



Sustainability and Being

*Reflecting on the
Philosophical Underpinnings
of Sustainability Narratives*

Ana Cristina Campos Marques



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Sustainability and Being

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Philosophical Underpinnings
of Sustainability Narratives

Duurzaamheid en zijn

*Reflecteren op de filosofische onderbouwing
van duurzaamheidsnarratieven*

Thesis

to obtain the degree of Doctor from the
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and in accordance with the decision of the Doctorate Board.

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by

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born in Formosa do Oeste, Paraná, Brazil

Erasmus University Rotterdam

The Erasmus University logo, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.

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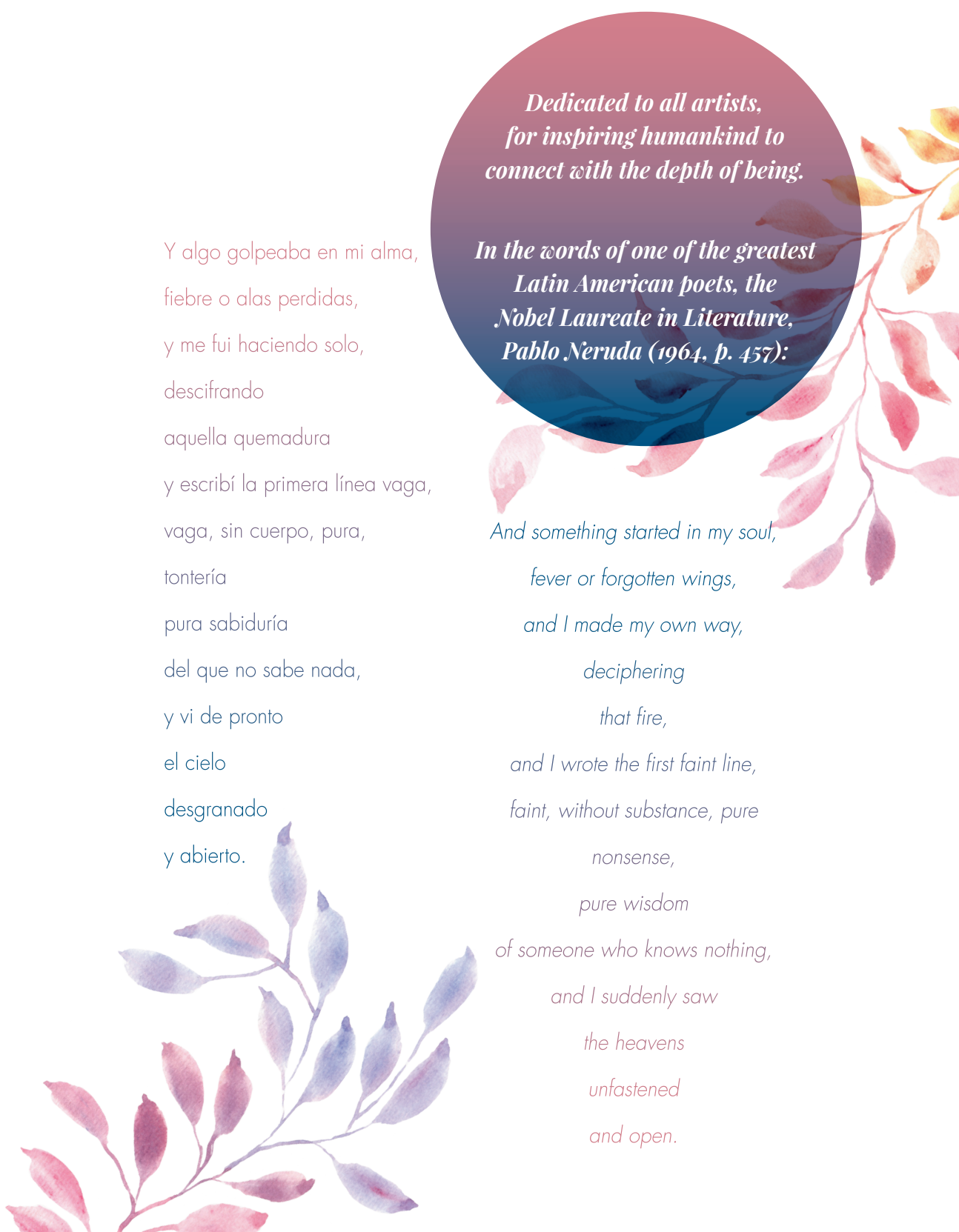
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*Dedicated to all artists,
for inspiring humankind to
connect with the depth of being.*

*In the words of one of the greatest
Latin American poets, the
Nobel Laureate in Literature,
Pablo Neruda (1964, p. 457):*

Y algo golpeaba en mi alma,
fiebre o alas perdidas,
y me fui haciendo solo,
descifrando
aquella quemadura
y escribí la primera línea vaga,
vaga, sin cuerpo, pura,
tontería
pura sabiduría
del que no sabe nada,
y vi de pronto
el cielo
desgranado
y abierto.

*And something started in my soul,
fever or forgotten wings,
and I made my own way,
deciphering
that fire,
and I wrote the first faint line,
faint, without substance, pure
nonsense,
pure wisdom
of someone who knows nothing,
and I suddenly saw
the heavens
unfastened
and open.*



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Chapter 1





*I encourage all of us, whatever our beliefs,
to question the basic narratives of our
world, to connect past developments with
present concerns, and not to be afraid
of controversial issues.*

(Harari, 2016, p. i)





Introduction



1.1 Preamble

A Narrative from Davi, Brazilian native, January 2015:

At some point we lost the way, but human communities from certain ancient cultures were already aware of the notion of sustainability. Perhaps it was not through rational consciousness, but with an empirical consciousness, a more organic one. To exemplify this, there is an episode that happened in the history of Brazil, which is registered. It occurred when the French arrived in Rio de Janeiro via Guanabara Bay to explore the trade possibilities of brazilwood. At first, the Tupinambás** accepted the idea proposed by the French to provide the newcomers with brazilwood. The Tupinambás began to fell, carry and transport shipments of brazilwood. An exchange was made: the French supplied instruments (machetes, axes, etc.), chickens, and other things, and in return the Tupinambás only had to cut down and load the brazilwood. Initially, the Tupinambás found the terms of the negotiations reasonable and accepted them. Over time, they saw more ships arriving and carrying lots of brazilwood. Then, the tribal chief, who was the leader of the Tupinambás community, stopped and asked for a meeting with the ship's captain who had made the agreement with him. He asked him, "What do you do with so much brazilwood?" And the captain answered: "My friend, with two or three such shipments in my land, France, a person becomes so rich that he does not have to work anymore for himself, and neither do at least the next four or five generations of his family". And then the chief said to the captain: "You think so differently from us, we do not think this way". Then, the captain asked: "So, how do you think?" The chief replied: "We believe that Mother Earth provides for me and my family what I need for today, for tomorrow, and for the day after tomorrow. When my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren come to be born, when they live and have needs, then Mother Earth will also provide for them exactly what they need for their moment and in their time".*

*Brazilwood is the tree that gave Brazil its name. It has carried great social and economic importance in the history of Brazil, due to its high commercial value. Besides the high quality of the wood, due to its reddish color, it has also been used to produce dye.

**Tupinambás are Brazilian natives, who inhabited part of the Brazilian coast in the sixteenth-century

In this sixteenth-century narrative, two leaders from different communities are both trying to do their best; however, they approach this from different narratives as they have different ways of understanding their realities. In objective reality, the reality of facts and logic, brazilwood is being felled, carried, and transported. Both the ship's captain and the tribal chief agree with these facts. In subjective reality, the reality of beliefs and feelings, there is no longer the same agreement between them. For the ship's captain, the increase in the amount of brazilwood being provided pleases him because of its perceived value. For the tribal chief, the same objective fact of increasing the amount of brazilwood being traded is somewhat strange. The same fact has different meanings for the two parties involved. People can approach such situations from different perspectives, based on objective reality, subjective reality, or something in between – intersubjectivity, the reality constructed by interactions between people.

