

# The Visual Metaphor in the Integrated Report: a semiotic analysis

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## Abstract

The Integrated Report is a new corporative communication practice, concise and innovative, which uses visual language symbols in the presentation of information. Due to its novelty, this article explores the visual communication in the Integrated Reports of companies participating in the Brazilian Pilot Program, focusing on a specific type of sign, the visual metaphor. This is a qualitative study, supported by descriptive and exploratory research, outlined by documentary data collection. Regarding visual metaphor, this research aims to answer: which is the dominant pattern of visual language applied to the corporate information, whether economic or financial or of any other kind, observed in the most concise Integrated Report developed by the companies in the Brazilian Pilot Program? The analysis of the contents is related to the Conceptual Structure of the Integrated Report according to the Peirce's Classes of Sign.

**Keywords:** Integrated Report. Metaphor. Visual Communication. Peirce's Semiotics. Stakeholders.

## Introduction

The Integrated Report (IR) derives from an evolutionary social process and innovative corporate communication, reflection of changes in the design and business

management, in dialectical relations between the company and stakeholders (ROCHA; GOLDSCHMIDT, 2010).

According to Freeman (2010), stakeholders are individuals or group that may affect the organizational objectives or that may be affected by a company's results achievement. So, it involves from investors, suppliers, employees up to consumers, in addition to the governmental and non-governmental organizations, potential employees and customers and the surrounding communities of the company or suppliers. Considering relational aspects that involve stakeholders (PESQUEX; DAMAK-AYADI, 2005), IR can be seen as a communication process that enhances different agents who finance diversified organization capitals and also contributes to connect different levels of communication users whose interests not always concatenated.

IR is originated from "*The Prince's Accounting for Sustainability Project*", issued in 2004, by Prince Charles, in partnership with the International Accounting Standard Board and the Global Reporting Initiative, and resulted in the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), entity that articulates IR around the world (MACIEL; CINTRA, 2015).

IR consolidates three other reports: Sustainability, economic-financial, administration and Corporate governance, which separately, these reports should present fragile connections among them (ECCLES; KRZUS, 2011). IR allows to highlight the sustainable strategy, aligning the corporate social responsibility actions, focusing on the stakeholders needs by reducing discrepancies and inconsistencies (ECLLES; KRZUS, 2011), which gap in debate is explored in this present research, with, also, analysis of the potential significance of the visual language of information in IR.

Since 2012, over one hundred organizations worldwide adopted to the Pilot Program, named Business Network IIRC, aiming to test IR assumptions (CHENG; IOANNOU; SERAFEIM, 2014). By 2017, 150 companies, from several countries have had adopted IR, including Brazil with one of the largest numbers of participating companies such as: AES Brasil, BNDES, CCR, CPFL Energia, Fibria, Itaú, BRF, Grupo Segurador Banco do Brasil e Mapfre Seguradora, Natura, Petrobrás, Via Gutenberg and Votorantim Cimentos.

This article aims to respond the following question: what is the dominant pattern of the visual language used to inform finance and economic and other type of information in the Integrated Report issued by Pilot Program's participants in Brazil? Having the premise that the visual metaphor is presented as a kind of sign with complex structure which tends to generate innovative sense relationships, the main objective is to identify the strategies of using the visual metaphor in RI information.

## **Communicational aspects of the Integrated Report**

Eccles and Krzus (2011) consider that it makes a difference to inform the company's goals and vision, as well as giving stakeholder's feedback. Both attitudes mean responsible and transparent type of communication. The International Integrated Reporting Council

(2013) sets this brief communication that aligns strategy, governance, performance and the prospects for value creation in the Organization in short, medium and long term, as the Integrated Reporting.

The IIRC (2013) combines the company overview and external environment; business model and governance; risks and opportunities; strategies and resource allocation; finishing with performance and prospects which are based on the presentation of results, explained in six kinds of capital: financial, human, intellectual, relationship, manufactured and natural.

The IIRC (2013, p. 7) stresses that “the main objective of an integrated report is to explain the financial capital providers as an organization generates value over time [...]”, reinforcing that the IR should emphasize the “organization’s ability to meet the lawfully stated interests and needs of the key stakeholders”. In fact, they emphasize the relevance of reporting in clear and concise language (INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATED REPORTING COUNCIL, 2013, p. 3). IIRC (2013) points out that the report increases transparency and accountability are essential virtues to build up confidence and resilience with the stakeholders and that they are subjected to decisions, actions and performances, what calls for transparency to the sponsors of the various capitals.

Eccles and Spiesshofer (2015) suggest that corporate reports include negative externalities generated by the company and the efforts to mitigate them; interests and expectations of other parties with which it can contribute to sustainable development; adequate balance between meeting the expectations of shareholders and other stakeholders; involvement of institutional investors in sustainable performance and investment decisions; and long-term perspective for the company and investors.

The scientific analysis requires complementary concepts, through which it is possible to understand problems, formulate hypotheses, and choose appropriate investigative methods and the purposes of this study investigating the potential for signification of visual language of the account for different users.

In December 2013, the IIRC issued a framework in order to systematize the IR foundations. Resulting from debates carried out in a bulk of international forums and the trial process leaded by the companies of the pilot program, the framework aims to find the balance between flexibility and general principles (Table 1) in order to combine the peculiarities of each company at the same time as it allows comparability among companies from different business environments.

