> That is so 2000s!

these works have brought valuable insights, they however failed to reflect on the particular implications of having an organization on top of and constituted of other organizations.

The second tendency has been to treat meta-organizations as inherently non-organizational phenomena such as networks or institutions. As such, these works have often overlooked the organizationality of this phenomenon. The concept of meta-organization on the other hand, has provided us with the basic and yet fundamental insight that part of the environments of organizations are often just other levels or forms of organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008) (see Figure 10). This specific nature of meta-organization, or its peculiar ontology (Berkowitz, 2019) creates a number of challenges : for autonomy, for actorhood of meta-organizations, for decision-making processes, for impact or effects of meta-organizations, etc. This is why it becomes useful to have meta-organization as a concept.

**Figure 10: Three different visualizations of meta-organization and member-organizations, as both internal and external to one another (Berkowitz, 2019)**



### *Defending meta-organization as a concept*

In 2018, a few papers were published in the *Journal of Management Inquiry* on trade associations (Barnett, 2018; Lawton et al., 2018; Spillman, 2018). My attention was brought to one paper in particular, entitled *Meta-organization Matters*. I remember Olivier Germain tweeting it to me, back then when Twitter was at its beginnings and still fraught with promises. Sharing it with Sanne Bor, we were both surprised, to say the least, to see no reference to Ahrne and Brunsson’s work. The argument of the paper was that basically trade associations were meta-organizations and as such they mattered because they did important things. So, we decided to propose a response to the article to the editor of the journal. After a few round of revisions, the paper was quickly published (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). I really enjoyed the process of writing this response.

Looking back at my initial works, I kept attempting to develop and legitimize the concept, to show the value of taking such an approach (Berkowitz, 2015a; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015, 2016), or to defend “why meta-organizations matter” (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). In that sense, meta-organizations are not just an important empirical phenomenon, they are also a specific conceptual approach, seeking to regenerate classical organization theories. Recent works have argued that organization studies are somewhat in

decline and need renewing (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016; Ahrne et al., 2017; Apelt et al., 2017; Grothe-Hammer & Kohl, 2020). This is precisely what meta-organization does.

And I have repeated the same arguments over and over again, reusing Ahrne & Brunsson's core arguments: meta-organizations are organizations that are themselves made of organizations, and matters. So there is organization outside of organizations that is worth studying as such (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, 2019; Arnold, 2020; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c; Crespín-Mazet et al., 2017; Den Hond et al., 2019; Laamanen et al., 2020; Rasche et al., 2013). I thought that with the increase of the community (even though there are disagreements in the uses of the term, as I will discuss hereafter), it would at least prove that this is now cemented and accepted. Yet, coming across this recent introduction to a special issue on organizing for grand challenges, I noticed that any collaboration among organizations still belongs to the realm of "informal networks" (Baumann et al., 2024). So. There is still a long way to go to defend why meta-organization as a concept matters.

#### Serendipity moment – SCORE workshop

I remember fondly the wonderful 2016 SCORE workshop with Göran and Nils in Stockholm, where I met so many original people. I especially remember morning breakfasts with Sanne when we started to discuss meta-organization theory, which led to our many projects...

#### *What is the status of the concept exactly?*

As argued before, meta-organizations are organizations which members are themselves meta-organizations. This has several significant implications. I like to repeat that meta-organizations are everywhere, yet we rarely think of them as such. This comes with the corollary that many empirical phenomena (see the previous section) have actually been studied already, and often extensively, by other fields, disciplines, communities, through specific theoretical lenses (network, neoinstitutionalism, interest groups, etc.). So, what is under the theoretical umbrella? Well researched examples of meta-organizations and their literatures or main used concepts include trade associations (Bradley, 1965; König, Schulte, & Enders, 2012; Rajwani, Lawton, & Phillips, 2015), multi-partner alliances (Das, 2015), federations (Provan, 1983), standard organizations (Boström, 2006), multi-stakeholder initiatives (Mena & Palazzo, 2012; Rasche, 2012), cooperatives (Sharfman, Shaft, & Anex, 2009). We saw previously the diversity of empirical phenomena that could be studied as meta-organizations.

I really like Kerwer's works on this topic because he and his co-authors expertly show the key argumentation for using meta-organizations in the field of International Relations and the study of International Governmental Organizations (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Kerwer, 2016; Ahrne et al., 2019; Kerwer, 2013). I could summarize it as "approach X or Y see such phenomenon as this and that, but they failed to take into account that this was actually a meta-organization, and this changes many things". For me Ahrne, Brunsson and Kewer (2016) paper is the poster child of positioning the concept with regard to existing literatures and showing the dual perspectives that the concept can offer. I always enjoy reading

the paper and observing how they contrast the other dominant approaches in international relations (principal-agent theory and bureaucratic organization theory) with the concept of meta-organization. For me, the value of using the concept of meta-organization always revolves around the theoretical implications that result from its nature, or “intrinsic” dimensions of meta-organizations, e.g. multi-level meta-organizational cooperation (Azzam & Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020).

But this further raises the question of the status and relation of the concept of meta-organization with regards to these other strands of literature. I find it interesting to think of it in two manners, both as something overarching and an umbrella concept (therefore potentially encompassing all these literatures) and at the same time as a distinctive conceptual approach that means to yield novel insights about the phenomenon. I think that this dual perspective highlights the value and the versatility of the meta-organization concept. This dual perspective positions meta-organization both as an overarching concept or framework that can span across various literatures and disciplines (from management to sociology, political sciences, economics, regulatory governance, etc.), encompassing a wide range of organizational phenomena, and also as a unique analytical lens that offers a novel and refined understanding of complex interactions, interdependencies, tensions, and collaborative dynamics within and among organizations.

This dual positioning of the concept (as an overarching framework and as a distinctive conceptual approach) also facilitates pluridisciplinarity. As an analytical tool, it can be easily exported to other fields and disciplines. I have done so for instance in marine conservation (paper in *Marine policy*) and begun to do so in economics (Promsopha et al., 2022). Within management studies, I have exported the concept to transition studies, innovation management among others. But the concept’s dual positioning also comes with risks of failing to consolidate knowledge, either because of a risk of neglecting past contributions (of literature like that on networks for instance) or of a risk of conceptual dispersion and fragmentation. I will focus on this in section III. But I now turn to methodological challenges of using meta-organization as a conceptual lens.

## **2) Methodological challenges of studying meta-organizations**

With the distinctiveness of the concept of meta-organizations also come methodological challenges. My Phd thesis started with a concrete endeavor: attempting to assess the number of meta-organizations related to or including members from the oil and gas sector. To do so, I created a small database of meta-organizations, with information on membership composition, date of creation, topics addressed etc. As mentioned in Section I, I identified 96 meta-organizations. And yet at the end of my thesis, upon finalizing my manuscript, I came across a whole related sector that I had failed to integrate in my database.

I remember the despair of that moment because I feared this incomplete mapping challenged my analysis and contributions. In fact, it showed the complexity of studying, mapping and analyzing meta-organizations, because first of all it is highly challenging to make an inventory of them. There is no global or even national or regional database. Meta-organizations generally have little to no obligation of transparency and produce therefore little standardized, findable and interoperable information about themselves, what I would call here meta-data about meta-organizations. The lack of existence of meta-

data about meta-organizations makes it incredibly challenging to develop a good understanding of their quantitative importance, but also to study them and compare them. In Section I, from the transparency Register, I evaluated that there could be between 7,245 and 8,623 meta-organizations registered as lobbies at the European Union level. This also shows that even knowing whether an organization is a meta-organization can be quite difficult.

In my opinion, the black box of meta-organizations partly explains the dominance of case studies in the field and the difficulty of conducting quantitative studies. And beyond the database created during my Phd thesis, I also focused on in-depth case studies, in a variety of empirical settings (See Table 16). In my Phd thesis, I took the industry-level as entry points (oil and gas), but also developed an entry point focused on management problems (underwater noise pollution) (Berkowitz, 2016a). Then I sometimes focused directly on certain meta-organizations (International Whaling Commission, FPF), or a series of meta-organizations (in FinTech).

**Table 16: Examples of levels and units of analysis in my studies (not exhaustive) (Source: the author)**

<b>Studies</b>	<b>Empirical setting (Domain or sector)</b>	<b>Methodology and sources</b>	<b>Levels and units of analysis</b>
(Berkowitz, 2016a)	Oil and gas industry and beyond	In-depth study of a sector, in-depth case studies; Database, Interviews and field work	Meta-organizations involving one or more oil and gas company; practices and activities
(Berkowitz, 2016 a)	Ocean governance	In-depth case study; Experimentation and interviews	Meta-organizations dealing with underwater noise pollution; practices and activities
(Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c)	Crowdfunding sector	In-depth case study; Interviews and field work	One meta-organization; its structuration and practices
(Berkowitz et al., 2020)	Ocean governance	Multiple case studies; Interviews and secondary data	Several meta-organizations related to ocean governance; Organizational attributes
(Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022)	Ocean governance	In depth case study; Archives	One meta-organization; Decisions over time
(Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024)	Fintech sector	In-depth case study; Interviews, Archives and field work	Several meta-organizations; Internal and external mechanisms

But this dominance of in-depth case studies, or rather of qualitative methodologies, also relates to another factor: the very nature itself of a meta-organization. How do we address a meta-organization? Whom do we speak to when we speak to a meta-organization? How do we develop a processual approach to study meta-organizations as embedded processual entities, multi-level decided orders combining undecided orders? These are important questions that raise epistemological challenges. These become all the more complex with the multi-level perspective of social orders and their intertwining, which I will develop in the next section.

So how did I tackle these issues? I did interviews with various peoples in the meta-organizations, to triangulate and vary points of view on the meta-organizations and to reconstruct or attempt to access actorhood, collective identity, strategies, etc (Berkowitz, 2016; Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019; 2024). I took websites as entry points of analysis and as proxies for collectively negotiated narratives and identities (Berkowitz, 2016; Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). I took official decisions and votes as entry points of analysis of social orders in meta-organizations (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). On this basis, I looked for tipping points and critical junctures where new sequences emerged (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019; 2024; See also Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024 on the study of social orders), in a way that could be easily turned into a processual approach in the Lestian tradition (Mendez, 2010a).

I find two elements interesting. First of all, nobody really knows or thinks for the meta-organization. That is precisely the fascinating tensions in meta-organizations, between member-organizations who are besides represented by individual representatives, and the meta-level actor. There is a multi-level actor, and there are always members, but actorhood and collective identity are a constantly negotiated and challenged process that is never fully successful. And from the perspective of members, I was surprised in my Phd thesis to find that one single member (Oil and Gas French major Total) did not even know the full extent of its membership portfolio. In these cases of multi-national companies, participating to dozens of meta-organizations, it is not always the same people that represent their organization in the meta-organizations and nobody really follows it all.

### **3) How to apply the concept? Developing a meta-organizational analytical perspective**

So, how to use the concept? In relation to these methodological challenges, through my works, I slowly developed a meta-organizational analytical perspective or lens, meaning that I developed tools to look at certain phenomena as meta-organizations and derive insights from the approach.

In several of my papers, I either used the same framework or changed it a little, adding dimensions here and there, changing the focus of the conceptual tool. The common thread was to look for the ontology of meta-organizations, their specific attributes and manners to study this empirically. I then often used it to study meta-organizations' dynamics over the long term. And then it enabled me to unravel the functions that meta-organizations can play with regards to various theoretical literatures. These are the three

dimensions of this meta-organizational analytical perspective: attributes, evolution dynamics and functions of meta-organizations as a concept.

### *The development of meta-organizational attributes*

After my Phd thesis, I started to develop analytical framework first using meta-organizational attributes, like ‘acting as a platform’, ‘functioning by heterarchy rather than hierarchy’, ‘producing information’, ‘enabling coopeition’ (see Table 17) (Berkowitz, 2018). Maybe at this stage of the dissertation you can see filiations and evolutions between activities and attributes here. Then I began to integrate Ahrne & Brunsson’s (2011) concept of partial organization or organizational components (see also Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019b on collective intelligence). I first viewed meta-organizations as partial organization, and so integrated it as a dimension of the framework (See

Table 18): meta-organizations are formal organizations, organization-based, and partial organization, among other characteristics (Berkowitz et al., 2020). And then, I started to unpack what being a partial organization concretely meant in terms of organizational components (membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, sanction) (Berkowitz & Bor, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c, 2024).

**Table 17: Attributes of meta-organizations as a device for sectoral governance (Berkowitz, 2018, p. 423)**

Attributes of meta-organizations	Main references from the literature
Act as a platform	(Ciborra, 1996; Gawer, 2014)
Consists of an association of other organizations	(Berkowitz and Bor, 2017; Ahrne and Brunsson, 2008; Bor, 2014)
Functions by heterarchy rather than hierarchy	(Ahrne and Brunsson, 2008; Stark, 2009)
Makes decisions on consensus	(Ahrne and Brunsson, 2008; Bor, 2014)
Has a low-cost structure	(Berkowitz and Bor, 2017; Berkowitz and Dumez, 2016)
Includes heterogeneous actors from direct competitors to stakeholders	(Berkowitz et al., 2017; Boström, 2006; Clarysse et al., 2014)
Permits coopeition, dialogue and information capture	(Berkowitz et al., 2017)
Facilitates knowledge transfers and collective learning	(Ahrne and Brunsson, 2005, 2008; Clarysse et al., 2014; Gulati et al., 2012)
Produces information for members and outreaching	(Berkowitz and Bor, 2017; Malcourant et al., 2015)
Results in self-regulation and industry shaping	(Lawton et al., 2017; Rajwani et al., 2015; Spillman, 2017)
Produces reporting mechanisms and enhances social responsibility	(Berkowitz et al., 2017; Chaudhury et al., 2016; Rasche et al., 2013)

**Table 18: Meta-organizational key common characteristics, implications, advantages and disadvantages (Berkowitz et al., 2020, p. 2)**

Characteristics	Implications	Advantages	Disadvantages	References
Formal organization	Creation date Collective goal	Collective action among organizations	Potential inertia due to the necessity to take decisions Decisions produce contestation	[3,13–17]
Organization-based	Membership made of organizations Access to direct and indirect resources	Representative-ness Delegation of decision-making	Limited resources Difficulty to build an identity of its own	[3,18]
Partial organization	Selective combination of organizational components Consensus	Low-cost structure	Difficulties to assess performance of members and to sanction them	[8–10]
Inter-organizational space	Knowledge brokerage	Facilitated dialogue and knowledge sharing Outreach strategies	Potential lack of actorhood Risk of ghost MO	[12,19]
Coopetition enabler	Gathers direct competitors	Neutralization of conflicts Information capture	Predatory strategies Competition among MOs or among MO and members	[20,21]
Regulatory intermediation	Integration of levels of regulation Self-regulation Reporting mechanisms	Strength and scope of regulatory diffusion, Harmonization Legitimacy and effectiveness	Potential competition of norms and rules Risk of regulatory capture or stalemate	[22–25]

### *Analysis of evolutionary dynamics*

This meta-organizational lens has enabled me to develop long term studies of meta-organizations and to analyze their evolutionary dynamics. This is particular the case for my studies in crowdfunding and in ocean governance (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2017, 2019c, 2024).

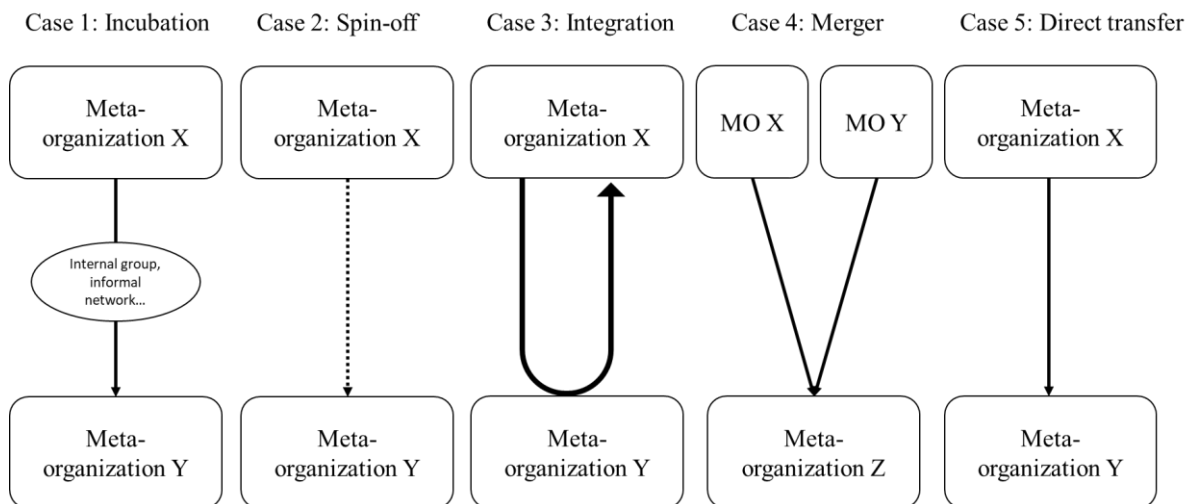
In all these studies, I have worked with the framework on one hand, and chronologies on the other hand. I used the framework to identify not only phases where meta-organizations disclosed different parameters or characteristics, but also the tipping points or critical junctures themselves (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2017, 2019b, 2024). These tipping points could be special events or decisions.

In our latest paper with Souchaud for instance (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024), we analyzed the evolutions of meta-organizations as devices of sectoral governance in response to the emergence of successive innovations over close to 30 years in the FinTech sector in France. We argued that successive innovations create multiple technologically-induced governance gaps that meta-organizations can fill. We argue in that paper that the sheer speed of technological innovations itself increases the rate of technological disruption. This disruption then accelerates the obsolescence of regulators and regulations (Fitzgerald, 2018). This obsolescence creates governance gaps which we called ‘technologically induced’ governance gaps (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024). We focused on ten collectives, whether in the form of meta-organizations, informal groups, or networks of individuals.

Using a meta-organizational analytical lens, we identified three different phases with different innovations, intermediaries and individual boundary spanners. What we noticed was that meta-organizations conducted unique activities for a variety of contributors (members, non-members and other meta-organizations) that informal groups or networks could not perform. Meta-organizations participated in co-management or co-regulation activities with members and non-members through advocacy, resulting in the joint production of legislation and self-regulation, key activities that I had already analyzed in my previous work and that I have highlighted in the previous sections. Additionally, meta-organizations helped non-members, especially regulators and end users, increase their own capabilities about digital innovation.

By extending our initial analysis of the creation and constitution of FPF (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019b), in this study of the FinTech sector, we highlight specific trajectories and situations where meta-organizations evolve or are established (See Figure 11). We have called “meta-organizational filiation” the relations that are created between these meta-organizations. Indeed, meta-organizational filiation can occur through incubation, spin-offs, integration, mergers, and direct transfer. This filiation is enacted through a meta-organization-to-meta-organization capacity building. In this specific case study, we showed the value of taking a meta-organizational lens to study innovation intermediaries, which leads me to the next part, functions of meta-organizations as intermediaries.

**Figure 11: Evolutions of meta-organizations through trajectories of meta-organizational filiation (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024, p. 10)**



### *Functions of meta-organizations as intermediaries*

While working on developing the concept of meta-organization, I became increasingly aware of a growing literature, in different fields, looking at intermediaries. Various communities from different disciplines (innovation studies, transition studies, regulatory governance in particular) use this concept to study organized, intermediary action.

An extensive literature in innovation studies has looked at innovation intermediaries (Agogu e et al., 2017; Howells, 2006; Lee et al., 2010; Rossi et al., 2021; Stewart & Hyysalo, 2008). The notion of innovation intermediary describes both various types of organizations that contribute to innovation diffusion and diverse processes of innovation intermediation (Howells, 2006). Agogu e et al (2017) describe innovation intermediaries' core functions as connecting and engaging actors, as managing potential conflicts of interests and stimulating innovation. At the crossroads of political science, management, and regulatory governance, several scholars emphasize the importance of intermediaries in regulatory processes, or regulatory intermediaries (Abbott et al., 2017; Br es et al., 2019; Ciernei et al., 2023; Hysing & Du Rietz Dahlstr om, 2024; Jordana, 2017; Medzini & Levi-Faur, 2023). Regulatory intermediaries may diffuse, transpose, transform policies, norms etc. Then, transition studies also argue that intermediation is increasingly needed for the transformation of socio-technical systems and of relationships between actors (Kivimaa et al., 2019). In that perspective, transition intermediaries allow for tackling resistance to change and creating the conditions for successful market disruption (Kivimaa, 2014; Mignon & Kanda, 2018).

Some of these intermediaries are organizations made of individuals, like public agencies (Rossi, Caloffi, et al., 2021). Some are even individuals, like architects (Horne & Dalton, 2014). Others are actually meta-organizations (Berkowitz, 2016c, 2018; Berkowitz, Fernandes, et al., 2023; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024). Meta-organizations as intermediaries may have been studied previously under the term of industry associations (Dalziel, 2006; Watkins et al., 2015), organized and structured

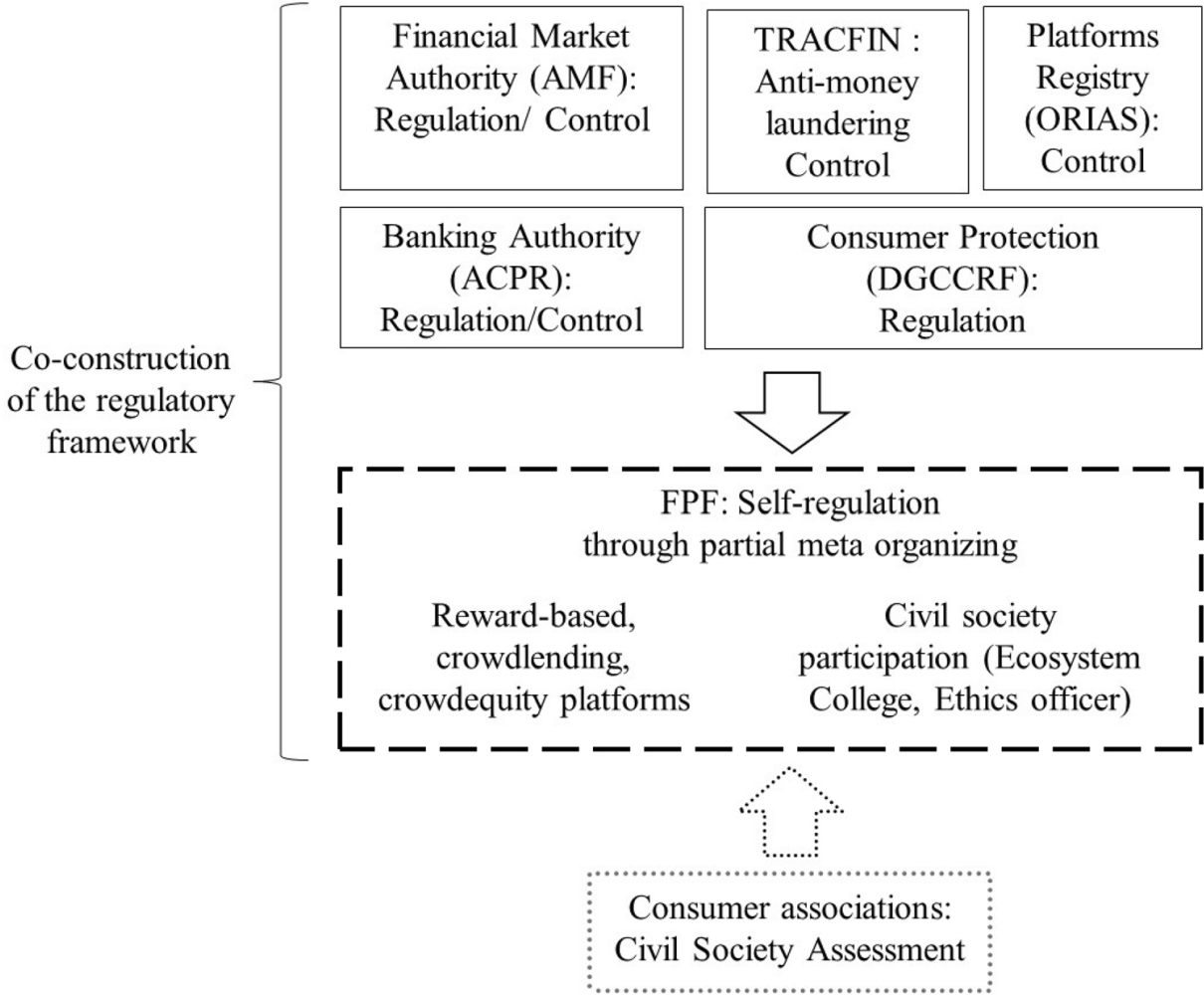
networks (Lee et al., 2010; Van Lente et al., 2003), organized inter-organizational collaborations, between firms and innovation communities (Lauritzen, 2017), and other forms of membership-based organizations (Kant & Kanda, 2019), but few works have focused on meta-organizations as intermediaries .

In most of my work, I investigated what meta-organizations do and how they behave as intermediaries across the three functions (regulatory intermediaries, innovation intermediaries and transition intermediaries). This has led me to often cross literatures (meta-organizations and the intermediary literature). In so doing, I still embraced this perspective of meta-organization as a concept, and I kept asking: what are the implications of having a meta-organization?

### *Regulatory intermediaries*

In my earlier works, I begun to investigate meta-organizations as regulatory intermediaries (Berkowitz, 2016c; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2017, 2019c). In so doing, I connected in particular with the literature on sectoral governance (M. Cohen & Sundararajan, 2015; King & Lenox, 2000; Sundararajan, 2016) and regulatory governance (Abbott et al., 2017; Brès et al., 2019; Djelic & Quack, 2018; Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Hysing & Du Rietz Dahlström, 2024; Levi-Faur & Jordana, 2005; Medzini & Levi-Faur, 2023). Meta-organizations functioning as regulatory intermediaries may contribute to building regulation and self-regulation of members, through partial meta-organizing (See **Figure 12**). Meta-organizations, by nature, favor standardization and soft law and are therefore well equipped to act as regulatory intermediaries towards their members. They are also actively conducting advocacy and can well represent collective interests towards nonmembers like regulators. They are indeed often regulatory intermediaries that seek to affect regulatory frameworks.

**Figure 12: Co-construction of the regulatory framework of crowdfunding in France and the meta-organization as a regulatory intermediary (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019, p. 972)**



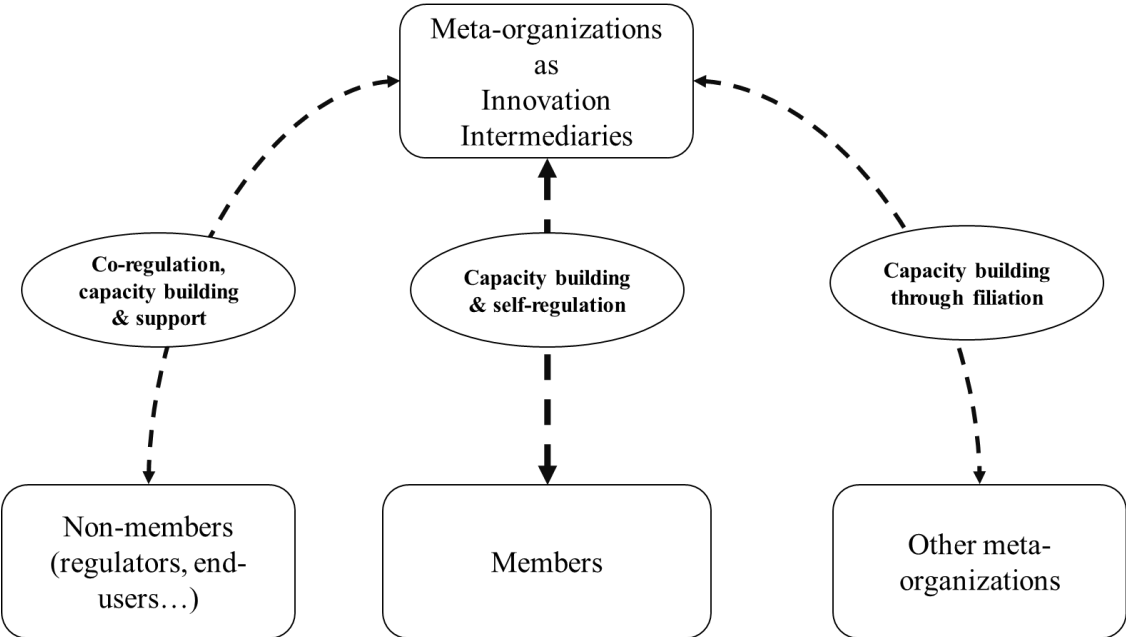
These meta-organizations fill governance gaps, which puts into question the role of the state and of politics. This question is even more pressing in contexts of technologically-induced governance gaps where regulators and regulatory framework face rapid obsolescence (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024). In these cases, meta-organizations may help regulators’ capacity for understanding and regulating innovation, but the frontier between capacity building and lobbying can be blurry and can easily lead to regulatory captures (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024).