Likewise, when people talk about sustainability, so much more is at stake than logic and facts. Facts need a context to be understood and to be meaningful. Some people claim that sustainability is proven to be in danger because of climate change, i.e. warming of the earth, basing their arguments on facts and logic. Others argue that they distrust the science behind these claims, that the facts are misleading, and that technological innovation will solve the problems. It is not so simple as a matter of determining the truth: at least, this is what I have come to realize after spending more than 20 years working in this area. What people talk about on the surface usually hides some other layers underneath. Inspired by the work of a range of researchers (e.g. Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1998, 2004; Flory, 2008; Harari, 2016), I picked up on the notion of the narrative. We are narrative beings, meaning that we need stories to make sense. Stories in newspapers, movies, or novels. Stories told by politicians and leaders. Even scientists tell stories, although some may deny it: stories about doing research, battling other positions, winning out, and succeeding. Stories with the scientist as the main protagonist, or with scientific models as metaphors that aim to explain the world through logic and facts. Thus, while sustainability research usually concentrates on logic and facts, this research proposes another perspective in this discussion. The purpose of this research is to understand the multiple layers of the different sustainability narratives, in their deepest possible connection with the being.





1.2 MOTIVATION

Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting [...] cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives [...] narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

(Barthes, 1977, p. 79)

1.2.1 Sustainability Narratives

“Everything of value is vulnerable”, noted the Dutch poet Lucebert (Klamer, 2016, p. 21). The planet is vulnerable. The balance of ecosystems is vulnerable. Life is vulnerable. Human life is vulnerable. Despite many valued things being vulnerable, humankind has narratives that seem to forget this vulnerability. Still, humankind needs narratives to make sense of the world and to allow people to band together. Narratives allow the creation of meaning in the intersubjective realities that are built between people (Boje, 2001; Harari, 2016; Maturana, 1998). It is not strongly related to facts and logic (objective reality), but it will probably be intersubjective reality that will decide the future of everything that has value on this planet; therefore, it is vulnerable. In the words of Harari (2016): “In the twenty-first century fiction [i.e. narratives] might thereby become the most potent force on earth” (p. 177). This is due to the fast pace of technological development, which can enhance the destructive power of narratives that were constructed in different contexts in the past. Humankind has never experienced such a massive exponential rise in technology as it has over the past few decades—from artificial intelligence and genetic engineering, to weapons of war that can save or destroy millions of lives at the push of a button. Technology is being developed at a faster pace than the very narratives of human reality. Due to this rapid technological development, a singularity is expected in the next few years; that is, a

moment beyond possibility of forecasting (Gawdat & Daher, 2018). A moment where technologies developed with narratives from past contexts can destroy everything that has value, so is vulnerable. A moment when critical changes may happen on such a scale that it would no longer be possible to reverse them.

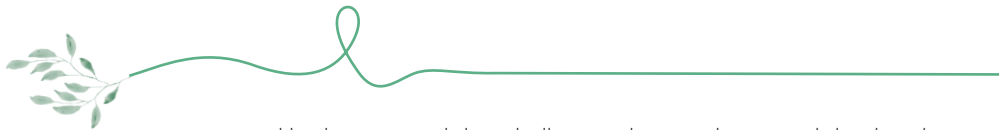
Meanwhile, humankind seems to be lost in a tangle of narratives that are no longer relevant to the current context of a world of such exponential technological development. As Gadamer (2013) has already warned:

... if we go on this way, if we pursue industrialization, think of work only in terms of profit, and turn our earth into one vast factory as we are doing at this moment, then we threaten the conditions of human life in both biological sense and in the sense of our own ideals for being human, even to the extreme of self-destruction. (p. 568)

These kinds of narratives, which forget the vulnerability of what is valuable, consider the planet, ecosystems, and life itself in an instrumental way, as means to humanity's ends. These narratives were built for a reality of human and technological development different from the current one. They may have made a lot of sense in the context of the past, but they no longer suffice in the current context. Such narratives have helped humankind to come so far, but they will probably not help it to continue to move forward. It is more likely that, if these narratives are maintained, humankind will run the risk of moving backward or even destroying itself. Thus, humankind needs to reflect on the world it is constructing, now and for the future, by questioning whether fundamental errors are hidden in the narratives that construct its world.

The problem is that humankind seems to continue to construct new narratives based on past contexts. An example is the narrative that aims to tackle the challenge of sustainability. This is a complex challenge, composed of several interdependent issues like biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, economic crises, poverty, and the widely discussed concern of climate change. Due to the likely influence of humankind on the planet's ecosystems, we are seeing a unique moment in our history—so unique that this epoch has been named the Anthropocene (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). However, there is, of course, no absolute certainty about the scale of human influence on the planet. Due to the complexity of these systems, which cannot be analyzed in terms of direct cause and effect, it is not a matter of facts and logic, but is beyond that. This is not to say that facts and logic are irrelevant, but they cannot define everything.





To tackle the sustainability challenge, the word sustainability has become fashionable all over the world. A broad range of products and concepts use this word: from sustainable organizations and sustainable products, to sustainable professionals and sustainable societies. This means that the new narrative of sustainability has been constructed and disseminated worldwide. However, this sustainability narrative seems to be based on narratives from a world that is different from our current one. Individuals, organizations, and societies are trying to address the sustainability narrative; however, there is a struggle to reconcile this new narrative with other ones, such as profit maximization and economic growth. Many organizations try to reconcile the profit-maximizing narrative with the sustainability narrative by creating a new narrative, that of the business case for sustainability. In this narrative, sustainability practices are carried out as long as there is maximization of profits as a result of such practices. The basic narrative of organizations is thus maintained, and sustainability practices are performed, if they generate some kind of profit. Two extremes are seen: some organizations simply deny the sustainability challenge and proclaim a return to supposedly better narratives of the past, while others reinvent themselves through innovative sustainability narratives.

In the same way, societies and countries try to reconcile the sustainability narrative with narratives such as that of infinite economic growth. In some societies and countries, sustainability practices are implemented as long as they contribute to growth in the economy. Again, two extremes are seen: some societies and countries deny the sustainability challenge, they want to “make something great again”; while others innovate and reinvent themselves. We must consider whether this is based on facts and logic, or just on narratives built in the intersubjective reality created among people. While sustainability research typically focuses on facts and logic, this research proposes a new approach to this discussion. This study focuses on the basis of the formation of the different sustainability narratives, in their deeper connection possible with the being.

1.2.2 The Interplay Between Language and Reality

“Sapiens use language to create completely new realities” (Harari, 2016, p. 175). Profit maximization, economic growth, and even sustainability are narratives shared in the reality of humankind. There is also a narrative that suggests that there is something like objectivity, a material world, to be captured by means of logic and

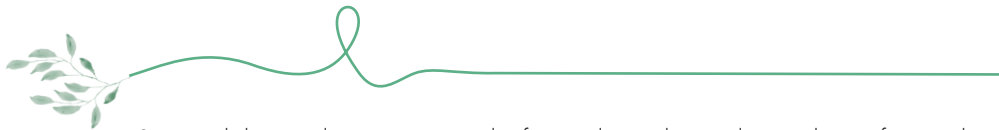
facts. This is the area on which most sustainability research focuses, that of facts and logic. However, humans communicate with each other with stories, images, and metaphors, which are not objective, but rather intersubjective. Such narratives construct realities that are shared only by humans. Facts and logics are not the only elements of this construction of realities through language; rather, facts only make sense in the context of a story. For example, in the narrative presented in the preamble of this research (Section 1.1), the objective reality of facts and logic was represented by the brazilwood being felled, carried, and transported. Both the ship's captain and the tribal chief agreed with this so-called objective reality. However, the same objective reality had different meanings for them, which can be explained by their differing intersubjective realities (Harari, 2016): those constructed by the interaction between humans through language.

Accordingly, in the postmodern view of social constructivism, language constructs reality (Wittgenstein, 2009). Some researchers believe strongly in this view, stating that language is the human domain of existence. For example, for the biologist Humberto Maturana (1998), "the individual exists only in language, [that] the self exists only in language, and [that] self-consciousness as a phenomenon of self-distinction takes place only in language" (p. 31). This means that, as per Wittgenstein above, language arguably constructs human reality. Additionally, according to the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013), "Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a world at all" (p. 459). This is known as "linguistic turn", where in place of language being seen as just a tool to describe a reality, so-called reality is seemingly constructed through language (Flory, 2008). The current research draws upon this interplay between language and reality.

1.2.3 "Being-in-the-world"

When science expands into a total technocracy and thus brings on the 'cosmic night' of the 'forgetfulness of being', the nihilism that Nietzsche prophesied, then may one not gaze at the last fading light of the sun setting in the evening sky, instead of turning around to look for the first shimmer of its return?