**Table 1** – Mandatory Aspects of Integrated Report - Principles

| <b>Guidelines</b>                   | <b>Foundations</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Strategic focus and future guidance | To offer the organization’ strategic vision in relation to the ability to generate value in short, medium and long term, as well as use and impacts on the capitals. |

| <b>Guidelines</b>             | <b>Foundations</b>   |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Information connectivity      | Show the relationship and dependencies between the factors that affect the Organization's ability to generate value over time.   |
| Stakeholders relationship     | To provide insight into the nature and quality of the Organization's relations with the main stakeholders, including how they understand them, how they consider them and how they respond to the lawfully interests and needs of these parties. |
| Materiality                   | Disseminate information on issues that significantly affect the Organization's ability to generate value in short, medium and long term (relevance).   |
| Conciseness                   | Report the context sufficiently to understand the organization's strategy, governance, performance, and perspectives, discarding less relevant information.  |
| Reliability and Completeness  | Cover all material issues, positive and negative, in balance and free from significant errors  |
| Consistency and Comparability | Report coherent information, over time, in order to provide comparison with other organizations aiming to improve the organization's ability to generate value over time.  |

Source: INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATED REPORTING COUNCIL (2013).

There are situations in which the conciliation of all principles requires good sense or justification of priorities. Because of this, the framework provides for minimal content to be evidenced (Table 2). As the framework warns about the possible difficulty of synchronizing concision and completeness, it gains importance in the synthesis through visual language.

**Table 2** – Mandatory Aspects of Integrated Report - Contents

| <b>Guidelines</b>                                | <b>Foundations</b>  |
|--|---|
| External environment and Organizational Overview | It refers to the company's core business and under what circumstances it operates. Identifies the mission, organization vision, and external factors affecting the company and how it faces external challenges.  |
| Governance                                       | Describes how the governance structure supports the ability to generate value in short, medium and long term, considering leadership structure, processes used in strategic decision making, monitoring of strategic management and risks, culture, ethics and organizational values. |
| Business Model                                   | System of transformation of inputs into products, through the activities of the company, as well as the impacts related to the achievement of organizational strategic purposes by generating value in short, medium and long term.   |
| Risks and opportunities                          | Specific risks and opportunities that affect the organization's ability to generate value in the short, medium and long term, and how the company with them.  |

| <b>Guidelines</b>                      | <b>Foundations</b>  |
|--|---|
| Strategy and resources allocation      | Indicates the direction which the organization wants to go and how it intends to achieve objectives, strategies, and resource allocation plan and performance indicators.   |
| Performance                            | It situates what level the organization is compared to the strategic objectives foreseen for that period. Quantitative indicators on goals, risks and opportunities. Positive and negative effects of the organization on the capitals, along the value chain. The quality of the relationships with key stakeholders. Links among past, current, and future performance. |
| Perspective                            | Challenges and uncertainties that the organization tends to tackle to implement its strategy and potential implications for the business model and future performance of the company.   |
| Basis for preparation and presentation | It indicates how the organization determines the topics included in IR and how they are quantified and/or evaluated.  |

Source: INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATED REPORTING COUNCIL (2013).

Thus, IR should be understood as the means by which stakeholders are communicated about the integrated thinking of the company. In this sense, its formulation requires a profound and articulated understanding of the company’s value creation process. For IIRC (2013, p. 19), “an integrated account should disclose information about issues that significantly affect the ability of an organization to generate value in short, medium and long term”. And continues, the process for determining materiality for preparation and presentation of RI involves: (i) the identification of relevant topics; (ii) The evaluation of relevant issues regarding the known or potential effect on the generation of value; (iii) Prioritizing themes based on their importance in relation to others; and (iv) the determination of information to be disclosed on relevant topics.

Such implications may directly or indirectly affect the organization, when they can reach capital belonging or available to others (INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATED REPORTING COUNCIL, 2013). Evidencing risks is one of the differentials of the integrated report compared to the financial report.

The International Accounting Standards Board -IASB- considers that information is material and materiality is based on nature or magnitude – or both – of the items to which the information relates, in the context of the accounting-financial report of the entity in particular (CFC, 2011). For the Global Reporting Initiative – GRI (2013), materiality should address aspects with significant economic, environmental and social impacts of the Organization; substantially influencing the assessments and decisions of stakeholders. This is the boundary from which the aspects become sufficiently expressive to be reported, because it affects the Organization’s ability to satisfy present needs, without compromising the needs of future generations.

## Peirce's Semiotics and Visual Metaphor

Due to its ability to serve as a theoretical-analytical instrument, which allows to understand the potential of meaning of concrete objects (through verbal, visual, audible signs and their combinations), semiotic theories have been adopted by different areas of knowledge, such as in the Administration and Accounting, where studies on the uses of IR are developed in the communication of the results of the organizations. In this text, when using the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, it is considered the communicative intention of IR.

Peirce (2003) considered the sign, in all its forms and manifestations, as a representation of an object and generate significations. In Peirce, the sign is the vehicle that takes something from the outside to the mind; The represented is the object; The communiqué is the signification; And the idea that provokes is the interpretant, and it can be a word, a book, a scream, a painting, a person, a photograph, a sign of transit, any object that means something to someone (SANTAELLA, 2002).

