

Limits to economic growth and technical efficiency in alternative organizations: sufficiency and conviviality

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Abstract

This research investigated a community association whose way of organizing showed misalignment with the dominant organizational model. The results point to the term “limits” as a link to establish an organizational mode oriented toward “sufficiency” and “conviviality” as an alternative to economic growth and technical efficiency, characteristics of the dominant organizational logic. Sufficiency was characterized by the qualitative experience of the present moment, with an appreciation of simplicity and good living, elaborated from the renouncement of work aimed at the accumulation of material goods. Conviviality was demonstrated through the appreciation of affective relationships in detriment of results based on performance; conducting the organization through intuitive and contingency procedures to the detriment of formal planning; the development of emancipatory skills to achieve autonomy in the face of the industrial system and, finally, learning through free experimentation. The notion of “limits” in the organization studied is also in line with a narrative of renouncing the dominant model and of human and nature sacralization. The discussion notes that the search for emancipation from technical domination can raise other forms of domination. In addition, the discussion points out the need for more precise definitions regarding the differentiation between conventional and alternative organizations since some characteristics that the literature attributes to alternative organizations are appropriated by the dominant model. Finally, it suggests that “technical efficiency” and “capitalist modes of organization” do not necessarily constitute interdependent categories.

Keywords: Alternative organizations. New organizational forms. Limits to economic growth and technical efficiency. Sufficiency and conviviality.

Limites ao crescimento econômico e à eficiência técnica em organizações alternativas: suficiência e convivialidade

Resumo

Esta pesquisa investiga uma associação comunitária cujo modo de organizar evidenciou um desalinhamento com o modelo organizacional dominante. Os resultados apontam o termo “limites” como elo para estabelecer um modo de organização orientado para a “suficiência” e a “convivialidade”, como alternativa ao crescimento econômico e à eficiência técnica, características da lógica organizacional dominante. A suficiência se caracterizou pela vivência qualitativa do momento presente, com valorização da simplicidade e do bem viver, elaborado com base na renúncia do trabalho direcionado ao acúmulo de bens materiais. A convivialidade foi demonstrada por meio da valorização das relações afetivas em detrimento único dos resultados baseados em desempenho, da condução da organização por meio de procedimentos intuitivos e contingenciais em detrimento dos planejamentos formais, do desenvolvimento de habilidades emancipatórias para alcance de autonomia frente ao sistema industrial e, por último, da aprendizagem por meio de experimentações livres. A noção de “limites” na organização estudada também se alinha a uma narrativa de renúncia ao modelo dominante e de sacralização humana e da natureza. Nas discussões, o estudo observa que a busca por emancipação à dominação técnica pode suscitar outras formas de dominação. Além disso, chama à discussão a necessidade de definições mais precisas quanto à diferenciação entre organizações convencionais e alternativas, visto que algumas características que a literatura atribui às organizações alternativas são apropriadas pelo modelo dominante. Por último, aponta que “eficiência técnica” e “modos capitalistas de organização” não necessariamente são categorias interdependentes.

Palavras-chave: Organizações alternativas. Novas formas organizacionais. Limites ao crescimento econômico e à eficiência técnica. Suficiência e convivialidade.

Límites al crecimiento económico y la eficiencia técnica en organizaciones alternativas: suficiencia y convivialidad

Resumen

Este estudio investigó una asociación comunitaria cuya forma de organización mostró una desalineación con el modelo organizacional dominante. Los resultados apuntan al término “límites” como vínculo para establecer un modo de organización orientado a la “suficiencia” y la “convivialidad”, como alternativa al crecimiento económico y a la eficiencia técnica, características de la lógica organizacional dominante. La suficiencia se caracterizó por la experiencia cualitativa del momento presente, con una apreciación de la sencillez y el buen vivir elaborado a partir de la renuncia al trabajo orientado a la acumulación de bienes materiales. La convivialidad se demostró mediante la valoración de las relaciones afectivas en detrimento de los resultados basados en el desempeño; de la dirección de la organización a través de procedimientos intuitivos y de contingencia en detrimento de la planificación formal; del desarrollo de habilidades emancipadoras para lograr la autonomía frente al sistema industrial y, finalmente, del aprendizaje a través de la libre experimentación. La noción de “límites” en la organización estudiada también está en línea con una narrativa de renuncia al modelo dominante y de la sacralización humana y de la naturaleza. En las discusiones, el estudio señala que la búsqueda de la emancipación de la dominación técnica puede plantear otras formas de dominación. Además, invita a debatir la necesidad de definiciones más precisas sobre la diferenciación entre organizaciones convencionales y alternativas, ya que el modelo dominante se apropió de algunas características atribuidas por la literatura a las organizaciones alternativas. Finalmente, señala que la “eficiencia técnica” y los “modos de organización capitalistas” no constituyen necesariamente categorías interdependientes.