(Gadamer, 2013, p. XXXIV)



Sustainability studies seem mainly focused on the understanding of something instrumental. Studies regarding understanding how to profit from sustainability thus intrinsically imply an instrumental relationship with the environment. This instrumentality does not seem to value what is valuable (and, therefore, vulnerable). Additionally, due to the rapid rate of technological development, one of the key questions in contemporary science is how advanced technologies can conquer the environment to sustain growth, preferably infinitely. Again, humankind continues to construct new narratives based on past ones; in this case, the unsustainable narrative of infinite growth in a planet of finite and over-exploited resources. This predominantly instrumental focus of sustainability research forgets the narratives that construct the human world and, by doing so, forgets the being itself.

In the words of Gadamer (2013), “man, unlike all other living creatures, has a ‘world,’ for other creatures do not in the same sense have a relationship to the world, but are, as it were, embedded in their environment” (p. 460). In this separation of the individual from the environment, there is a distancing, or a duality, between the observer and the observed. This means that people position themselves as the “subject,” seeing the environment as the “object.” Due to these phenomena, “we are led to ask with increasing urgency whether a primordial falsity may not be hidden in our relation to the world” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 568). By focusing on the basis of the formation of different sustainability narratives, this research aims to better understand the non-instrumental embeddedness of the being in the environment—the “being-in-the-world”, in the words of Heidegger (2010)—which implies a deep interdependence between being and the environment.

1.3 AIMS AND SCOPE

*“We must also decipher the fictions that
give meaning to the world.”*

(Harari, 2016, p. 177)

This research studies the narratives that construct the human world (Boje, 2001; Harari, 2016; Maturana, 1998), and more specifically, sustainability narratives. To understand sustainability narratives in terms of the deepest possible connection with being, this research focuses on the underlying layers (philosophical underpinnings) of these narratives. This will allow academics and practitioners to reflect on these philosophical underpinnings and decide whether or not we want to maintain the unsustainable world we are building, individually, organizationally, and societally. Therefore, the main research question is framed as: What are the philosophical underpinnings of today's sustainability narratives?

The scope of this research are the sustainability narratives in their different dimensions: personal; individual; organizational, and societal. Each one of these dimensions is studied in a different chapter of this research, written for different publications. As they can be read independently, there is some overlap of basic information between them. The purpose of studying these dimensions is to understand the different levels on which the sustainability narratives are formed, from micro to macro. Starting with the ancient aphorism "know thyself," the personal dimension is a reflection on the philosophical underpinnings of my own sustainability narratives. The individual dimension is a reflection on the basis of the sustainability narratives of individuals (entrepreneurs, executives, and professors). The organizational dimension is a reflection on the philosophical underpinnings of the sustainability narratives of organizations, examined through their sustainability reports. The societal dimension is a reflection on the basis of the sustainability narratives that are emerging in society.

This research follows Klammer (2016), who argues that science has two main roles: therapeutic, and edifying. In his words, "scientific work is therapeutic when it poses new questions, uncomfortable questions maybe, and makes people aware of certain phenomena" (Klammer, 2016, p. XIV). This research aims to be therapeutic by questioning the philosophical underpinnings of the current sustainability narratives. Then, academics and practitioners can reflect on the basis on which these sustainability narratives are constructed and decide, in a more conscious way, what to change or maintain in order to construct a more sustainable world. Klammer adds that, "scientific work becomes edifying when it offers concepts, ways of thinking, models, insights and findings with which people can make sense of the questions they encounter and enables them to see their world in a different light and act accordingly" (2016, p. XIV). This study aims to be edifying by providing examples of alternative narratives, concepts, models, and approaches to reflection. These alternatives are presented so



that academics and practitioners can make sense of the sustainability narratives on a more profound level, and they may then tackle the complex overall sustainability challenge through its deepest level, the closest possible to the being one. In this way, the main scientific contributions of this research are framed in therapeutic and edifying ways.

1.3.1 To the Reader

I would like to emphasize that I deny neither the technical approach nor that of instrumentalism, because I have a reasonably technical background and I have also worked as an engineer. However, after seeing several failures and dangers in applying only technical and instrumental approaches to tackling the sustainability challenge, I have decided to explore another perspective. I do understand that the daily experiencing of a reality that seems so concrete and certain may hinder the acceptance of some ideas proposed in this research. I ask the skeptical reader to reserve judgment, because I will explain further in the course of this research. Please read this study with an open mind and an open heart: an open mind to suspend judgment, opening a space for the different perspective provided by this study, and an open heart to appreciate this perspective. Perhaps this different perspective will surprise the reader as it has surprised me, or perhaps not. In any case, I ask that the reader should be open to the experience and decide in the end what she/he wants to take away from it.

1.3.2 My Role as a Researcher

I have been working on sustainability issues in the private, non-profit and government sectors for nearly 20 years. During this time, I have visited and worked for hundreds of organizations, and I have also talked with thousands of people working in this field. This experience has offered me insight regarding sustainability from many different perspectives. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage in my role as a scientific researcher. It is an advantage because I can read or hear a narrative on sustainability and easily understand the technical and business concepts it refers to and the plays on words included, amongst many other factors. My long-term experience in the field is also a disadvantage, as it inevitably means I already have certain constructed beliefs, pre-assumptions

and paradigms that I tend to refer to. Therefore, this research is also the result of my own experience. I agree that “every act of knowing brings forth a world” (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 26). Thus, this research is not neutral, in the sense of being free from presuppositions. This study is based on the epistemology of social constructivism, where the so-called reality is constructed both individually and collectively. It is not about revealing an independent reality, but about exploring subjective and intersubjective realities, as shaped by language. Additionally, I have based this research on reflexivity (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009) and hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2013; Heidegger, 2010; Ricoeur, 2016) to reflect and balance out all these issues. Moreover, during this study I maintained a dialectic between distance and familiarity (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009) in terms of the issues analyzed. In summary, the purpose of this study is not to claim new truths, but to reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of sustainability narratives, as a way to make more apparent that which seems ignored. This includes an overall reflection on the basis of the construction of “truths” in sustainability research and practice.

1.3.3 Declaration of Contribution

This study started a number of years ago, when I was working in the field of sustainability for private, non-profit and government sectors in Latin America. My conversations with thousands of people during this time inspired me and provided me with the insight that I wanted to understand more through conducting scientific research. During my move from being a sustainability practitioner to becoming a sustainability researcher, several academics guided and advised me on the scientific path. Therefore, this dissertation is a collective product. However, I am the sole author of all articles of this manuscript that have been accepted for publication. Additionally, I declare that I wrote and carried out the majority of the work in this PhD manuscript independently. Feedback from my promoter, supervisor, academics, practitioners, and colleagues has been incorporated in the revisions.



1.4 APPROACH

"All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language that allows the object to come into words."

(Gadamer, 2013, p. 407)

1.4.1 On Understanding and Method

Most sustainability researchers are inclined to reduce the discussion to a matter of truth—of facts and logic. However, by focusing on narratives, this research aims to broaden this scope, by not simply considering the so-called objective reality but focusing more on subjective and intersubjective realities. This involves not just analysis of a supposedly objective truth, but the basis of formation of meaning (i.e., philosophical underpinnings) in a myriad of different sustainability narratives. As meanings require interpretation, this research is based on hermeneutics. It is noteworthy that hermeneutics in this research goes beyond a methodology; it is a way of approaching philosophical reflection. Thus, in this study, hermeneutics is used to delve deeper in terms of understanding the basis of the formation of sustainability narratives, in their relation with being.

There are different kinds of hermeneutics, but this study draws upon the alethic approach. Some of the leading scholars in alethic hermeneutics are Gadamer (2013), Heidegger (2010), and Ricoeur (2016). This style of hermeneutics "breaks radically with the subject-object problematic as well as with the twin concepts of understanding/explanation" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 95). This means that, in this research, there is a fusion and constant interaction between the subject (the researcher) and the object (what is being interpreted). Due to this deep interaction between subject and object, this research is not free of value-based considerations. Accordingly, "hermeneutics itself puts us on guard against the illusion or pretension of neutrality" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 3).

Additionally, in alethic hermeneutics, "time is central to the understanding of being" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 127). However, in most mainstream research time is suppressed, "in the form of timeless scientific models or timeless philosophical concepts, which would supposedly constitute the true reality behind occurrences in time" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 127). Thus, by forgetting the significance of time and developing research in the form of timeless abstract models and concepts, most mainstream research forgets the being. Since this research aims to restore the awareness of being, time is also restored. To achieve this, this research focuses on narratives, because "every narrative moves through the fundamental medium of time" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 128). Additionally, the main aspect of narrative is not merely the sum of episodes, but the significant whole of dispersed events (Ricoeur, 2016).