Peirce's Logic (2003) is based on three universal categories: Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. The firstness is the potential of the sign, perceived by the immediate qualities: colors, shapes, smells, sounds, flavors, textures that arouse uncertain feelings, possibilities free of certainties. So ephemeral that it precedes the synthesis and hides itself immediately in thought. It results from the first contact and expresses itself in the freshness of inenarrable sensations, without judgment of reasoning.

The secondness binds the sign to something existing (duality), involves relationship, dependence, action and reaction. Existence, resistance and reaction to occupy space and time in the universe, confronting other bodies, while responding through sign forms, perceptible marks that, to a greater or lesser degree, the being that leaves traces of its historical existence, social, circumstantial and unique. After the pure sense of the firstness and prior to the articulated thought of the thirdness.

The thirdness approximates the firstness to the secondness in an intellectual synthesis. To understand the phenomena, consciousness produces the sign, which mediates the relationship between him and the individual. In this process, the signs are established as a convention and legitimated, because they represent, perceive and interpret the world.

For Peirce (2003), the third category presupposes the second and the first. To be accepted as a sign of the third category, the sign must be agreed to the objects from the qualitative characteristics (sign of firstness). The second category assumes the first, by indicating the real object ("dynamic object", as named by Peirce) based on its physical qualities. On the other hand, the first one is free, because it is formed only by the qualitative characteristics that raise possibilities (NÖTH; SANTAELLA, 2014). These three categories multiply in three types of relationships. It is precisely these relationships that allow us to point out the signification potentials of a given object.

The classification matrix defines nine signs (Qualisign, Sinsign, Legisign, Icon, Index, Symbol, *Rheme*, Dicent and Argument), organized in the three categories described

and is the most detailed of the work of Peirce (2003). The first trichotomy (Quali, Sin and Legi) deals with possibilities, because there is no effective relationship with the object, nor with the interpretative. If the object is limited by the qualitative characteristics of the sign, it is a qualisign; One suggests possibilities of relationship with an existing specific, singular, it is a sinsign; If it is a possibility the sign legitimized, is a legisign.

The relation between the sign and the object is also presented in three modalities: the icons are signs that suggest objects by the qualities; indexes are signs indicating existing objects; and symbols are signs that legitimately represent such objects.

The symbolic character, signs of thirdness, is given by using conventional signs in the form of letters, numbers, visual representations that allow the propagation of the content contained in the text and visual language, predominating the pragmatic aspect. In this way, the symbol holds in a collective and non-individual convention. The indexical character provides references, the meanings of text, image and semantics. The index indicates an existing specific, concrete, singular. There is, between the sign and the object that it represents, a connection, which enables it to point directly to the object. On the other hand, the iconic character, in visual language, supports the understanding of the qualitative characteristics of the image. According to Santaella (2002), the icon is the type of sign that suggests its object: “It seems to be”, “looks like”. It is in this last type, as will be observed below, that resides the visual metaphor.

Peirce (2003) classifies the interpretant into three levels: *Rheme*, *Dicent* and *Argument*. Peirce’s (2003) interpretive theory details the process, or analytical course, of the three modes that enable anything to function as a sign: the remainder (feeling quality), the dicent (finding an existence), and the argument understanding of the character of law).

The interpretants generated by these signs are presented in three levels. The first level is the immediate one, characterized by the interpretative potential of the sign, previously. It is given by the potential of the signs chosen by the sender of the message, before reaching the receiver (user) - this research analyzes the potential significance of the visual signs that represent the companies through the IR, regardless of the perspective of the users. The second level of interpretant is dynamic. It deals with the effect that the sign causes in the user, considering the psychological and sociological dimension, the influences of the moment, the trajectory and the affinities, and the collateral experience. The third level, the final interpretant, deals with the ideal interpretation, the maximum stage in which every dynamic interpretant should achieve in the pursuit of “true interpretation” by exploiting the signifying potential of signs, given certain conditions. Because of these premises, this stage is considered almost an utopia.

According to Nöth (2013, p. 20), it must be considered that

The theory of Peirce an interpretation is not a hermeneutic theory, which prescribes which of the possible readings of certain texts is right and wrong, or a dogmatic theory that forbids individual readings. According to Peirce,



interpretations are interpretative, effects that a sign creates in an interpretant, but these effects can be of many orders: feeling, emotion, affection, admiration, action, obsession, aggression, repudiation, conviction, belief, war and peace. Only a few of them are logical. The assumption that texts can only have one interpretation is not supported by Peirce's semiotics.

For the analysis of visual languages, Nöth and Santaella (2014) recommend that, in the analysis of the sign in relation to the object (icon, index and symbol), the types of icons (image, diagram and metaphor) should be highlighted. In this text, we will deal specifically with metaphor as an iconic sign. For Peirce (2003, p. 64), "every method of indirect communication of an idea must depend, in order to be established, on the use of an icon. From this affirmation on, it is considered that every assertion must contain an icon or set of icons".

According to Peirce (2003), the iconic sign, or hypo icon, makes it possible to represent an object by comparison, in three modalities: image, similarity to the level of qualities (shapes, colors, textures); diagram, similarity of the relations between parts of a whole, as it occurs in the organization chart and in the flow chart; and verbal or visual metaphors, by the parallel between the symbolic character of a sign and something different from it. According to Peirce (2003, p. 64):

Hypoicons may be roughly divided according to the mode of Firstness of which they partake. Those which partake of simple qualities, or First Firstnesses, are images; those which represent the relations, mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts, are diagrams; those which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are metaphors.