*Innovation intermediaries*

Then I looked at meta-organization as innovation intermediaries (Berkowitz, 2018). I connected with the extensive literature on innovation intermediation (Agogu  et al., 2017; Howells, 2006; Lee et al., 2010; Radnejad et al., 2017; Watkins et al., 2015). I argued that meta-organizations can also build members’ capacity for sustainable innovation. In our latest paper (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024), we show that

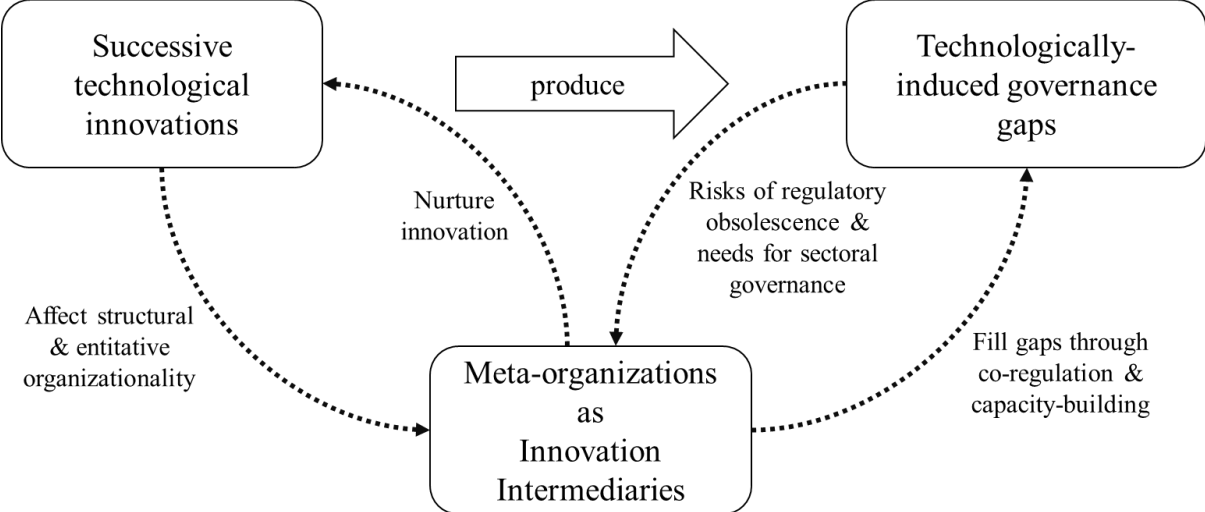
under certain conditions, non-members enhance the role of meta-organizations innovation intermediaries and meta-organizations can serve as innovation intermediaries for not only members, but also non-members, and other meta-organizations (see Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Relations between meta-organizations as innovation intermediaries and their contributors (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024, p. 10)**



In that paper, we actually merge innovation intermediaries and regulatory intermediaries literature, to focus on regulatory innovation intermediation, i.e. those that focus on regulatory function in innovation intermediation, rather than direct value creation. We show that such meta-organizations successfully fill successive governance gaps through co-regulation and capacity building. Meta-organizations and non-members co-regulate each other, members self-regulate through meta-organizations, and meta-organizations build capacity of other meta-organizations. We indeed describe how meta-organizations may contribute to other meta-organizations’ capacity-building for innovation intermediation, often through boundary spanners that facilitate knowledge transfer. This capacity-building enables sustained transmission between different meta-organizations and can occur through different meta-organizational evolutions as I mentioned in the evolutionary dynamics section. While meta-organizations appeared well geared to accompany the regulation of new digital innovations, the digital nature of innovation also affected the collectives’ organizationality, which directly influenced their regulatory innovation functions (Figure 14)

**Figure 14: Interrelations between successive innovations, governance gaps and meta-organizations as regulatory innovation intermediaries (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024, p. 11)**



*Transition intermediaries*

Finally, I have focused on meta-organizations as sustainability transition intermediaries. In a way, this has been a red thread since my Phd thesis, including on innovation (Berkowitz, 2018) or regulatory governance (Berkowitz, 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2020) but I really started to engage with the transition studies themselves in my latest works (Berkowitz, 2023b; Berkowitz, Fernandes, et al., 2023; Berkowitz & Bor, 2024; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024). I have shown that meta-organizations act both as regulatory intermediaries and as transition intermediaries.

In my studies of the Catalan context, I focused on a fascinating case of the creation of a meta-organization to manage conflicts of use on a coastline (Berkowitz, 2023b). The Co-management Table of the Baix Empordà is a multi-stakeholder meta-organization implemented in a coastal area of Catalonia, bringing together several organizations from different fields of activity: economic, associative, public and scientific players. The meta-organization seeks to jointly manage, in a socially just and ecologically viable way, the various uses of the coastline by commercial and recreational fishing, tourist activities, scientific and educational activities, and heritage protection. The meta-organization acts as a regulatory intermediary at a very local level, i.e., it constitutes a collaborative actor that produces a form of regulation of members' practices. And the meta-organization also acts as a transition intermediary, enabling the transformation of several sectors of activity, production and consumption systems, towards greater socio-environmental sustainability.

The meta-organization does several things: 1) territorializing the co-construction of the problem and its solutions, 2) decentralizing and empower local stakeholders, while enabling coopetition among a variety of constituencies, 3) assessing different values of the livings and hierarchizing them.

First, the meta-organization enables members to jointly construct what the problem is (here unsustainable and contradictory uses of the coastline). It does so by bringing together different point of views and perspectives on the matter and territorializing the boundaries of the problem and of its solutions. Second, the meta-organization empowers local stakeholders to take decisions and pilot transitions. In so doing, the meta-organization decentralizes decision making and territorializes decision power. It also enables forms of cooperation, the combined advantages of cooperation and competition). In that perspective it is interesting to note the shifting role of public powers, from decision makers and law makers, to negotiators and mediators of discussions and local decision-making. Finally, the meta-organization enables members to jointly assess values of their activities and the ecosystem, and to give them priority. Here, the meta-organization has for instance chosen to prioritize health of natural ecosystems over economic value of activities. It has intentionally and collaboratively proceeded to a paradigmatic shift in its values. What I have also noticed with such multi-stakeholder meta-organizations that include the states or public actors is that those are very much needed, but their roles are changing from legislators and experts to mediators and negotiators (Berkowitz, 2023b).

## **Conclusion**

The concept of meta-organization as introduced by Ahrne and Brunsson has represented a major break from several dominant discourses, which usually exhibit one of two tendencies: 1) treating meta-organizations as if they were individual-based organizations, and 2) treating meta-organizations as if they were non-decided social orders, that is to say networks or institutions. Owing to their specificities, meta-organizations are a valuable concept. However, for the same reasons they create important methodological challenges. Starting from my Phd thesis, I have developed several frameworks to unpack the specificities of the concept and to operationalize it into an analytical lens to study the evolutionary dynamics of meta-organizations and the functions of meta-organizations as regulatory intermediaries, innovation intermediaries, and transition intermediaries). However, in the process of developing these frameworks I also increasing became interested in theoretical underpinnings and developments behind the concept.

### III. Meta-organization as a theory centered on decision

#### Synthesis

What we have seen so far is that meta-organizations are extremely diverse, something that no theory has been able to grasp so far for a lack of an overarching approach. And meta-organizations are more than simply a multi-faceted empirical phenomenon. They are also conceptually different from other phenomena, and are difficult to study, not only because of their incredible diversity but also because of their very nature.

The endeavor of meta-organization theory is precisely to move beyond the empirical diversity and tackle the theoretical foundations of such a phenomenon (See my contributions in

**Table 19**). A growing body of literature has contributed to this effort. My own investigations have focused especially on the theoretical implications of meta-organizations being decided social orders and especially being layered multi-level decided social orders.

The notion of social order describes the general “ordering” of society, that is to say social structures like rules or hierarchies that make the world somewhat predictable (Johnson, 2000). Emergent social orders are those that emerge spontaneously through unplanned interactions, typically in networks (Goffman, 1966), or emerge slowly through time and a taken for granted reproduction of behaviors that become unquestioned, typically in institutions (Jepperson, 1991).

I have developed with my co-authors an overarching, multi-dimensional theoretical approach of social orders (and that includes meta-organizations) based on decision (i.e., decisionalism). There are, for now, five dimensions of this ‘decisionalism’: 1) infra-organizationality, which deals with fundamental parameters of social orders, like ontology and changeability, 2) structural organizationality which has to do with structural components of a decided order, like membership, authority, rules, monitoring and sanctions, 3) entitative organizationality which deals with attributes of organizational entities, that is to say actorhood, collective identity and interconnected decision making systems, 4) contextual organizationality which has to do with contextual aspects and combines temporality, territoriality and professionalism, and 5) meta-organizationality, which has to do with intrinsic attributes of meta-organizations, like multi-referentiality, dialectical actorhood, layering and multi-level decidedness. These dimensions contribute to a more holistic understanding of contemporary society, to a better understanding of whether and how social orders can change, and whether meta-organizations may provide solutions to grand challenges but also what kind of specific problems they create (in section IV).

**Table 19: My key papers and contributions to section III**

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Key questioning relevant to the section</b>	<b>Key contributions to this section</b>
(Berkowitz, 2015) <i>Gérer et Comprendre</i>	How do meta-organizations perform sustainability?	A performativity approach
(Berkowitz, 2018) <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>	What are the key implications of being meta-organizations and how do they contribute to sustainability?	Reflection on decided orders and their nature And how meta-organizations by nature facilitate certain activities for transitions
(Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019b) <i>Comptabilité Contrôle Audit</i>	What are the characteristics of decided orders in the context of collective intelligence?	Decided orders Co-dependent organization
(Berkowitz et al., 2020) <i>Marine Policy</i>	Developing the idea of decided orders and connecting it with sustainability transitions	Decided orders, actorhood, multi-stakeholderhood, spatiality
(Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022) <i>Research in the Sociology of Organizations</i>	Developing the idea of decided orders and issues with large-scale collaborations	Concept of decidability of social orders
(Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022) <i>Research Handbook on the Sociology of Organizations</i>	Developing an integrative framework (Organization as Decision Theory)	Bringing together Luhmann, Ahrne & Brunsson, and Dobusch & Schoeneborn as the bases for an Organization as Decision Theory
(Berkowitz & Bor, 2022) <i>Handbook on Clusters</i>	Connecting organizational and decisions	Concept of decisionality
(Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022) <i>Handbook on Clusters</i>	Meta-organizations as transformative agents	Responsible actorhood, meta-organisational accountability, transformative mediated reflexivity, negotiated professional restructuring
(Berkowitz, 2023b) <i>Conflits d'usage en mer</i>	Meta-organizations as transformative agents	Multi-referentiality
(Berkowitz, Fernandes, et al., 2023) <i>EGOS communication</i>	Linking transformationality and territoriality	Concept of place-based meta-organization
(Berkowitz & Bor, 2024) <i>Journal of Organizational Sociology</i>	What are the key attributes of meta-organizations? and how does this interfere with or align with principles of transitions?	Multi-referentiality, layering, dialectical actorhood, multi-level decidedness

(Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming) <i>Revue Française de Gestion</i>	Organization as Decision Theory	Insights from the French scholarship (temporality, territoriality, professionalism)
(Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024) <i>Critical Sociology</i>	How are social orders constituted?	Expanding the binary of decided and non-decided orders
(Coulombel & Berkowitz, under review) <i>International Journal of Management Review</i>	How do social orders in formal meta- organizations differ from social orders in informal meta-organizations?	Clarification between meta- organizations with a meta-level actors vs. orchestrated ecosystems, distinction between collectively decided social order and orchestrated social order

## 1) Is it a theory? (and is it performative?)

What is a theory? A theory aims to explain a phenomenon by describing it, making assumptions about effects and reactions, and connecting factors and variables to make such assumptions.

### *Performative theories*

In my Phd thesis, I worked on performativity of theories. Drawing mostly on Callon's work, I proposed to define the performativity of management theories as their ability not only to describe phenomena through assumptions and interrelated factors or variables, but also to actually transform practices by integrating theoretical knowledge into socio-material devices, or today I would say, into social orders and organizations (Berkowitz, 2016a). I was driven by the analysis of the Pasteur's Quadrant and an aspiration of our field (i.e., management) to be an applied science that has concrete effect on organizations.

Now, thinking again of my conceptualization of performativity as a nexus of felicity conditions, with framing and overflowing processes and transformation of practices, I feel contented with the part of description and understanding of phenomena, making assumptions and connecting factors. If meta-organization theory truly is a theory, I am not sure it can actually change practices themselves, rather it can change the way we look at practices and think of organizations. And this is already achieving a lot. Besides, given how the field of meta-organization studies has grown, it is becoming somewhat performative in academia at least. The year 2017 counted 7 publications in journals, reaching up to 15 papers in 2022, and I am expecting a lot more in 2024 (Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming).

However, what is interesting about this theory, is that we are witnessing high fragmentation in the field, for various reasons. Pressures to publish, the increase pace of publication and the constant search for "gaps", "novelty" and "theoretical contributions" either encourage or even force certain behaviors and practices, like failing to cite relevant works. We exclude certain works because they are not in the right outlets, because they are not in the right language, because they deal with the same phenomenon but not the right literature, or because they deal with the same literature but not the right phenomenon, or they do not use the same methodology, and so on so forth. Every reason is used to exclude works, even when they would be relevant, and this leads to fragmentation. This contributes to reinforce sanctioned ignorance (in the context of colonialism) (Spivak, 1986) and epistemic ignorance (Kuokkanen, 2008). Devi Vijay introduced me to Spivak's work on sanctioned ignorance. This was in relation to the development of *Peer Community in Organization Studies*, but I think it is interesting and useful to discuss it here, as the fragmentation of research on meta-organization (which is already a small niche and would benefit from more consolidation) can be partly explained by hierarchies of knowledge and the sanctioning of scholarly ignorance.

How we addressed this at M@n@gement and PCI Org Studies, consisted in attracting the attention precisely to whom we cite in our works. We added the following text to our code of conduct "M@n@gement is strongly committed to knowledge as a global public good that is inclusive for researchers across the world. Consistent with this commitment, we encourage authors to adopt

epistemically just citational practices by being attentive to racialized, gendered, or imperialist hierarchies of knowledge production. This involves (but is not limited to) considering whose works authors cite or do not cite thus reproducing some hierarchies while invisibilizing other forms of knowledge.” (See M@n@gement website, and similarly PCI Org Studies website).

*Serendipity moment – FPF as a meta-organization*

I cannot remember when this was, probably back in 2017 or around those years. We were still doing field work in the crowdfunding sector with A. Souchaud. We had tight ties with the meta-organization, Finance Participative France. We did presentations there, did many interviews with members, participated in board meetings, we were even members of the Ecosystem’s college which we studied in our paper (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c). And then at some point, I remember learning that the general secretary of the association had made a big speech at a crowdfunding conference in Greece, and she had used the term meta-organization, to explain what they were, and had made use of our work, to describe the actions of FPF. That’s a performativity victory for sure!

*Fragmentation of the communities*

Since the pioneer works of Ahrne and Brunsson, we have witnessed the development of two different communities. I noted this early in my Phd thesis, and then in subsequent papers and even in a systematic review of the literature (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming). One stream, mostly anchored in organization studies, draws on Ahrne and Brunsson’s work and uses a bounded definition of meta-organization. Another stream, mostly anchored in management and strategy uses an introduction to a special issue published in the *Strategic Management Journal* by Gulati et al. (2012). This started as a “territorial” conflict of perspectives, between two geographical areas of studies, a UK/US based community and a European one (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). But since then, the communities have expanded, and we noticed through a systematic literature review that the geographical boundaries were no longer relevant, but that the boundaries were more conceptual (Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming). While both communities use the same term, their definitions as well as the empirical phenomena they study, differ greatly. The strategic perspective studies more “informal” or unorganized meta-organizations such as entrepreneurial ecosystems or platforms, something that we precisely discuss as not being meta-organizations because they are not organized and have no meta-level actor (Berkowitz et al., 2022). As a consequence, we felt the need to write a “clarification” with N. Brunsson and colleagues in the introduction to the special issue of M@n@gement (2022), stating what meta-organization is, and what it is not.

In most of my work so far, I have done basically exactly just that: I have ignored most works that do not use the concept as I use it and define it. This has led me to discard research on strategic alliances, on whole networks, on private public partnerships while simultaneously acknowledging the need for consolidating research, and failing to do it (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). Maybe some nuance is needed here,

as we are trying to do that with Bor, in a paper under review (Berkowitz & Bor, Under reviewb), but we are not systemically reviewing and bridging all these literatures.

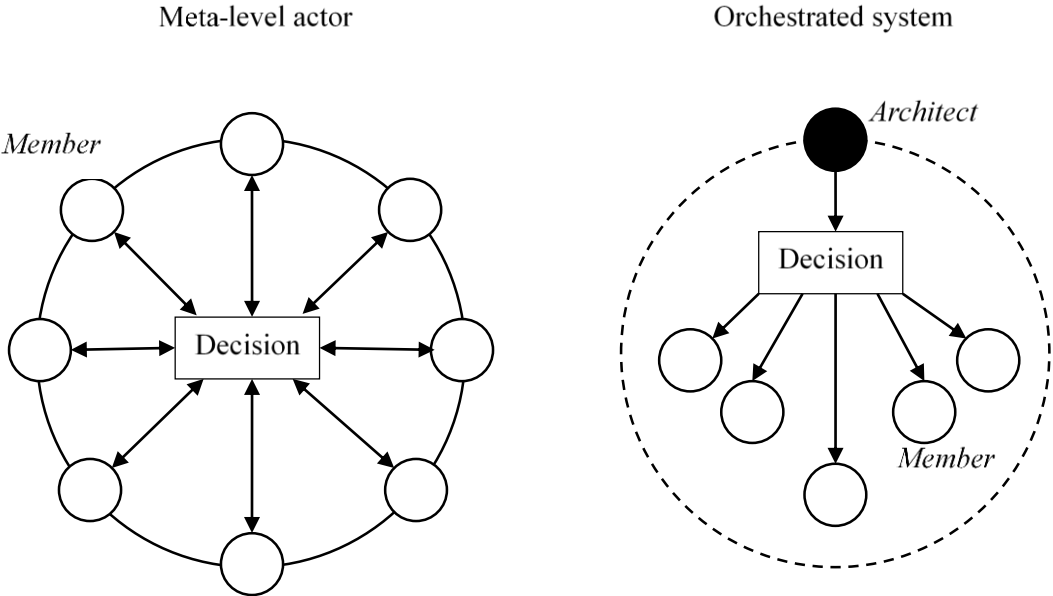
At some point, it became really problematic to see the increase in publications from the more strategic management perspective, on ecosystems, platforms, etc., wholeheartedly ignoring the organization studies approach. In our recent paper with Coulombel, we argue that this divide is becoming a real issue because it poses many risks to knowledge production. One risk that I mentioned earlier is obviously fragmentation and the lack of consolidation. By ignoring each other and evolving in silos, research streams risk producing redundant or contradictory knowledge. Redundant and contradictory knowledge becomes an issue if nobody does the job of discussing, contrasting and consolidating knowledge. At a time where novel, groundbreaking research gets a premium, nobody does consolidation (nor replication, as I will discuss later). Then there is also a risk of irrelevance. This can happen when the concept of meta-organization is no longer useful to understand social phenomena because it is being applied to everything and anything. Another third risk would be theoretical misfit, where inadequate transpositions are made. The emerging trend of hybrid papers, which blend and integrate elements from both streams, is increasingly posing this risk.

#### *Meta-organizations as meta-level actors or as orchestrated systems*

In our review (Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming), we therefore systemically analyze the literature on meta-organization, acknowledging and integrating both streams of research. To solve the issue of definition, we propose a new classification. We distinguish between meta-organizations as "meta-level actors," rooted in the organizational perspective, and meta-organizations categorized as "orchestrated systems," grounded in the management perspective.

With this paper, we hope to contribute to bring greater clarity to the field and we can only hope that this will trigger academic debates among the communities. More deeply, we also identify two different ways to create decided, organized order among organizations, i.e., meta-organizing (Figure 15). Meta-organizing can happen through collectively decided social orders, where the collective of organizations (the meta-level actor) is the center of authority and is taking joint decision. This "non-directed" or collective meta-organizing process producing a decided social order that can also be conceived as collaborative. Conversely, meta-organizing can also happen through orchestrated decided social orders, i.e., social orders that are decided but by one architect in particular. These social orders are "directed", that is to say orchestrated by one organization in particular.

**Figure 15: Visualization of the meta-level actor and orchestrated system decision making process (Source: Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming)**



**2) The decisional perspective and social orders**

Through my works on meta-organizations, and because I got interested in Ahrne and Brunsson’s other concepts, especially partial organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011), I kept reflecting upon the nature of social orders in and around meta-organizations. And I slowly developed with my colleagues a decisional perspective, in line with Ahrne and Brunsson’s initial works.

*From partial organization...*

In a study of crowdfunding, we started to unpack the notion of co-dependent organization, proposing an extended codependence approach between the crowdfunding platform, project owners, the crowd (or individual investors), and chartered accountants, enabling an “engineering” of collective intelligence, i.e., its expression, transformation and exploitation. Drawing on partial organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Grothe-Hammer, 2019a; Nielsen, 2018), we have shown how decided social orders are created among the various organizations or stakeholders. Each organization and individuals indeed take interdependent decisions on membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions, and these decisions affect the crowdfunding process (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019a). Through the inclusion of chartered accountants in this process, we show how the expression of collective intelligence can be strengthened and made more reliable for investment decisions (See Figure 16)

**Figure 16: Model of decisionalism in crowdfunding: decisions on organizational component by type of decision maker and target of decision (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019, p. 17)**

	Platform (P)	Project owner (PO)	Crowd (C)	Chartered Accountant (CA)
<b>Type of decision</b> - Membership - Hierarchy - Rules - Monitoring - Sanctions	<b>P's decision =&gt; PO</b> - <i>Strict, shared</i> - No decision - Strict - <i>Strict, shared</i> - <i>Strict, shared</i>	<b>PO's decision =&gt; P</b> - Boundary pushing - Shared - Boundary pushing - None - Boundary pushing	<b>C's decision =&gt; P</b> - No decision - No decision - No decision - Limited - Limited	<b>CA's decision =&gt; P</b> - <i>Boundary pushing</i> - <i>No decisions</i> - <i>Strict</i> - <i>None</i> - <i>Boundary pushing</i>
<b>Type of decision</b> - Membership - Hierarchy - Rules - Monitoring - Sanctions	<b>P's decision =&gt; C</b> - Open membership - No decision - Loose - <i>Strict, shared</i> - Limited sanctions	<b>PO's decision =&gt; C</b> - Contribution-based - No decision - Limited - None - Limited	<b>C's decision =&gt; PO</b> - No direct decision - No decision - Loose - <i>Strict, shared</i> - <i>Strict, shared</i>	<b>CA's decision =&gt; PO</b> - <i>Strict and shared</i> - <i>No decision</i> - <i>Strict</i> - <i>Strict, shared</i> - <i>None</i>
<b>Type of decision</b> - Membership - Hierarchy - Rules - Monitoring - Sanctions	<b>P's decision =&gt; CA</b> - <i>None or strict</i> - <i>No decision</i> - <i>Strict</i> - <i>None</i> - <i>None</i>	<b>PO's decision =&gt; CA</b> - <i>Boundary pushing</i> - <i>No decision</i> - <i>Boundary pushing</i> - <i>None</i> - <i>Boundary pushing</i>	<b>C's decision =&gt; CA</b> - <i>No decision</i> - <i>Shared</i> - <i>No decision</i> - <i>No decision</i> - <i>No decision</i>	<b>CA's decision =&gt; C</b> - <i>No decision</i> - <i>Shared</i> - <i>No decision</i> - <i>Strict, shared</i> - <i>None</i>

In this paper, the development of a decisional theory enables us to provide an alternative understanding on the case. Most approaches so far developed a network externalities approach and a partnership logics approach. Using an approach based on decisions and co-dependence of social orders, we find additional explanations in the presence of an informal veto mechanisms and the failure of the platform to monitor the forum of discussion.

I have used partial organization as a framework in other papers, as mentioned previously, including as an analytical lens to study meta-organizations (Berkowitz & Bor, 2022). However, at some point I seemed to reach the limits of using “partial organization” in itself.

*To decisional organization theory or decisionalism...*

While working on partial organization, I started to investigate social orders, and especially Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) distinction between emergent social orders and purposefully constructed social orders that are created through decisions, i.e., organizations. This binary of orders opposing constructed and organic, or intentional and non-intentional, has been repeatedly used in social sciences as we argue in a recent paper (Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024), distinguishing between spontaneous (“grown”) order and organized (“made”) order (von Hayek, 1991). This dichotomy means that unplanned order can actually emerge without human planning, “products of human action, not human design” (A. Ferguson cited in Horwitz, 2007 about institutions).

While recent literature in organization studies acknowledges the inherently intertwined nature of social orders (Laamanen et al., 2020), I have been more interested in the implications of considering

organizations as decided social orders, especially in meta-organizations. Being decided orders in the words of Ahne and Brunsson means that decisions are the core components of organizations, as their primary mode of stabilization and perpetuation. As such, we distinguish ourselves from approaches like works from Simon and March, because decision becomes precisely constitutive of organizations<sup>14</sup>. Further, decisions may become premises for new decisions (Luhmann, 2005), either within certain systems or even within other connected systems.

In a conference talk, invited by Valerie Carayol at the University of Bordeaux, when I presented this approach, I was asked how it differed from other alternative theories of decisions, criticizing the rational Weberian model<sup>15</sup>. There have been many attempts at theorizing organizations and decisions, especially from a practice, situational perspective, more or less challenging the rational choice perspective and showing why organizations or decision-makers are prevented from taking rational decisions (Cabantous et al., 2010; Germain & Lacolley, 2012; Journé & Raulet-Croset, 2012).