Palabras clave: Organizaciones alternativas. Nuevas formas organizativas. Límites al crecimiento económico y la eficiencia técnica. Suficiencia y convivialidad.

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INTRODUCTION

The contradictions and problems arising from the dominant model of organization are prominently noticeable in the human and environmental dimensions. Environmental degradation, climate change, the unsustainability of the global economic and financial system, increasing inequalities and social injustices (Boff, 2012), as well as the recurrent epidemics and pandemics (Izurieta, 2020), the precariousness of working conditions (Antunes, 2018), the lack of autonomy (Gaulejac, 2007; Illich, 1976), the growth of mental pathologies – such as depression related to dissatisfaction and physical and mental exhaustion in the work context (Dejours, 2012) –, violence in work organizations (Alcadipani & Medeiros, 2017; Faria & Meneghetti, 2007; Silva & Abdalla, 2020) are just some of the symptoms that can be linked to the character and reality of the dominant organizational mode in modernity. In this context, there is a growing search for attempts to escape the logic of work in conventional organizations and to organize life and work on different bases from those that prevail in these spaces.

The scenario of problems and contradictions of the dominant model and the cases of people who change the old pattern of professional success for alternative organizational modes call attention to studies that search for alternatives to such models. Thus, organizations that exercise distinct practices have received greater attention in recent years (Barcellos & Dellagnelo, 2013; Barcellos, Dellagnelo, & Salles, 2014, 2017; Costa, Seifert, Meira, & Hocayen-da-Silva, 2018; Misoczky, 2010).

Defining what would be an alternative, however, is not a simple task. The search for definitions regarding the representations of the dominant mode of organization and its alternatives reveals that there is no consensus in the specialized literature (Costa et al., 2018). Broadly speaking, this literature suggests that dominant organizations constitute an imposed model, which directs people's ways of being, acting, feeling, and thinking (Ramos, 1989), guided towards maximum technical efficiency and economic growth (Barcellos & Dellagnelo, 2013; Costa et al., 2018; Seifert & Vizeu, 2015). Meanwhile, the alternatives point to the possibility of initiatives that oppose the dominant mode of organizing in modernity, not submitting to its logic (Barcellos et al., 2014, 2017; Barcellos & Dellagnelo, 2013; Costa et al., 2018; Misoczky, 2010; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Serva, 1993).

Recognizing the absence of agreement in the terms used to name both organizations that oppose the dominant model and those that reproduce such model, in this study, we use the terms “alternative organizations” to refer to the former and “conventional organizations” to speak of the latter. We believe that these definitions, although imperfect and limited, are more open and comprehensive, allowing us to accept the diversity and conviviality of different organizational modes in the social reality we intend to investigate.

To contribute to a better understanding of the subject, we investigated a community living and production initiative whose way of organizing evidenced, even if in a preliminary way, a misalignment or an alternative to the dominant one. We use “community organization” (CO) as a fictitious name to refer to the case under study. Considering this, we established as a research objective: to understand the CO's way of organizing vis-à-vis the dominant organizational model.

Furthermore, based on the categories of analysis that emerged from the field, we structured two dimensions to compare the conventional to the alternative way of organizing the CO: economic orientation (growth versus sufficiency) and technical orientation (efficiency versus conviviality).

The orientation toward economic growth underlies the ideology of unlimited accumulation dominant in the capitalist mode of production (Latouche, 2009; Schumacher, 1977; Seifert & Vizeu, 2015), incorporating the prevailing market assumptions through the scarcity principle (Latouche, 2009), the competition, the creation of artificial needs (Illich, 1976) and consumerism (Bauman, 2008). Alternatively, recognizing that this ideology brings damage to the environment and human dimensions, Seifert and Vizeu (2015) point to the possibility of economic orientation toward “sufficiency and good living”.