The metaphors are in the group of signs in "whose similarity is aided by conventional rules" (PEIRCE, 2003, p. 65), universe of the signs of thirdness. Referring to Pignatari, Ferraz Jr. (2011), remind us that Peirce used the expression "first firstness [...] to refer to the degree of immediate similarity we perceive between images and their objects". It follows that: the diagrams would constitute a "second firstness"; and metaphors a "third firstness, because they represent the qualities of their object by equivalence, in a given context, between two representation" (FERRAZ JR, 2011, p. 72). For the author, because they are embedded in triadic relations, metaphors would be argumentative icons - that tend to generate interpretant of thirdness.

What is, in fact, peculiar to the third type of hypo icon is that, in it, the recognition of the similarity between representation and object (that is, the recognition of iconicity) will always be conditioned to the interpretation of a



semiotic equivalence, thus resulting from a process relatively more abstract than that demanded by an analogy, or by a replica of the simple qualities of the object (FERRAZ JR., 2011, p. 73).

In this sense, the “representation of parallelism” to which Peirce (2003) refers, makes of the metaphor a complex semiotic unit composed of several signs. Ferraz Jr. (2011, p. 74) explains this relation as follows:

The representation of a parallelism occurs, for example, when we use a sign or representation (S1) in a context in which the most usual would be the use of another sign (S2), since we are assuming that S1 and S2 are equally able to represent a given object (O2). The representative character of S1, that is, its capacity to substitute S2 in certain respects, will then be deduced from a semiotic equivalence [...]. Whatever the mode of representation in which the relations of S1 and S2 are defined with their respective non-metaphorical objects (O1 and O2) ... only by way of a relatively complex logical inference (more precisely from a semiosis of the argument type) is that the quality extracted from this parallelism will allow the metaphoric association between S1 and O2.

Thus, for the author, the metaphorical icon has in its complex structure, but without being restricted to it, a symbolic legisign argumentative. It is precisely this structure that aims at the argumentative interpretant, which we understand to present itself as an innovative form of communication within the scope of IR.

## **The Visual Metaphor within the Integrated Report**

Since this study analyzes the potential for meaning of visual language - with emphasis on the use of the metaphorical icon - in the Integrated Reports of the companies participating in the Pilot Program in Brazil, the eight themes of the IIRC Conceptual Framework were used as a reference. The collection of data occurred through non-probabilistic method and was identified in the Reports from nine Brazilian companies participating in the Pilot Plan, such as: AES Brasil, BNDES, CCR, CPFL Energia, Fibria, Itaú, BRF, Natura and Votorantim Cimentos. IRs refer to the fiscal years of 2014 and 2015, and therefore 18 IRs, with an average of 76 pages each one.

In the analysis, it was found that 94% of the pages use some visual element in the communication process (photography, drawing, graphic, colored background or upper or lower bar, sometimes along with the title or logo of the company). If we consider photos or diagrams which are more interesting to this study, this percentage reaches 73%.

Briefly, the first step in data processing for further analysis was the structure of each IR. In the second, once the pages were defined as context units and the types of languages

as registration units, the pages were read and classified by topic, or categories, as follows: organizational overview and external environment; governance; business model; risks and opportunities; strategy and resource allocation; performance; perspective; basis for preparation and presentation. In the sequence, the types of signs were categorized, using software Nvivo 11 for Windows (2017).

Through the Nvivo 11 (2017) software, we performed the following steps: IRs registration; creation of eight nodes based on the eight themes provided by the Integrated Report Conceptual Framework or categories (Table 2). In each category were considered the relations of the signs with the objects.

Due to the large number of images we analyzed, we present here a sample of each category that serves as an example of the strategies used by companies to communicate the mandatory characteristics through metaphors.

### **Basis for Preparation and Presentation**

In line with the IIRC guidelines (2013), the organization must inform how it determines, quantifies, and evaluates IR issues. This information helps to understand the process of preparing IR, in effect for the credibility of IR.

In the relationship between the sign and the object, to indicate the basis of preparation and presentation of the story, the indexical signs prevail, observed in the photographs. Thus, it is a visual language that points to the real, indicates something existing in line with the purposes of this theme. The predominance of this type of sign can also be observed in the other categories.