If we go back to Cyert and March's (1963) Behavioral Theory of the Firm, organizations are perceived as coalition of actors with varying interests, with a bounded rationality approach. Decision-making then appears as a process of satisfying these interests rather than maximizing or optimizing them. Allison (1971) on the other hand, proposed a political approach, with three different models to explain the Cuban crisis. One model is close to Weber's perspective, another one has to do with organizational processes and views decisions as emerging from standard procedures and routines (and not from a centralized rational calculating actor), and in the last model, decisions are the consequence of negotiation, diplomacy, bargaining powers among different political actors. In France, Crozier and Friedberg are famous for their work on organizations as phenomena of power (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977; Friedberg, 1993). Power dynamics prevent actors, as decision units, to make rational choices thus making them develop strategic actions. Lindblom (1979) also developed an alternative political view on decision, called incrementalism. Incrementalism suggests that decision-makers avoid making comprehensive, disruptive (rational) decisions that would seek to maximize outcomes. Rather, decisions are incremental and are based on the current status quo, or the degree of agreement these decisions gather, not on the objectives they serve. In Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) Resource Dependence Theory, organizations must obtain resources to survive. This may lead to power dependencies between organizations and other constituents. In this perspective, decisions are the result of tensions between the need to manage these dependencies or external control and the need to maintain autonomy. Yet developing a different perspective, Mintzberg and his colleagues also contributed to the analysis of decisions and organizations in terms of configurations of structure and control (Langley et al., 1995; Mintzberg, 1979; Mintzberg et al., 1976). Their work also started from a critique of the purely rational model of decision. They emphasize the importance of power, negotiations, but also the emergence of strategy from practices, at grassroots levels. Other alternative works also include Cohen, March, and Olsen's (1972) Garbage Can Model, which departs from rational decision-making, and views organizations as "garbage cans", i.e. anarchies.

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<sup>14</sup> Reference to CCO intended

<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Valerie Carayol who highlighted the need to position more clearly with regards to alternative approaches

Decisions then appear as the result of four independent dimensions, i.e., problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities, coming together in what the authors call "organized anarchies."

Here, I am anchoring myself in a discussion about decisions which is understood not as a choice in its psychological dimension, nor as a social event, but as a type of communication that describes "the way people should act or the distinctions or classifications they should make" (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2019, p. 7; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Luhmann, 2018; Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Decisions therefore have special characteristics as a type of communication distinguishing them from other social or communication events. Notably, they communicate their own "contingency" (Seidl, 2005):

*What is particular about decisions is that they are 'compact communications', which communicate their own contingency ('contingency' here in the sense of 'also possible otherwise'). In contrast to an ordinary communication, which only communicates a specific content that has been selected (e.g., 'I love you'), a decision communication communicates also – explicitly or implicitly – that there are alternatives that could have been selected instead (e.g., 'I am going to employ candidate A and not candidate B') (Seidl, 2005, p. 39; cited in Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022).*

Decisions indeed implicitly or explicitly communicate discarded alternatives (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Decisions are therefore inherently paradoxical, and can be understood as "attempts", as Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) put it, because they simultaneously close and open meaning (Grothe-Hammer & Schoeneborn, 2019). Further, decisions provide immediateness, specificity and accountability, something no other form of social order can do (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2019; Grothe-Hammer, et al., 2022).

In a study of the International Whaling Commission as a meta-organization, we precisely developed a social order approach (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). We highlighted the significance of decidability of social orders, showing how social orders can be decided and non-decided, but can also become non-decidable, when several orders in the meta-organization, clash and can no longer be changed.

Then, with Grothe-Hammer and Berthod, we have been working on an integrative framework. In a first chapter, and then in a paper (Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022), we have brought together key perspectives or concepts that emphasize the importance of decisions to understand social orders. In so doing, we answer recent calls to renew organization studies by putting back decisions at the core of organizations (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016; Apelt et al., 2017; Grothe-Hammer & Kohl, 2020). We made a pun in that work, suggesting that this decisional organization theory could be considered a new "decisionism". Decisionism is used in sociology, legal studies, organization studies but also theology to emphasize the importance of decisions on action (Abend, 2018; Harmon, 1998). However here, I will refer to this approach as decisionalism, first because I struggle to pronounce decisionism, second because we do not draw at all on the field of decisionism, and lastly, because I find the label itself connects better with other concepts I have worked on, like decisionality (Berkowitz & Bor, 2022).

The perspectives that we bring together include works based on Luhmann's systems theory (Luhmann, 2018; Peng & Chanut, 2017), on the concepts of partial organization and meta-organization (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016; Gadille et al., 2013; Gimet & Grenier, 2018; Leys & Joffre, 2014), and the

concept of organizationality (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Grenier & Denis, 2017; Hussenot, 2021). These perspectives, i.e., Luhmann's modern systems theory, the concepts of partial organization and meta-organization, and the concept of organizationality, have in common to share this definition of decision as a paradoxical communication about how people should act or what distinctions or classifications they should make, as explained above (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2019; Ahrne et al., 2016; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Luhmann, 2018).

By bringing all four together and pulling that thread, we are able to conceive the organization as “an important phenomenon in modern society, i.e., that of de-paradoxifying decisions by creating decision-based social orders” (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022, p. 35). Further, organization appears as a multi-level and processual system of decisions constituting decided and interlocking social orders, with two facets: a decided structure and a processual entity. The objective of developing such a theoretical overarching approach is to better differentiate so-called formal organizations from other forms of more or less organized social orders, thus opening up organizational analysis to a wide range of social phenomena, without neglecting so-called formal organizations.

In the chapter with Grothe-Hammer and Berthod (Grothe-Hammer, et al., 2022), this leads us to therefore distinguish and articulate two dimensions, structural organizationality and entitative organizationality, based on the argument that social orders are simultaneously structure and processual entities (Ahrne et al., 2016; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Luhmann, 2018).

Structural organizationality refers to the degree to which organizational elements are used in a social order, focusing on the structural level of organization: membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanction, i.e. what Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) call organizational components or partial organization (see also Berkowitz & Bor, 2022). The concept of structural organizationality enables us to argue that the (partial or complete) use of organizational elements contributes to both the production of predictability, stability and organizational complexity. Indeed, the use of fundamental organizational components such as membership, hierarchies, rules, monitoring, and sanctions, generates a degree of expectability in decision-making processes and organizational structure. And this degree of expectability and complexity is scalable based on the number and elaboration of organizational elements used, which also connects with the concept of decisionality (see Berkowitz & Bor, 2022).

Entitative organizationality on the other hand refers to the degree to which a social collective exhibits characteristics related to being a processual entity. Entitative organizationality involves three degrees that can be partially or completely achieved, like structural organizationality: interconnected decision-making processes, actorhood, and collective identity (See Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). Organizations as processual entities indeed involve interconnected processes of decision-making, reflecting the idea that organizations are decision-based entities. Organizations may also imply actorhood, i.e., the fact that a collective is constituted as a social actor, able of making decisions independently and being held accountable for them. Actorhood differs for me from agency (see Berkowitz et al., 2020). There can be agency without actorhood, and probably vice versa. Lastly, organizations may present a collective identity,

which involves the production of self-descriptions by a collective, communicating what it stands for, and leading to the creation of a decided identity.

Combining both structural and entitative organizationality as a continuum allows for a differentiated analytical view on social phenomena (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022). This also means that any degree of entitative organizationality may feature any degree of structural organizationality and vice versa. Using a decision-based approach also means unpacking the paradoxical effects of decisions, through decisionality and decidability (see hereafter). And as this theory draws on Luhmann, it opens ways to explore the functional equivalence between differently organized social phenomena.

#### Serendipity moment – 2018 ISA burger

I remember that Burger time at ISA Toronto in 2018 with Michael Grothe-Hammer and the process of coining Organization as Decision Theory (which later became Decisional Organization Theory and now Decisionalism). We compared it to Communication as Constitutive of Organization. Michael told me how CCO is rhythmically and phonically ideal (and was designed as such), which helped a lot, we thought, with its academic success. I remember we discarded Decision as Constitutive of Organizations because it was way too similar but that could have worked too ;)

#### *...And the integration of context and social orders*

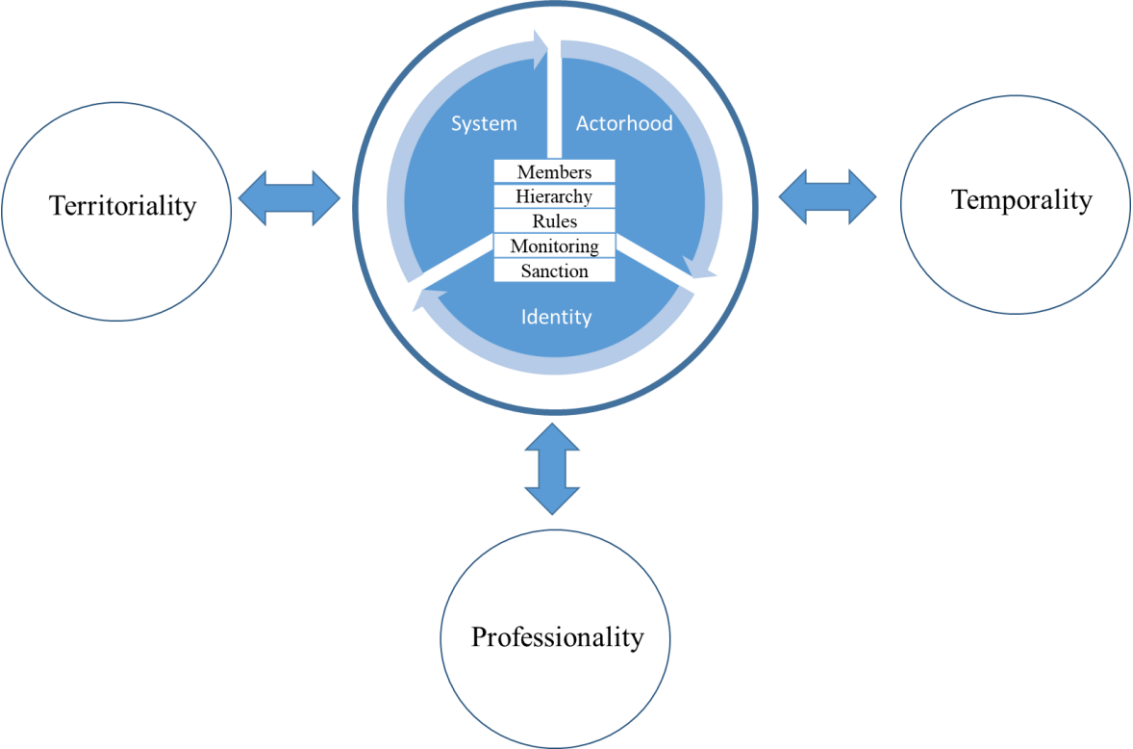
It is interesting to note that French communities have had this intuition as well to bring together these perspectives. This is what we are showing in a paper forthcoming in *Revue Française de Gestion*. We conducted a narrative literature review where we highlight the added value and specific contributions of French research to decisional organization theory, namely 1) temporality, 2) territoriality and 3) professionalism (Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming).

Drawing on the French literature (Hussenot, 2021; Saives et al., 2018), we define temporality in decisionalism as a time dimension that is both structuring social orders and object of communication and organization (Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming). This also echoes with the work on expanding binaries of social orders where the time dimension is present via the idea of changeability (Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024). Then, we use the concept of territoriality to describe the spatial anchorage, co-evolution and even co-construction between places and social orders, and the way we think spatiality affects and is affected by organizationality (drawing in particular on François et al., 2013; Gadille et al., 2013; Hirczak et al., 2019; Mazzilli & Pichault, 2018; Peng & Chanut, 2017). Lastly, we identify professionalism as the last key dimension developed by the French literature. We understand professionalism as “savoir, savoir-faire, savoir-être” (knowledge, know-how, know-how-to-be). Based on a suggestion from Gadille, we view professionalism as an ideological, behavioral, intellectual and epistemological position of an individual in relation to the exercise of their profession (Evans, 2008). The works we draw on for this dimension deal

less with skills *per se*, and more with the organization of a social system around a profession (Grenier & Denis, 2017; Henrion, 2023; Leys & Joffre, 2014; Maisonnasse et al., 2013; Peng & Chanut, 2017).

In our paper, we argue that these three dimensions allow us to think of the organization as simultaneously a processual entity and a structure, as an interweaving of decided and non-decided orders, and above all, as anchored in space, time and the professionalities that run through the organization. If each dimension (temporality, territoriality, professionalism) can present a structural organizationality, each dimension can also affect the entitative and structural organizationality of collectives to varying degrees (See Figure 17)

**Figure 17: The three dimensions of temporality, territoriality and professionalism in relation with OD (Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming)**



For the purpose of this dissertation, I reflected on whether and how we could articulate structural organizationality, entitative organizationality and these three more contextual dimensions (See **Table 20**). I therefore suggest to call them “contextual organizationality”, as these dimensions (temporality, territoriality, and professionalism) we argue in the paper, both affect structural and entitative organizationality and are affected by it: they are co-constituted.

**Table 20: Structural, entitative and contextual organizational (adapted from Grothe-Hammer, 2019; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming)**

Structural organizational	Entitative organizational	Contextual organizational
Membership	Interconnected decision-making	Temporality
Hierarchy	Actorhood	Territoriality
Rules	Collective identity	Professionalism
Monitoring		
Sanction		

In parallel, with Grothe-Hammer (2024), we started to investigate the properties of social order in a more systematic manner. Working to further decisionalism, and drawing especially on Luhmann (2018), we outline various properties of social orders that contribute to a finer understanding of the complexities and dynamics of social phenomena, especially compared to approaches such as network theory or neoinstitutionalism (as synthesized in

**Table 21):** Ontology, determination, changeability and acceptance. I suggest to add density to this.

**Ontology** refers to the specific nature of the order, i.e., whether it is a system (what we call processual entity in Grothe-Hammer et al. (2022)) or a structure (which relates to organizational components).

**Determination** refers to how a social order was established, in a retrospective manner. With the property of determination, we seek to distinguish between social orders that were decided (i.e., organization), or that emerged organically, in a non-decided manner (e.g., what we traditionally understand as networks, prejudice, traditions, etc.).

**Changeability** describes the decidable or non-decidable properties of social orders, i.e., whether they are perceived as potentially changeable or not. This dimension emphasizes the temporal dynamics and change in social orders. This relates to our paper on the International Whaling Commission and decidability/non-decidability of social orders (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022).

The notion of **acceptance** aims to distinguish between social orders that are (at least at some point in time) accepted, and those social orders that are contested.

I would add to these properties of social order, a **“density”** dimension, i.e., the degree of decisionality (Berkowitz & Bor, 2022) of a social order, that is to say the intensity of decision-making about the structure or the system, thin or thick (See

**Table 21).** In Berkowitz & Bor (2022), we discussed decisionality as density of decisions in meta-organizations, leading to thin or thick, more or less partial, meta-organizing. Here I would argue that density applies to decided social orders in general, not only to meta-organization. There can therefore be thin or thick decisional orders, whether we are looking at organizations or meta-organizations. Going back to our paper, and the use of Luhmann dimensions, I would argue that density belongs to the fact dimension of meaning, although it is affected by temporality and can therefore belong to the time dimension of meaning (Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024). But this deserves more thinking.

This paper is actually a very methodological one and seeks to answer some of the challenges brought in section II on challenges of studying meta-organizations.

**Table 21: Description of the properties of social order (adapted from Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024)**

<b>Properties of social order</b>	<b>Core question</b>	<b>Main distinction</b>
Ontology	What is the order?	System or structure?
Determination	How was the order determined? (Retrospective attribution)	Decided or non-decided?
Changeability or decidability	Can the order be changed? (attribution)	Decidable or non-decidable?
Acceptance	For whom is the social order expected to be valid?	Accepted or contested?
Density or decisionality	To what extent is the social order highly decided upon or not?	Thin or thick decisionality?

In that paper, we emphasize the constructed, processual and relational nature of social orders in decisionalism. The framework provides a multi-dimensional perspective on social orders, challenging oversimplified binary concepts, but also moving beyond network, institution and even organization to some extent. What I like about the framework is that it enables the analysis of tipping points, as shifts between characteristics (decided/non-decided, accepted/contested, decidable/non-decidable). The framework allows us to unpack complexity in a quite concrete manner, by examining different properties of social order and their intertwining, allowing for a fine-grained analysis of what could be previously understood as organization, network, institutions, etc. It also allows to identify and describe potential incompatibilities, conflicts or contradictions between different social orders, particularly when diverse social orders converge in one place (Cf. the IWC, Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer (2022)). I will further integrate all dimensions in the next section.

### **3) From infra- to (meta-)organizationality: An integrated framework**

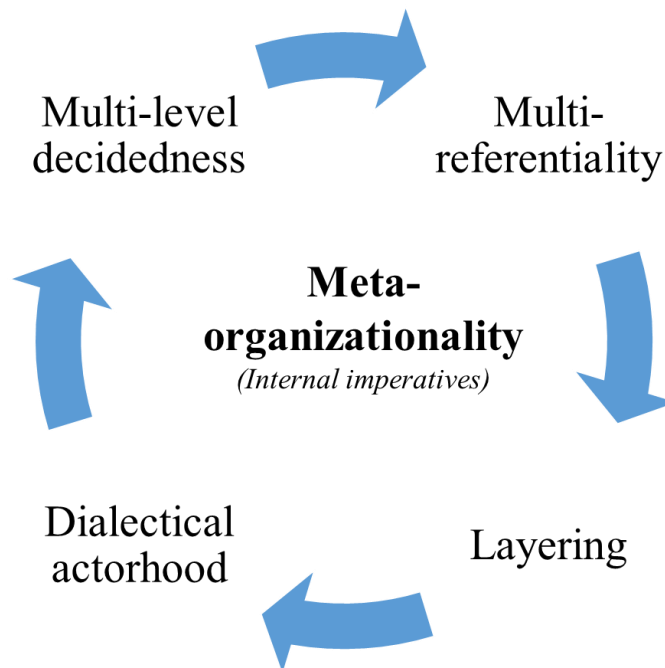
I see an evolution in my work, from socio-material devices to partial organization, social orders, organizationality and finally meta-organizationality. The term meta-organizationality attempts to capture an idea that I have been struggling with since my Phd Thesis and exploring through various frameworks in Section II: the intrinsic attributes of meta-organizations that can affect their behaviours and have broad implications on their functioning and dynamics.

#### *Meta-organizationality*

In a recent paper, and drawing on and adding to decisionalism, we have define several such key attributes of meta-organizations, or meta-organizationality, that explain and affect their functioning as transition intermediaries (Berkowitz & Bor, 2024). We identify four attributes of meta-organizationality: multi-

referentiality, layering, dialectical actorhood and multi-level decidedness. As we argue in the paper, these dimensions affect one another and are deeply interconnected, as Figure 18 illustrates.

**Figure 18: Meta-organizationality (Source: Berkowitz & Bor, 2024)**



**Multi-referentiality** refers to the diverse range of norms, expertise, values, logics, cultures, professionalities and perspectives that are incarnated and brought together through member-organizations within a meta-organization, especially multi-stakeholder meta-organizations. Multi-referentiality involves potentially conflicting or divergent references. I distinguish multi-referentiality from the literature on logics because multi-referentiality has for me a strong recursive dimension. Indeed, it implies that members and meta-level actor may evaluate, value and prioritize the meta-organization differently (i.e., members among themselves, and members and meta-level actor).

**Layering**, which I have already discussed previously (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022) involves the establishment of new social orders (meta-organizations) alongside or on top of existing social orders (member organizations), without supplanting or substituting them. Meta-organizations may become part of higher-level meta-meta (or more) organizations. Each additional layer requires decision authority to be vested to some extent, from “lower” layers, leading to challenges in decision-making, actorhood, responsibility and accountability. Complexity increases with each layer, making it difficult to discern decision-making authority. This is something we have also explored in a different manner with Bor in a paper using Deleuze and Gattari (Berkowitz & Bor, under review). It appears clear that layering may aggravate risks of escaping responsibility and may create even more of what we called “smokescreen effects” (Berkowitz et al., 2022). It also contributes to cognitive loading of members, and a form of decoupling between decision centers and the minimal organization unit (the member-organization).

The concept of **dialectical actorhood** aims to capture the complex and dynamic equilibrium and process that is constantly happening within meta-organizations as they constantly need to balance autonomy, collective identity, accountability, and responsibility of both members and themselves, meta-level actors. Meta-organizations present a dual actorhood as defined by Fredriksson (2023), that of the meta-level actor and that of members. However, dialectical actorhood moves beyond duality to conceptualize relational internal and external dynamics. Dialectical actorhood indeed involves both internal and external aspects. Actorhood *per se* shifts the emphasis of agency on action, to the ability of a collective to take joint decisions and be externally recognized as a social actor (Berkowitz et al., 2020). Dialectical actorhood describes, first internally, autonomy-dependence tensions between members and meta-level actor. Second, dialectical actorhood describes, externally, the recognition and addressability of the social actor in the environment, leading to tensions or uncertainty about decision attribution and accountability (of members and meta-level actor).

Lastly, **multi-level decidedness** constitutes a key attribute of meta-organizations because they imply explicit and recursively determined decision-making processes at multiple levels. This relies on Luhmann (2005) key argument that decisions become premises for other decisions. But this can happen within and across (interconnected systems) that are meta-organizations, meta-meta-organizations, orchestrated systems, macro-organizations, etc. Decidedness includes two aspects: decisionality (extent to which social orders are subject to decision making, i.e., density of decisions on social orders) and decidability (actors' ability to reach collective decisions and change social orders). The interest here lies in the fact that one decision can become the premise for a decision elsewhere but can produce more or less density and can further lead to decidability or non-decidability in other systems. Even further, we can argue that the intertwining of decided and non-decided social orders can lead to conflicts and potential lock-ins, impacting meta-organizations as agents for transformative change (Berkowitz & Bor, 2024).

### *Integrating all dimensions*

Attempting to integrate all these dimensions and concepts may prove a little messy (see Table 22 and Figure 27, page 111). While I previously presented papers in a chronological manner, here if I try to be organized and develop a systematic approach, my starting point would be fundamental parameters of social orders (Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024). In line with the existing framework terminology, I thought of labeling these parameters “infra-organizationality”. However, this is open for debate.

I made this choice for several reasons, apart from looking for symmetry in labeling. The prefix “infra” can denote several things: what is below or beneath, elements that exist at a foundational level, influencing broader dynamics (I think this works well with my purpose); what is underlying (fundamental principles that may shape the nature of social orders – works as well); foundational or supporting elements (still working); and lastly inherent dimensions of social orders (works too). So infra-organizationality basically describes the foundational and underlying parameters of social orders that affect their nature and dynamics. Infra-organizationality includes previously described parameters: ontology, determination, changeability, acceptance, to which I suggested to add density or decisionality. To repeat, density of

decisions here aims to describe the degree of decisionality of a social order, i.e., the density or intensity of decision-making about the structure or the system. The question remains open at this stage whether density also applies to other dimensions (meta-organizationality, or contextual organizationality for instance).

**Table 22: Dimensions of social orders: from infra-organizationality to meta-organizationality**  
 (Source: the author, adapted from on Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming; Berkowitz & Bor, 2024; Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024)

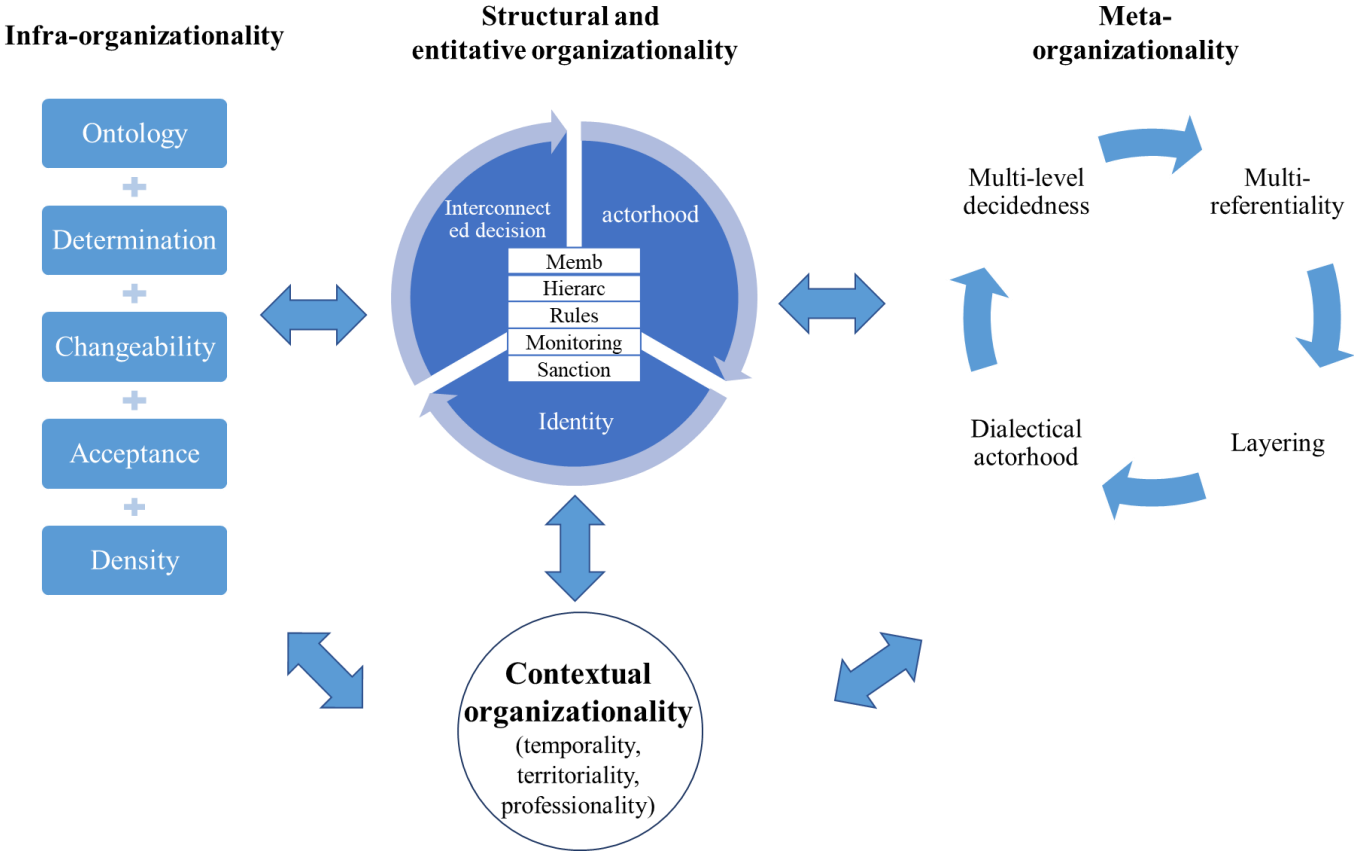
<b>Infra-organizationality (Parameters of social orders)</b>	<b>Structural organizationality (structure)</b>	<b>Entitative organizationality (System)</b>	<b>Contextual organizationality (Context)</b>	<b>Meta-organizationality (Nesting)</b>
Ontology (Structure or system); Determination (decided or non-decided); Changeability or decidability (Decidable or non-decidable); Acceptance (accepted or contested); Density or decisionality (density of decision-making)	Membership; Hierarchy; Rules; Monitoring; Sanction	Interconnected decision-making; Actorhood; Collective identity	Temporality; Territoriality; Professionality	Multi-referentiality; Layering; Dialectical actorhood; Multi-level decidedness

Next comes structural organizationality, which has to do with structure or organizational components (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022). Then entitative organizationality deals with various dimensions of the entity itself as a system or processual entity: interconnected decision-making, actorhood, and collective identity (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Grothe-Hammer, 2019b; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022). Then, I am suggesting to add “contextual” organizationality (although now I am sort of doubting about the adequacy of the term to capture the professionalism part): about temporality, territoriality and professionalism. And then finally comes meta-organizationality, to deal with specific attributes resulting from the nesting of social orders in meta-organizations (or meta-meta and more): multi-referentiality, layering, dialectical actorhood, and multi-level decidedness (Berkowitz & Bor, 2024).