The technical orientation toward productive efficiency refers to the act of rationalizing to achieve maximum efficiency between means and ends, relying on methods rather than individuals (Ellul, 1968). It demands the mastery of things by reason, making quantitative what is qualitative and thus causing the loss of spontaneity and freedom of the human being (Ellul, 1968). As a coexistent alternative to the technical productive efficiency, Illich (1976) highlights the possibility of conviviality – which gives autonomy to the human being in face of the technical tool –, equity and creative action in the order of social life based on its ethical values.

The research brings important contributions to the advancement of studies in the area of alternative organizations. The first refers to the presentation of empirical evidence of a productive initiative unaligned with the economic logic of growth and technical productive efficiency.

The second demonstrates the emergence of the category “limits” as the main analytical link for the attempt to differentiate conventional and alternative organizations. Our study indicates that, in the case investigated, it was the establishment of limits to the economic orientation toward growth and the technical orientation toward the maximum efficiency that fertilized alternative thinking and living, oriented toward sufficiency and conviviality. Such limits were grounded in a narrative of renunciation and sacralization of material life.

The third calls attention to the need for more precise definitions regarding the differentiation between conventional and alternative organizations, since some characteristics that the literature attributes to alternative organizations are appropriated by the dominant model. Moreover, capitalist accumulation may not be associated with technical subjugation, as some studies suggest. Furthermore, the search for emancipation from technical domination does not necessarily exempt from other forms of domination found to affirm an ideology of opposition to the prevailing mode of technical domination.

The article is organized in seven parts, the first of which is this introduction. The second presents the theoretical foundation on conventional and alternative organizations. Then, the methodological procedures adopted in the development of the study are presented. Next, the empirical results of the research are shown. In the sixth part, discussions about the study of alternative organizations are raised, relating them to the case studied. At last, in the final considerations, the main contributions of the research, the limitations and suggestions for future studies are listed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A look at conventional and alternative organizations

The scientific literature on the comparison between conventional and alternative organizations does not present a consensus regarding the denominations and characteristics used to differentiate the two organizational types. In view of this, we take the points of agreement as the starting point.

The unanimity that addresses the differentiation between the two organizational types points out that conventional organizations make up the dominant model in modernity, presented as the ideal type, indicated as the model capable of leveraging maximum technical efficiency (Barcellos et al., 2014, 2017; Ellul, 1968; Illich, 1976; Paula, 2002; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Serva, 1993, 1997a, 1997b) and economic growth (Barcellos & Dellagnelo, 2013; Latouche, 2009; Schumacher, 1977; Seifert & Vizeu, 2015). In contrast, alternative organizations are those that oppose the dominant way of organizing in modernity, not submitting to its logic (Barcellos et al., 2014, 2017; Misoczky, 2010; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Serva, 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Sullivan, Spicer, & Bohm, 2011).

The economic growth orientation, according to Seifert and Vizeu (2015), constitutes a dominant organizational ideology founded on the assumption that human disposition is essentially economic and that the progress and riches of nations fundamentally depend on individuals motivated to satisfy unlimited needs. In these terms, economic growth is naturalized in a way that defines the teleology of productive social organization. The market logic, guided by economic growth, is based on the scarcity principle, leading to accumulation and competition for resources. Thus, “the economy transforms natural abundance into scarcity by creating artificial shortages and needs as it appropriates and commodifies nature” (Latouche, 2009, p. 46). With this, the high standard of consumption becomes a sign of success (Bauman, 2008).

Several authors point out that the orientation for economic growth is linked to numerous environmental and social problems and damages (Latouche, 2009; Schumacher, 1977; Seifert & Vizeu, 2015). According to Seifert and Vizeu (2015), the logic of growth causes social harm, such as the destruction of convivial spaces and the reduction of diversity, as small producer organizations, which often play a primary role in local communities, end up being abolished by the growth process of large corporations.

Recognizing the harms of growth ideology, Seifert and Vizeu (2015) highlight the economic orientation toward “sufficiency”. This alternative admits both the possibility that entrepreneurs attribute different meanings of economic growth to their businesses (Souza & Seifert, 2018) and can be associated with living in the present moment, considering qualitative aspects such as the good living and the valuation of personal relationships (Serva, 1993) in order to meet real human needs, without the need to accumulate and compete for supplies and goods.