1.4.2 Subject-object Interdependence

Philosophers and researchers (e.g. Gadamer, 2013; Heidegger, 2010; Maturana, 1978, 1988; Maturana & Varela, 1987) argue that the world independent of the observer, i.e., the separation of being from the environment, is constructed through language. The very structure of our language contains a subject and an object, which creates a duality, a separation from observer and observed, from being and environment.

The biologist Humberto Maturana and the neuroscientist Francisco Varela studied the biological roots of understanding and concluded that "cognition does not concern objects, for cognition is effective action" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 244). This means that the separation of subject and object, from being and environment, is a self-constructing process. Maturana (1988) complements this by arguing that "language arises and gives origin to self-consciousness, revealing the ontological foundations of the physical domain of existence as a limiting cognitive domain" (p. 3). This means that the separation of subjects and objects, of individuals and environment, is arguably constructed through language.

It is important to consider Gadamer's (2013) statement that, "what comes into language is something different from the spoken word itself. But the word is a word only because of what comes into language in it. Its own physical being exists only in order to disappear into what is said" (p. 491). This means that the separation of being and environment is constructed through language on a deeper level than the





word itself, but it is through the words that we can understand the embeddedness of being and environment. This is because, "Language is a medium, where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 490). Language, as the medium where the so-called reality seems to be constructed, is where the being can manifest the original belonging in the environment. In order to better understand the non-instrumental belonging of being and the environment, language, and more specifically narrative, is the focus of this study.

1.4.3 Narratives

This research is based on the sustainability narratives of individuals, organizations, and society. Narrative is "the reflective product of looking back and making sense of stories constructed to make sense of life" (Flory, 2008, p. 70). Additionally, "narrative requires plot, as well as coherence" (Boje, 2001, p. 1). The main plot of the narratives considered in this study is sustainability.

It is noteworthy that what is "considered a vice in science — openness to competing interpretations — is a virtue in narrative" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 7). This means that the same event can have different narratives, constructed in the intersubjective reality created between people. These different narratives on sustainability are what attracted me to this area of study. This research aims to delve deeper into the diverse sustainability narratives, reflecting on their philosophical underpinnings. By exploring these narratives in depth, we may understand the way back to the non-instrumental belonging of being and the environment. In the following sections, I present the basis for the use of poetics and metaphors in the narratives throughout this study.

1.4.2.1 Poetics and Metaphors

According to Gadamer (2013), the essence of understanding and language at its deepest levels is metaphorical-poetic, not logic-formal (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Thus, metaphors and poetics are used in this study to understand the deepest levels of sustainability narratives, in terms of their connection with being.

It has been said that poetry "often becomes a test of what is true" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 466). This is because "the language of a poem involves totally dissolving

all customary words and modes of expression" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 486), i.e., poetry is created not through the words and forms of expression that the poet knows, as if in a moment the poet had access to what is deeper than one's pre-conceptions of the so-called reality. If that were true, then in this depth the poet would have access to essence of being. In the words of Gadamer (2013), "the verbal event of the poetic word expresses its own relationship to being" (p. 486). This develops the concept of the being expressing itself beyond language, through poetics. Poetics is thus used throughout this research to reach a level of understanding beyond language, to be inspired beyond the logic-formal approach, to "hear" the being behind the sustainability narratives. This is the case because "Logic constitutes an epiphenomenon to poetics, rather than the other way around" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 124).

In addition to poetics, this study also uses metaphors. Like poetics, "the function of metaphor is to transpose the meanings of ordinary language by way of unusual ones" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 142), thus raising language above itself (Ricoeur, 2016). The use of metaphors in this research is an inspiration contrary to the excess of rationalism that considers language secondary to logic; however, "language permeates thinking in its very essence" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 124). Thus, to consider a deeper level of language, closer to the basis of sustainability narratives, metaphors are used. This is because metaphors access a deeper level than merely descriptive language (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Thus, at the beginning of each chapter there is a metaphoric phrase and/or poem that summarizes and provides inspiration for the chapter, and metaphors and poetics are used throughout this research.

Finally, concluding with the words of the thirteenth-century poet Rumi (1996, p. 14):

*"Narrative, poetics, destroyed, my body,
A dissolving, a return."*



1.5 RESEARCH OUTLINE

This dissertation is structured in seven chapters, which each elaborate on different dimensions or research issues. Figure 1.1 shows an overview of the dissertation.

Chapter 1 introduces the research theme by describing the motivation, the aims and scope, the approach, and this outline.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 are the core of this research. They are independent research papers, written for different academic publications. Because they can be read separately, there is some repetition of content. Moreover, each one of these chapters elaborates the subject in a different dimension: personal ("I"); individual (other people); organizational, and societal. Chapter 2 studies the personal dimension: in this chapter I reflect on my own embeddedness in the environment, understanding the basis of my sustainability narratives through ontology. Chapter 3 studies the individual dimension, reflecting on the embeddedness of individuals (entrepreneurs, executives and professors) in the environment. It studies the process of individuals understanding sustainability, i.e., epistemology. Chapter 4 studies the organizational dimension and reflects on the deeper levels of its narratives; namely, antenarrative and fractal narrative. Chapter 5 studies the societal dimension, reflecting on the emerging narratives and their deeper levels, i.e., antenarrative and social attractor.

Chapter 6 presents reflections about the entire research, including the main understandings and contributions.

Finally, Chapter 7 is an epilogue including the 'so what?', a message with reflections on practical implications for academics and practitioners.