I am still exploring how to connect all five dimensions of the framework in an overarching model (See Figure 19). The objective is to understand how all dimensions affect one another. Let’s take infra-organizationality, that is to say the ontology of an order (is it a structure or a system/entity), the determination, changeability, acceptance and density. Contextual organizationality can be thought to affect this. Temporality was already integrated by Luhmann (See Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024). And temporality is integrated in the dimension of changeability, acceptance and density. However, territoriality also affects these parameters. Acceptance, whether a social order is accepted or contested, is clearly linked to spatiality, because by nature this is a very relational approach and so it is based on perceptions of actors, and actors belong to, are shaped by and co-evolve with their territories. And then there is the issue of professionalism, which to some degree has a different status than the other dimensions. But professionalism also affect acceptance, but also I would assume decisionality. Savoir faire and savoir être in a profession might lead to more or less accepting or contesting certain social orders.

So the relations between contextual organizationality and infra-organizationality are not so obvious but should be mentioned and further discussed.

**Figure 19: Tentative overarching model of decisionalism (Based on Berkowitz, 2024; Berkowitz & Bor 2024; Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming; Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024)**



**Conclusion**

In this section, I have delved into the development of a more integrated approach based on decisions. Drawing on decisionalism, social order analysis and meta-organizations, I propose five dimensions of an overarching theory: infra-organizationality, structural organizationality, entitative organizationality, contextual organizationality, and meta-organizationality. I am unsure everything needs to be about organizationality, but I like symmetries. So infra-organizationality basically describes the foundational and underlying parameters of social orders that affect their nature and dynamics. Infra-organizationality includes: ontology, determination, changeability, acceptance and density. Next comes structural organizationality, which has to do with structure or organizational components. Then entitative organizationality deals with various dimensions of the entitative organizationality (i.e., the system or processual entity): interconnected decision-making, actorhood, and collective identity. Then, contextual organizationality is about temporality, territoriality and professionalism. And finally comes meta-organizationality to address specific attributes resulting from the nesting of social orders in meta-organizations (or meta-meta and more): multi-referentiality, layering, dialectical actorhood, and multi-level decidedness.

## IV. Meta-organizations as part of the problem: Decentering my knowledge production

### Synthesis

I have begun to develop more critical approaches of both organizations and meta-organizations, through the question of relations to livings (human and nonhuman), ecosystems and territories (See **Table 23**). In recent works, I am starting to acknowledge that meta-organizations can be part of the problem. This is what I called the responsibility imperative in the introduction to this dissertation. This implies that their roles and actions may have drawbacks or unintended consequences on social orders, communities, species and ecosystems. On this basis, I do several things. I reflect on conditions for meta-organizations to become more transformative agents, i.e., so they act as positive forces for change in sustainability transitions. Then, I extend my perspective to organizations and show that they function as systems of ocean destruction. I investigate preliminary principles for operating a paradigmatic shift towards organizations as systems of ocean thriving. My approach here is on conceiving social orders, organizations and meta-organizations no longer as driven by and driving exploitation and economic growth, but as dynamic and purposeful contributors to the well-being of the ocean, human and nonhuman livings. This also means a shift towards socio-natural ecosystems and especially territories, conceived as embedded processes. Lastly, I have begun to explore more critical concepts in alternative organizing, such as heterotopia.

**Table 23: My key papers and contributions to section IV**

Paper	Key questioning relevant to the section	Key contributions to this section
(Berkowitz, 2014) <i>Le Libellio</i>	Impacts of organizations on the ocean	Importance of the ocean, acidification as an impact of organizations
(Berkowitz & Dumez, 2014) <i>Le Libellio</i>	How to approach oceans?	Approach as a management problem
(Berkowitz, 2016) Phd thesis	Impacts of industries on the ocean through underwater noise pollution	The roles of meta-organizations
(Berkowitz et al., 2018) <i>Academy of Management</i>	How to sustainably organize seafood systems?	Importance of place-based meta-organizations and innovation
(Berkowitz et al., 2019) <i>M@n@gement</i>	Why we need an ocean turn in management studies?	Urgency of Sustainable Ocean Studies

(Berkowitz & Guérineau, 2022) <i>IST</i>	How to rethink innovation processes and dynamics in relation to the nonhumans?	Developing an eco-centric thought experiment to imagine alternative pathways for development
(Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022) <i>Handbook on Clusters</i>	Meta-organizations as transformative agents	Responsible actorhood, meta-organisational accountability, transformative mediated reflexivity, negotiated professional restructuring
(Berkowitz, 2023a) <i>Business and Society Review</i>	How to ensure co-viability between organizations and nonhumans?	From organizations as systems of ocean destructions to organizations as systems of ocean thriving
(Berkowitz, Guérineau, et al., 2023) <i>Systèmes alimentaires/Food Systems</i>	How to value the livings in transitions?	Pragmatist approach, different values that the livings can take
(Berkowitz, 2023b) <i>Conflits d'usage en mer</i>	How to organize for conflicts of uses and integrate natural ecosystems?	Paradigmatic shift towards valuing natural ecosystems
(Fernandes et al., 2023) <i>EGOS communication</i>	How to analyze the dark side of meta-organizations?	International meta-organizations as creating global orders perpetuating models of domination and exploitation in Global Souths
(Fernandes & Berkowitz, 2023) <i>International sociology Association communication</i>	What are the specificities of Indigenous meta-organizations?	Territorialization, temporality of decision-making, heterotopias
(Berkowitz & Fernandes, 2024) <i>Dictionnaire de l'autre gestion</i>	How to meta-organize just and democratic sustainability transitions?	Notion of heterotopias, co-presence, multi-referentiality
(Berkowitz & Bor, 2024) <i>Journal of Organizational Sociology</i>	How meta-organizationality fosters or prevents transformative capability in meta-organizations?	Tensions between imperatives of sustainability transitions and imperatives of meta-organizationality
(Berkowitz & Leclair, 2024) <i>EGOS communication</i>	Rethinking relations to the livings through art	Showing the value of art to highlight ways of connecting with nature, cosmopoetics

## 1) Shedding light on and conceptualizing the dark side of meta-organizations

There has been a positive bias in my research. By seeking to establish meta-organizations as transition intermediaries, I often focused on their positive contributions to sustainability, while neglecting negative aspects. But there is a dark side to meta-organizations and more broadly to organizing among organizations. Meta-organizations and other forms of organizations also contribute to creating and maintaining unfair global orders and to perpetuating a paradigm of organizations as systems of ocean destruction, while avoiding responsibility for this. In this section, I focus more on this dark side of meta-organizations and discuss some of the conditions I have begun to analyze, for them to act as *transformative agents* in just sustainability transitions.

### *Meta-organizations as perpetuating or as resisting global orders?*

Meta-organizations can produce smokescreen effects – mechanisms to hide from negative actions – which would explain why member organizations, especially firms, so eagerly set up or join meta-organizations (Berkowitz, 2016a; Berkowitz et al., 2022). They may amplify dilution responsibility and generally unresponsibility (see Brunsson et al., 2022). Further, meta-organizations can produce inertia (König et al., 2012), actively resist transitions (Bor & O’Shea, 2022), reproduce domination relations and empower large players over small ones (Carmagnac et al., 2022). Meta-organizations can also transfer responsibility to members to avoid accountability (Pazi & Kvåle, 2022) or perpetuate models of exploitation, especially in business only meta-organizations (Alo & Arslan, 2023).

Despite recent calls (Ahrne et al., 2020), there are still few works about the dark side of meta-organizations (Alo & Arslan, 2023; Carmagnac et al., 2022). Notably, few works unpack how this dark side is intrinsically connected to the very nature of meta-organizations, which specific meta-organizational mechanisms may enable members or meta-level actors to escape or dilute responsibility, and how this might be further analyzed through decisionalism. Brunsson, Gustafsson Nordin and Tamm Hallström (2022) argue that meta-organizations may be attempts at controlling the expansion of organization, which strongly relates to issues of responsibility attribution especially in a global world. Drawing on Bauman’s work, they see the dilution of responsibility (in macro-organization) as an important driver of resistance to globalization, precisely because globalization processes are perceived as anonymous, despite or as a result of the multiplication of organizations and meta-organizations involved.

In an EGOS communication, we have been exploring the role of meta-organizations in globalization and social orders in the Global Souths (Fernandes et al., 2023). I am incredibly grateful to my Brazilian colleagues for involving me in their reflections on global orders, meta-organizations and Brazil. This paper has been an occasion for me to familiarize myself with works of Latin American authors like Quijano and his concept of coloniality of power. For Quijano (2007), the coloniality of power refers to a system of power relations that originated during the colonial era but continues to shape social structures, cultural practices and knowledge production, leading to social, cultural and epistemological dominations. Meta-organizations like the Mercosur or the EU reinforce these forms of domination and increase coloniality of power through commercial agreements that increase exploitation and deforestation (Fernandes et al.,

2023). This is still preliminary work where we investigate these mechanisms, the role of meta-organizations like industrial lobbies in maintaining global orders of domination and the role of grassroots meta-organizations in resisting such global orders. What we can note already is that the Mercosur-EU agreement may constitute the visible first-level order decision of a form of macro-organization where many organizations and meta-organizations attempt to shape social orders.

Following Brunsson et al., (2018, 2022), macro-organizations are large systems of interconnected decision-making where various organizations and meta-organizations take first level and second level order decisions (i.e. more or less direct decisions that can be accounted for) and decisions that may become premises for other decisions in the system. While macro-organization presents all five elements of structural organizationality, it lacks other dimensions of entitative organizationality (i.e. collective identity and actorhood).

Brunsson et al (2022) write p. 12 :

*Yet a macro-organization differs from the traditional construction of the autonomous formal organization in that it dilutes responsibility rather than concentrating it. The key decision premises are decided by other organizations. An organization cannot issue standards for itself, just as it cannot accredit or certify itself. Because the decision premises are all presented as voluntary, responsibility attribution among the organizations is complicated. The interconnected decision premises form a chain of decisions and a responsibility that is diluted with every decision. In fact, the macro-organization makes the actorhood of participating organizations seem less realistic. They are all dependent on the decisions of other organizations for their existence and are therefore less capable of bearing responsibility. [...]*

*So unlike formal organizations, including meta-organizations, the macro-organization cannot be held responsible, nor even accountable for the decisions made within its structure. Rather, this form of organization is constructed such that anyone can decide what another should do, but no one can make a decision directly affecting everyone. [...]*

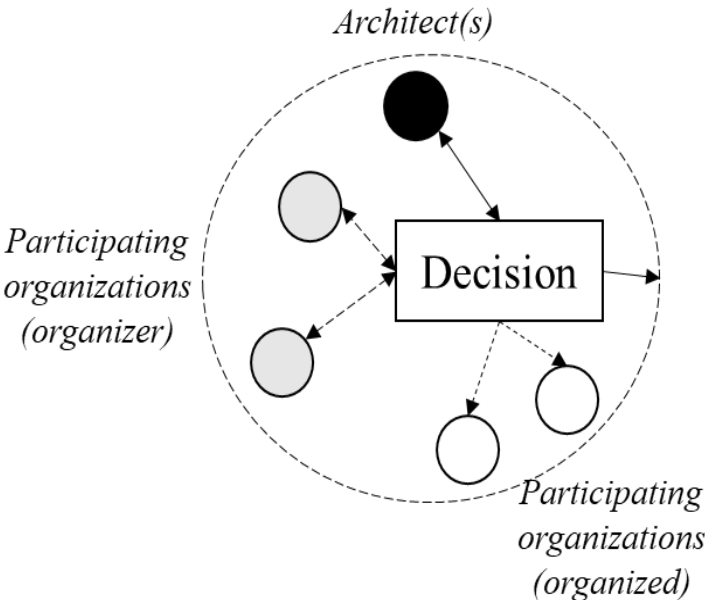
*Macro-organizations show a high degree of organization, and because of that, the responsibility of participating organizations is highly diluted, and it is impossible to find anyone responsible for the organization as a whole.*

However, what we can observe with the Mercosur-EU agreement, is rather that despite a high degree of decisionality or density of decisions, macro-organizing relations between the two meta-organizations simultaneously leads to a dilution of responsibility while creating global social orders and maintaining the coloniality of power. So I would slightly disagree with Brunsson et al., (2022) analysis. I would argue here that it is not because of the “high degree of organization” that responsibility is diluted. Rather it is the combination of what I would call multi-directionality of decisionality, with a high degree of decisionality on structural organizationality, and a diluted actorhood (i.e. low to no actorhood), that enables the dilution of

responsibility for the organization as a whole. This therefore transfer responsibility and criticism to the most visible actors (EU and Mercosur).

Let's think of macro-organization as an iceberg, some parts are highly visible but much of the macro-organizing is invisible and therefore hard to analyze and unpack. Taking inspiration from our systematic review and the distinction we made between collectively decided and orchestrated social orders (Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming), we can try and conceptualize macro-organization as a multi-directional system of decisions (see **Figure 20**). Decided order in a macro-organization differs from decided order in meta-organizations as meta-level actors and meta-organizations as orchestrated systems. Decided order in macro-organization is multi-directional because several organizations can affect and be affected by the system of decisions, in various ways. This is why I would talk of multi-directional decisionality – density of decisions is affected by and affects several players.

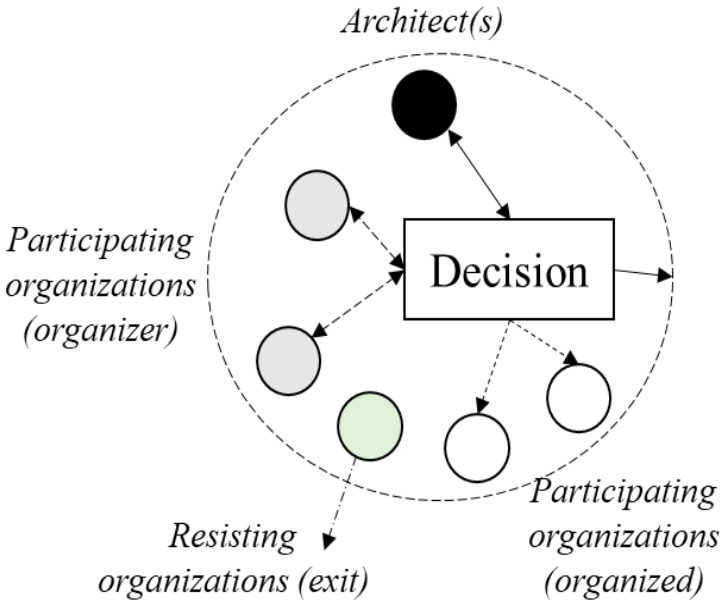
**Figure 20: Multi-directional system of decisions in macro-organization (Adapted from Coulombel & Berkowitz, forthcoming)**



Further, we can conceive the Mercosur and the EU as the architects of the macro-organization. By architect, here I mean those key actors that are taking structuring and organizing decisions that affect and shape other participating organizations in the macro-organizations. The decisions architects take, here through the Agreement, simultaneously affect them and make them responsible and accountable as architects constitute the visible part of the iceberg that is a macro-organization. However, various participating organizations also act as organizers in the sense that they affect more or less directly decisions (especially through advocacy activities) and may be affected by them. Meta-organizations and organizations constitute participating organizations precisely if and when they manage to shape decisions, i.e. through taking decisions that become premises for the macro-organizational level decisions. And then, some non-participating organizations are still affected, as we see for the Mercosur-EU agreement: various sectors and industries, civil society organizations, indigenous communities, etc.

Grassroot meta-organizations on the other hand may seek to resist this macro-organization through issuing decisions of their own at the local and regional level in Brazil. However, in so doing two things might happen (See **Figure 21**): 1) they may to some extent succeed in exiting the macro-organization and 2) they become visible targets and identified as a new emerging part of the iceberg (and may be held more accountable than other participating organizations). Business meta-organizations conversely remain in the dark and push for exploitation of natural resources in the Amazonian forest in particular. This echoes Brunsson et al. (2022)'s arguments about the relations between lack of actorhood and dilution of responsibility. It also raises many questions about responsibility mechanisms and conditions under which meta-organizations may have a positive or a negative impact, especially where socio-ecological transitions are concerned.

**Figure 21: Resisting social order in macro-organization (Inspired from Coulombel & Berkowitz, forthcoming and Fernandes et al., forthcoming)**



In another project, we explore how indigenous meta-organizations in Brazil support efforts to dismantle Quijano’s coloniality of power, as mentioned previously (Fernandes & Berkowitz, 2023). In that paper, we analyze the organization of indigenous communities in grassroots or indigenous meta-organizations and their contributions to the recognition of the indigenous peoples and their rights in the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 and the abandonment of the assimilationist posture (which prevailed at the time, in which indigenous people were considered a transitory social category destined to disappear). We also argue that indigenous meta-organizations enabled indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making arenas of the federal and state governments. For Quijano, the coloniality of power also translates into cultural subordination, eroding indigenous cultures and we explore how indigenous meta-organizations seek to maintain and develop members’ biocultural identities.

Further, we explore how indigenous meta-organizations organize to resist global or dominant social orders. Something we have not done yet but plan to do is to analyze how they manage to take decisions

about their organizationality and how that specific decisionality contributes to challenge the coloniality of power. We have the intuition that an important dimension is the place-based collective embodied experiences that temporarily territorialize the meta-organization in a specific place (through Acampamento Terra Livre, ATL which I will discuss in more detail hereafter), while enacting pluriversal experiences of relations to territories. In a way, ATL is enabling a process of de-territorialization and then re-territorialization of decided social orders, which facilitates temporary joint decision making while fostering diverse voices.

#### *Conditions for meta-organizations as transformative agents and organizational consequences*

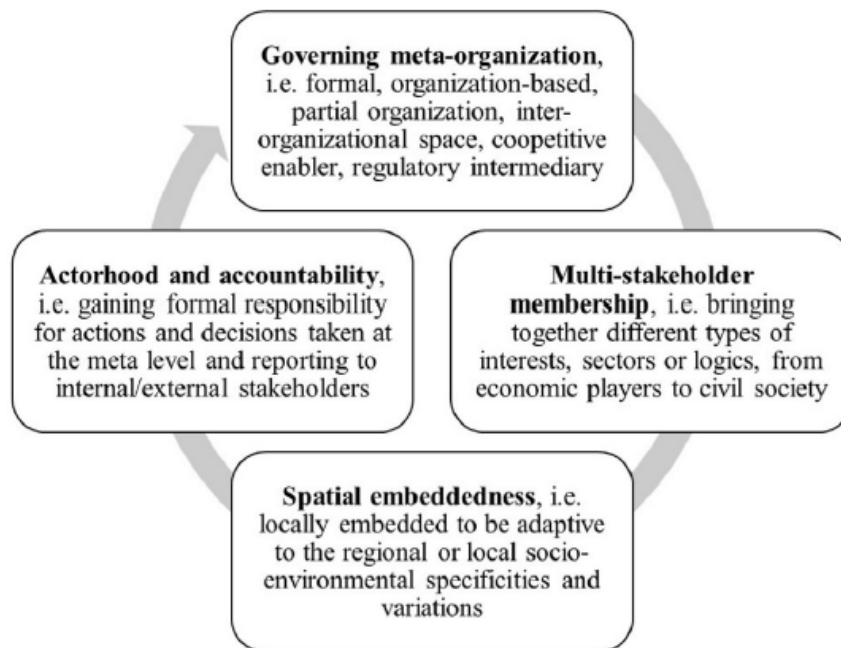
My Phd thesis started with the concept of performativity (Abrahamson et al., 2016; Berkowitz, 2016a), which I have used again recently to study how leaders performed their vision in organizations (Massé et al., 2022). However, a major shift of my work has consisted in moving from performativity to what I would call instead “transformationality”, i.e., the ability of a social actor to become a transformative agent and contribute positively to sustainability transitions.

In a work with Grothe-Hammer and Rachlitz (Berkowitz, Grothe-Hammer, et al., 2023), joined later by Gouteux, we draw on decisional organization theory to explain the value of meta-organizations for tackling grand challenges. We focus on multi-stakeholder meta-organizations to argue that their value comes partly from two elements detailed in Section II and III: 1) the intrinsic nature of meta-organizations as both multi-level decided social orders and layered processual entities that can take decisions in a context of extreme uncertainty while being held accountable, and 2) the functioning of meta-organizations as regulatory and transition intermediaries that enables them to address and reduce the complexity of ecological climate change by drawing on members’ various logics, values and expertise to produce adaptive self-regulation.

On the one hand, ecological grand challenges and sustainability transition management in general raise specific issues of participatory governance, of problem and vision definition, and values prioritization (Loorbach, 2007). On the other hand, multi-stakeholder meta-organizations provide immediateness, specificity and accountability for collective decisions. They also empower members, help jointly define a desirable and sustainable future while prioritizing shared values to achieve it. As such, multi-stakeholder meta-organizations can help fill the governance gap existing in many ecological grand challenges cases.

In a report on participatory governance (Berkowitz, 2020) and in my paper with marine biologists (Berkowitz et al., 2020), I explore such conditions for transformative meta-organizations: actorhood, multi-stakeholder membership composition (which I would now analyze as multi-referentiality), spatiality and accountability (see **Figure 22**).

**Figure 22 : Organizational conditions for transformative meta-organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2020, p.7)**



Drawing on this, in another work (Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022), we further investigate some of these conditions more in depth. We argue that “responsible actorhood” of a meta-organisation is a major condition to ensure it can act as a transformative agent (See previous section). Responsible actorhood entails several mechanisms to ensure “multi-directional accountability” (Bor, 2019), especially responsiveness to various stakeholders, from civil society to non-human entities like the biosphere and transformation of professionalities. I would further qualify this here as meta-organizational *multispecies* accountability to hint at the necessity of going beyond humans only. Responsible actorhood also entails fostering what we called 'transformative mediated reflexivity' based on Gadille et al., (2013), at the meta-organisational level, i.e., the reflexivity about broad ecological impacts and technological disruptions. We suggest that transformative mediated reflexivity can be developed by adopting a public-centric approach, accounting for impacts on both human and biosphere dimensions. This also connects with the “total responsibility principle” I have developed (Berkowitz, 2023a) (see next subsection).

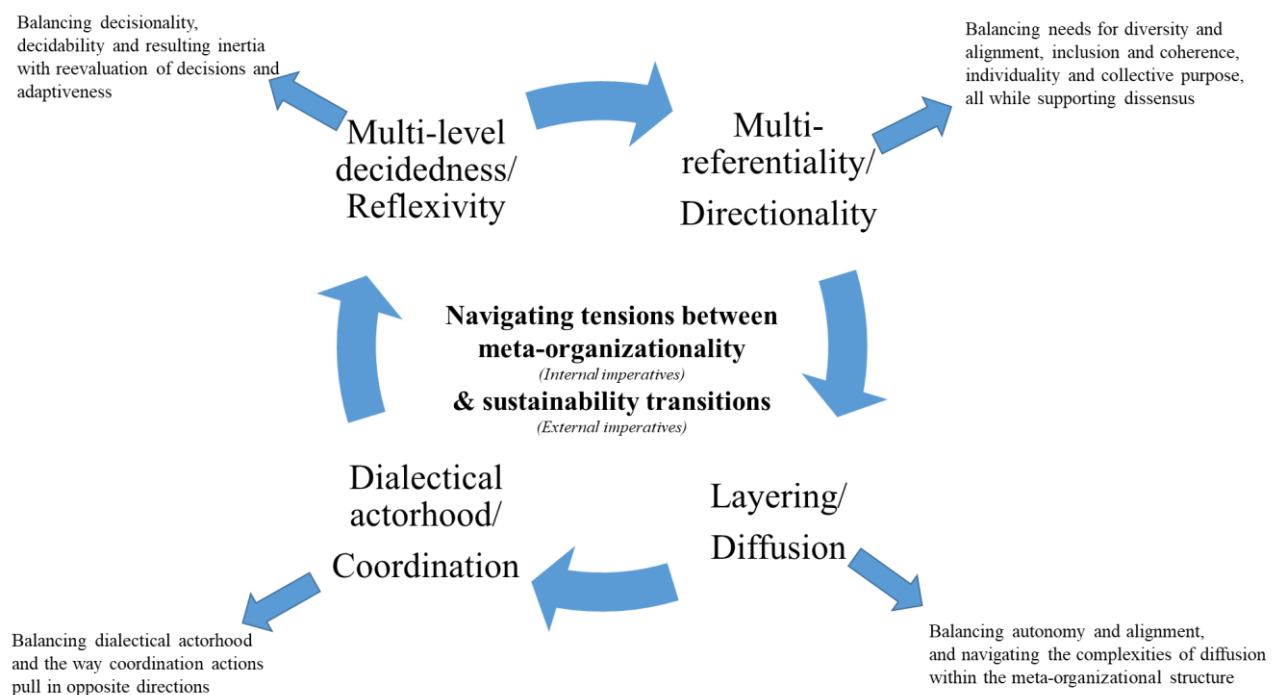
Ultimately, achieving multi-directional meta-organizational accountability and transformative mediated reflexivity necessitates facilitating 'negotiated professional restructuring', i.e. developing new knowledge and work processes to mitigate the risk of labor resistance to sustainability transitions. Under such organizational conditions (responsible actorhood, meta-organizational multispecies accountability, transformative mediated reflexivity, negotiated professional restructuring), the meta-organization can lift some lock-ins of sustainability transitions such as path dependency to growth or competency traps.

Then we have begun to explore the meta-organizational-sustainability transition tensions (Berkowitz & Bor, 2024). In that paper, we no longer inquiry whether and how meta-organizations can become transformative agents. Rather, we focus on the question of how being a meta-organization creates

tensions for sustainability transitions. We argue that these tensions result from frictions between principles of transitions, i.e., conditions for achieving broad socio-technical transformations for sustainability, like directionality, diffusion, coordination and reflexivity, and imperatives resulting from meta-organizationality. We identify and describe four tensions: the multi-referentiality-directionality tension, the layering-diffusion tension, the dialectical actorhood-coordination tension and the multi-level decidedness-reflexivity tension. We argue that transformative meta-organizations are those that effectively navigate these tensions to produce socio-technical system changes (see

Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Tensions between meta-organizationality and sustainability transitions principles (Berkowitz & Bor, 2024)**



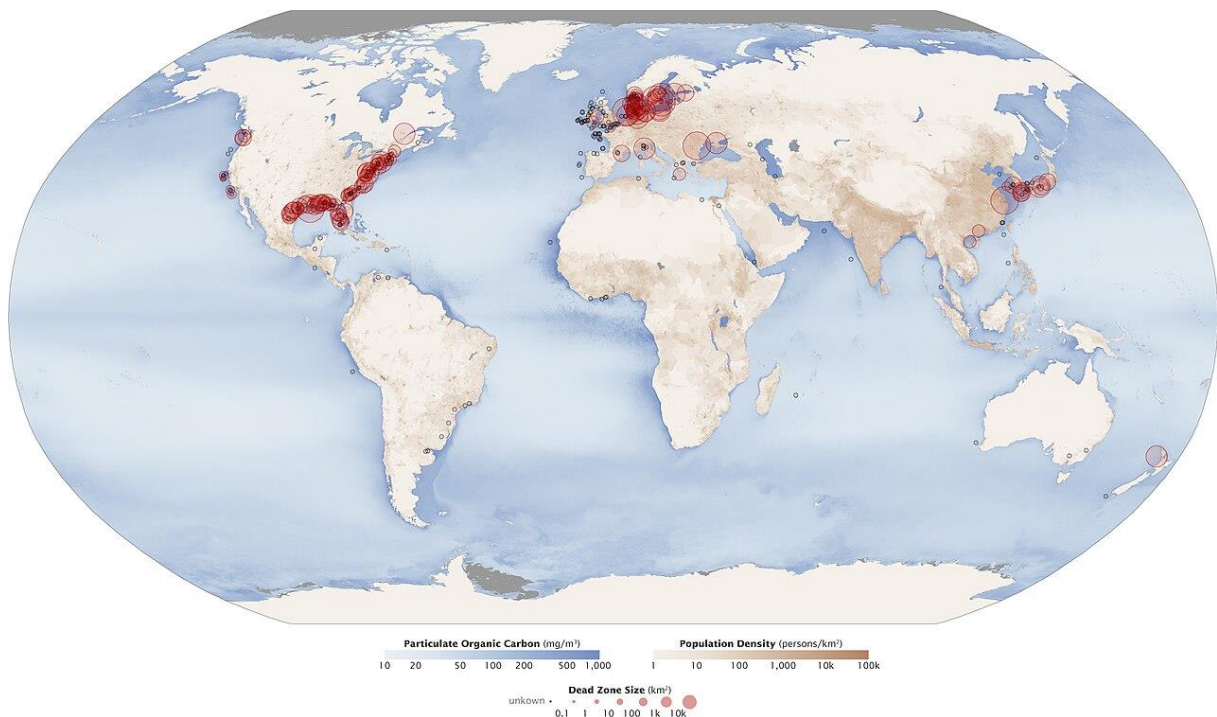
## 2) Rethinking relations and social bonds: the ocean, nonhuman livings and non-livings, and organizations

I have been interested in the ocean since my Phd thesis, but also for personal reasons. I have tried several times to attract attention to the urgency of thinking about the ocean, as an object of embodied knowledge, as an object of research and as a planetary boundary to care for (Berkowitz, 2014a, 2016a, 2023a; Berkowitz et al., 2018, 2019; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2014a). I then moved to a more ecosystemic and territorial approach.