Our second analytical dimension aggregating the conventional way of organizing is characterized by technical orientation toward efficiency. For Ellul (1968), technical efficiency is the best one way, that is, the best way to perform an activity. Therefore, the performance of activities is not spontaneous, since it receives the intervention of instrumental reason. In other words, it concerns the effort of human beings to master things by reason – to make accountable what is subconscious, quantitative what is qualitative. In this regard, it can be understood as a way of losing human freedom, since it submits action to rationalization and to knowing how to do things. Thus, technical efficiency seeks to solve in advance all the problems that may arise in an organization, since it evokes the difficulty and solves it in advance, not admitting the possibility of surrendering to one’s own inspiration, ingenuity, and intelligence, in order to find a solution the moment the difficulty presents itself (Ellul, 1968). It refers, therefore, to the world of productivity and performance (Gaulejac, 2007).

According to Illich, (1976), the technique for productive efficiency manifests itself mainly in mass production, which makes the tool dominate man, enslaving him.

Coexisting with the technical orientation toward efficiency, typical of the industrial production mode, Illich (1976) points out the possibility of a convivial production mode. According to the author, in a convivial society citizens participate in the creation of social life and ethical values (survival, equity and creative autonomy) surpass technical value. There are no social contracts or submission to technical experts. Moreover, access to the tools of the community is free, on the condition that they do not impair an identical freedom of access for others. In these terms, conviviality would offer the possibility of exercising a more autonomous and creative action, with the help of tools that are less controllable by others. In this context, human beings would be free to shape the objects that surround them – unlike what happens in industrial society. Conviviality comes close to what Gaulejac (2007) calls existential, which provides a record of the lived world, feelings, emotions, and affective, loving, and social relationships.

Based on such categories, this research sought to understand the organizational mode of community organization vis-à-vis the dominant model. In the next section, the methodological procedures used in the theoretical-empirical operationalization of the study are described.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This qualitative research is characterized as a case study, guided by an exploratory-descriptive approach. The option to conduct a case study is justified by the possibility of exploring complex issues based on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). This is characterized by the preferred methodological design regarding questions such as “how” and “why”, in addition to referring to the study of phenomena immersed in the daily life of associated human life (Yin, 2003).

The case selection criterion considered the fact that the selected organization questions and opposes, in some way, the dominant organizational model. Moreover, the case conveniently presented itself closer to the researchers’ network of relationships, facilitating their access.

The first materials collected in the data collection process were obtained through information publicly accessed on the internet, especially on social networks and mass media reports. The data collection process was guided to gather information that would allow us to understand the dynamics of the organization of the case under study. To this end, we used different forms of data collection, including: participant observations, informal conversations, and semi-structured interviews. The data collected through participant observations were recorded in a field journal – always within 24 hours. In addition, the audios of the interviews conducted personally with the interviewees were recorded for later transcription.

The observations and interviews were conducted in September 2017, in a five-day immersion in the investigated organization. Moreover, there were approximately ten successive visits between July and October of that year.

The participant observations were made in an unsystematic way, free from a script, sometimes in a simple, spontaneous way, more like a spectator, and sometimes in a more participatory way. In addition to individual observation, predominant during the study, the observations of the research team were relevant. The aspects observed included: behavior, routine, activities performed, the way activities are carried out, internal relationships and with the external public, administrative aspects, relationship with the past and the dynamics of the manifestations of precepts, as well as perspectives for the future of the CO and its members.

The topics of the semi-structured interview script included: a) guiding precepts, reason for existence, and inspirations of the organization; b) history of the CO; c) administrative aspects and work organization; d) professional and life history of the members; e) personal motivations of the members in relation to the CO; f) future perspectives of the CO and its members.

The recordings of the interviews and conversations generated audios of approximately six hours, of which three were fully transcribed, and three were only listened to three times, as they presented information that we thought had already been captured and saturated in other modes of data collection, which generated thirty pages of transcript.

The interviewees from the community organization were adults, over the age of 18, who, at the time of the field research, were part of the CO core, as indicated in Box 1, below.