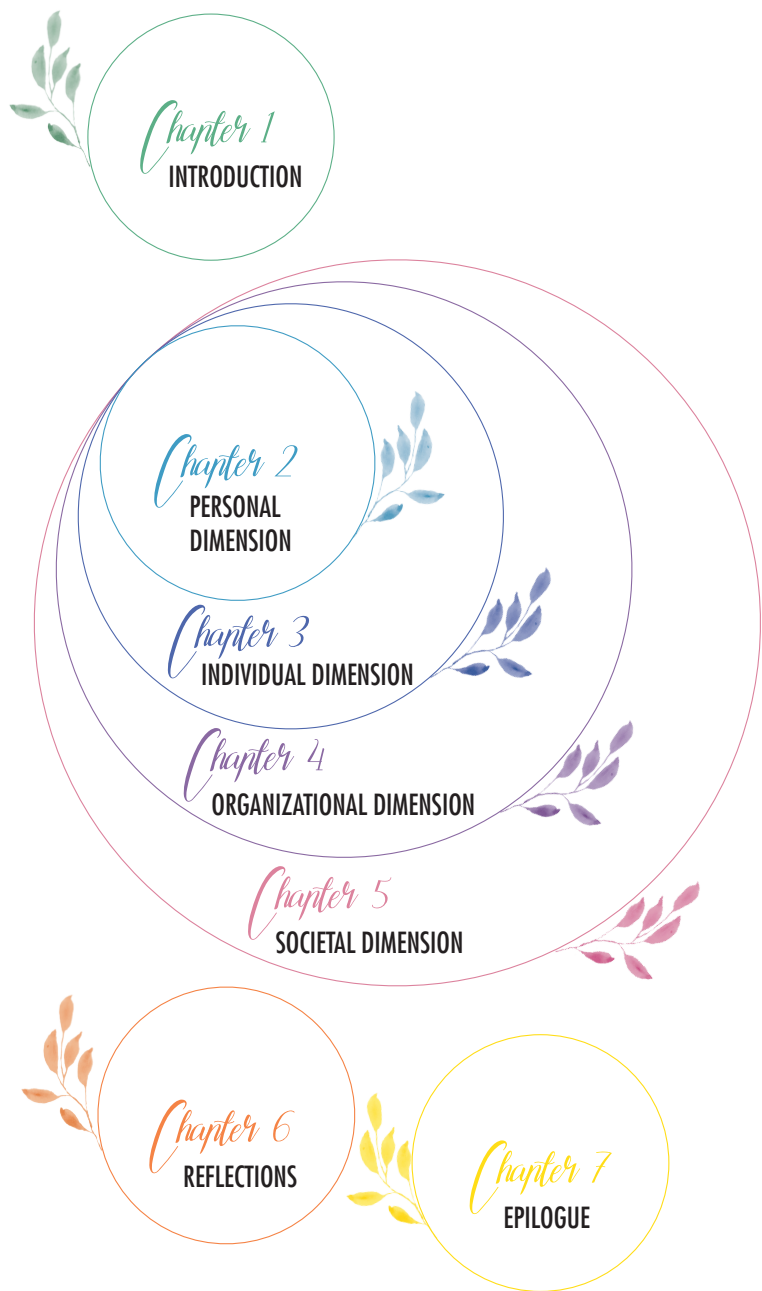
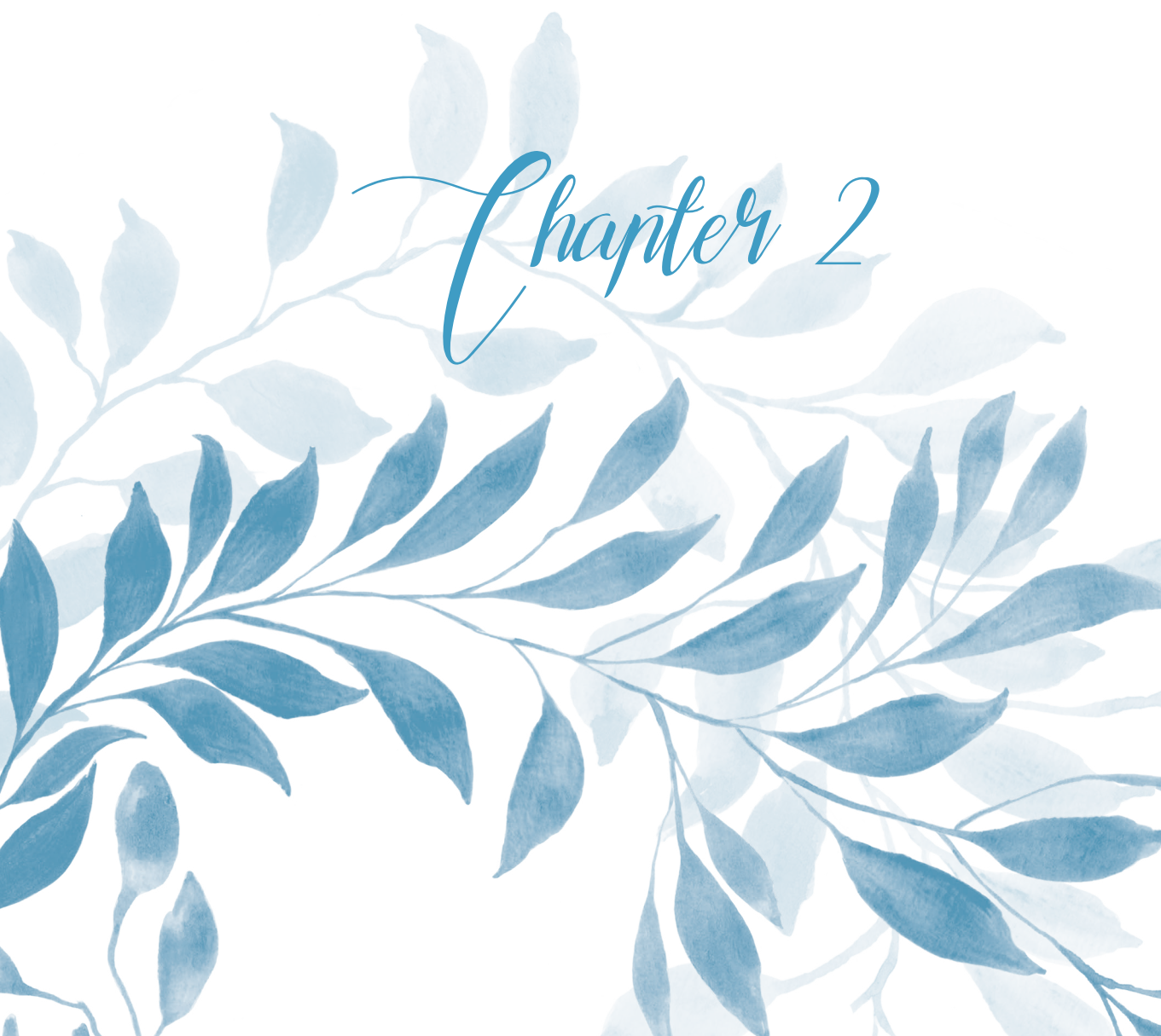



FIGURE 1.1 | Overview of the dissertation

Chapter 2





*The things we see are the same things
that are within us.*

*There is no reality except the one
contained within us.*

*(Herman Hesse, 1919
Nobel Laureate in Literature)*





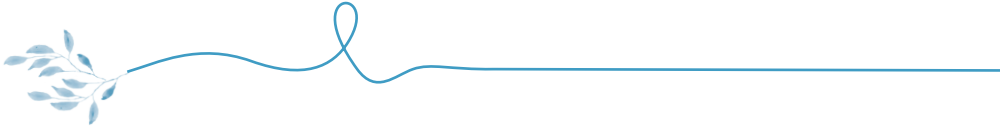
Personal Dimension

DANCING ON THE THRESHOLD OF ONTOLOGY:

*A Personal Perspective
on Sustainability Narratives*

* This paper has been accepted in a research publication, as follows:

Marques, A.C.C. (2018). "A Hermeneutical Approach to Sustainability Research and Practice". In C.L. Voinea & C. Fratostiteanu (eds.), *Corporate Social Responsibility in Emerging Economies: Reality and Illusion*. London: Routledge. ISBN 9781138082601.



Guidance: this chapter studies the personal dimension of the sustainability narratives, where I reflect on the basis of my own sustainability narratives.

Abstract

Currently, we are witnessing a sustainability challenge so complex that it could influence all life on the planet. This challenge is manifested in many interdependent environmental and social crises, which both academics and practitioners are attempting to tackle. However, due to the permanence of this challenge, there has been little success. In which case, what if we are forgetting to reflect on basic assumptions in order to tackle the sustainability challenge? What if this forgetfulness is making the problem more difficult to solve? These are questions that I reflect on this study, and to address them, I reflect on my work of almost 20 years on sustainability issues within a wide range of organizations in both Brazil and South America. In addition, I examine the changes in the sustainability narratives through the ontologies of realism and relativism. Finally, I conclude this study with implications for research and practice.

Keywords: ontology, sustainability narratives, relativism, realism, hermeneutics, sustainability challenge

2.1 INTRODUCTION

"Know thyself", is an ancient aphorism that can inspire a different perspective from which to tackle the sustainability challenge. This challenge comprises many other interdependent challenges such as climate change, the loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation, geopolitical instability, refugees, poverty and social inequality. We are in a unique moment in the history of humankind and, because of the likely influence of humans on the planet's natural systems, this epoch has been named the Anthropocene (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). Of course, there is no certainty regarding the level of human influence on the planet. These are complex processes, not merely a case of direct cause and effect, and scientific thinking is limited, unable to be certain of everything. However, despite its limitations, there is significant faith in technology. There is hope that science will quickly develop new technologies that will save the planet and humanity. The problem, however, is that the same technology that could tackle the sustainability challenge could contribute to making it even worse. Everything depends on the assumptions used to develop and use that technology. The danger is that technology is moving faster than humankind understanding of itself and reality.

The development of technology with the certainty that everything can be predicted and controlled has proved to have catastrophic consequences. For example, the gases produced for refrigeration systems, which seemed so harmless, were discovered to be destroying the ozone layer. Another example is fossil fuels, which seemed the perfect solution to providing energy for the development of the economy, but which are now known to be polluting the atmosphere and contributing to global warming. When these technologies were developed, it was believed that they would solve many problems without major consequences. In the past, there were many other beliefs that today seem absurd, such as the earth being at the center of the universe with the sun spinning around it. In a way, this belief still exists, as humankind still seems to believe it is the center of the universe.

The sustainability challenge influences all life on the planet, including humans. This complex challenge defies humankind's view of reality and its role within it. Therefore, it is time to reflect on more fundamental questions about reality and existence, i.e. ontology. This study is a reflection on these fundamental questions in the context of the sustainability challenge. I will reflect on questions relating to the interplay between the assumptions on reality, being and tackling the

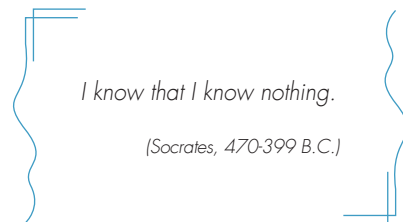




sustainability challenge. Accordingly, scholars argue that it is important to reflect on the philosophical assumptions of research and practice. An example is Maturana (1998), who argues that “scientists usually do not reflect upon the constitutive conditions of science” (p. 4). Another example is Vildåsen, Keitsch and Fet (2017), who found that the majority of scientific publications on corporate sustainability are not transparently aware of their philosophical assumptions.