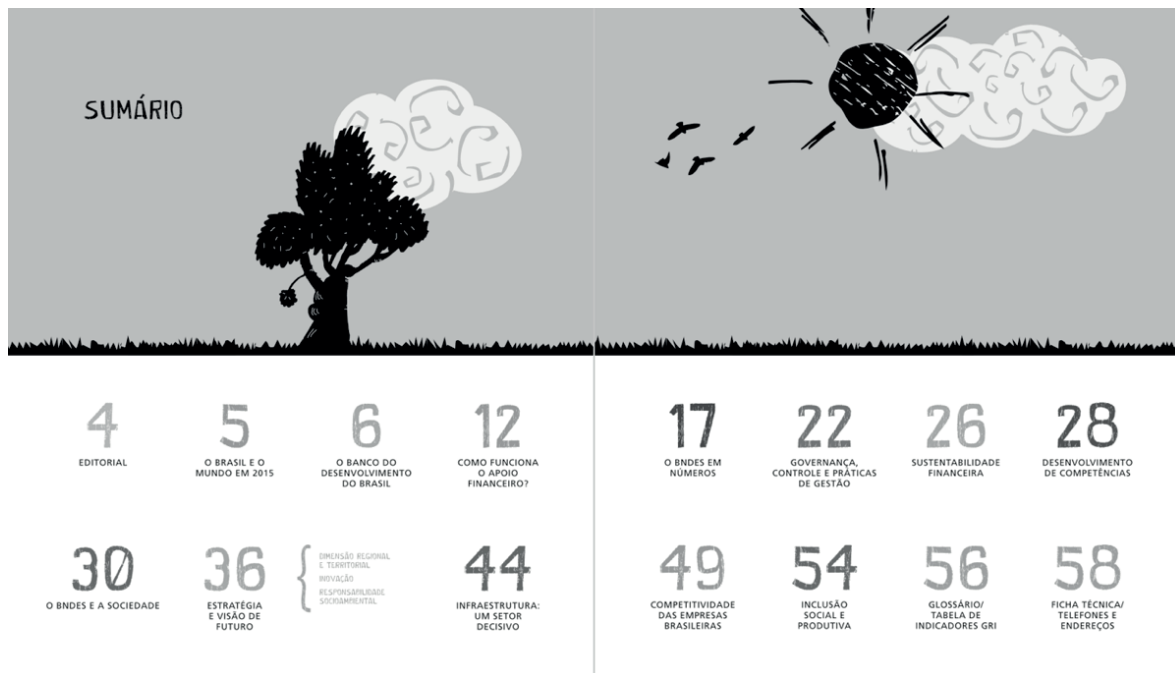
In this type of icon prevails the use of images, followed by diagrams and, to a lesser extent, by visual metaphor. The use of photographs is very present inside the IRs. Most of these photographs divide the space with verbal text. It is a way to perfect the space, in search of the concision.

In the Figure 1, referring to the BNDES IR summary, the iconic aspect suggests a representation of the pre-photographic paradigm (SANTAELLA; NÖTH, 2014), that is, the universe of artisanal productions, specifically through similarity (image), *cordel* literature. The diagram is presented by the similarity of relationships between the topics that make up the structure of IR and its pages. The metaphor is presented through a transversal theme, giving Brazilian meaning to the IR, through the aesthetics of the *cordel* that underlies the images.

The representation of parallelism occurs when the image (S1) - in the graphic treatment of illustration and page numbers - refers, by similarity, to an interpretant, *cordel* literature (O1), while the diagrammatic structure of the summary (S2) refers to another interpretant, the topics that make up the structure of the BNDES integrated report (O2). In other words, by isolating S1 and S2, an interpreter who does not know the document can remember the art of *cordel* when looking at the image, and another one who is familiar

with IR can understand the logic of the document through the diagrammatic structure. The relations that can be established between S1 and S2, and their respective objects (O1 and O2), result in the potential interpreter of that page. That is, S1 refers to the image of BNDES (O2), the National Bank for Economic and Social Development presents itself as an organization that reflects the country's values. The complexity of semiotic relations that must be established by the interpreter so that the image (S1) is related to the IR of the organization (O2) is thus perceived.

**Figure 1 - Summary of BNDES' Integrated Report**



Source: BNDES' Integrated Report (2015, p. 2-3).

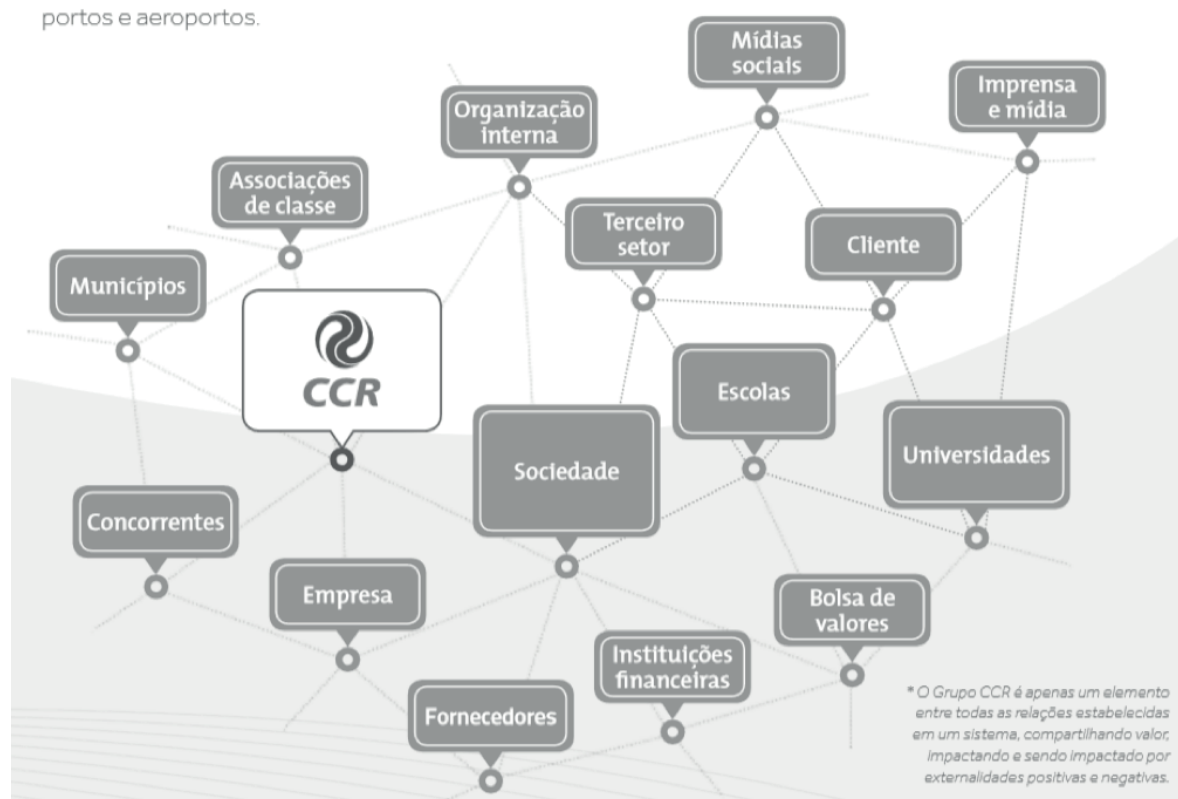
## External environment and Organizational Overview