*The importance of oceans*

Scientists have raised the alarm for several years now about the state of the ocean. The climate crisis, abusive and unsustainable exploitation of marine resources, and other impacts resulting from human activities are threatening the ocean and the cryosphere in an unprecedented way (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Costanza, 1999; Pörtner et al., 2019). According to the UNESCO, there are almost 500 dead zones in the oceans, places where life has literally become impossible, which together span more than 245,000 km of ocean (see Figure 24). About 35% of key marine habitats like mangrove, kelp forest or coral reefs that provide crucial ecosystem services to humanity have disappeared between 1980 and 2005 (Berkowitz, 2023a). Abrupt marine dead zones or anoxia were found to an important trigger of mass life extinction (Bartlett et al., 2018).

**Figure 24: Map of ocean dead zones (Source: Wikipedia)<sup>16</sup>**



Source: Robert Simmon & Jesse Allen - NASA Earth Observatory. “Red circles on this map show the location and size of many of our planet’s dead zones. Black dots show where dead zones have been observed, but their size is unknown. It’s no coincidence that dead zones occur downriver of places where human population density is high (darkest brown). Darker blues in this image show higher concentrations of particulate organic matter, an indication of the overly fertile waters that can culminate in dead zones.” (Wikipedia)

Despite its importance for human life and the grand challenges it faces, the ocean has so far been a blind spot in our fields, even in eco-centric critical approaches. We are therefore failing to holistically understand the impacts of organizations, in particular global and most exploitative ones like States and multinational companies in industrialized, global systems of production and consumption, on the ocean, and how to

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead\\_zone\\_%28ecology%29#/media/File:Aquatic\\_Dead\\_Zones.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_zone_%28ecology%29#/media/File:Aquatic_Dead_Zones.jpg)

address them. This blind spot is likely to perpetuate an exploitation paradigm both in academia and public decision-making (Banerjee et al., 2021; Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021; Sandhu, 2010).

This, in turn, aggravates risks of global collapse. ‘Blue growth’ and other national or transnational ‘blue economy’ strategies just keep popping as new frontiers for growth opportunities and will exacerbate this risk (Eikeset et al., 2018). These schemes would put further pressure on marine ecosystems as they are grounded neither in degrowth or postgrowth approaches (Banerjee et al., 2021; Pansera & Fressoli, 2021), nor in socio-ecological ‘coviability’, that is to say, avoiding global collapse by ensuring a harmonious, interdependent, sustainable evolution of both the human and nonhuman (Barrière et al., 2019).

With that vision, and in line with critical approaches of organizations, I am arguing that organizations act as systems of destruction of the ocean, and I explore how to shift to organizations as systems of ocean conservation and thriving (Berkowitz, 2023). To do so, I take inspiration from ecological thinking and ecological philosophy (Bonnet et al., 2021; Charbonnier, 2020; Servigne & Stevens, 2020). I analyze the significance of the ocean for organization studies and the organizational affordances of the ocean, that is to say its actionable characteristics that affect organizations’ actions and in return their impacts on the ocean. I identify several organizational affordances: incommensurability, open access and complex property regimes, structural domination by humans and land, perceived inexhaustibility and cognitive distance. I then review transdisciplinary evidence of organizations as systems of ocean destruction. In so doing, I argue that organizations produce ocean negative commons, defined as visible or invisible, material or immaterial organizational outputs or externalities that possess a negative value because they are detrimental to the appropriate functioning and beauty of marine ecosystems and marine life (See

**Figure 25**). Organizations therefore contribute to a process of ocean zombification – of systematic transformation of ocean life into ruins.

**Figure 25: A fisherman on a beach in Temuco, Chile that is blanketed with dead sardines, a result of algal blooms that suck oxygen out of the water (source: photography of Felix Marquez/AP<sup>17</sup>)**

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jan/04/oceans-suffocating-dead-zones-oxygen-starved>



In that paper, I describe how organizations create a broad variety of negative commons: from habitat destruction to chemical pollution, underwater noise pollution, modern slavery or acidification, marine current and ocean temperature disruptions, biopiracy, and plastic and marine litter. Some of these ruins result directly from anthropic activities at sea. In that case, they can be directly traced to a specific point-source pollution and a direct organization, such as an oil spill from an oil tanker. These negative commons – some emergent, others longstanding – can be thought of as marine-industry-specific. This is typically the case of overfishing or the destruction of marine life by deep-sea mining. However, negative commons resulting from non-point-source pollutions are less readily traceable. A good example is underwater noise pollution which, in a given area, can result from a combination of maritime traffic, renewable energy facilities, fishing boats, cruises, and seismic exploration (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2017). In both examples, the organizations involved are part of the wider marine industry, as highlighted in Figure 26, but non-marine industries also have indirect yet significant impacts (e.g., agriculture).

**Figure 26: Categorization of ocean negative commons by origin and source (Source: Berkowitz, 2023)**

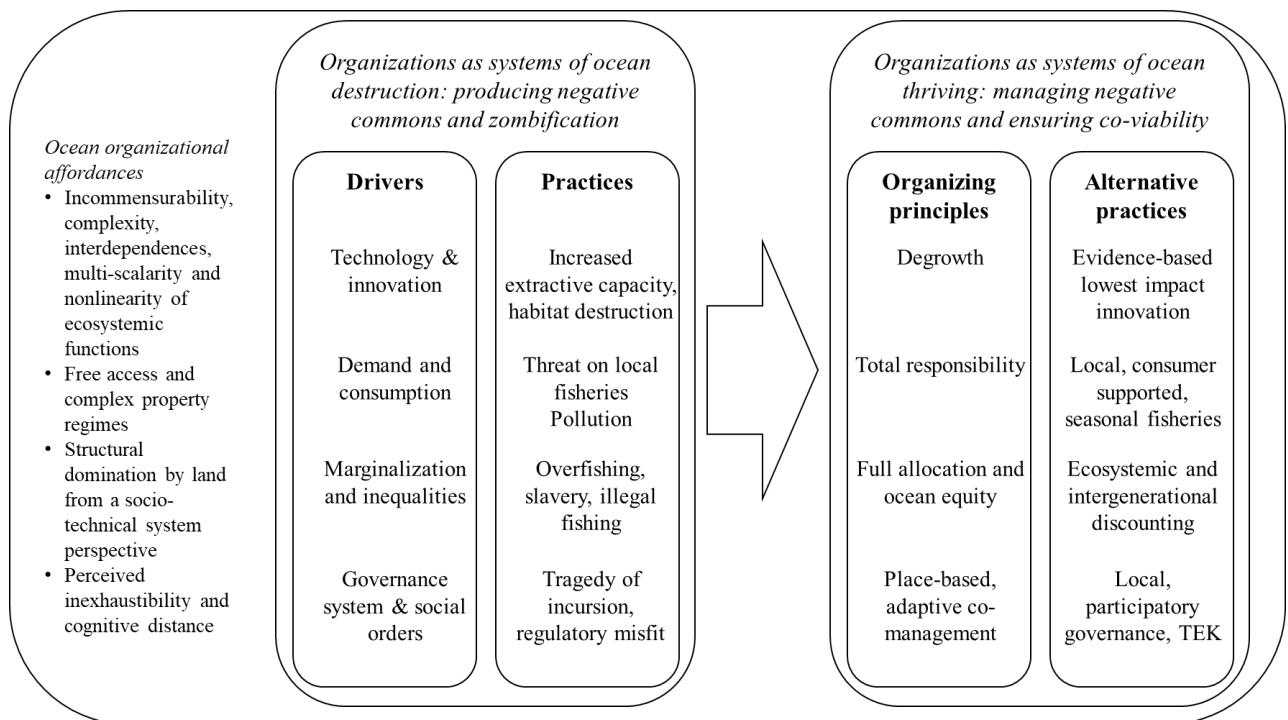
	Point-source	Non-point-source
Marine industry-specific	Oil spills; lightning enhancement; overfishing; ghost fishing; bycatch; habitat destruction; finning; methane pollution; degassing; jellyfication; modern slavery	Underwater noise pollution; air pollution; invasive species; water pollutants

Non-marine-  
industry-specific

Sand overexploitation; nuclear catastrophe; biopiracy	Terrigenous pollution; plastic & marine litter; acidification; toxic algae bloom; novel entities; eutrophication; dead zones
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Finally, working up from these foundations, I put forward a framework to transform organizations into systems of ocean conservation and thriving, enabling coviability. This framework articulates principles of degrowth, total responsibility over the value chain, full cost allocation to ensure ocean equity, and adaptive, place-based co-management, synthesized in **Figure 27**.

**Figure 27: Integrative model: from organizations as systems of ocean destruction to organizations as systems of ocean thriving (Berkowitz, 2023, p. 11)**



I am continuing to explore these issues with my colleague Margot Leclair in a project on art and oceans, where we investigate how art can help us connect in various ways to the nonhuman and especially to the ocean (Berkowitz & Leclair, 2024).

### *The shift to ecosystems and territories*

In relation to this growing attention to ocean and nonhumans, I have made another shift recently in the focus of my research towards socio-natural ecosystems, species and territories. I have begun to look for tools to understand the effects of organizations on biodiversity (something we explore at the MATIN seminar series 2023-2024<sup>18</sup>) and especially following my mobility to the LEST research center, I begun to explore territories as a concept and as a relational, embedded process.

Contrary to what I initially thought, territories are not just a “level” (i.e., a level of analysis for instance of meta-organizational membership or meta-organizational mandate). Territories, territoriality and spatial embeddedness can be thought of conditions for meta-organizational transformationality (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2023). But more interestingly, territories and territorialization can be conceived as ‘processes’ that construct and reveal actors, resources, ways of living and relating (François et al., 2013; Mazzilli & Pichault, 2018). In a sense, territories or places are co-constituted by and with organizations (and supposedly meta-organizations). This has led us to analyze “place-based” or territorialized meta-organizations as intermediaries for revealing such processes. We argue that place-based meta-organizations are those that are not only anchored in their territories or places but also contribute to reveal them and co-evolve with them (Berkowitz, Fernandes, et al., 2023). This approach differs from the spatial turn in organization studies or from institutional theory like Ostrom’s work on proximity of institutions to resources. In addition, territorialization as a process may challenge other processes happening in meta-organizations. For instance, how do territorialization processes affect or are made visible in dialectical actorhood? When we started to work on the place-based meta-organizations paper (Berkowitz, Fernandes, et al., 2023), I became aware of the incredible variety of definitions and approaches to draw from when one starts thinking about spaces, places and territories. Many works on space in organization studies rely on French geographer Henri Lefebvre’s Pioneer work, which Devi Vijay was actually the first to introduce me to.

In our communication (Berkowitz et al, 2023), we attempted to review his pioneer work. Lefebvre (1970, 1991) proposed the concepts of “lived space”, “constructed space”, and “perceived space” to understand the various dimensions of space and their social significance. These concepts influenced many approaches that have been later developed in geography, economics, and management and organization studies. Lefebvre called lived space the particular space where individuals and communities experience and practice their everyday lives. In the space of lived experiences, people engage in social interactions, activities, and daily routines. Lived space appears profoundly subjective and relational. It is intimately tied to personal and collective meanings and identities, to emotions and memories that are associated with a place. This definition reminds me of the Proust madeleine. The lived space is truly about how we use space daily, whom (and what) we encounter there and how we relate with them/that. There is a growing trend in recent literature, especially in philosophy but also in social sciences in general, to view this lived space as a multispecies relational experience (Arregui, 2023; Brugidou & Clouette, 2018; Despret, 2019;

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<sup>18</sup> <https://matin.hypotheses.org/>

Komi & Kröger, 2023; Massarella et al., 2021; Mercier-Roy & Mailhot, 2024), where we encounter other, nonhuman species and thus co-create our environment. This is particularly relevant and affected by recent changes, in the age of the Anthropocene, climate and socio-ecological emergencies.

Then, the constructed space can be understood as built infrastructures, i.e., the physical and built environment, including buildings, infrastructure, and urban design. It is interesting (or rather depressing) to note, from an ecological transition perspective, that the “global human-made mass exceeds all living biomass” (Elhacham et al., 2020). The overall material we produce, the constructed space, the anthropogenic mass, is now higher than all the natural biological mass (plants, bacteria, fungi, animals, etc.). The constructed space is influenced by social, economic, and political forces and reflects power relations and ideologies that shape its form and function. It embodies the spatial organization and arrangement imposed by social actors – organizations, institutions, public policies, procurement, industries, municipalities, urban and territorial planning, etc. And lastly, the perceived space consists of subjective and cognitive representations of space held by individuals or social groups. This concept encompasses the mental and symbolic images, ideas, and perceptions that people have about a place.

These three concepts taken together provide an interesting approach for understanding the social production and interpretation of space in relation to human experiences, power dynamics, and the construction of meaning. Drawing on these concepts, French management studies have also highlighted the dichotomy between a “prescribed territory”, that is to say top-down defined by the public actors with administrative boundaries, and a superimposed territory “built” by the actors in an emerging way according to the relationships forged between the actors on this space and that they consider to make sense for their action (Raulet-Croset, 2008).

In our paper (Berkowitz et al., 2023), we show how that French approach of space strongly connects with relational place-making theory, where places are socially constructed through interactions, meaning and experiences (Pierce et al., 2011). Place-making theory encompasses a range of perspectives and approaches that emphasize the creation and enhancement of meaningful, inclusive, and vibrant places. It is rooted in the understanding that places are not just physical spaces but are socially constructed and shaped by human activities, relationships, and meanings. These works have focused however overwhelmingly on cities and urban places (Gehl, 2013; Jacobson, 1961; Lynch, 1984; Whyte, 1980).

Yet, one should not neglect broader spaces, for which much of the French geography has developed a broader approach through the concept of “territory” and territorial development. I for instance relate to my island for instance, la Réunion, even though I always lived in cities. I also now relate to Provence and to the Mediterranean region. Territories appear as complex processes that are both co-constructed and co-evolve with social actors (François et al., 2013; Hirczak et al., 2019; Mazzilli & Pichault, 2018). Combining this with decisionalism promises interesting headaches.

*Serendipity moment – the Lestian mobility*

When I moved to the LEST research center, in October 2020, during COVID-19 or rather after the worse part of the confinement, I discovered fascinating works on territories which was the object of Axis 3 of the previous project of this laboratory. I am extremely grateful for the many colleagues I met at the lab and who now collaborate in the ANR MetaOrgtrans to precisely study these questions (See hereafter). In a way, my mobility to the LEST illustrates the importance of placeness and socialization (Saives et al., 2018) including in research labs.

### **3) Imagining alternatives? Rethinking (meta-)organizations in relation to democracy and governance**

In my paper on organizations as systems of ocean destruction, I have argued that the major ecological challenges we face - climate change, loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, ocean acidification - are the result of a neoliberal paradigm in which the dominant organizations (states, multinationals, etc.) are conceived as systems for exploiting and destroying the living (Berkowitz, 2023a). Living things, human and non-human alike, constitute resources instrumentalized for growth and financial performance. Consequently, neoliberalism is an ideological and political project that is accompanied by the privatization of public resources, the commodification of activities and social ties, and global deregulation, all of which pose serious risks for democracies (Varman & Vijay, 2022a).

In an entry for the *Dictionnaire de l'autre gestion*, we have begun to discuss meta-organizations in relation to democratic governance of sustainability transitions (Berkowitz & Fernandes, 2024). We argue that imagining management and organizational alternatives that recreate solidarities (Eynaud & Carvalho De França Filho, 2023), including between living humans and non-humans, and enable new forms of democracy is essential to resist the destructive social order of neoliberalism (Varman & Vijay, 2022a). Drawing on the work of Foucault and Lefebvre, Varman and Vijay (2022b), in their study of Leftword, show that heterotopia, in particular, is an essential dimension of alternative organizational spaces.

Again here, we draw on Lefebvre (1970)'s work who conceives heterotopia as having a dual dimension: firstly, a dimension of historically marginalized and marginalized spaces, and secondly, a dialectical dimension with isotopia, insofar as a heterotopic place diverges from and differentiates itself from homogeneous, uniformly organized urban centralities. Heterotopia describes places of co-presence enabling the performative staging of political contestation, the questioning of norms, as well as the imagining of alternative, divergent and multiple perspectives, all crucial aspects in the current context of societies evolving towards post-democratic regimes (Varman & Vijay, 2022b). Heterotopic spaces, such as Leftword, or the Friche de la belle de mai in Marseille (Lucchini, 2013), embody forms of resistance to established and dominant social orders, and it is in this sense that heterotopia appears to be essential for imagining multiple directionalities of ecological and social transitions that are fair to all.

So, we have begun to explore how heterotopia can be expressed and organized in meta-organizations, in order to facilitate the implementation of a more just and democratic governance of ecological and

socially just transitions. We were particularly interested in "grassroots" meta-organizations, emerging through and by local actors directly, and transformative.

As Varman and Vijay (2022b) show, heterotopias act as "counter-sites of inversion, resistance and often subversion" to the dominant social orders of neoliberalism (p. 278). From the perspective of democratically governing the ecological and social transition, we can ask whether and how heterotopias are embodied and organized in meta-organizations. We focus on grassroots, territorialized meta-organizations as they seem better suited to Lefebvre's notion of heterotopic space and Varman and Vijay's use of it. I do not really see how heterotopias could be embodied in other types of meta-organizations, but maybe that should be investigated.

We have argued that some of these elements can be found in certain cases. For example, Acampamento Terra Livre (ATL) appears as a temporary, heterotopic counter-site. ATL is a yearly arena organized by a meta-organization of indigenous communities, the Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil (APIB), enabling the temporary co-presence of indigenous leaders. There were over 7,000 leaders from 176 ethnicities in Brasília in April 2022, for example. ATL's main objective is to organize resistance against the extractivist order (Domingues & Sauer, 2023).

What happens at ATL exactly? People organize plenary sessions and meetings with officials. There are also cultural events. What is fascinating here is that ATL has succeeded in articulating the defense of indigenous rights and the territories occupied by these peoples for centuries, thus strengthening the fight for climate justice and the preservation of biodiversity in Brazil. Although we have begun to look at ATL as a meta-organization, it is still unclear what it is exactly. At least, it seems to function more like a collective assembly or temporary community, developing participatory approaches that allow multiple voices to contribute to discussions and decisions. ATL focuses on amplifying the voices and concerns of indigenous communities, which are still too invisible in Brazilian politics.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Baix Empordà co-management table in Catalunya was founded in 2018 and brings together different organizations from multiple spheres of society (economic, associative, public and scientific players). This multi-stakeholder, multi-referential meta-organization seeks to collaboratively manage conflicts of use on a protected area of the Costa Brava coastline (Berkowitz, 2023b). The table's regular meetings, organized in daily workshops, have enabled the development and appropriation of a specific methodology for analyzing impacts on ecosystems, but also and above all the reversal of value hierarchies. In fact, the meta-organization itself decided to give priority to ecosystem health, i.e., non-human living beings, rather than the economic value of activities, in its decision-making. In addition, this system makes it possible to decentralize decision-making as close as possible to local stakeholders, giving a voice to many organizations that are generally excluded from these decision-making processes (Berkowitz, 2023b).

In these cases, heterotopias are indeed manifested by physical co-presence, albeit sometimes punctual and temporary. This temporality can be explained partly by the meta-organizational and partially organized nature of these organizations, which have few resources of their own and tend towards a light,

flexible coordination process. Then, we believe that heterotopias are enabled in multi-stakeholder meta-organizations by the organization of multi-referentiality, i.e., measures to accommodate and foster the multiplicity of logics, values and frames of reference (Berkowitz, 2023b). This multi-referentiality enables the reversal of habitual hierarchies and social relationships, for example with the living in the case of Catalunya. Finally, in the perspective of ecological and social transitions, heterotopias imply forms of solidarity (e.g., between indigenous communities, or with non-human living beings).

In both cases, heterotopias imply inscriptions of solidarity in open and heterogeneous, divergent and multiple spaces, as may be the case in certain co-working spaces (Chabaud et al., 2023). The case of *la Friche de la Belle de Mai*, which has been for a long time and is still an important partner of my lab, the LEST (Duprat et al., 2023), clearly came to my mind when I was thinking about heterotopias in meta-organizations. I believe it is a beautiful case of heterotopia in a more permanent place-based meta-organization exploring alternatives to neoliberalism.

Heterotopias are essential for the organization of alternatives and resistance to dominant social orders, notably neoliberalism (Varman & Vijay, 2022b), and *a fortiori*, in processes aimed at piloting just ecological and social transitions. Grassroot meta-organizations that enable the governance of these transitions can constitute sites of heterotopia. Because of the ecological stakes and meta-organizational characteristics, heterotopias can take shape thanks to a multi-referentiality that fosters a diversity of perspectives and voices and enables the reversal of power relations, physical co-presence and links of solidarity, including with non-human living beings (the Amazon or the Catalan coast). These characteristics help to make meta-organizations alternative places conducive to resistance (Varman & Vijay, 2022b), and thus spaces of democratic governance. Faced with the urgency of ecological issues and the destruction of the livings, the question arises not just of conservation, but also of the representation of non-human living beings in (meta-)organizations (Berkowitz, Guérineau, et al., 2023).

We can argue that heterotopias in place-based, transformative meta-organizations can give voice to, or at least integrate, non-humans. But this raises further questions about 1) who is not represented or who is silenced in these meta-organizations (dominated groups or subalterns, e.g., women, children, etc., non-humans?), and 2) how exactly nonhumans can be given voice or represented.

#### *Serendipity moment – The Vijay Encounter*

My meeting with Devi Vijay (IIM Calcutta) is another example of serendipity. I knew and admired her work, which I became familiar with first thanks to a paper in *M@n@gement* (Vijay & Monin, 2018). I then met her online during a COVID-19 EGOS subtheme I was co-convening and was really inspired by her (albeit online) presence. We got to exchange and discuss, she did us the great honor of accepting to become senior editor at *M@n@gement*. The more I talked with her, the more I grew intellectually and humanly. I could not find a better person for starting the PCI Organization Studies adventure. She is a constant source of inspiration for me, I am so grateful for knowing her. And just like with H el ene, I am so surprised to feel so close to her even though most of our exchanges have been online.

## Conclusion

This section is a bit of a melting pot. I touched upon the dark side of meta-organizations *per se*, with the risks of creating and maintaining unfair global social orders and escaping responsibility. I explored decisional conditions for meta-organizations to act as transformative agents. I also discussed organizations in general as systems of ocean destruction and principles for shifting to a paradigm of organizations as systems of ocean thriving. I explored notions of territories, space, relations to nonhuman, and concepts of alternative organizing, especially heterotopia.

# V. Projects for the future

## Synthesis

In this section, I am presenting ongoing or future projects, how they relate with the previous developments, extend them or challenge them. One main project I have started to work on this last year has to do with meta-organizations, transitions and territories.

I also look forward to the more institutional projects I am working on, especially developing Peer Community in Organization Studies, the Standing Working Group at EGOS which I hope to turn into a European Project, and the collaborative research handbook on ecological transitions and work, at my lab (See Section VI).

### 1) Meta-organizing sustainability transitions in territories: A place-based approach

In the upcoming years, I will be working on the ANR JCJC “Meta-organizing sustainability transitions in territories a place-based approach” (ANR-22-CE26-0004), which I coordinate as principal investigator. This project is also connected and based on an A\*Midex Funding (MetaOrgTrans) that will be completed in 2024.

In this project, the key idea is to embrace decisional organization theory and move from a more static approach of organizations and meta-organizations to a more processual understanding. This is the objective of MetaOrgTrans, to analyze meta-organizations, territories and transitions as triply embedded processes, but more careful work needs to be done to conceptualize this and to develop methodologies based on process approaches (Bidart et al., 2013; Mendez, 2010b). We would need to integrate organization (as both structures and processual entities), space (territories as processes), temporality (as evolution, time and processuality) and directionality (of transitions).

Transition studies argue that deliberative governance is needed to create a shared vision of the sustainable desirable future (Weber & Rohrer, 2012). One level for enacting such a shared vision is precisely territories, like Andalusia for the European Green deal and new industrial policy, a case I worked on with the Joint Research Center of the European Commission (Konnola et al., 2021; Pontikakis et al., 2020). But transition studies’ multi-level approach tends to overlook the variability and richness of territories by focusing on either strategic local niche management, e.g. through incubators and innovation scaling up strategies, or on national or transnational processes, e.g. industrial, research and innovation policy (Geels et al., 2016; Gliedt et al., 2018; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018).

Such views contribute to push towards a “one-size-fits-all” solution to address grand challenges and sustainability transition, despite the seemingly shared understanding that exploring alternative pathways and local experimentations and identifying regional opportunities is of paramount importance to ensure

successful transitions (Pontikakis et al., 2020; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018). This is perhaps even more paradoxical when transition processes are explicitly conceived as embedded in regional contexts and involving decentralized decision-making and participatory governance through shared agendas (Fernández & Romagosa, 2020; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018). However, implementing and accelerating transitions is harder when objectives have not been collaboratively defined and agreed upon by stakeholders (Loorbach, 2007), and the MetaOrgTrans project argues, by stakeholders at the right level of action, i.e. territories, through special transition intermediaries, i.e. meta-organizations.

As I have extensively discussed in this dissertation, tackling grand challenges and ensuring the sustainable transitions of territories requires to profoundly change social orders (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). Social orders are affected by grand challenges but also provide the context in which grand challenges can be solved and transitions can be accelerated. A general assumption underlying dominant transition studies and policy is that transition processes and transition intermediation take place mostly through emergent social orders. Transition processes may indeed rely on networks of innovators, entrepreneurs and other informal communities that will then disrupt regime players and infrastructures (Gliedt et al., 2018; Kanda et al., 2020). Transition intermediation can also be understood as the systemic activities that enable to articulate local or individual level, national or state level, with business actions, through networks of actors (Gliedt et al., 2018; Kanda et al., 2020). Conversely, institutions, e.g. the French State or the European Union, centrally define legislations, industrial policies or frameworks and may rely on institutionalized intermediary organizations, e.g. energy or environmental agencies like ADEME, to translate and diffuse new rules (Borrás & Edler, 2020). This perspective of emerging social orders might explain why some of the literature considers intermediaries as “neutral” or “without agency”, thus neglecting collective actorhood, shared agendas and values, regime resistance to change and politics at different scales (Kivimaa et al., 2019).