In the words of philosopher Paul Ricoeur, “to understand myself is to make the greatest detour, via de memory which retains what has become meaningful for all mankind” (2016, p. 12). This study is personal, and I use my own experience of sustainability from nearly 20 years of working with sustainability issues in Brazil and Latin America. I disclose the changes in my sustainability narratives through the changes in my ontology. Furthermore, this study is based on hermeneutics, which is concerned with the process of understanding. In the hermeneutics of this study, “understanding is not concerned with grasping a fact but with apprehending a possibility of being” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 17), which I do by disclosing my own story. The main contribution of this study is a call for reflection on the philosophical assumptions that underlie sustainability research and practice.

2.2 PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES



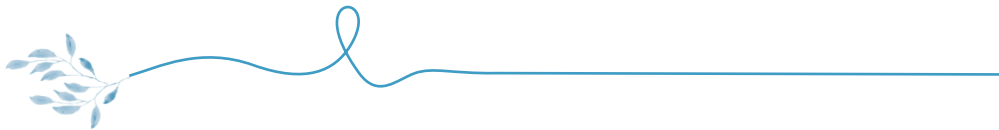
2.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology

What is reality? Or, more specifically, what are the philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality? These are questions of ontology, which is related to the “nature of reality and existence” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012, p. 17). How do these philosophical assumptions relate to the different sustainability narratives? To illustrate this, I share my own story, which illustrates the interplay between the ontology and sustainability narratives.

At engineering college, I learned to calculate and control an objective reality that seemed to exist independently of me. I was immersed in a world in which the predominant ontology was realism, where "an apprehendable reality is assumed to exist, driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). When I had completed college, I went to work in industries in the area of sustainability; initially, on more technical issues and then in management. The intersection of these two areas was important for the change of my ontology. A clear example for me was the decision-making process when purchasing pollution-control equipment at a company for which I was the sustainability manager. All engineering calculations were made for the equipment, as well as calculations for technical and economic feasibility. Therefore, in an ontology of realism, which believes in a single truth, these calculations would be enough for the decision-making process. However, each person within the company interpreted the same data completely differently. The predominant ontology was relativism, in which reality is subjective and is, therefore, different for each person.

Now, two decades later, living in another country, in a "reality" different from that in the country where I was born, I keep asking the same questions about the nature of reality and existence. I now understand that this is a question that philosophers have been pondering for millennia. The answers vary according to different philosophical assumptions (ontologies), which determine how scientific research is conducted and interpreted. Then, epistemology can be defined as "a general set of assumptions about ways of inquiring into the nature of the world" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012, p. 18). This study is based on the epistemology of social construction, in which so-called "reality" is constructed individually and collectively. Therefore, in this study, reality is subjective and based on a dialectic of people's inner worlds (cognitions, feelings, intuitions, values) and outer worlds (interactions, relations, social practices), through language. In the words of Maturana, we "exist as human beings in language using language for our explanations" (1998, p. 3). Therefore, this study is not about revealing an independent reality but exploring a subjective reality through the dialectic of my own inner and outer worlds, shaped by language.





2.2.2 Language and Reality

In the postmodernist view of social constructivism, language constructs reality. This is called the linguistic turn, which is "a philosophical change from viewing language as a medium for expressing a pre-given reality to viewing reality as being shaped by language" (Flory, 2008, p. 21). Some researchers go further in their definition of this idea, stating that language is the human domain of existence. One example is biologist Humberto Maturana, who suggests that language is what separates subjects from objects. In his words, "without language and outside language there are no objects, because objects only arise as consensual coordinations of actions in the recursion of consensual coordinations of actions that languaging is" (Maturana 1998, p. 30). He complements this by adding that, "for living systems that do not operate in language there are no objects; or in other words, objects are not part of their cognitive domains" (Maturana 1998, p. 30). Therefore, as language is also the medium through which reality is constructed, then perhaps language cannot mirror reality. However, "science is not a manner of revealing an independent reality; it is a manner of bringing forth a particular one bound to the conditions that constitute the observer as a human being" (Maturana, 1998, p. 6). In this study, I analyze my own reality through personal experiences of sustainability narratives. Additionally, as language is also the human medium of communication, social researchers (e.g. Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Ricoeur, 2016) acknowledge the limits of language and emphasize the importance of reflection on its application during research. In this study, I use hermeneutics to become aware of the limits of language, so to reflect on these.

2.2.3 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is concerned with the process of understanding. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) add that the process of understanding may be even more relevant than the results it produces. Ricoeur (2016) complements this by stating that the "understanding ceases to appear as a simple way of knowing in order to become a way of being and a way of relating to beings and to being" (2016, p. 4). In this study, I describe my process of understanding the diversity of sustainability narratives and how this changed my own way of being and of relating to myself and to others. My purpose in exposing my process of understanding is to challenge and inspire

people in their own processes. I agree with Klamer's (2016) suggestion that science plays two main roles: therapeutic and edifying. In Klamer's (2016) words, "scientific work is therapeutic when it poses new questions, uncomfortable questions maybe, and makes people aware of certain phenomena" (p. XIV). He adds that, "scientific work becomes edifying when it offers concepts, ways of thinking, models, insights and findings with which people can make sense of the questions they encounter and enables them to see their world in a different light and act accordingly" (Klamer, 2016, p. XIV). My hope is that this study will make a contribution that is both therapeutic and edifying.

It is noteworthy that hermeneutics in this study relates more to ontology than to epistemology. Thus, "hermeneutics is not a reflection on the human sciences, but an explication of the ontological ground upon which these sciences can be constructed" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 15). Additionally, there are different approaches in hermeneutics, and this study follows the alethic approach. In alethic hermeneutics, the focus is on "truth as an act of disclosure, in which the polarity between subject and object [...] is dissolved in the radical light of a more original unity" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 91). Examples of scholars in alethic hermeneutics are Gadamer (2013), Heidegger (2010) and Ricoeur (2016).

This study is personal, as I disclose my process of understanding sustainability narratives. As such, how objective and neutral I can be as researcher could be debatable. However, "hermeneutics itself puts us on guard against the illusion or pretension of neutrality" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, for hermeneuticians, the social sciences are not value free, because "the subject and object are mutually implicated" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 17). This means that there is a constant dialectic between people's inner and outer worlds, which is more fluid and permeable than concrete and separated. Additionally, I agree with Maturana (1998), who states that, "science as the domain of scientific statements does not need an objective independent reality, nor does it reveal one" (p. 6).





2.3 THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

*In order to seek truth, it is necessary
once in the course of our life, to doubt,
as far as possible, of all things.*

(René Descartes, 1644)

I have come across several methods during my scientific path. Initially, I learned to calculate a reality that seemed so objective. Then, I understood the qualitative approach to developing scientific research. Now, I doubt everything, even the methods. However, I agree with McCloskey (1983), who suggests that “nothing is gained from clinging to the Scientific Method, or to any methodology except honesty, clarity, and tolerance” (p. 482). Thus, for the sake of honesty, clarity and tolerance, in this section, I present the foundations of this study, which is conducted through narratives.

Narrative is “the reflective product of looking back and making sense of stories constructed to make sense of life” (Flory, 2008, p. 70). Therefore, I look back to my own story to make sense of the sustainability narratives. Czarniawska (1988) suggests that the narrative approach is a “systematic reflection on a craft that we are practicing while doing re-search” (p. 77). This “re-search” is what I do when searching again and reflecting on the sustainability narratives in my story. Additionally, the narrative approach is different from the positivist approach, because “narratives exhibit an explanation instead of demonstrating it” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 8). Following Ricoeur’s (2016) reasoning, in the narrative approach, understanding and explanation are fused in an interpretation of the text (Czarniawska, 1998). The sustainability narratives in my story exhibit their explanations themselves, which, at same time, leads to an understanding.

It is worth highlighting that narrative is different from story, because story is polyphonic (Boje, 2012). On the other hand, “narrative requires plot, as well as coherence” (Boje, 2001, p. 1). In this study, the plot is sustainability, which I attempt to make sense of through my story. The coherence comes from the understanding of my ontology in the narrated moment. Of course, stories are made up of innumerable narratives that intertwine in different contexts. Therefore, my narrative in this study is

partial; it would be impossible to create a precise picture of everything I experienced in the area of sustainability. Furthermore, one might ask: how can this study about a personal narrative be related to societal narratives? In the words of Czarniawska (2004), "to understand a society or some part of a society, it is important to discover its repertoire of legitimate stories and find out how it evolved" (p. 5). This study is a contribution to understand society, through my stories and their evolution.