In this topic you must be informed what the organization does and under what circumstances it operates (INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATED REPORTING COUNCIL, 2013). Among the pages classified in this theme, the following ones stand out: message from the board of directors and the executive board, context and scenario.

About two hundred pages were identified with this theme. In the relation between the sign and the object, the indexical function is present in the 18 reports analyzed. Referring to the type of icon, it was noticed that prevalence of the use of images to express the organization and the external environment overview, usually as photographs, in 117 pages. Another 44

have some kind of diagram. In 11 pages, visual metaphors have been identified and they reproduce the external appearance of objects, only as a means to represent something that is not visually accessible, as exemplified in Figure 2. The metaphor of the web (S1) serves to inform, in a concise and concise manner, on the relations established among different dimensions of the organization (O2).

**Figura 2 – Spider Web Metaphor**



Source: CCR Integrated Report (2015, p. 9).

In terms of visual language of IR, conciseness and clarity are fundamental aspects in the construction of the immediate interpretant. However, they should provide security, just as in the verbal text, so the images need to be well sized.

## Governance

Regarding governance, IR should report how the governance structure supports the ability to generate value in the short, medium and long term (INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATED REPORTING COUNCIL, 2013). This is one of the most present themes in the set of reports analyzed.

As for the iconic sign, 92 pages were classified in the 18 reports that use the image (illustration or photography); another 18 pages, in eight reports, use the plastic image (without the use of figurativeness).

The visual metaphor is presented in a clear way in Figure 3. In it, the complementarity between visual language and verbal language is highlighted to speak of ethics and transparency. Eyes in the eyes, proximity, trust and satisfaction are several concepts reinforced by the metaphor to highlight the model of governance. From this feeling of trust and satisfaction, a way is opened to expose the Business Model.

**Figure 3** – Ethic and Transparency in Visual Language

### Ética e transparência

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Prática recorrente, Natura atualiza seus processos buscando reforçar postura e comportamento éticos



Source: Natura's Integrated Report (2014, p. 19).

## Business Model

The Business Model highlights the articulation of capital to become value creation and how it can be measured by the main performance indicators, bases for the construction

of integrated thinking. This theme usually uses visual language due to the variety of content involved.

Regarding the type of icon, we can see the prevalence of images and diagrams, both in number of pages and in number of reports. Still, metaphors are present.

In Figure 4, one can see the drawings that indicate the capitals (organization resources) are types of icons in image form to represent the object by the similarity in the qualitative characteristics: shapes and colors. The process of creating value is represented by a diagram, composed of the input of the six types of capital, and processed through activities and outputs. The distribution highlighted the percentage of the value created by each type of capital, including the negative contribution of the capital stock and relationship. Gears that represent the synchrony of governance actions are examples of metaphor, similarity of ideas that parallels the meaning of a sign and something different from it, in order to simplify the message.

**Figure 4** – Bank Itaú’s Business Model



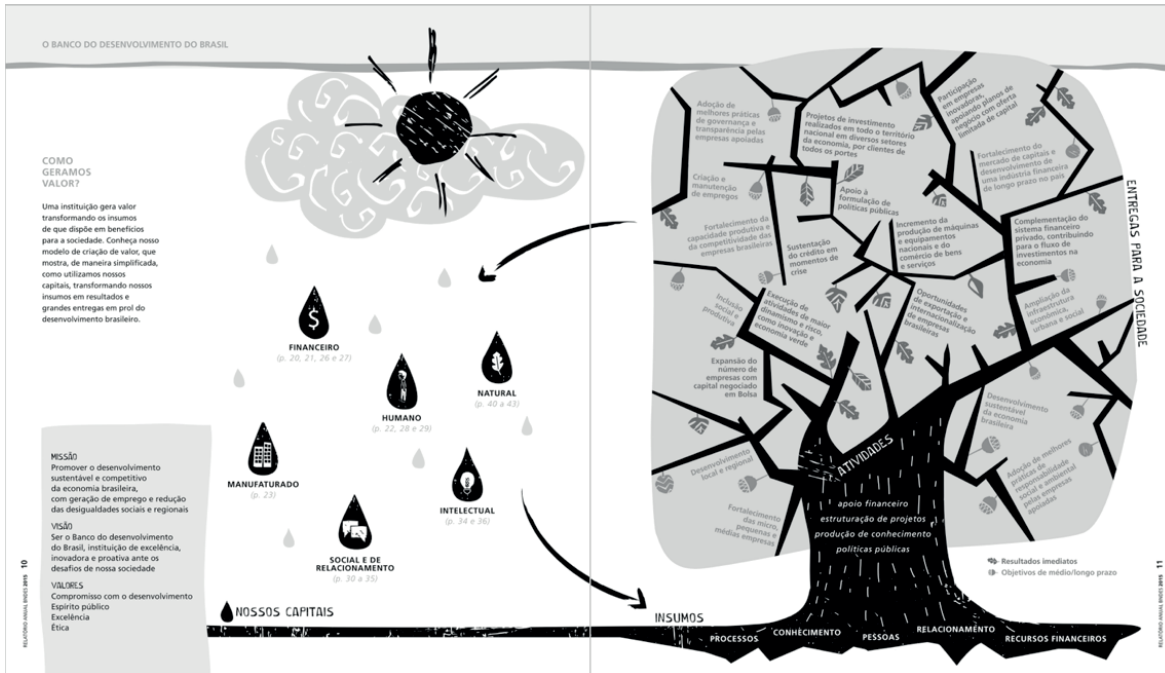
Source: Bank Itaú’s Integrated Report.