Box 1
Interviewees

Interviewees	Age	Profile	Respondents' Role in the Organization*
Jorge	56	Dentist and master in education	Founder, officer and board member of CO. Father, cook, farmer, teacher, lecturer, driver, etc.
Luciano	35	Pedagogue and master in environment and development. Agronomy undergraduate	Father, urban farmer (vegetable gardens, composting, recycling, soil preparation, etc.), course instructor and driver. Apprentice and helper in other activities.
Lúcia	35	Pedagogue	Mother, cook, hostess and responsible for the clothing bazaar. Apprentice and helper in other activities.
Marina	29	Veterinarian and master in animal nutrition	Organization of the environment, animal care, administrative/financial assistant and driver. Apprentice and helper in other activities.
Marcelo	33	Architect and visual artist	Builder, maintenance and architect. Artist of works for sale and exchange. Driver. Apprentice and helper in other activities.
Mônica	19	Pre-university student	Repairer and general maintenance of construction sites. Apprentice and helper in other activities.
Michelle	19	Pre-university student	Apprentice and helper in all activities (urban farming, cooking, organizing and cleaning the environment, animal care, hospitality, shopping, preparation and delivery of marketed food, etc.).

Note. *Everyone is sometimes a learner in one activity, sometimes a teacher in others.

These roles are not fixed or stable and may change over time.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Data analysis was conducted using the content analysis technique (Bauer, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). At first, the approach and familiarization with the data were sought by reading and organizing the material. This was done by listening to the audios and reading the field notes to recall the information, but without intending to perform previous classifications or categorizations of the data. Then a complete transcription of the interviews was made. Next, the transcribed interviews and the other field notes from the observations and immersion were read and re-read. Subsequently, the qualitative coding process of the data was started, as well as the organization and interpretive synthesis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The interpretation of the categories of analysis was centered on, as suggested by Trivinões (1987), three essential bases: on field findings, on the theoretical foundation used in the research and on the researchers' own personal experience. Finally, we performed triangulation procedures (Flick, 2009) between field findings, different data sources, literature on the theme of conventional and alternative organizations, in addition to debates with other researchers on the subject to confront interpretations and analyses, to ensure rigor to the study's conclusions. Field findings were also triangulated among themselves, considering the interviewees' views, observations, and tensions between what was observed and what was reported.

The following section presents the results from/of the case study.

RESULTS

The community organization and the imperative of limits to the hegemonic way of organizing

The community organization (CO), which has officially existed since 2003, is formalized as a civil society organization of public interest (Oscip) and is located in Curitiba. In its history, one can observe a non-linearity of action fronts, such as work with homeless people, religious activities, community workshops, audiovisual projects, pig farming, urban agriculture and cattle-raising, composting, among others. The CO was involved in several different projects that arose from local demands. At the time of data collection, it was involved with the theme of urban agriculture in which food production is directed, in the first place, to the subsistence of the group, while surpluses are commercialized and/or donated.

At the time of the field research, the CO was composed of ten members: two families, each consisting of three people; a single woman and a single man, who had renounced their professional careers in conventional organizations in recent years; and, finally, two 19-year-old girls preparing for university entrance examinations. The names mentioned here are fictitious.

The first family is composed of the founder of the CO, Jorge, 56; his wife, Joana; and their daughter, Aline, 14. Jorge has degrees in dentistry and zootechnics, and a master's degree in education and has a Judeo-Christian anarchist family tradition. His wife is a doctor and works professionally in a public hospital. Jorge, the initiator of the CO, plays the role of counselor and spiritual leader in the organization. He is the person who spreads the teachings and the values that structure the organization.

The second family that resides in the CO is composed of a couple, Luciano and Lúcia, and their daughter, Alice, 5 years old. Both are 35 years old and have a degree in pedagogy. Luciano has a master's degree in environment and development, and is currently pursuing his second degree, in agronomy engineering. They joined the CO in 2006.

Besides the two families that have a long history of ties with the CO, of about fifteen years, the organization has four other members that have been living in the house for about a year. Marina, 29, and Marcelo, 33, have both had careers in conventional organizations. Marcelo is an architect and plastic artist; Marina is a veterinarian and has a master's degree in animal nutrition by training. Besides her experience in the academic area, she has worked in business and was nominated in a public competition in her field. The pre-university students Michele and Mônica, both 19 years old, also make up the core of the organization. These four members have left their families to live in the researched community.

It is worth mentioning that the bond of the members with the organization is not formal. They call the CO home, as they all live together in the rented physical space. They are also not identified by functions performed or positions. In addition, the financial survival of the CO is guaranteed mainly by donations and commercialization of the products and services offered by the CO, including urban agricultural produce, bread, pasta, fermented beverages, and a small trade in second-hand clothes.

According to Jorge, the CO has a formalized structure, with updated regulations and records, but it is not directed by statutes and formal rules; it stands out for practices based on Judeo-Christian guidelines and resistance to the way society is organized at present and to the current economic system.