2.3.1 *The Brazilian Context*

Understanding and tackling the sustainability challenge is important worldwide. However, as this is a personal study, related to my own experiences on sustainability narratives, it is conducted through the Brazil context. The reason for this is that most of my experiences on sustainability occurred in Brazil. Additionally, it is important to point out that Brazil holds a substantial proportion of the planet's remaining natural systems, such as the Amazon rainforest and biodiversity. Brazil also faces complex sustainability challenges such as deforestation, environmental degradation, the existence of large socio-economic differences and widespread political and business corruption. All of these factors are mixed with a diverse population, which can contribute to a broad range of perspectives.

2.4 A BRIEF PERSONAL NARRATIVE ON SUSTAINABILITY

The human being is the measure of all things, of what there is and that is there, and of what there is not and that is not.

(Protagoras, 490-415 B.C.)

How can we tackle the sustainability challenge? I asked this question, directly and indirectly, to hundreds of people over 20 years of work in the area of sustainability, both in Brazil and in Latin America. I listened to countless narratives on sustainability, and these varied enormously: from specific technical issues to holistic human development; from greenwashing to consciously responsible organizations; from the need to predict and control the natural systems to considering these same



natural systems as part of oneself; from the importance of control over the growth and development of the country's economy, to the importance of freedom for the growth of people and the natural systems of the same country. Why were there so many differences in these narratives? What could explain this? Over the years, I asked myself the same question about tackling the sustainability challenge. My own responses varied as I listened and heard different perspectives on this issue. It was a constant dance between my inner and outer worlds. Here, I describe this process.

2.4.1 Sustainability Narratives through the Ontology of Realism

- Reality is objective; to predict and control this reality, it is enough to learn some technical fundamentals so that we can predict everything and control the immutable natural laws and mechanisms.
- We can also objectively study and control people, both individually (e.g. behavior) and collectively (e.g. economy).
- Additionally, we need to survive, and we also need to consume, which means that the planet's resources have to meet our needs.
- As we are the most intelligent beings on the planet, we can use and exploit all of its resources in ways that are convenient for us. However, do not worry, because we can control the processes of nature.
- In this way, tackling the sustainability challenge primarily involves making better use of technology (e.g. cleaner energy).

These are some of the narratives I have heard over so many years in the area of sustainability. Now, I understand that they are part of an ontology of realism. This type of ontology was predominant in the college I attended, in chemical engineering. I learned chemical and physical principles from so-called objective reality, which could then be used to calculate and control the world. After completing college,

I worked in various industries, initially, in more technical areas and then in more managerial roles. In the technical area, the realism ontology served me well, at least in predicting and controlling the operation of industrial processes. After some time, I realized that I enjoyed the environmental field, so I followed a master's degree in eco-design, through mechanical engineering. Again, I was learning to calculate a reality that seemed so objective. As my interest was in environmental issues, I considered nature in my calculations and predictions, but in an instrumental way. For example, when producing an "eco product", I would calculate and evaluate the materials and processes that would be most sustainable. Over time, because of my success in the technical field, I was invited to work in more managerial areas of sustainability. Here, there were fewer calculations and less process control, but more people management. The staff I managed had different ways of thinking and understanding their realities. In the area of people management, the ontology of realism no longer seemed to make sense, and I asked myself, how can we deal with people who understand reality in such different ways?

2.4.2 In Between

Gradually, my ontology of realism was being transformed. At first, the transformation was instrumental, helping me to meet technical sustainability goals. I was required to manage people from diverse cultures, as well as social and economic realities, as Brazil is a diverse country. As a result, ways of talking, motivating and managing were quite different from person to person. Additionally, since I was a sustainability manager in a large multinational industry, I managed several stakeholders, both internal and external. To help with this, I enrolled on an MBA at one of the best business schools in Brazil. My thought process at that time was, "now I will learn the 'technique' to manage all these stakeholders and their various interests". The MBA helped me to understand various technical issues (finance, accounting, etc.), as well as managerial issues (strategy, marketing, etc.). However, I understood that there was no absolute truth in managing people. Additionally, the MBA did not teach me about either people development or self-development. Now, I understand that the vast majority of MBAs in the world focus on an ontology of realism. As such, the techniques that are taught aim to predict and control a so-called objective external world. Personal development is not usually a focus on MBA courses. For me, this is strange: people's inner worlds are completely forgotten. How can a leader become





the very best she or he can be to then help others to develop to their maximum potential? I believe that we cannot help others if we cannot help ourselves. How can a leader help people to develop in order to make a real contribution to both their company and society? How can a leader really motivate people? Financially motivated strategies alone do not work particularly well in a broadly connected and competitive world. Many leaders suggest that this, in fact, never works, and only makes situations worse, turning people into machines to achieve goals, regardless of the methods used. Human beings are complex; although financial compensation is important, most people want to contribute to something bigger than themselves, to be part of a larger purpose. I have heard from different successful leaders that their secret was integrating people's humanity and helping them to find their own voices; when this happens, the company, people and society develop together.

2.4.3 Sustainability Narratives through the Ontology of Relativism

After working for more than a decade for different industries, I worked for an international consultancy company in the area of sustainability. I helped organizations throughout Brazil and part of Latin America. At that time, I heard many different narratives on sustainability. I spoke to people from various fields and roles, ranging from CEOs, PhDs, and leaders of different spiritual traditions, to machine operators and so-called ordinary people. Contexts varied from industries, universities and communities to governmental agencies. The range of different narratives was vast. During this time, I also participated in a transdisciplinary training course, taught by philosophers, psychologists, engineers, administrators and leaders of various traditions in Brazil. Then, the diversity of sustainability narratives has grown even more. All of these experiences intertwined and strongly shook the ontology of realism that I had previously learned. Objective and controllable reality were becoming increasingly more distant from my reality. For me, sustainability became less a way of "doing" than a way of "being". During that time, the sustainability narratives that challenged me the most were the following:

- Reality is subjective, and control is illusory.
- There is not a single reality, but several, which are constructed individually and collectively.

- Predicting and controlling nature is more illusory than real.
- People are continuously constructing their realities, both individually and collectively.
- We cannot objectively study or control people.
- Nature is part of ourselves, and an unlimited use of its resources affects us directly.
- Tackling the sustainability challenge relates mainly to becoming aware of subjective reality, then constructing a more sustainable one.

Now, years after experiencing these narratives, I understand that they are part of the ontology of relativism. In this ontology, "realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature [...] and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110).

I began this study full of certainties regarding sustainability. A solid academic background combined with decades of hands-on experience in this area provided me with the illusion that I already knew enough. However, after experiencing different challenges, combined with reflection on fundamental philosophical questions, my certainties began to dissolve one by one. This was not an easy process. I had to die, metaphorically, along with some of my certainties to be reborn with new and more innocent views. This personal process of the dissolution of certainties is still in progress. The words of Ubiratan D'Ambrosio, a Brazilian scholar, inspire me in this journey: "To evolve from the arrogance of knowledge to the humility of seeking" (Pozatti, 2007, p. 9). In the following sections, I discuss sustainability narratives in more detail and propose areas for further research and practice.





2.5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As a human being, one has been endowed with just enough intelligence to be able to see clearly how utterly inadequate that intelligence is when confronted with what exists.

(Albert Einstein, 1932)

2.5.1 *A problem to be Solved or a Paradox to be Managed?*

Perhaps realism and relativism are two states of the same thing, in the same way that light can be both a particle and a wave. The following quote relates to this apparent duality of light. However, it could also exemplify the apparent duality of the ontologies of realism and relativism:

It seems as though we must use sometimes the one theory and sometimes the other, while at times we may use either. We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality; separately neither of them fully explains the phenomena of light, but together they do! (Einstein & Infeld, 1938, p. 263)

Similarly, sometimes, the realism ontology seems to make more sense, and at other times the relativism ontology; while at times either. Additionally, as both realism and relativism seem to be contradictory pictures of reality, it is important to be aware that they are only limited representations of the so-called reality, a reality that we cannot possibly grasp totally. In the words of Maturana (1987), "we shall put aside our daily tendency to treat our experience with the seal of certainty as though it reflected an absolute world" (p. 25). Therefore, to develop science on the assumption that we have a complete and true version of reality can lead to even more catastrophic results than we have seen already. If we continue to believe that we can certainly predict and control the entire reality of the planet, further aggravated by the "advanced" technology for destruction we have today, we could destroy all life on earth, including our own.