In this project, we focus on meta-organizations as transition intermediaries (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Chaudhury et al., 2016). As I discussed previously, meta-organizations might constitute important transition intermediaries, playing key roles in governing and steering sustainability transitions. However, organization studies in general and meta-organization theory in particular share with transition studies a lack of concern for spatiality, territories, or place-based theory (Coenen et al., 2012; Pachoud et al., 2022). In other words, both streams of research tend to neglect spatial dimensions. Against this backdrop, the MetaOrgTrans project discusses the characteristics and specificities of place-based meta-organizations as transition intermediaries at the territorial level. It problematizes whether and how meta-organizations, territories and transition pathways are affected by one another.

A fuller picture of sustainability transitions requires an attention to how member-organizations relate to the meta-organization in the specific context of a given territory. This can be done through combining for instance contextual organizationality and structural organizationality and meta-organizationality.

## 2) The manifestations and consequences of meta-organizational proliferation

In some of my other ongoing works, I am generally interested in the manifestations and consequences of meta-organizational proliferation. This stems from both an empirical diagnosis (the explosion of meta-organizations) and a theoretical one (having meta-organizations create social orders has specific implications).

*What does meta-organizational proliferation look like and what are its effects?*

First of all, I want to keep investigate what this meta-organizational proliferation looks like and what its effects are. These effects may include the dilution of responsibility (Berkowitz et al., 2022; Brunsson et al., 2022), the cognitive loading on delegates or members, the complex feedback loops in layered multi-level decidedness, the impossibility of actually achieving dialectical actorhood or at least the resulting necessary trade-offs. In my Phd, I discussed the idea of a networked meta-order (Berkowitz, 2016a), i.e. through the layering and increase of meta-organizations and meta-meta-and more-organizations, this creates an interconnected order at a meta-level. This is also something we are exploring under the idea of an inter-organizational web of collaborations among organizations (Berkowitz and Bor, Under review).

This perspective connects with other approaches, for instance in political science, that observe the growth of a constellation of regulatory actors (Mathieu et al., 2016). We can describe the same constellation and intertwining of meta-organizations, meta-meta-organizations, etc. What does this do to governance? To accountability to citizens? What does this do to the state and the common good? In particular, Mathieu and Valenzuela (2024) observe an ongoing new interventionism in certain countries, with increased 'regulatory governmentalisation'. This transformation of public policy making and regulatory governance implies a return to a form of control of regulatory decisions by governments. I would argue that multi-stakeholder meta-organizations (for instance local co-management committees involving economic players and public ones, alongside civil society and other organizations) might enable this operationalization of regulatory governmentalisation. To my knowledge, this type of regulatory hybrid intermediary remains understudied in political science and regulatory governance. In relation with these questions, my colleague Promsopha argues that there might be at stake a profound transformation of labor divisions, favored by or at least embodied in the proliferation of meta-organizations. More work needs to be done to investigate this question and understand this phenomenon and how this relates to work transformations, socio-ecological complex problems, sustainability transitions and public policy.

I would be particularly interested in analyzing the effects of the increase of meta-organizations of universities on the governance of higher education and research, both at the meso level as well as at the macro level (Musselin, 2021). I myself received a master's degree from a meta-organization, the CEMS alliance. But concretely, I attended two schools that are members of the CEMS alliance (HEC Paris and FGV Brazil). We see the multiplication of meta-organizations in higher education (Zapp et al., 2020). How does this relate to the perpetuation of dominant orders (rankification, metrification, commodification of science)?

Beyond meta-organizational proliferation itself, several scholars have noted a general organizational inflation as I argued at the beginning of this dissertation (see for instance Borraz, 2022; Bromley & Meyer, 2015). This is in a way what we have begun to analyze in a paper under review using Deleuze and Guattari (Berkowitz & Bor, Under review). We develop a rhizomatic framework to study inter-organizational arrangements, including meta-organizations, policy networks, alliances, etc. We unpack the six principles of Deleuze and Guattari rhizome concept: connections, heterogeneity, multiplicity, a significant rupture, cartography, and decalcomania. With this framework, we seek to move beyond concepts such as network, institution and organization and conceive inter-organizational arrangements as “fluid acts of collaborations” (Berkowitz & Bor, under review). We focus on that each inter-organizational arrangement may present a specific rhizomatic profile. Arrangements that may have seemed similar based on the literature in which they are discussed, such as supply networks and business networks, or egocentric alliances and alliance constellations, turn out to be quite dissimilar. Conversely, arrangements that may seem very dissimilar, such as policy networks and alliance networks, actually present close rhizomatic characteristics. Even further, the framework allows us to conceptualize the interconnections beyond and among arrangements, showing that organizations are embedded in a wide, moving and fluid web of inter-organizational relations.

#### *Comparing, contrasting, generalizing*

Generally speaking, there is a need for more consolidation in knowledge production about meta-organizations. But how to consolidate meta-organizational knowledge? One major issue consists in managing to draw on existing works in other disciplines even though they do not use the concept meta-organization or think of it as a meta-organization. There are different ways to do that. First of all, we need more works that compare and distinguish forms and concepts, crossing literatures in inter-organizational relations as we advocated for (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018) or from other fields of research, like ecosystems, platforms, etc. Our work with Coulombel (Forthcoming) provides some baseline for this.

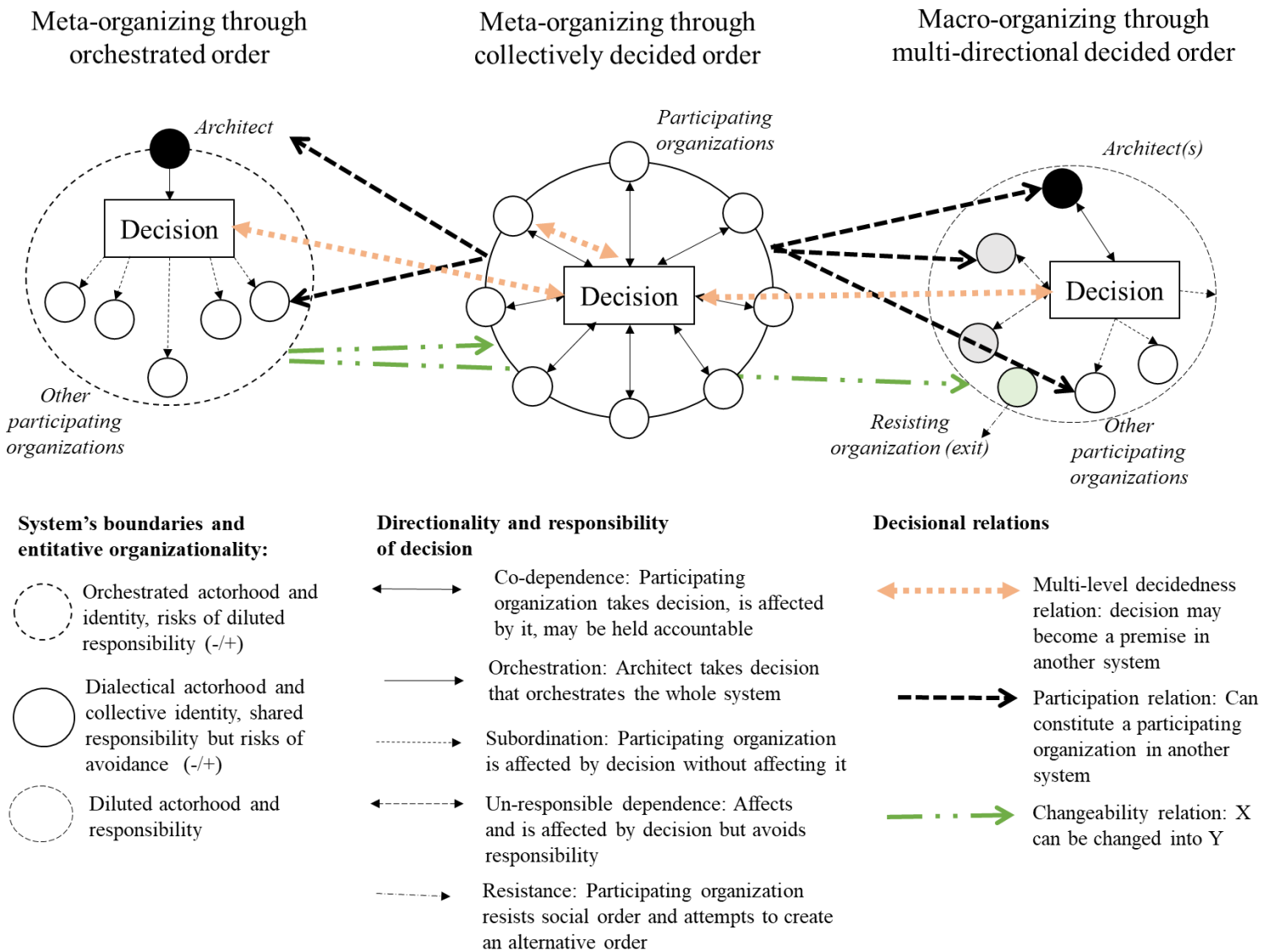
Next, another way to consolidate knowledge is to take inspiration from other theoretical frameworks or approaches and show what applying a meta-organizational lens brings as novel insights. I am interested in doing that on regulatory intermediaries and transgovernmental networks for instance (Abbott et al., 2017; Berkowitz, 2016c; Hysing & Du Rietz Dahlström, 2024; Jordana, 2017; Jordana et al., 2022; Medzini & Levi-Faur, 2023). This can be done by developing new case studies, or simply re-analyzing existing cases to show what different insights meta-organization brings, a bit like what we have done with the pluridisciplinary work with Crowder and Brooks (2020) in Marine Policy or with Grothe-Hammer and the IWC (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). I think more work is needed to systemically weave in the insights from meta-organization theory and the regulatory intermediaries' literature.

### 3) Decisional and alternative organizing among organizations

#### Creating order among organizations

Given the organizational inflation in modern societies, and especially the inflation of organization among organizations under various forms and levels (Brunsson et al., 2022; Borraz, 2022; Bromley & Meyer, 2015; Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming; Musselin, 2021), there is a need to further analyze organizing, meta-organizing and macro-organizing through the decisional lens. In **Figure 28**, I suggest a preliminary model of creating decided order among organizations, the varying directionality of decisions and responsibility, system's boundaries, entitative organizational and decisional relations.

**Figure 28: Model of creating decided order among organizations, directionality, responsibility and relations among participating organizations (Based on Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming, and this dissertation)**



As argued previously there can be different ways of creating decided order among organizations: meta-organizing through orchestrated order, meta-organizing through collectively decided order, macro-organizing through multi-directional decided order.

First, meta-organizing can happen through orchestrated order with the presence of an architect that takes decisions affecting the whole system (Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming). In that case, participating organizations are only affected by decisions and have a subordination relation with the architect. The orchestrated decided order may come with orchestrated actorhood and more or less orchestrated identity (see for instance entrepreneurial ecosystems focused on artificial intelligence). However, there are more or less high risks of diluted responsibility as architects may argue that they do not constitute the meta-organization and as there may be no contractual or formal ties among participating organizations. More work is needed to understand the implications of this form of decided order (Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming).

In meta-organizing through collectively decided orders, participating organizations (rather than the term members used in Coulombel & Berkowitz) develop a form of co-dependence: they contribute to taking decisions, are affected by them and may be held accountable for them (especially when there is clear collective actorhood and collective identity). As a result, such meta-organizations present clear system boundaries, a dialectical actorhood and collective identity and supposedly shared responsibility. However, the nature of the decided order itself may create risks of avoidance of responsibility and therefore dilution. We cannot ignore however here that there may be power asymmetries and some actors being more or less influential. There would be clearly variations in the both directionality of decision and decisionality in collectively decided orders.

In macro-organizing, or multi-directional decided order, the system of decisions involves a variety of actors and varying directionality of decisions. There is a diluted actorhood and responsibility of the system itself (i.e. no collective social actor per se with full entitative organizationality). Architects also present a form of co-dependence in that they are those key participating organizations taking structuring decisions for the system as a whole but also being affected by those decisions and being held accountable for them. This is typically visible in the Mercosur-EU agreement: Mercosur and the EU are architects (and meta-organizations) that shape and are shaped by the agreement. As they constitute the visible part of the iceberg that constitute the macro-organization, and present a co-depend directionality of decision, they are the ones made responsible for the effects of their decisions. Other participating organizations may develop an un-responsible dependence: they may influence decisions (especially through lobbying) and be affected by such decisions but they avoid taking responsibility for them. This is typically the case of business meta-organizations that conduct advocacy at the EU level are the target of industrial regulation in the Mercosur-EU agreement. Next some participating organizations are subordinated to the system: they are affected by the decisions but cannot affect them, i.e. they cannot take decisions that would become the premises of the macro-organization. This is the case of certain sectors and industries, of indigenous communities, etc. Finally, some participating organizations may resist the macro-organization and exit it through their decisions. For instance, it could be the case of certain grassroots, indigenous meta-

organizations like APIB through their actions at the ATL where they de-territorialize and re-territorialize dominant global decided orders.

Lastly, there are transformational or decisional relations and possible fluidity among the variety of participating organizations identified here. First of all, the multi-level decidedness relation means that a decision in one of the identified system may become a premise in another system (whether a participating organization of the system, or a different system) (See model). Then, a participation relation may exist among the various players. For instance, the meta-organization may act as an architect or any participating organization in both the orchestrated system and the macro-organization. Lastly, there is a changeability relation, one form may be changed into the other. For instance we could imagine some orchestrated systems becoming a meta-organization by transforming its decision-making process (from orchestrated to collective), and changing its system boundaries and entitative organizationality through reinforcement. An orchestrated system gaining size, growing its participating organizations, changing scale and creating in increasingly global social order may be viewed as turning into a macro-organization. Other changeability relations are difficult to conceive owing to the effect of decidedness: when there is a higher degree of decisionality or density especially on actorhood and identity, how can this be de-organized? Can we see a meta-organization with clear actorhood losing its actorhood? More work needs to be done to understand the dynamics across forms, potential tipping points and responsibility changes.

A different question emerges. Is macro-organization actually an orchestrated system or vice versa? I would argue here that several features help distinguish between meta-organizations as orchestrated systems and macro-organizations. First of all the scope and level of actions. Orchestrated systems tend to be more territorialized and be value-creation oriented (Coulombel & Berkowitz, Forthcoming). Macro-organizations on the other hand tend to bring together a great variety of participating organizations (from standard organizations to business meta-organizations, civil society etc) at a more global level (see the macro-organization around the Mercosur-EU agreement).

#### *Meta-organizing and macro-organizing for grand challenges*

Then, more works is needed to understand the relation to grand challenges. The grand challenges literature misses the point about decisionalism or the importance of decided social orders. Yet, the grand challenges literature advocate in favor of “organizations”, and explore what organization studies can bring, but exclude organization theory from the analysis of collective action. If we take for instance the recent special issue “on organizing for good” in the *Journal of Organization Design* (Baumann et al., 2024), collaborations are considered as outside of formal organizations and therefore fall under the “informal networks” category. But we have shown precisely how to move beyond the concept of network, through binaries defining social orders (Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024).

Several points are of interest here. First of all, further investigation is needed to understand what is so specific about meta-organizations for tackling problems like climate change. Climate change is a very peculiar global, complex problem that precisely results from our paradigm of organizations as systems of exploitation and destruction of nature. This raises the question of what value meta-organizing has to help

construct and organize collective action around this issue. But further, if we take stock of the proliferation of meta-organizations, orchestrated systems and macro-organizations, more work is needed to analyze 1) whether and how a particular form may be more suited to deal with a particular socio-ecological problem, 2) whether and how some forms actually amplify some problems (see for instance meta-organizations and macro-organization and the coloniality of power in the overexploitation of Amazonia and the domination of indigenous communities), 3) whether and how we can imagine alternative forms of organizing relations among organizations for sustainability.

### *Alternative (meta-)organizing*

Indeed, connecting more with the broad and diverse field on alternative organizing (Barin Cruz et al., 2017; Barros & Michaud, 2020; Daskalaki et al., 2019; Huybrechts & Haugh, 2018; Shanahan, 2023; Varman & Vijay, 2022b; Vijay et al., 2021, 2023), I have started with a top notch team of colleagues to review imaginaries and organizational forms of alternative organization. We hope to explore whether meta-organizations constitute one possible form, and what are other existing forms, as well as political and philosophical underlying imaginaries. Even further, one important question would be to understand whether and how decisionalism explains these varieties of forms and imaginaries, as well as the challenges and obstacles to alternative organizing, especially from a capitalistic perspective. To what extent are decided orders (e.g. orchestrated systems, meta-organizations, macro-organizations) linked to capitalism and neoliberalism? Can they provide the basic contexts for alternative organizing and imagining if we consider that they are part of the problem?

In relation to this, I would like to keep digging into the concept of heterotopia (Berkowitz & Fernandes, 2024; Varman & Vijay, 2022a). In particular, can we and if so how connect decisionalism, organizationality and meta-organizationality with heterotopias? Can heterotopias be organized in a specific way? Do they require or foster or are correlated with specific decisional, structural and entitative organizationality and meta-organizationality profiles?

In line with this and the issue of organizing democracies, one question I am interested in is how to represent and give voice to the voiceless. I have argued that local, multi-stakeholder meta-organizations can pilot just transitions, because they enable shared, territorialized decision-making of local stakeholders, co-competition and collaboration among different constituents, and collective, processual valuing of socio-natural ecosystems. But who is missing from these meta-organizations, and should they be included? We know that women tend to be invisibilized, but also (gender, political, ethnical, etc.) minorities. I am wondering what kind of problem this raises for meta-organizations and especially for meta-organizations as alternative forms of organizing for just transitions. If we pull this thread, and in relation with my most recent works on nonhumans (Berkowitz, Guérineau, et al., 2023; Berkowitz & Leclair, 2024),

Along with the non-scalability hypothesis, meta-organizations can help disseminate methodologies or frameworks, knowledge and practices, translocally. They can also produce multi-level effects through interactions with nonmembers (especially regulators). But transformative meta-organizations could also be themselves a social innovation used to develop solutions to ecological or social problems, by

collectively defining pathways that are adapted to each place, instead to transposing, diffusing or scaling up innovations. It would be interested to further analyze this in relation with the issue of non-scalability.

"In his view, it is because we have thought of the social order as a symbolic machine that concrete machines have come to colonize our entire living space." writes Chaudet about Mumford concept of megamachine (Chaudet, 2020). Mumford's idea of the megamachine is fascinating (see Chaudet, 2020; Mumford, 1934, 1973). With this idea, Mumford tries to argue for a reversed causality relationship: he means that it is the change in the organization of society that enables the emergence of certain technologies, tools, concrete (in flesh or not) machines. The invisible organization of society enables the apparition of visible machines (Chaudet, 2020). I am struck by the earlier Chaudet's quote. What in the megamachine enabled meta-organization to colonize society? Following that line of thought, is the very principle of "growth" (GDP, performance, growth as self-development) embedded in the megamachine and is it feeding this growth, this proliferation of organizations and meta-organizations? And if we cannot get away from growth as a principle of the megamachine, an infra-organizational principle of modernity to put it differently, how can we avoid unchecked, uncontrolled, unmanageable organizations and meta-organizations everywhere? Or on the contrary, are we reaching the limit of the meta-organizational model and will we observe a decrease, a consolidation and a deceleration?

## **Conclusion**

I am currently involved in or thinking about too many projects that will keep me busy for the next 5 to 10 years. With my amazing colleagues, I will probably keep developing meta-organization theory, in relation to sustainability transitions and in relation to the broader organizing of society. But hopefully, I will also develop works about other things than meta-organizations, in relation with alternative organizing in particular. And I am lucky to collaborate with other wonderful colleagues in more institutional projects.

## VI. My researcher identity

### Synthesis

In this section, I reflect upon my practices, my values, challenges, my vision of supervision. This is something I have done also through academic papers, as Table 24 shows. I also concretely show what I have achieved so far and how it will shape my future work and especially collaboration and animation of research.

**Table 24 : My key papers and contributions to section VI**

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Key questioning relevant to the section</b>	<b>Key contributions to this section</b>
(Berkowitz, 2016b) <i>Libellio</i>	Reenchanting the publication process	Criticizing rankings and metrics
(Berkowitz & Delacour, 2020) <i>M@n@gement</i>	Open, slow and engaged academia	Acknowledging the importance of M@n@gement's legacy and rethinking collective practices in academia
(Berkowitz & Delacour, 2022) <i>M@n@gement</i>	Open data in social sciences	Motivations and obstacles to open data Presentation of the open data policy of <i>M@n@gement</i>
(Berkowitz, Brakel, et al., 2023) <i>Journal of Openness, Commons &amp; Organizing</i>	How to collaborate online?	Open-source open access tools for co-writing
(Berkowitz, 2023c) <i>La Lettre de l'InSHS</i>	Open Science stakes in management	The loss of trust in the academic publishing system and in science in general, the causes found in the commercial system of publication, and promises of open science
(Berkowitz, 2024b) HAL document	Inspiration from visiting stays abroad	The importance of international traveling, and of imagining the best organization

## 1) On being all things to all people

Finding my disciplinary identity as a researcher has been difficult. I am clearly anchored in management and organization studies. But even more specifically, writing this dissertation made it even clear in my mind that my community is the (broad and itself pluridisciplinary) field of organization studies. That field however has an ambiguous status in France. I feel that I can neither introduce myself as a “manager” (gestionnaire in French) nor as an “orgologue” (as Rodolphe Durand called us). During my time at Stanford, I found it much easier to use the term social scientist, although it has no easy translation in French. So, I am still looking for an adequate way to present myself and I am always happily curious to hear how scholars are categorized on the French radio: socio-economist, sociologist, CNRS research in field X, professor in Y, etc.

Beyond the question of scientific discipline, reflecting on this section made me acutely aware of the pressure of “being all things to all people” (Parker & Crona, 2012), as we researchers must juggle with a variety of activities and do all things, for all stakeholders, from recording seminars so they are put online and dealing with visa problems when inviting foreign colleagues, to publishing papers, opening our data, teaching and training (oneself and others), animating research, fulfilling institutional responsibilities, curating our online presence, getting grants and managing teams, filling out reporting documents, participating to science fairs, presenting in conferences, getting involved with stakeholders, acting in all sorts of committees, reviewing papers, editing books, organizing conferences and workshops, formatting references<sup>19</sup>, designing flyers, sorting trash after conferences, recruiting people, participating in juries, meeting deadlines, answering emails, phone calls and all forms of solicitations, achieving impact, updating our resumes and doing whatever else I am forgetting now because it is not written on my “to do list”. There seem to be always more and more things to do, with the same amount of time.

Further, as a woman and a recent mother who struggled and still struggles through matrescence (the process of becoming a mother), I now see even more clearly how machist and childist our societies are, and how difficult it is to be a woman in academia (Fotaki, 2013). I also know that I am privileged to be a white woman, with a permanent position, in France.

## 2) Open science, slow science, engaged science

Through this identity chapter, I sought to reflect on my DNA and values as a researcher, something I also wrote about with my colleagues. This section on open, slow and engaged science is largely inspired from discussions and writings with H el ene Delacour (Berkowitz & Delacour, 2020, 2022), and from discussions and presentations with Devi Vijay (which we have in project to translate into writings) around the development of Peer Community in Organization Studies, which Devi and I co-founded.

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<sup>19</sup> Even with zotero there are always issues

### *Motivations for open science*

As we have contributed to show (Berkowitz & Delacour, 2020, 2022), in France, and internationally, plans, commitments and actions as well as alternative experiments in favor of open science as a global public good are multiplying: from the San Francisco Declaration on the Evaluation of Research (DORA), to the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable), cOAlition S, Peer Community In, and so on. Open science covers a variety of phenomena and practices. Broadly speaking, open science describes the transparent communication and free, barrier-less sharing of research throughout its lifecycle, from the production of research data, through to methods, software, tools and publications (Berkowitz, 2023c; Berkowitz & Delacour, 2022).

The shift towards greater openness in science is grounded in fundamental changes in how scientific communities view research accessibility. Innovations in information and Internet technologies have deeply transformed academic research. And then, the success of open source movements in software has demonstrated the effectiveness of open collaborations, fostering alternative models, socially responsible practices, and innovations (Berkowitz, 2023c).

Increasingly, issues inherent in the prevailing model of academic journals owned by major commercial scientific publishing entities have become more evident. When I started my Phd thesis, this was somewhat of a marginal discussion in very critical spheres. Now the debate has been extended and institutionalized, driven by key actors like the CNRS, Coalition S or CoARA. The exorbitant costs and limited access to scientific publications are not only unsustainable for society, they also create unacceptable barriers to knowledge dissemination, especially in Global Souths (Berkowitz & Vijay, 2023). This profit-driven publishing system, marked by a substantial profit margin of around 40%, surpassing that of major corporations like Google and Amazon, relies on the often unnoticed and exploited efforts of academics—an aspect frequently emphasized in both French and international academic forums and articles.

Furthermore, this system creates, nurtures, and perpetuates a set of issues that question its ability to meet the needs of scientific communities and the general public (Berkowitz, 2023c). One primary concern is the duration of the publication process, which in management sciences can span from two to five years. This delay is a result of sometimes arbitrary publication barriers that hinder or even prevent the production and dissemination of knowledge. Moreover, the system is marked by high opacity, particularly in economics, management, and social sciences in general. In the majority of journals owned by major commercial publishers, evaluation reports and editor names are not disclosed, preventing the identification of potential conflicts of interest or the assessment of potentially arbitrary or biased expertise quality.

Additionally, publishers' revenues are directly linked to the number of published articles, leading to perverse effects such as the development of prestige hierarchies, proliferation of bibliometric indicators encouraging optimization behaviors, publication pressure, publication bias favoring innovative results, the so-called "replicability crisis" involving low replicability, reproducibility, and concrete reproduction of results, and in a vicious cycle, potential frauds, scandals, among other issues.

This system leads to the production of fragile knowledge resulting from publication biases, frauds, or unethical practices. Additionally, this dominant system also intentionally overlooks and neglects knowledge produced regionally, especially in Southern countries, due in part to prestige hierarchies and forms of "gatekeeping"—the filtering or control of access to journals, whether in terms of publication or participation in editorial committees (Berkowitz & Vijay, 2023).

Open science, in fact, offers a range of promising solutions to address these significant challenges. Here, let me clarify that I mean diamond open science, certainly not gold open access, where academics, institutions and society as a whole pay publishers to make research open access. This is just profit-making and business opportunism, whether it comes from Elsevier or from MDPI.

What are the promises of diamond or “true” open science, one that is not for profit and supported by communities, as Coalition S suggests? First, diamond open science eliminates all paywalls and submission or publication fees. It thus enables fair access to research while breaking the business models of major publishers and addressing their high costs and exorbitant profit margins. Then, open science encourages the publication of research data, scripts, and codes, promoting both transparency and the reproducibility of studies. Further, models of open peer review require full disclosure of evaluations, editor names, and conflicts of interest, enhancing the credibility of publications, other practices, such as the use of pre-registrations and "registered reports" to improve transparency and mitigate publication biases, are also facilitated by various preprint servers.