Jorge also asserted that the chaotic situation of humanity is the result of the wickedness of the human being, who exceeded the limits established by God, turned away from the Creator, and fell into sin. He says: “The human being was created to fulfill a biomatic role in nature [...], but man exceeded the limits established by God [...] resulted in imbalance and chaos on Earth” (emphasis added).

Sin refers to the exploitation of the natural environment and people, as the human being was created to take care of both. Thus, for Jorge, the balance will be established on Earth when man repents of his sins, that is, when he stops exploiting the environment and human beings. He comments: “For balance to be established on Earth, it is necessary to repent of sins [...] change the way we think and do things”.

For this to happen, limits to the hegemonic way of life must be established, which can be achieved, according to Jorge, through the renunciation and sacralization of life.

It became evident that, for the members of the CO, the imposition of limits means renouncing the way of life that comes from the incessant search for economic growth, which, in the current model, happens without respect for human limits and the environment, which are also imposed under the view that recognizes as sacred that which is usually considered a resource, including nature and human beings. For Jorge, in the incessant search for economic growth, “human beings are treated as resources, that is why there is the relationship of employment and slavery. If people are considered sacred, they will not be exploited. In the same way, if the river is considered sacred, it will not be polluted”.

The recognition that there is an imperative to set limits to the logic of economic growth and technique for productive efficiency, based on a dynamic between renunciation and sacralization, fertilizes the emergence of an alternative way of organizing that we characterize as oriented by sufficiency and conviviality. Thus, this is what we explore in the next section.

Sufficiency and conviviality for an alternative organizing

The results of the study allowed us to recognize that the imposition of limits on the dominant organizing, whose narrative root was established by the renunciation and sacralization of what is usually understood as a resource, makes it possible to advance in the theorization of the emergence of an organizational alternative oriented toward sufficiency – instead of economic growth – and conviviality – instead of technical efficiency. In this process of analysis, we used the composition of two analytical categories elaborated based on the theoretical review and field data: economic orientation (growth versus limits to growth through sufficiency) and technical orientation (productive efficiency versus limits to efficiency through conviviality).

The members of the CO presented discourses and practices in opposition to the exclusive search for economic growth. Members, in choosing to live in the CO, renounced professional careers, aimed at economic growth, obtaining and accumulating material goods. They chose to give themselves to life and to work in community, without receiving remuneration or individual salary, because in the community the financial result of the group’s work is reverted to the maintenance and subsistence of the members in a collective way. Marina, for example, had the option of working in different types of jobs, with stability and good remuneration, but she renounced her academic and business careers, as well as the public position to which she had been appointed. She says: “We are here by choice, not for lack of choice”.

Marcelo, an architect and visual artist, says that, in his experience working in a large construction company, he realized that he did not want to work to enrich businessmen, who, according to him, are getting much richer. Thus, he chose to live and work at the CO attracted by a simple lifestyle close to nature, values in which he believes. For the interviewee, building a different life, one that makes sense in the “now”, is more sensible, since accumulating money does not bring security, as he pointed out: “My uncle died inside a big multinational company. He lived projecting a future that never came to him. [...] It makes no sense to live life projecting a future that doesn’t exist and to die building a future without enjoying the present of life, the now”.

The members of the CO presented individual attributions of meaning to the organization that were different from those propagated by the hegemonic current. Mônica reports “Here the result of our work stays for our community. [...] We work for ourselves, not for big companies”.

The affective motivations of the participants called attention. The members of the CO reveal that in the organization they feel loved as in a family. Mônica says: “I like being here with them”. Marina, in turn, declares: “I have everything I need here [...] I feel love and peace”.

The couple Luciano and Lúcia, who have accompanied the founder since the first steps of the organization, informed that one of the reasons for being in the organization is related to the welcome they received. They affirm: “We were helped in the moment we needed it most”.

Field data indicate that, contrary to the orientation toward economic growth, the CO guides its actions and activities by the principle of sufficiency. In these terms, its members seek to have and enjoy enough to live in this moment well, one day at a time, without the need to accumulate because, for them, the ecosystem is abundant. Thus, they present an alternative view of the dominant organizational premise whose resources are scarce and would justify the need to accumulate and compete for them. According to Jorge, there are varied possibilities regarding ways of living, eating, and working. In his view, society has been conditioned to follow a certain form of production in order to meet economic interests, thus rejecting all other possibilities offered by the environment.