Figure 5 also refers to the metaphorical image, either by the set that resembles *cordel* literature - previously observed - or by the parts with specific metaphors, such as the raindrops representing the different types of capital that irrigate the soil or the leafy tree



which delivers to society various products and services. It emphasizes the content that feeds the visual metaphor: inputs that nourish the tree by the root; and to the mature fruits that generate results in the short term and the fruits in maturation for the long term.

**Figure 5 – BNDES’ Business Model**



Source: BNDES Integrated Report (2015, p. 10-11).

## Risks and Opportunities

For the IIRC (2013), IR must inform risks and opportunities that can affect the organization’s ability to generate value in the short, medium and long term, and how to deal with them, as risk reduction should help companies reduce costs and more profitable (ROTH, 2014). In general, there are few expressive examples of visual language to portray this theme. Risk-related visual language was identified in 17 reports and about 80 pages, but the image contained in this theme is always specific to portraying the risk.

Figure 6 is one of the few examples in which the visual metaphor can be identified in this theme, although this type of sign is not preponderant. The stylized image of the erlenmeyer flask tends to refer to the area of Chemistry, it is used here to represent how the results of scientific research can collaborate with the actions of reduction of environmental risks.



**Figure 6** – Environmental Risks



**O plantio de clones melhorados e geneticamente distintos ajuda a mitigar riscos ambientais**

Source: Fibria's Integrated Report (2015, p. 45).

## **Strategy and Resources Allocation**

The IR must inform the company's target and the strategy to reach these objectives, in order to manage risks and to maximize opportunities for resources allocation (INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATED REPORTING COUNCIL, 2013).

The iconic sign that prevails in this category is the imagery, almost double the pages that have diagrams and five times more than those that present metaphors. Most of these images are photographic representations, such as Figure 7, which shows superimposed

hands, suggesting, by the resemblance, the hands of a child, an adult woman, and an adult man. These hands have the potential to generate the interpretant “family”, in which the largest (and/or strongest) holds (and/or protects) the smallest (and/or most fragile). This image presents itself as a metaphor for enhancing the strategy with a sense of security and acceptance, important sensations to be aroused in investors and other stakeholders. After all, it refers directly to security with the future of the company.

**Figure 7 - Strategy**



Source: Natura's Integrated Report (2014, p. 12).

This type of strategy also appears in other reports, such as Figure 8 in which the image explores the similarity of the open book to the roof of a house in order to enhance the meaning of shelter and protection.

**Figure 8** – CPFL at Schools



Source: CPFL's Integrated Report (2015, p. 64-65).

Figure 9 is also an example of a metaphor, using the similarity of the bow and arrow object to express the company's strategic priorities. Such resource empowers the immediate interpretant by accentuating the significance of the impulse from the starting point (weaker traces) to the point of arrival (strongest arrow traces), when portraying priorities that are born in the soul of the company to boost the results, are: sustainable chain, innovation, people, quality, sales and logistics and the brand, all differentiated by colors and symbols.

**Figure 9** – Strategic bow of priorities



Source: BRF's Integrated Report (2015, p. 39).

Thus, the strategy theme seems to favor the use of the visual metaphor, since it is necessary to signal the future to arouse the interest of investors and other related parties, with clear, concise and attractive language, which are parameters with great appeal in visual language. The strategies released today are tomorrow's commitments by highlighting long-term goals, actions, benefits and the level reached through performance, a topic discussed in the next topic.