#### *The M@n@gement and PCI experiences*

I started to engage with diamond open science through the journal *M@n@gement*, the first open access diamond journal in management and organization studies, created more than 20 years ago. In October 2019 I was appointed co-editor-in-chief of *M@n@gement* with my colleague H  l  ne Delacour (University of Lorraine) by AIMS (Association Internationale de Management Scientifique). Since our application and following our appointment, we launched several projects fully in line with the national and CNRS Open Science plan: changing the platform and website, and developing the open data policy, chief among other actions.

Before our mandate, the Bepress platform used by *M@n@gement* for submission management was acquired by Elsevier, which posed a political problem for AIMS. In mid-2019, as part of our application, we conducted a comparative study of open scientific publishing alternatives. With the agreement of AIMS, we chose and migrated *M@n@gement* to a new submission platform: OJS (Open Journal System) developed by the multi-university open science initiative PKP (Public Open Knowledge), in line with the journal's open science philosophy. We also launched a new partnership with Open Academia, a scientific publishing initiative supporting free and open access journals. As part of this partnership, the *M@n@gement* website has been completely redesigned ([management-aims.com](http://management-aims.com)), as has the layout of the articles. *M@n@gement* will also henceforth be DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) certified, an important step in the recognition of the pure open science model embodied by *M@n@gement* since its creation.

With H  l  ne, we wrote an editorial about our values for the journal and for academia : as open, slow, and engaged (Berkowitz & Delacour, 2020).

I worked hard on the open and engaged part. I think my research topics are engaged (for sustainability). And with H  l  ne we contributed to M@n@gement's pioneer role in open science, notably by writing the open data policy, the first one in the French management and organization studies community (to the best of my knowledge, probably the first one in management and organization studies internationally) (Berkowitz & Delacour, 2022).

I also co-founded Peer Community in Organization Studies with Devi Vijay in 2023 and with a large team of colleagues, including H  l  ne Delacour. Peer Community In (PCI) is an open science initiative that enables academic communities, thematic or disciplinary, to organize the evaluation and recommendation of preprints—academic articles that have not yet undergone formal peer review and publication. This process is conducted freely, transparently, and collaboratively. PCI is organized by communities or fields, like PCI Evolutionary Biology. In line with the philosophy of PCI, our PCI Org Studies aims to break away from the commercial publication system, promote bibliodiversity in management, be more inclusive of colleagues and research from Southern countries, and distribute the workload more equitably by relying on a broad team of recommenders. It also seeks to break down the barriers in the field of organizational studies by fostering a multidisciplinary approach (management, economics, sociology, political science, etc.). An essential objective is to enhance transparency in the evaluation process by openly publishing editorial decisions and assessments at the conclusion of this process.

I am now questioning how I can still submit and publish in journals held by large commercial publishers and even review for them. I have started to decline reviewing for any journal or community that is not diamond open access. Both for philosophical reasons and for lack of time. I have also always put my works online, freely accessible in HAL. But I am increasingly questioning whether it makes sense for me to keep submitting and publishing in dependent journals, thus myself contributing to fuel the system.

But regarding the slow part of the editorial, I must admit I have not been as slow as I would have like in the end. Conducting new research is still taking a long (too long) time, especially as I increasingly do more things that are not research and that slowness is frustrating. But on the publishing side, or on the accumulation of other activities, I feel like I should find ways to fight the acceleration I am experiencing in my life and that I know we are all experiencing (Rosa, 2010). But can I decelerate? Can we collectively decelerate? And how do we find resonance (Rosa, 2019)?

#### *Serendipity moment. The Delacour Encounter*

When I was invited to become co-editor in chief of M@n@gement with H  l  ne Delacour, I did not know her at all. I basically decided to agree to the position, as a duo with her, simply based on the recommendation and high praise Thomas Roulet gave me of her. Total serendipity! It could have gone sideways for so many reasons. But she is a wonderful and inspiring person. She always supported me and helped me in any way she could. Notably, she took over M@n@gement on her own during my

maternity leave and I am forever grateful to her for that. She has always been a great adviser, a great listener too as I tend to often turn to her to complain about many different things. Working with her has always been so incredibly easy, and this, even though we actually met very little in person, just like it has been with Devi. So when I had to think of a supervisor for my habilitation, there was no doubt for me that she was the right person. And she managed to yet surprise me, by not only guiding me through the writing process, by always reading the versions of my manuscript and providing precious feedback, and also by doing something she always did at M@n@gement as well (which I find so impressive!): correcting and editing everything (and I did write a lot in this dissertation!). So, as I know you will read this, thank you H el ene!

### *On writing and slow science*

I write a lot. And most of the times I really like writing. I also like reading a lot, although I feel like I have less and less time to do so. And like many of us in academia, I feel the pressure of writing more, writing faster. What I have come to truly understand through the years is that not only research requires time, but also the writing process itself, at least in social sciences. This is a big difference between PCI Org Studies and other PCIs for instance. Most other PCIs (and therefore disciplines) basically assess the content of an experimentation or a demonstration that requires less emphasis on language and writing. For us, in social sciences in general and especially in management and organization studies, that are so theory-driven (for good or bad), we need more time because our experiments are also about concepts and theories. I see how my mind requires time and pauses for ideas to take shape and ripen. Everybody has noticed this on holidays for instance or when they “forget” about a paper and get back to it. I became even more aware of it recently when I had to ask for several extensions in paper revisions. This longer than usual time in revisions resulted in development of ideas that I would simply not have had the time to get without such breaks. Again, long breaks in the lives of papers enable them to evolve deeply.

When I was working on getting PCI started and outreached and talked to a lot of people about it, a colleague told me something that stuck with me. She said that we did not need new ways to publish, we did not need PCI, but we needed to focus on publishing less, but with higher quality. And I frequently reflect on her comment. Other colleagues have made the same diagnosis. I do wonder whether I should apply her advice and how. But while this might work with some people, I for one think I need several in-between milestones papers, that help me progress. Maybe that is a problem resulting from using papers for dissemination of research. Our thoughts become parceled out and we need to write many papers to get one valid good idea. Maybe writing books would be different. But in the end, in our field, this is how we produce knowledge. For good or bad, we write mostly papers and that is how our collective thinking progresses – through papers, communications, seminars and conferences, peer review, revising and resubmitting. Should I write less papers, but “better ones”, and on which criteria? This question haunts me. Especially from the perspective of the “slow” science that we advocated for with H el ene when we took office at M@n@gement.

Of course, the literature has pointed out the problems resulting from the proliferation of papers (which itself can be linked to rankification and commodification of science). These problems range from knowledge production evolving in silos, to risks of papers not being read, to frauds and manipulations, to the so-called reproducibility crisis, burnouts, collective fatigue and failure of the whole system as it works (i.e., the peer review system). But at the same time, I cannot help but think that injunctions to publish less may create, perpetuate or reinforce hierarchies of knowledge production. Everyone who is doing solid research should be able to publish it open access and free, whatever their rhythm and whatever their “novelty”. Publishing less might seem an easy solution to a broader problem, but it is unclear to me how to encourage and on which principles to decelerate. I also see that in some years I am publishing less and, in some years more, for simple research life-cycle reasons. Of course, research takes time anyway, especially now that we have so many rules to follow, like getting proper data management plans, preparing our datasets to be openly accessible when that is possible, etc., and therefore publishing takes time. So, there is value in slowing down, reflecting on our practices, sharing workloads more evenly, supporting early career researchers or colleagues from minorities that face gatekeeping. But I guess I am uncomfortable with the idea of encouraging or restraining publications because the underlying question is always who decides what gets to be published and on which criteria.

#### Serendipity moment. The Abrahamson Encounter

When I did my visiting at Columbia and met with Eric Abrahamson, he shared with me Starbuck's cookbook (Starbuck, 1999). That cookbook is a funny guide about academic writing. And it basically says that we need to write, and re-write, and re-write, and re-write again and again. And that's exactly what happened every time we met with Eric, for a paper later published in the *Academy of Management Review* (Abrahamson et al., 2016). I do not think I ever met somebody rewriting their own writing so much as Eric Abrahamson. But that paper was much more “achieved”, than many papers I submit and even get accepted and published elsewhere.

Editing, editing, editing again. And at the same time, one has to stop somewhere.

Since then, I have been sharing this quirky cookbook with everyone. But I have not edited this dissertation as much as I wanted or should have, for lack of time and acceleration of social times 😊 I decided to apply here the phd dissertation principle: “une bonne thèse est une thèse finie”. See the next serendipity moment.

### **3) Supervision and teaching**

Supervision and teaching is an important part of our work and activities. Here I reflect both on what I have done so far in that regard and what kind of vision I have begun to develop about it.

I am currently supervising one Phd candidate and one postdoctoral researcher (ANR MetaOrgtrans). I am currently involved in four thesis committees, I have been a jury member in two Phd theses Defenses, and

was a pre-examiner for two Phd theses (to allow the viva). I have supervised five Research Master Theses and one research internship (ANR MetaOrgTrans).

I started teaching during my Phd at Ecole Polytechnique. I taught organization studies beginner's course at the management school in La Rochelle and was a teaching assistant at ESADE. I also taught at Toulouse School of Management (TSM) in the doctoral program in the Strategy and International Management pathway, both a course on meta-organizations, and introductory seminars to the research profession (particularly on dissemination issues). I continue to follow and promote a MOOC on Coursera developed in English in 2016 and in French in 2017. This MOOC on writing and publishing scientific articles has been a huge success, with over 150,000 students since the launch. I have also done some occasional interventions in diverse programs, either on meta-organizations or open science (Toulouse Business School, FNEGE CEFAG Program, among others).

Finally, since 2020 and my move to the Lest laboratory, I have been lecturing in the M2 Human resources management master's degree course in research, studies and consulting in organization, work and human resources (OTRH) at Aix Marseille University's Faculty of Economics and Management. On one hand, my courses on meta-organizations aim to achieve the following objectives: 1) Help students understand the specific nature of meta-organizations, as opposed to organizations made up of individuals (firms, associations, administrations, etc.), 2) provoke critical reflection on the part of students around the notion of competitive strategy, by highlighting the importance of governance and inter-organizational collaboration, particularly in terms of development. On the other hand, the objectives of my courses in organization theory are to : 1) help students understand the effects of organizations on the natural environment, and the effects of the environment and socio-environmental issues on organizations in turn, 2) enable them to take a step back from their organizational experiences, to sow seeds for the future by providing keys for "navigating" in a variety of organizational contexts and, ultimately, to broaden their own courses of action, taking into account the effects on the environment and society, and thus acting "responsibly".

I also keep training myself, thanks to our institutions support and thanks to Jocelyne Martinière-Tesson (our HR manager). For instance, in 2022, I attended the ANF Huma-Num training on open data in the repository Nakala. I also attended the training on creating and managing a Hypothèses website (organized by the LEST and Hypothèses). In 2018, I was trained on issues of Ethics and Data Protection in Research dealing with human subjects (CIREP), etc.

I also remember fondly the CEFAG program, which I attended in 2014. I learned so much there about the tricks of the trade, the "ficelles du métier" in French, and forged lasting friendships. During my time there, I remember some sessions in particular where I encountered implicit norms or guidelines that I found profoundly objectionable, about publication for instance. This realization came with another one, which dawned on me during my Phd thesis and persisted throughout my career - that many colleagues, be they junior, experienced, or more senior, keep criticizing the system while harboring a desire to either benefit from it or become a part of it.

In response to these norms that conflicted with my values, I explored alternative practices, taking inspiration from other fields, disciplines, countries or institutions. I am incredibly grateful to Geraldine Schmidt who gave me the opportunity to come back to the CEFAG in 2023 and participate to the training of a new cohort of Phd students. I was glad and proud to be back and help make the CEFAG a heterotopic place (See section IV on heterotopia), contribute to shape it as a training environment that deviates from dominant norms and unfair systems and fosters alternative perspectives.

#### *My vision of research, teaching and supervision*

Writing this dissertation as an occasion to reflect upon my vision of research, teaching and supervision. It reminded me that we actually started a project with Amy Church Morel, whom I precisely met at the CEFAG, on how to sustainably and responsibly supervise Phds.

I like the idea of “compagnonnage” developed Antoine Souchaud in his own habilitation dissertation (Souchaud, 2022), although I feel that I am learning as much from those I am supposed to be in a relation of supervision with, as they are learning. I suppose that what we are both learning is different of course. "Compagnonnage" in French refers to an old (although still implemented in some activities) system of training and apprenticeship, often associated with skilled crafts or trades. Taking inspiration from Souchaud (2022), compagnonnage in research, teaching and supervision involves fostering a relationship between educators and learners (who are both at the same time!), facilitating a process of mutual learning. Learning is not a one-way street, both parties involved contribute to it. There is still a dimension of mentor-apprentice dynamic that is inherent to this type of compagnonnage though. This translates into the more experienced party sharing knowledge and expertise. In addition, in the tradition of compagnonnage, hands-on learning is highly valued, through practical, real-world experiences and traveling through the country to gain experience. I like to see a parallel with research action and field world, but also with visiting abroads, that teach us so much.

In compagnonnage, there is also an idea of personalized guidance, as the mentor must adapt to each individual' needs and strengths, recognizing that there are different learning styles and abilities. In that perspective, through parenthood, I have encountered challenges that have pushed me to reflect more upon the child's unique needs and to reflect more reflect upon myself, analyze and understand where I come from and how I react to situations.

Compagnonnage, just like parenthood, encourages the development of autonomy and the empowering of the learner and child. In addition, as a result of my (still ongoing) parenthood process, I have become more attuned to my needs, more patient, empathetic, and resilient in the face of adversity. Understanding and addressing a child's needs has especially asked of me more empathy. I think this newfound or heightened empathy has translated into how I connect with and support my colleagues. This also connects with the sense of camaraderie and collaboration that comes with compagnonnage (or at least with the idea that I have of it). And this is the kind of environment I want to work in and to support, with a collaborative atmosphere, conducive of learnings. Now that I can reflect on the writing process of the

habilitation, I can also say I feel the relation with H el ene Delacour as my mentor also embodied this idea of *compagnonnage*.

*Serendipity moment. Preparing the CNRS exam with Emmanuelle Mathieu*

Meeting with Emmanuelle Mathieu (Lausanne University & IBEI) was and keeps creating serendipity moments. I like to tell the anecdote that she was the one who made fully understand my own Phd thesis, six months after I defended it. She made me question my work, reflect upon the bigger picture and articulate it with other main approaches. This happened for the preparation of the CNRS. I am forever grateful for our discussions and for simply knowing her.

Since then, I force myself to take a step back, and even several steps back. Ask bigger questions. Try and see the bigger picture. And I owe her the questioning of the introduction (how is my meta-organizational approach distinctive?). I thought of her and the preparation of the CNRS when I worked on developing this general framing. I want to help others do that.

#### **4) Research animation, pluridisciplinary collaborations, and coordination**

##### *Research animation*

Research animation is an important activity for me. We need to help communities grow, live and stay alive. I remember “back in the days” when we organized our own Phd seminar at Ecole polytechnique with Mathias Gu erineau. Looking back to my evolutions on this activity, I see that I increasingly take on a role of facilitator. My recent activities have been about bringing fields and people, and have also led me to train myself in facilitating and ice-breaking roles and practices. For me, research animation is really about creating connections, providing and getting support and above all feeding our minds. That requires listening to others and finding ways to create resonance (Rosa, 2019).

That is very much how I see the MATIN seminar today. I co-founded and co-lead the MATIN network with Mathias Gu erineau (Nantes University), funded by Alliance Europa. Within this framework, we are organizing a series of seminars on TransitionS, the first one of which took place in December 2021. In 2023-2024, the season thematic is about relations between humans, nonhumans and organizations. We have invited anthropologists, social scientists, geographers, etc to present their work and this has been incredibly inspiring (the “feeding the mind” part). But research animation is very time consuming, from inviting to updating the blog (which I am curating <https://matin.hypotheses.org/>)

I also see research animation in the management of projects. I am currently the principal investigator of two projects on meta-organizations and sustainability transitions, one funded by the National French Agency as an ANRJCJC (2022) and one funded by the A\*midex P epini ere d’excellence 2021. The second

one, reaching its end soon, has more of a critical approach and gathers international researchers, including colleagues from Cameroun. The first one, the most important, also gathers an international and pluridisciplinary team. Many members of the projects are also part of the LEST and of the research axis I am coordinating, as I will discuss hereafter (e.g., Martine Gadille, Karine Guiderdoni-Jourdain, Maud Hirzcak, Ingrid Mazzilli, Gwendoline Promsopha). I am extremely grateful for the opportunities to collaborate with them and learn from them and with them. I have learned a lot, first about grant writing, but then also about management, data management plans, etc. We were particularly lucky to organize the first Cameroun-France MetaOrgTrans workshop in March 2024, which was precisely food for the mind (and soul).

From 2024 to at least 2027, I will be co-coordinating the first Standing Working Group on meta-organizations at EGOS. The EGOS Standing working group (SWG) on Meta-Organizations and Meta-Organizing (MOMO) aims to provide a platform for scholars interested in investigating meta-organizations and meta-organizing processes and dynamics. The community stands at the intersections between organization studies and many other fields, among others political science, sociology, marketing and communication, social movements and (public) management, and thus includes a diverse set of scholars. Each year, Standing Working Groups organize subthemes (2024, I will be co-convening the subtheme with Nils Brunsson (SCORE, Sweden) and Michael Grothe-Hammer (NTNU, Norway) on Partial Meta-Organization), and potential Paper Development Workshop, plenaries, etc. I see the constitution of this Standing Working Group as a great sign of development of the community but also as a form of institutionalization of it, knowing that I have been involved in organizing subthemes at EGOS every year since 2019.

In relation with this topic and the development of the meta-organization community, I have also organized several workshops on meta-organizations, two of which received specific workshop grants (ALLSH 2021 and Toulouse MSH AAP 2019). I was also a co-editor of the special issue on Meta-organizations at *M@n@gement* published in 2022 and I am co-editing a collective volume on Meta-organizations (at Elgar) with Sanne Bor (LUT, Finland) and Nils Brunsson (SCORE, Sweden). I have also organized sessions at the International Sociology Association RC 17 (for which I am a board member) and at EURAM.

#### *Organizing pluridisciplinarity and collaborations*

Organization studies are by themselves a pluridisciplinary field, at the crossroads of sociology, management and political science. By nature of the field, and probably my own interest, I draw on a variety of disciplines and theoretical frameworks, as I have mentioned in this dissertation. I also concretely developed collaborations with a variety of colleagues, either within social sciences (especially from sociology and economics) or beyond (in marine biology in particular). I hope to continue developing this pluridisciplinarity in my future work.

In terms of practices, I have found two main ways to organize collaborations and pluridisciplinarity, beyond readings, co-writing and the MATIN seminar (which is profoundly pluridisciplinary): 1) facilitating

collaborations by doing visitings or inviting visiting scholars; 2) making use of digital tools to continue such collaborations.

Since my Phd thesis, I have frequently done visitings and I keep always in the back of my mind to plan for future ones. In 2015 I went to Columbia University, in the School of International and Public Affairs in New York, in 2016 I went to Stanford Center for Ocean Solutions in Monterey, in 2017 to IBEI in Barcelona, in 2018 to Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki, and in 2022 to NTNU in Trondheim. I always sought specific travel for these visitings, which contributed to both my grant application expertise but also constantly shape and renew my research projects, and feed me with pluridisciplinary collaborations, especially by attending labs and seminars in other disciplines (See the interlude). While my network has always been mostly international, since moving to the LEST and thanks to my lesbian colleagues, I managed to anchor myself more locally and we have been developing a wonderful team in the Provence region.

Then, in relation also to my changing facilitator-role, I have always looked for new tools or best tools to continue these collaborations that were always cross-country and involving sometimes significant time differences (the worse was when working on an ocean data paper with Stanford when I was already back in Europe). I explored the uses of team management and project management tools like Slack or Trello. But these last few years, I operated a move from business tools, to open source, open access and free tools, whether institutional or not, like Element, Sharedocs. The idea of using these tools was also to help me and my colleague manage the email overload (Tarafdar et al., 2023). In a recent collaborative piece initiated by de Vaujany in the Research Group on Collaborative Spaces (RGCS) (Berkowitz, Brakel, et al., 2023), we have explored the uses and advantages of framapads (over in particular privately owned software like Word documents or Google doc). However, there is a myriad of tools, and nobody uses the same ones. Besides, there is a clear difference in ergonomics and easy to use between public tools and business ones. And finally, I noticed firsthand how this multiplication of tools produces technostress (Truța et al., 2023). So recently, especially when writing this dissertation, which has taken a toll on my (mental) health, I decided to reduce uses of digital tools, at least for myself.

#### *Serendipity moment – Stanford*

The many visiting stay I did have always provided serendipitous moments because they provide such incredible opportunities for discovering different ways of working, opening oneself to other forms of thinking and organizing.

I want here to get back to my visiting at Stanford though, which was serendipitous on so many levels. I wrote a little piece on the organization of the Center for Ocean Solutions, where I stayed during that time. It was never published so I have put it online as a preprint (Berkowitz, 2024b) for the purpose of this dissertation and I thought I would integrate some parts of it here because it was funny to write and read again (although somewhat naïve). “Le labo qui n’existait pas”, *the lab that did not exist* (a reference to Midler’s famous 2004 book on the car that did not exist), shows my surprise at seeing such an innovative and original way of organizing research and relations in a research lab. It was so very different from

anything I had experienced so far (including in the USA at Columbia University). So pluridisciplinary, so open and centered on transparent communication, with a lab manager (say what!) and multi-site meetings via BlueJeans (that was much before covid!), with this so Californian and even silicon-valley flavor. I remember the time there fondly and I am forever grateful to the France-Stanford Center for Interdisciplinary Research and to Larry Crowder for the kind support they provided. I have so many memories from there, including how Larry rescued me and hosted me when on my very first arrival (after 24h traveling) I locked myself out at my (oh so lousy!) apartment I rented close to the lab. At that time, I used to wake up very early in the morning (4 or 5am), go for runs on the beach, and then basically live all day long at the lab, until going home (a bit sad and lonely I must say) late at night. Several times some colleagues forgot about me and locked me in the lab when they left 😊.

Changing the format of my dissertation I will write a little “interlude” about the lab that did not exist. It deserves that much.

## ***Interlude*<sup>20</sup>**

### **The lab that did not exist.**

### **Immersion in a Californian research center.**

*For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; [...] I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*  
(Corinthians, 9. 19-23, in Parker & Crona, 2012, p. 2)

Summer 2016. 10am, Tuesday morning, lab meeting at the Center for Ocean Solutions (COS), Stanford University, Monterey, California. The mission of this research center is to solve the major problems facing the oceans, and to train the future leaders who will have to respond to these challenges. COS was born of a partnership between multiple centers and institutions (Stanford through the Woods Institute and Hopkins Marine Center, Monterey Bay Aquarium and Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute). The center is interdisciplinary (natural and social sciences) and bi-located, on both the Stanford and Monterey campuses. Meetings are held via BlueJeans, a remote meeting software program, with two screens showing each team in real time. A total of twenty people is present. Part of the center is away, either in Hawaii for a conference, or out in the field, but the majority of members are here.

The meeting begins with announcements: a research assistant finishes their six-month stay the same day, a summer intern from Stanford arrives, as does a visiting scholar, the author, both for two months. The person in charge of the meeting moves on to the agenda, which has been e-mailed in advance: discussion of the laboratory rules.

The document starts with the lab's shared values. "We laugh often", "we believe in puppy therapy" (and yes, there were often dogs at the lab). Still today, I remain admiring of this document and the process which led to its development and implementation. I am still fascinated by my colleagues' reflexivity and willingness to make explicit shared values. For having been in many different organizations, I believe this is quite rare, especially in higher education and research.

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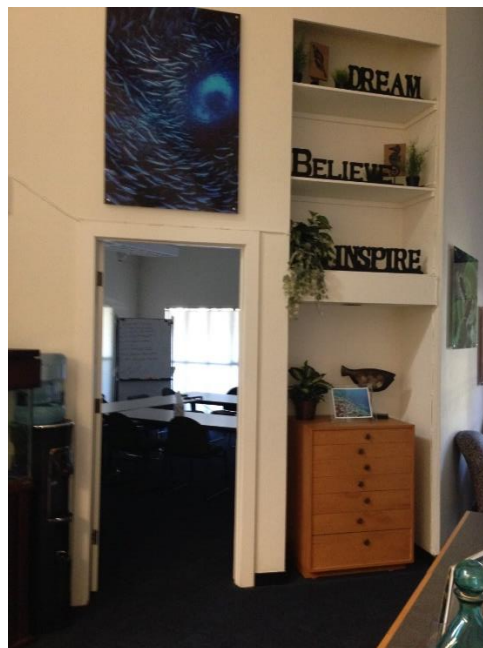
<sup>20</sup> We are reaching the end of the dissertation. It might be late for an interlude. Yet this did not fit anywhere else. Please bear with me a moment!

**Figure 29: “Puppy Therapy” (Source: the author)**



Throughout my time at the Center for Ocean Solutions (COS), I have witnessed this reflexivity and these efforts to exist collectively and make the organization work as well as possible. These efforts are all made with the same objective in mind: to function smoothly and have a positive impact on the world, by producing interdisciplinary, collaborative, "solutions"-oriented research into ocean protection, disseminating this knowledge widely to public decision-makers, and training students to become leaders who are intellectually independent, sensitive to environmental problems, trained in the tools to try to respond to them, and critical of their own course (Figure 30).

**Figure 30: “Dream, believe, Inspire”, at the entry of the lab (Source: the author)**



Following this first meeting, called a "staff meeting", I studied the rules in detail, and talked to the people directly involved in setting up the guide.

COS is seen by its members as a "boundary organization", or more precisely a "university-based boundary organization attempting to reconcile the needs of water policymakers, university administrators, university departments, and funding agencies" (Parker & Crona, 2012, p. 1). Parker and Crona's (2012) seminal and fascinating article "On being all things to all people: Boundary organizations and the contemporary research university" is sent to all new members and interns on their arrival in June. It shows that adaptive "boundary management" is needed to resolve the tensions resulting sometimes from the contradictory demands of the stakeholders to whom such a boundary organization is accountable. This is a recurring theme that also guides the drafting of standards. In particular, the questions that nag at them are: what changes do we need for project management in such a boundary organization, and how can we collectively improve? COS is open and aware of the need for "up management", i.e., the management of superiors.

"The Center's Rules" (I don't remember its name exactly and I don't know whether it's still in place) was a document designed to articulate current or future rules, which are either put into practice by members or seem desirable to them. The list of rules describes both "who we are and what we do", as explained in the guide's introductory chapeau. An asterisk indicates standards whose application in practice leaves something to be desired and could be improved. For example: "don't let the dishes in the sink for the fairies" is a rule that could be better put into practice, as I've found.

Topics covered range from organizational culture ("cultural norms") to project management, financial and budgetary issues, reducing the environmental footprint, rules of communication and teamwork, organizing meetings and keeping dogs in the office.

For example, the organization of meetings involves preparing an agenda and sharing it with participants in advance, presenting a timed schedule of speeches. Staff meetings last an hour. Meetings are followed by an email summarizing what has been achieved and the next steps. Participants do not multitask during meetings, and put their laptops away. A new standard has been the introduction of mandatory oral debriefing by all lab participants at the first staff meeting following a conference.

So, I've often witnessed this center culture, as one of the rules states that "We encourage each other to take care of ourselves..." and the office manager and education manager insisted from day one on installing a second, large screen for me, so as "not to damage my eyes" on the laptop. Here I want to use this opportunity to emphasize how well cared for and how lucky we are at the LEST, to benefit from such a large support team (thank you Laurent, Georges, Jocelyne, Marion, Kristelle, Christine, Nathalie, Amaranta, Anne, Isabelle).