When we consider the technical dimension of the productive organization, we observe that instead of the search for maximum efficiency (Ellul, 1968) the members of the CO prioritize conviviality, which can be interpreted as a limit to the pressures for constant increments in efficiency that characterize the conventional way of organizing.

In the CO, it was found that work activities, which involve personal relationships and enjoyment during work accomplishments, are as relevant as the final result. Michelle says: “People are more important”.

The moments of conviviality are prestigious. The group has the habit of sitting at the table every day for at least four meals. After the meal, a period is dedicated to socializing activities, which involve readings and explanations of biblical texts or specific books, prayers, songs, and conversations. For them, these moments are important not only for their spiritual-religious nature, but above all because they represent moments of conviviality for the group. Furthermore, visitors who, by chance, are present during the activities period are included in these moments of communion.

The organization does not guide its actions based on formal planning. However, it values intuitive and spiritual processes, reactive, spontaneous, and improvised in face of the contingencies of the moment. Even if, in another context, it comes close to what Carrieri, Perdigão, Martins, and Aguiar (2018) call “ordinary management”, planning, for them, represents a restriction on the free interaction with life, making it impossible to open up to different possibilities and needs. Consequently, demands and problems are met as they arise. In this direction, the term “contingency” was mentioned by the members. For them, it is important to pay attention to contingencies, that is, eventualities, as they have much to reveal. From this perspective, it is worth mentioning two examples referred to by the group: one concerns the moment when there was the need to help a friend; the other, the change in the areas in which the CO operates.

Luciano and Marina remember: “João’s car overturned [...], we stopped everything here and went there to help. [...] In another moment, we saw that garbage was a problem in the city. The city government was having difficulties carrying out recycling projects. This demand came up. We studied the subject and started to develop practical activities”.

The members of the CO, in their daily work, seek to develop skills that provide autonomy and independence from the industrial production mode. Thus, learning in the organization, which often occurs through experimentation (trial and error), is developed in this sense. Marina says: “Here I have the opportunity to learn skills that I would not have learned in another workplace, [...] such as baking, cooking, olericulture, knitting, sewing, animal husbandry, playing the piano”.

Additionally, for the group, food is an important issue. They value producing their own food, preparing their own meals, and partnering with small local producers. Marina recalls: “When I was working at the company, I ate on the run, bad, industrialized food. [...] Here, I have the privilege of eating well, the best quality food”.

In these terms, our data suggest that the establishment of limits to economic growth in the CO fertilizes a sufficiency-oriented organization, typified by the qualitative experience of the present moment, with the valorization of simplicity and good living, based on affective motivations and on the renunciation of the dominant organizational mode of work aimed at obtaining and accumulating material goods.

The establishment of limits to technical efficiency, on the other hand, allowed us to observe an organization oriented toward conviviality, in which the valuation of affective relationships prevails at the sole expense of performance-based results, the conduction of the organization through intuitive and contingent procedures in opposition to formal planning, the development of emancipatory skills to achieve autonomy in relation to the industrial system, and, finally, learning through free experimentation.

At last, it is worth mentioning that tensions between conventional and alternative organizational principles have not ceased to exist in CO. To ignore this would be to establish a romanticized reading of the investigated reality. In several moments, some members have demonstrated that they face conflicts in the face of years of conditioning by the dominant organizational assumptions. The founder of the organization revealed that abandoning these entrenched conditioning, learned socially since childhood, is one of the main challenges for the way of life in the CO.

Finally, the following section presents relevant discussions on the theme of alternative organizations and the case studied.

DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results of this investigation, vis-à-vis the scientific literature on alternative organizations, allow us to elaborate some discussions in view of the scientific development of knowledge in this field.

First, it is worth noting that the characteristics that the literature attributes to organizations unaligned with the dominant model – among them, the discourse of promoting self-management practices, horizontality, participation in the decision-making process, teamwork, cooperation, participation, openness, trust, commitment, and shared responsibilities (Barcellos & Dellagnelo, 2013; Misoczky, Flores, & Bohm, 2008; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979) –, as Paula (2002) observes, can be easily co-opted by dominant organizations. Thus, despite the more horizontal organizational structure and the humanization discourse usually attributed to alternative organizations, there is a technical domination through more subtle and effective forms of control (Faria & Meneghetti, 2011; Paula, 2002).