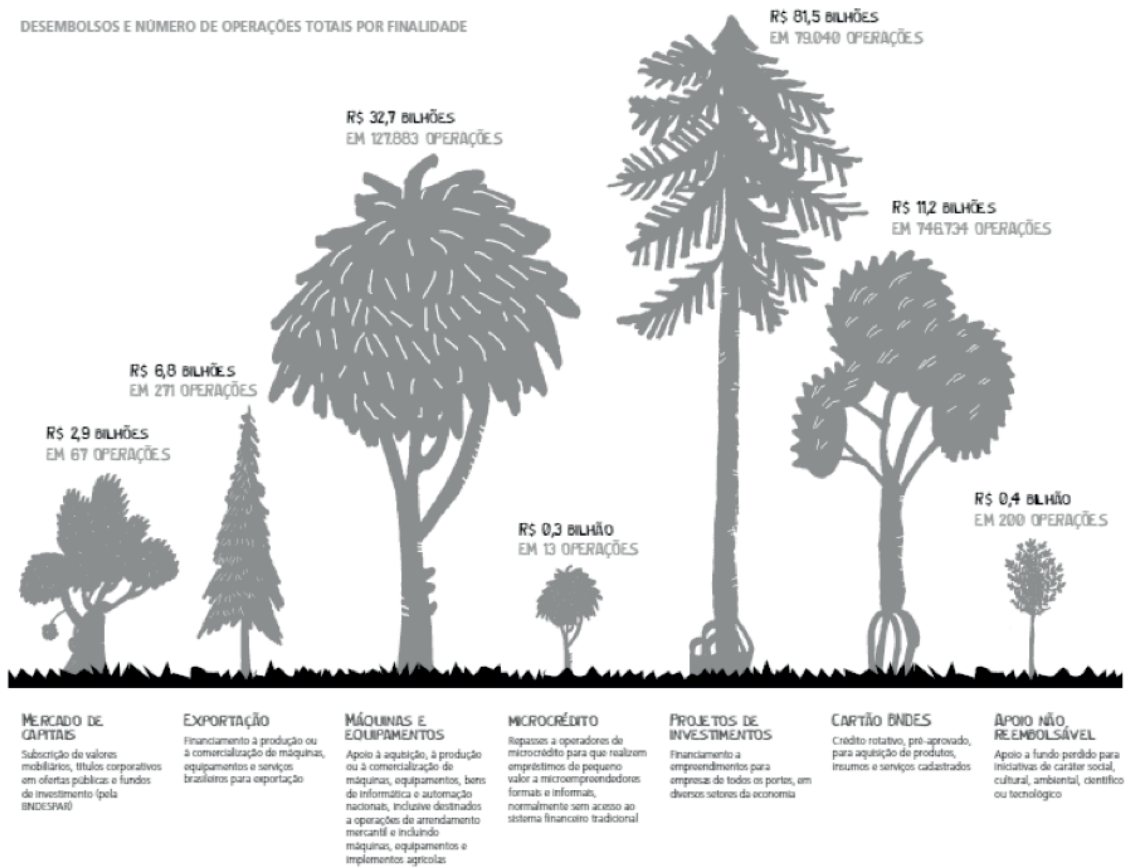
## **Performance**

The IR should inform the level of achievement of the strategic objectives for the period and how it affects capital. Therefore, performance goes beyond the financial result, reflecting on sustainability, governance and strategy (IIRC, 2013).

The performance theme is the one that occupies the largest number of pages in the reports analyzed given the variety of financial and non-financial indicators reported in the specific reports. Thus, the integration of metrics is one of the major challenges of the Integrated Report, due to the diversity of assumptions. On the type of icon, the use of images, 313 pages, prevailed in the 18 reports.

Figure 10 shows a metaphorical image as an alternative to the conventional bar chart. Because of this, it potentiates the meaning of the immediate interpretant. Following the logic of Peirce (2003), we can consider the diagram, because it has similarity to the relations in the performance between the products, as an indicative sign, originating in legisigns, conventions (bar charts), which are materialized by the iconicity of the metaphorical image. In the process of interpretation, the tendency for the reader to go the other way around: to recognize, by means of the similarity, the images of the trees (imaginary hypo-icon), organized as a bar graph (diagrammatic hypo icon), which indicate something else (metaphorical function), the performance among products. The different uses and relationships of the different types of signs are important in this figure, which may characterize an important communication strategy in IR.

**Figure 10** – Operational Performance



Source: BNDES' Integrated Report (2015, p. 18).

## Perspectives

In line with the IIRC guidelines (2013), IR should report what challenges and uncertainties the organization faces in order to implement its strategy and potential implications for the business model and future performance of the company.

Regarding the icon type present in this visual language, the use of images is emphasized, followed later by diagrams. The visual metaphors are present in a little representative quantity, which justifies their examination.

## Final Considerations

Although we consider the predominance of the indexical signs in the reports, which aim to point to existing data and information, the analysis shows that the form of use of the

visual metaphor deserves special attention from the elaborators of this type of document. In establishing a parallel between the representative character of a sign and something different from it, the relations established between such signs tend to attract the attention of the observer and simplify the interpretative potential.

Although less used than the image and the diagram, the metaphor was identified, mainly, in the disclosure of the themes Strategy and Performance. Some metaphors permeate the entire narrative, such as the BNDES / 2015 RI *cordel* images (Figure 1), and others `starting point, the priorities and the target (the result). The metaphorical image also shows performance as social indicators, as in Figures 7 and 8 when exploring the relationships that are established between the imaginary signs, the overlapping hands and the book as roof of a house.

Less common is the use of the visual metaphor in the disclosure of economic-financial performance, perhaps because of the common formality in reporting this information in the original reports, as they follow regulatory guidelines. Just as in the “Perspective” category, in this case, seemingly without reason.

The use of the visual metaphor in IR is shown as an innovative and efficient resource as it allows the communication of financial or non-financial information in an environment usually based on formal language. The IR should be a document should be concise and integrate various fields of knowledge in business management. The care that must be taken in the process of defining the visual signs is to ensure that there is no compromise of the content, at the same time it can potentiate the interpretant based on the completeness and the conciseness of the information through the visual language.

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