Back to COS, 2016. Some rules, such as "we date documents, use pagination and add initials when editing", contribute to the proper management of collaborative research projects. Other rules, such as "we

try not to email on weekends except when necessary", help create a balanced and fulfilling work environment. I see now that I took many of these habits there.

As far as reducing the environmental footprint is concerned, there are no plastic cups or plates, and everyone is responsible for washing the utensils they use. It was also decided to ban plastic water bottles. Halfway through my visit, a member of the communications team receives the new reusable water bottles with the lab's logo.

There are other schemes like this collection of standards, such as collaboratively-constructed internal guides. The idea is always to try and make invisible knowledge visible, and to actively and collectively construct implicit norms, often passively transmitted within a community (Origi, 2010).

If you want to learn more about the rest of my little immersion, you can read my piece (in French) (Berkowitz, 2024b). I get into elements of efficiency, funding schemes and organization and more cultural aspects, with several anecdotes and bad weather (**Figure 31**).

**Figure 31: So Cali! Stand Up Paddle board for lunch breaks (I did not get to try it much as it was a terribly cold summer) (Source: the author)**



From this micro-study or immersion, I drew some general conclusions at the time of the writing (2016). Firstly, for many of the members of this laboratory, it seemed important for an organization to "function well to have some well-identified common values and objectives. These must be shared explicitly and actively, and not implicitly and passively (badly) disseminated. It seemed equally important to them that the organization embodies these values and achieves these goals by actively seeking to create an

environment where each individual member can flourish and find what they are looking for in order to realize themselves as a person. In order to achieve this, collective reflexivity is essential, especially in boundary organizations such as pluridisciplinary, multi-university research centers. Respect for others, gentle communication and trust are highlighted as necessary elements in organizations of all types and sizes, and help to create a space for dialogue and exchange. Other elements highlighted here are perhaps less easily transposed to other cultural, geographical or organizational contexts, but can nonetheless serve as a source of inspiration.

Capelli (2016) explains that professional experience is made of a body of informal knowledge and learning, some tacit, others implicit and often unconscious. Explaining this knowledge in order to pass it on more effectively, reflecting collectively on the values and goals of the organization to which we belong and the means of achieving them, transcribing them in writing and discussing them from time to time seem to be practices to be explored in order to invent the ideal organization, or at least improve the existing ones (hence, “the lab that did not exist”). But this requires us researchers to ask ourselves a fundamental question: why are we doing the research we're doing?

End of the interlude

### *Coordination and institutional responsibilities*

I have taken several coordination and institutional responsibilities, often based on solicitations from colleagues or an intention to enhance workplace practices and our sense of community. For instance, at TSM, I was from December 2019 to October 2020 the Gender Officer (“correspondante égalité”) at TSM with Cyrielle Vellera. The mission of the equality correspondent was essentially focused on (1) disseminating information to the unit's staff (sharing news in the field and examples of good practice), but also on (2) raising awareness of the field of professional equality and even directing people to the relevant services at the regional delegation (directing people in complex situations to the equality correspondent at the CNRS Occitanie Ouest Regional Delegation). During my time at TSM, I was also involved in animating research, through organizing short visiting and research seminars of international colleagues. In 2020-2021, I was a member of the national committee of section 37, replacing a departing member.

Since I moved to the LEST, I have also been involved in several coordination activities. I am co-coordinating the MATIN seminar series on transitions which I mentioned previously. I am involved in the Editorial Committee of the lab (which works on topics such as edition or open science). And I am also co-coordinating the COT axis (Changements, Organisations, Transitions) with Martine Gadille, Hugo Lauret and Francesca Petrella. This axis focuses on examining shifts in work and organizational dynamics, considering ecological and human concerns in our analyses and their integration into transition paths. Investigating the adaptation of organizational structures to intricate social and ecological challenges, such as biodiversity loss or digitalization, necessitates exploring transformations involving multiple levels and actors. The goal is to comprehend how these changes either foster or hinder a kind of coexistence between humans and non-humans, meaning ecological and social sustainability (See the description of the Axis on the LEST’s website<sup>21</sup>).

We are organized in three sub-axes. The first one is particularly dear to me, as it deals with “repairing epistemes” (Epistemes réparatrices). This sub-axis endeavors to address a key question, as we have developed: What relational, epistemological, and affective frameworks are required to analyze and unpack transitions and to reimagine the studies of work and organizations in a manner that attends to the well-being of the animate (both human and non-human) and the inanimate? Responding to this inquiry entails a profound reevaluation of our engagements – as social scientists and as citizens – with various realms, coupled with an exploration of the intergenerational, interspatial, and even interspecies repercussions of current dominant socio-economic paradigms and labor dynamics. Specifically, our focus will be on elucidating the intricate links between the livings, non-human entities, inanimate organisms, geographical territories, infrastructures, socio-ecosystems during periods of transition.

Implicit in this sub-axis is a deliberate interrogation of the epistemological and methodological metamorphosis required within the realm of sciences, with a particular emphasis on the sciences of work and organization. This will translate into a project of a collaborative research handbook on ecological

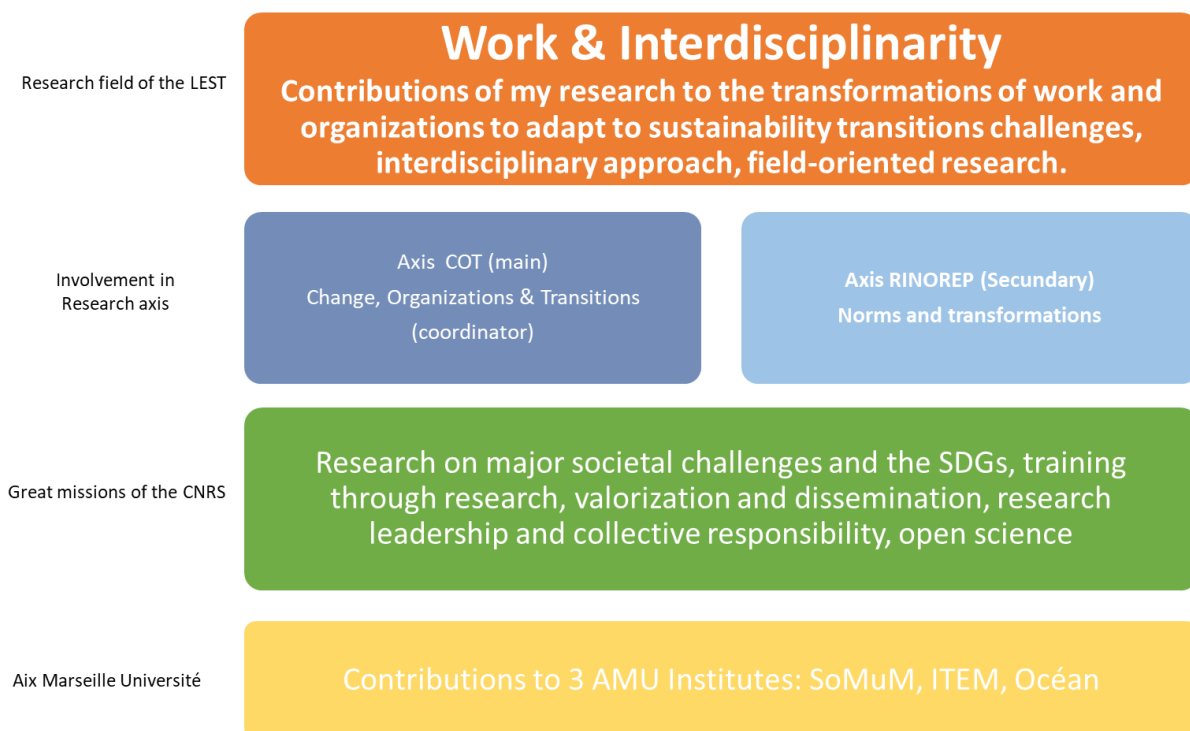
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<sup>21</sup> <https://lest.fr/fr/recherche/axes-recherche/cot-changements-organisations-transitions>

transitions and work, which I am currently preparing with several colleagues (organized first via Carnet Hypothèses, and then potentially transformed into an edited volume). The objective is to shed lights on historical and innovative concepts used at the LEST to study ecological transitions and work. It is also within this sub-axis in particular that the third season of the MATIN Transitions seminar series unfolds, with a focus for 2023-2024 on biodiversity.

I see all my activities as all integrated. In particular, I see my involvement at the CNRS, LEST, Aix Marseille University as contributing to various questions or dimensions, as synthesized in **Figure 32**.

**Figure 32: Relations between my work involvement and the various institutional bodies**



### 5) Broader dissemination and links to the socio-economic sphere

Since my visiting at COS where I was made aware of the importance of having a communication plan before starting a research project, I developed a dissemination routine that forms an integral part of the communication plan for my research activities. While I allow myself to publish articles on unpublished current research topics (fishing in Catalonia), I try to systemically double my academic publications with a dissemination article (Le Monde press, The Conversation, CNRS press release, etc.), on which I used to communicate extensively via social networks (formerly Twitter, LinkedIn, Mastodon, now almost nothing as I experience Technostress and social networks fatigue) and my personal website. However, these activities consume a lot of time and energy, and I do not always have the opportunity to complete them all in a short space of time. In addition, and in line with the CNRS open science plan, all my articles can be found online, at least in pre-print form.

I used to be quite active via other channels. I used to run a twitter account with more than 3,500 followers, which I used to monitor publications and talk about my work on meta-organizations and my job as a researcher. But I left the blue bird given recent evolutions of the company. I also ran the "En direct du labo" account to raise awareness of management science and management research.

In addition, I have had the regular opportunity to be filmed and have my contributions posted online (for example, in the La Fabrique de l'Industrie competition or at a conference at the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance, my 2022 Bronze medal of the CNRS, or 2023 Provence prize), and even to be interviewed for the Spla\$h economic popularization podcast (20,000 subscribers).

In 2020, I made the **#Thinklist30**, a ranking of scholars made by the Center for Business, Organizations & Society, University of Bath (UK) which recognized 30 influential female scholars on social media around issues of responsible business.

My awareness about the need to always have a dissemination strategy and the importance to leave the "ivory tower" (Baron, 2010) was clearly accelerated during my visiting at Stanford (See the interlude or the full text, Berkowitz, (2024)). I always keep in mind this dissemination strategy and I make a particular effort to disseminate my work in other medias and the general press. Including invitations to seminars and academic conferences, which I consider part of dissemination, I have 110 forms of dissemination (invitations, general press article, interviews, citations in the press, other media, public conferences or artistic events) and I regularly published in Le Monde, Les Echos, La Tribune and The Conversation, as well as in the Letter of CNRS Sciences Humaines et Sociales.

I have also been interviewed for newspapers such as l'Express, la Dépêche du Midi and la Vanguardia. Finally, I remember fondly being interviewed on France Info by Matteo Maestracci, one Saturday morning, on the partial organization of the yellow vests (a subject on which I have published in the press).

I have been lucky enough to benefit on several occasions from the invaluable help of the Occitanie Ouest and the Provence Corse delegations as well as the CNRS Sciences Humaines et Sociales for regional or national press releases. The fallout from the national press release was particularly significant, with an article in Le Monde, and reprints on some twenty scientific and academic websites.

Lastly, I want to mention that I took on the responsibility for the digitalization of the AIMS conference in 2020, during covid. This was one of the first digital conference organized during the covid, with more than 250 participants, and I directed the realization of a promotional video [https://www.strategie-aims.com/conferences/31-xxixeme-conference-de-l-aims/president\\_word](https://www.strategie-aims.com/conferences/31-xxixeme-conference-de-l-aims/president_word) which was a wonderful activity.

## **Conclusion**

In our challenging journeys as researchers, the many threads of our work and engagement weave a complex narrative, encompassing, beyond research itself, and depending on each one of us, varying levels of teaching, supervision, animation, coordination, and broader dissemination towards society. As

we navigate knowledge production, mentorship, public outreach, and their tensions, in a context of acceleration, increased competition and fewer resources, we can only hope to become catalysts for intellectual and societal transformation to create our own more sustainable and fair future. The path is ever challenging. The need (or is it a risk?) to "be all things to all people," as elegantly put by Crona and Parker (2012), translates well the multi-directional demanding nature of today's researcher's roles and contradictory injunctions. This is even aggravated for women. The balance between diverse responsibilities on the one hand, and between professional sphere and personal life, can at times feel like too much. Despite hardships, and all while acknowledging that I am truly privileged, as a white woman in a Western country and a renowned institution, I am grateful for this journey, for it allows me to embrace learning and diversity.

## VII. Conclusion

More than ten years of research have passed since I started my Phd at Ecole polytechnique in 2013. Busy years dedicated to studying meta-organizations and sustainability transformations. Meta-organizations, organizations which members are themselves organizations, constitute an important and multifaceted organizational phenomenon in modern and globalized societies (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2022). Catalan fisheries co-management committees, the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Association of Supervisors of Banks of the Americas (ASBA), the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), Finance Participative France, the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB), la Vía Campesina, or the European Union (EU) are examples that illustrate the diversity, breadth and scope of meta-organizations' presence and importance in today's world society organizational landscape.

### The distinctiveness of meta-organizations

In their pioneer work, Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008) laid the foundation for a meta-organization theory, by emphasizing the unique theoretical value of the concept, compared to other social phenomena and theoretical approaches. From the beginning, I have therefore treated meta-organizations as an empirical phenomenon, as a conceptual tool or analytical lens, and increasingly as a specific theory and as part of contemporary complex problems. These facets I developed in this dissertation through the various sections.

Getting back to the specificity of meta-organizations, their distinctiveness stems from both the specific organizational nature of meta-organizations and the fact that their members themselves are also organizations, rather than individuals. Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008) main argument about the need for the concept of meta-organization is therefore that most conventional approaches such as organization theory, institutional theory, and network theory, while valuable, may fall short in understanding some specific aspects of meta-organizations. Notably, being a meta-organization has significant implications on the functioning of the meta-level actors and the interactions between members and meta-level actors as I developed in this dissertation.

The first characteristic is that meta-organizations are **decided orders**, meaning that they are social orders primarily based on decisions. They are established through decisions, with a creation date, and constantly use decisions (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, 2011). As such, meta-organizations differ from network and institutions, which both constitute emergent social orders that emerge more organically through repeated interactions or through taken-for-grantedness (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, 2011). This has implications on decision-making processes, layering and multi-levelness of social orders in meta-organizations (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018, 2022, etc.).

The second important characteristic is that **members of meta-organizations are themselves organizations**, rather than individuals. This makes them intrinsically different from individual-based

organizations like associations, firms, clubs, social movements, communities or bureaucracies. This has implications as mentioned earlier on the functioning of the meta-level actor and relations between members and meta-level actor.

The third characteristic is that meta-organization are generally **voluntary association**, this means that members chose to come together and to collaborate. This has two implications: it enables members to internalize the environment of organizations in an overarching actor (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), and it shifts the emphasis from competition to collaboration, or at least cooptation (i.e., combined advantages of cooperation and competition) (Berkowitz et al., 2020).

In my work, I have been particularly interested in how this specific nature of meta-organizations affects the functioning and organizing of the meta-level actor (see among others, Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2022; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022). Members, whether firms, nongovernmental organizations, hospitals, states, among others, possess their own collective identities, specific resources, strategies, logics, values, norms, autonomy and organizational actorhood (or not), all of which exert an influence on the meta-organization. Indeed, the fact that members are themselves organizations affects the meta-organization's constitution, its ability to attract, renew and retain members, to take collective decisions and be held accountable for them, to create and develop a cohesive meta-level identity (referred to as the family name by Ahrne and Brunsson (2008)), and effectively make sense of diverse interests while externally representing its members.

Then, the distinctive nature of meta-organizations also in turn reflexively affects the relationship between the meta-level actor and its members. Both the meta-level actor and its members need to balance autonomy and dependence tensions. Members retain their autonomy but at the same time need to abandon part of it to the meta-organization so it can function and take decisions. In parallel, the meta-organization requires some degree of autonomy and at the same time, highly depends on its members for its functioning (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), and for its resourcing in particular (Bor & Cropper, 2023). Further, having a concrete impact on members, for instance succeeding in regulating their practices, might be challenging for meta-organizations because they tend to be partially organized and generally lack monitoring or sanctioning power.

### **Why do meta-organizations exist?**

Meta-organizations exist to achieve various purposes and they engage in different activities to fulfill these purposes (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2022). One primary purpose is to **enable interactions among their members** and as such internalize the environment (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). For instance, fishing co-management committees in Catalunya or the Global Business Initiative actively foster collaborations among members (Berkowitz, et al., 2020). Further, in fields ranging from innovation to ocean governance, meta-organizations tend to foster cooptation (Berkowitz et al., 2020). Another critical purpose of meta-organizations is to **facilitate joint actions in order to affect nonmembers**. This includes joint actions of trade associations to lobby regulators, to publish common statements, etc. Another important purpose explaining the existence of meta-organizations is to **shape the identity and**

**status of their members** (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2022). To achieve this purpose, meta-organizations can help members create a collective identity or establishing a hierarchy of prestige among members, a phenomenon commonly observed in meta-organizations related to universities (Brankovic, 2018). Lastly, one important purpose of meta-organizations is to **conduct certain tasks for their members** (e.g., training). Members may outsource these tasks to the meta-level actor in order to pool costs and collectively achieve greater efficiency.

In addition to these general purposes of meta-organizations, specific activities are conducted by and within these collectives: governance activities, advocacy activities, boundary and category work, service provision (Berkowitz et al., 2022). Many meta-organizations often engage in governance and co-management activities, contributing to the regulation, control, and management of member behavior. Multi-stakeholder meta-organizations, in particular, play a crucial role in **regulating and self-regulating members** through consensus-based, jointly taken decisions that involve various constituents, for instance Catalan fishing co-management committees (Berkowitz et al., 2020). Second, meta-organizations serve as representatives of their members and conduct **advocacy activities**. Indeed, meta-organizations advocate for their and their members' interests, engaging in negotiations related to prices, contracts, and regulations. They can raise awareness or even influence stakeholders on specific issues, using for instance outreach strategies (Berkowitz et al., 2022). Meta-organizations also engage in "boundary and category works", to create identities, markets or product classifications (Berkowitz et al., 2022). This **boundary and category work** involves shifting or establishing new organizational boundaries, delineating specific categories for members and nonmembers, and contributing to the development of a collective identity (See Berkowitz et al., 2022). Finally, meta-organizations provide a range of services to their members, including information production, statistics, research, and capacity-building. These services sometimes even include more tangible benefits like infrastructures as in the case of cooperatives. Occasionally, these services, especially capacity-building, extend beyond meta-organizations' membership. Indeed, some meta-organizations conduct **capacity building for nonmembers**, such as legislators, citizen organizations, or even other meta-organizations (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024).

Recent literature has also argued that other factors may explain meta-organizations' existence and multiplication. First of all, their **low-cost structures** make them easy to establish and to maintain (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), even when they are no longer active. Second, governance and institutional gaps might explain the establishment, diversity and expansion of meta-organizations, as they easily **fill governance gaps** and enable the development of alternative regulatory frameworks (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024). Further, and this is related, meta-organizations appear offer organizational advantages to **tackle major societal problems**, like climate change and ocean governance, compared to institutions, networks, markets, firms and other conventional organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2020).

### **From empirical phenomenon, to concept, to theory**

Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) argue that meta-organizations may be even more diverse than organizations made of individuals, since meta-organizations can encompass a wide array of member organizations,

including corporations, hospitals, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, associations, and more. Further, meta-organizations vary across a wide range of attributes, which I have addressed in this dissertation, e.g. membership composition, segmentation, perimeter of action, geographical scope, mandate specificity and sectoralization (Berkowitz, 2018, 2019; Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015).

In my work, I have been particularly interested in **how the specific nature of meta-organizations affects the functioning and organizing of the meta-level actor** (see among others, Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2022; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022). Members, whether firms, nongovernmental organizations, hospitals, states, among others, possess their own collective identities, specific resources, strategies, logics, values, norms, autonomy and organizational actorhood (or not), all of which exert an influence on the meta-organization.

I used this specific meta-organizational lens to study the evolutionary dynamics of meta-organizations but also to show that meta-organizations serve as multi-faceted entities, operating as regulatory intermediaries, innovation intermediaries, and transition intermediaries (Berkowitz, 2016c, 2018, 2023b; Berkowitz & Bor, Under review; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019c, 2024). Their importance in society cannot be overstated. Although they can be instruments of regime resistance, precisely for all the activities they conduct, their multifaceted roles still make them invaluable social actors in driving transformative change for sustainability.

The endeavor of meta-organization theory is precisely to move beyond the empirical diversity and tackle the theoretical foundations of such a phenomenon. A growing body of literature has contributed to this effort. My own contributions have born on two complementary facets: **1) the theoretical implications of meta-organizations being decided orders and especially being layered multi-level decided orders, and 2) theoretical implications of meta-organizations being conceived or designed as agents for transformative change.**

Generally speaking, I have developed with my co-authors an overarching theoretical approach of meta-organizations based on decisions. Drawing on decisionalism, social order analysis and meta-organizations, I slowly developed through iterations and various works, four dimensions of this overarching theory: 1) infra-organizationality, 2) structural organizationality, 3) entitative organizationality, 4) contextual organizationality, and 5) meta-organizationality (Berkowitz et al., Forthcoming; Berkowitz & Bor, 2022, 2024; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Grothe-Hammer & Berkowitz, 2024).

These dimensions contribute to understanding the complexity of contemporary phenomena, including by shedding light on the different ways of creating decided order among organizations (e.g. collectively decided order, orchestrated order, multidirectional decided order), on their decisional characteristics, on their possible interrelations and resulting effects, notably on actorhood and responsibility and resistance or exit of members. These dimension also help analyze the challenges of changing existing social orders

and whether and how meta-organizations may be equipped to tackle grand challenges and what kind of specific challenges they create.

### **Towards a more critical perspective**

More recently, I also developed a more critical approach of both organizations and meta-organizations, through the question of relations to livings (human and nonhuman). In my latest works, I am starting to acknowledge that meta-organizations are sometimes part of the problem, i.e. the responsibility imperative (Fernandes et al., 2023). This implies that their roles and actions may have drawbacks or unintended consequences on social orders, communities, species and ecosystems.

On this basis, I identify conditions for meta-organizations to become **more transformative agents**, i.e., so they act as positive forces for change in sustainability transitions, and what kind of consequences they produce (Berkowitz, 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz, Grothe-Hammer, et al., 2023; Berkowitz & Bor, 2024; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022).

Then, I extend my perspective to organizations and show that they function as systems of ocean destruction. I investigate preliminary principles for operating a paradigmatic shift towards organizations as systems of ocean thriving (Berkowitz, 2014a, 2023a; Berkowitz et al., 2018, 2019; Berkowitz & Leclair, 2024). My approach here is on conceiving (meta-)organizations not merely as entities operating within a larger system dedicated to exploitation and economic growth, but as dynamic and purposeful contributors to the well-being of the ocean and human and nonhuman livings (Berkowitz, Guérineau, et al., 2023, 2023; Berkowitz & Leclair, 2024). This also means a shift towards socio-natural ecosystems and especially territories, perceived as processual constructions (Berkowitz, Fernandes, et al., 2023).

Lastly, I have begun to explore how to use more critical concepts from the alternative organizing literature, such as heterotopia (Berkowitz & Fernandes, 2024; Fernandes & Berkowitz, 2023; Varman & Vijay, 2022a).

### **As a way of conclusion or opening**

While the academic community studying meta-organizations as such is in expansion, much more work is still needed to unpack the full potential of this approach for understanding the multifaceted modern phenomena it aims to describe. More research, and especially interdisciplinary research, would be needed to consolidate knowledge about the empirical phenomena themselves, but also grow our theoretical understanding of what affects the variety, functioning but also efficiency of the meta-organizations and the interactions and potential tensions between members and meta-level actors. Connecting with other fields may be valuable to further understand why meta-organizations proliferate and what it tells us about relations to the economic sphere, to public policy governance and governments.

I started this dissertation making the following claim: that meta-organizations and modern society were co-constitutive of one another. Rosa (2010, 2019) argues that modernity is characterized by acceleration of our times, which creates different forms of alienation (he sees epidemics of burnouts as a symptom of

this phenomenon). Combined with the desynchronizing of economic, political and technological temporalities, acceleration makes it difficult to articulate multiple interests and to foster democratic deliberation he further argues. His solution to the alienations resulting from acceleration is resonance, that is to say experiencing transformative, responsive and affective relations to the world (Rosa, 2019). In my opinion, meta-organizations and meta-organizing processes may be viewed as both a symptom and an attempt at dealing with this acceleration and desynchronizing. But then, an interesting question some earlier works already raised about meta-organizations (Ettighoffer & Beneden, 2000; Géniaux & Mira-Bonnardel, 2003) is whether the proliferation of meta-organizations indicated a new form of modern society or a transitory phase of society towards something else. Will the acceleration lead to more meta-organizing? Until when can it be manageable? Will we move to another form of social order and what will this look like? Can we find Rosa's 'resonance' in social orders and how? What does resonance mean at the level of meta-organizations?

This question (is it a new form of modernity or is it transitory?) is nagging at me. In a sense, one can see a parallel with Mumford's idea of a megamachine, for whom the organization of society prefigures the emergence of technological machines (Chaudet, 2020; Mumford, 1973). The industrial revolution was possible only because there was first a transformation in the organization of society, i.e., in social orders themselves. Similarly, if meta-organizations and modern society co-constitute one another, it could mean that, like the megamachine, the infra-organizationality of social orders prefigures and enables the emergence of meta-organizations which in turn affect the infra-organizationality of social orders. There is a proliferation of decided orders, there is no denying that. And a proliferation of local, national and global meta-organizations. But what does that tell us of the evolutions of social orders or of the megamachine? Are we doomed to see more and more meta-organizations? And how do we change the megamachine?

But then if we consider traditional chefferies in Cameroon as meta-organizations (Biwolé Fouda, 2024), are really meta-organizations so constitutive of western globalized modernity<sup>22</sup>? Even further, if we agree that confederations are meta-organizations, then we could think of Ancient Greek confederations of city-states, like the Delian League (478-404 BCE), the Achaean League (280 BC-146BC), the confederation of Maya States in the Yucatan Peninsula, League of Mayapan (987-1461 CE) as meta-organizations<sup>23</sup>. For the purpose of this conclusion, I identified 174 historical or contemporary confederations of states, confederations of tribes and present-day federations or associations of indigenous communities as meta-organizations (Berkowitz, 2024c)<sup>24</sup>. That's it, my madeleine de Proust, I'm getting the same feeling as when I finished my Phd and discovered I was far from having understood the breadth of meta-organization. When will I ever be done with them?

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<sup>22</sup> We have never been modern, Bruno Latour pointed out already.

<sup>23</sup> Uh oh. And why would the EU be a meta-organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Kerwer, 2013; Ahrne et al., 2016) and not these confederations, right?

<sup>24</sup> Of which 61 Confederations of states (predominantly historical ones), 44 Tribal confederations (predominantly historical ones), 69 Indigenous peoples associations or federations (contemporary). The database is imperfect but still available online, see Appendix.

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# Appendix

Open access database

The two databases I constituted for this dissertation are accessible on my OSF project page and on Zenodo.

The first one is an extract from the Transparency Register which I cleaned and re-organized and analyzed (Berkowitz, 2024a). It is available here: <https://zenodo.org/records/10959248>

The second one, I quickly constituted based on a list of confederations of states and tribes on Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_confederations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_confederations)) and a list of indigenous peoples' organizations signatories the RIO +20 indigenous peoples' international conference on self-determination and sustainable development (<https://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2012/06/list-indigenous-peoples-organizations-networks-and-federations-who-are-signatories-rio-20-indigenous.pdf>)

It is available here: <https://zenodo.org/records/10959354>