In light of this, our study brings empirical evidence that portrays the search of a small community to set limits to a social form of technical and economic domination. Our study presents clear indications that, in the case studied, this confrontation is not based on the mere modification of organizational characteristics or attributes; it is constructed by establishing limits to technique and economic growth based on a narrative of renunciation and sacralization of material life. This is a path that is still little explored in the investigation of alternative organizational experiences that confront the dominant technical-economic model. That is, the spiritual, sacralized, affective and non-rational root that fertilizes the imposition of limits on growth and technical efficiency, aiming at the construction of a non-conventional mode of organization.

It is important to recognize that search to confront and break a certain logic of technical domination does not imply an automatic state of freedom. Although it was not the focus of this study, we were able to perceive, especially regarding the strategic aspects that involve community life in the case studied, a certain form of explicit charismatic domination in the figure of the organization's founder. In other words, the search for constructing an alternative organizational mode and the emancipation from technical domination does not necessarily exempt other forms of domination. Thus, we recognize the possibility of other forms of domination being established to affirm and exercise an ideology of counterposition to the prevailing mode of technical and economic domination.

With regard to the limits established to economic growth, translated into a narrative of the search for sufficiency and for the good living in the case studied, we corroborate the argument of Seifert and Vizeu (2015) when considering the possibility of alternative economic orientations defined by the dominant managerial ideology. In fact, our study presents empirical evidence of a productive initiative not aligned with the economic logic of growth. On the other hand, given the totalitarian nature of the capital system, we must consider the extent to which initiatives such as these can subsist if they present a real threat to the economic system of capitalist accumulation dominant in the market.

Finally, we recognize that the mere absence of an orientation toward capitalist accumulation does not exempt the technical subjugation of the organization. Such an argument refers back to Meneghetti's (2018) study, in which the terrorist organizations studied, despite presenting a counterposition to capitalism, were not exempt from hierarchical, centralizing, and authoritarian characteristics, in addition to prizing technical efficiency. This leads to the recognition that technical efficiency is not necessarily linked to capitalist modes. Thus, it is important that future studies on alternative organizations recognize that these two constructs – organizational orientation toward progressive capital accumulation and technical efficiency – are not necessarily interdependent categories.

In our concluding remarks, we recall that this study sought to understand CO in the face of the dominant organizational model. The results of the research contribute to the field of study in different ways, as suggested in the aforementioned discussions. However, the main result indicates that it is essential to include the discussion on the role of limits to economic growth and technical efficiency in view of the advancement of research on alternative organizations.

We recognize that the discussion on limits to economic growth is not new. The Club of Rome studies are a landmark in this direction and have been echoed by numerous authors, such as Latouche (2009); Meadow, Rander, and Meadow (2007); Schumacher (1977) and, more recently, amplified in the economic perspective of Raworth (2019). However, the discussion of limits to technical efficiency is largely absent when considering the technical dimension in the organizational context. In a sense, the search for technical efficiency has become dominant. We believe that the criticism of technique, present in the pioneering studies of the authors who formed the Frankfurt School, as well as the contributions of Ellul (1965), is fertile ground for this intent. On the other hand, absent from those discussions is the explicit allusion to the role of limits. In our analysis, the establishment of limits to technical efficiency and economic growth forms the foundation for the emergence of a mode of organization not aligned with the dominant logic. However, we recognize that such a finding needs to be addressed and discussed by the academic community, especially when considering the sources and bases for the establishment of a sufficiency – and conviviality-oriented organizational mode, which, in the case studied, is rooted in the renunciation and sacralization of resources.

It is important to recognize that every study has limitations, and this one would be no different. We agree that the case described here is a cut in a historical space-time that is dynamic. In other words, it should not be read that the characteristics presented here are not subject to change. Moreover, the characteristics and conclusions considered here are not expected to dispose to a process of unthinking generalization to other cases. We do however, point to the possibility of analytical generalization of the category limits to growth and technique as a central element in the construction of organizational alternatives to the dominant model. Obviously, such a statement should be subject to future investigations that aim both at replicating the use of the analytical category and at deepening it. Finally, we emphasize that the conclusions of the study are subject to the methodological limits of the investigation. We believe that future studies, by focusing on longer data collection processes, may deepen and recognize nuances of the results reported here, mainly with the aim of exploring how these limits are established and the references adopted in their application.

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