2.5.2 *Beyond Realism and Relativism*

Considering the limitations of both realism and relativism, if we look through realism or through relativism, we may see different but limited perspectives. In the words of Gadamer (2013), "Every finite present has its limitations [...] The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (p. 313). However, "[a] person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand, 'to have a horizon' means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it" (p. 313). Hence, it is important not to be limited by both realism or relativism, to not over-value either, but to see beyond them.

A concept that can help to see beyond is the "fusion of horizons", which is a Gadamer (2013) concept. This means that each person has a limited version of reality because of filters such as beliefs, preconceptions, prejudices, etc. There is a fusion of horizons when we are open to seeing through different perspectives. I believe that this openness requires humility and courage because, to be open we must detach from absolute certainties, not be limited to a single vision of reality. We must then also demonstrate humility to accept that we have a partial and limited version of reality. In the words of Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1526), "No man is wise at all times, or is without his blind side". We must have courage to deconstruct our own certainties at every moment, be in the empty space of not knowing, to look at the world with a more innocent gaze.

The fusion of horizons alone might not be sufficient to tackle the complex sustainability challenge. *Phronesis* (practical wisdom) can help to "figure out what is the right thing to do" (Klamer, 2016, p. 25). *Phronesis* is an Aristotelian term (2009); Aristotle considered it to be the principal form of knowledge, before technical (*téchne*) and theoretical (*sophía*) knowledge. "*Phronesis* involves the weighing of values, conditions, interests and findings in order to do the right thing" (Klamer, 2016a, p. 372). Several other scholars (e.g. Heidegger, 2010; MacIntyre, 1981; McCloskey, 2007) also argue about the importance of *phronesis* in research and practice. *Phronesis* "is often a chaotic process with a lot of talk, a going back and forth, the making of mistakes, and more talk and deliberation" (Klamer, 2016a, p. 372). In this way, *phronesis* is more than rational reflection. According to Heidegger (2010), it is a way of being-in-the-world (in his words, *Dasein*), being concerned and caring for it.



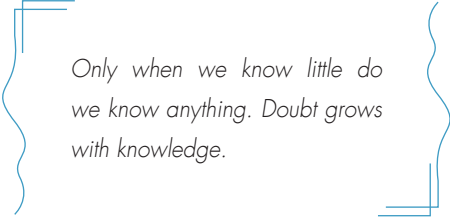


2.5.3 Implications

In this study, I have reflected on questions relating to the interplay between the assumptions on reality and the tackling of the sustainability challenge. In terms of implications for research and practice, I suggest the following:

- Awareness that both realism and relativism are limited interpretations of the so-called reality, a reality that is shaped by language (Flory, 2008; Maturana, 1978). As such, caution is important in sustainability research and practice, especially in relation to the sustainability of the planet. It is possible that we know little, and that our scientific methods are still rudimentary to understanding all of the complexity of nature's systems.
- In addition to the limitations of realism and relativism, research and practice on sustainability generally draw from these philosophical assumptions without explicit awareness of them (Vildåsen, Keitsch & Fet, 2017). Therefore, it is valuable to reflect before taking for granted the results and narratives of sustainability research and practice. Hermeneutical reflection can contribute to this.
- Fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013) can contribute to expanding the limits of realism and relativism. For this, it is useful to be open to considering multiple perspectives, from different philosophical assumptions, and to ask different questions.
- However, even an amplified horizon may not be sufficient to tackle the sustainability challenge. In which case, *phronesis* (Aristotle, 2009) can help to find the right way (Klamer, 2016), through being-in-the-world with concern and care (Heidegger, 2010). For this, I also suggest the inclusion of self-development in the sustainability programs of organizations and business schools.


Finally, to tackle the sustainability challenge, it might also be important to open space for uncertainty and doubt. In the words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832):



*Only when we know little do
we know anything. Doubt grows
with knowledge.*

Chapter 3







*Consciousness
expresses itself through
creation. This world we live in is the
dance of the creator. Dancers come and go
in the twinkling of an eye but the dance lives on.
On many occasion when I am dancing, I have felt
touched by something sacred. In those moments, I felt
my spirit soar and become one with everything that exists.
I become the stars and the moon. I become the lover and
the beloved. I become the victor and the vanquished. I
become the master and the slave. I become the singer and
the song. I become the knower and the known. I keep on
dancing then it is the eternal dance of creation. The
creator and creation merge into one wholeness of
joy. I keep on dancing...and dancing...and
dancing, until there is only...the dance.*

*(Michael Jackson, 1991. The Dance.
Album Dangerous)*





Individual Dimension

THE DANCE WITHIN:

*A Different Perspective to Tackle
the Sustainability Challenge*

Previous versions of this paper were presented at:

3rd Workshop on Business Ethics, held at EIASM (European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management) on November 2015 in Brussels – Belgium;

76th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, held on August 2016 in Anaheim – USA;

8th International Conference on Sustainability and Responsibility, held on November 2018 in Cologne – Germany.



Guidance: this chapter studies the individual dimension of the sustainability narratives. Thus, I reflect on the process of individuals (entrepreneurs, executives and professors) understanding sustainability.

Abstract

The world is currently witnessing a sustainability challenge that is unprecedented in the history of humankind. This challenge is composed of many interdependent crises, including global warming, climate refugees, and socio-economic crises. Different perspectives are called for to tackle this complex challenge. This study was inspired by my observations from 20 years of field research on sustainability. To understand its nature better, I have interviewed entrepreneurs, executives, and professors. Inspired by hermeneutical analysis, I found that an inner dimension of sustainability was present in the interviewees' understanding of sustainability, more in a sense of being. I analyzed the interviewees' answers thoroughly and found moments of clarity amongst the answers. Consequently, in this study I argue that sustainability consists of more complex layers than the technical issues it presents. Thus, to understand and tackle the sustainability challenge in a deeper way, it is not enough simply to teach individuals technical knowledge about sustainability. A more fruitful approach would be to include the "dance within" of individuals, i.e., the development of their inner sustainability.

Keywords: sustainability, narrative, inner sustainability, being, epistemology, ontology, hermeneutics

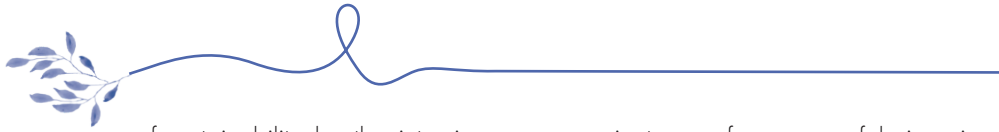
3.1 INTRODUCTION

Humankind is going through a unique moment, a time that presents a sustainability challenge that has the potential to influence all life on the planet. This challenge is manifested in many interdependent crises, such as climate change, refugees, biodiversity loss, poverty, and decreasing organizational and political trust. There are huge challenges ahead in all these areas, but perhaps we are forgetting a different perspective from which to tackle these issues.

This research was inspired by over 20 years' work in the sustainability field. As an expert, I helped companies, universities and communities with their sustainability practices and strategies. This work has offered me insight about sustainability from many different perspectives; over time, I began to understand that it is concerned with much more than the Brundtland definition of sustainable development as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987). Perhaps an important piece of this puzzle was being left out: despite the technical complexity this area involves, we might be forgetting something crucial. I realized that it was as if we were constantly looking out of a window, watching everything happening at a certain distance, involved with the complexity of technical solutions, but forgetting to consider another important perspective. After talking with thousands of people about sustainability over the course of a number of years, this different perspective presented itself. Besides having quite a technological background, I came to realize that sustainability is not just a way to make better use of technology (e.g. cleaner energy). It might also be a way of "being"; seeing the world with new "eyes". Following this insight, I started looking for approaches to sustainability that include human beings and our development, based on different sources: sustainability concepts and theories and human development theories, amongst others. On analyzing the existing concepts of sustainability, I came to realize that they barely consider the human dimension of this issue. Even the Brundtland definition does not elaborate on the understanding of the human dimension. Rather, the existing sustainability concepts focus mainly on the external, i.e., the technical, aspects of sustainability.

To gain a deeper understanding of this new perspective, I conducted semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs, executives and professors. I found that an inner dimension of sustainability was present more clearly in the understanding

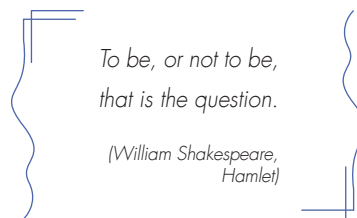




of sustainability by the interviewees, more in terms of a sense of being, in a complementary way to the outer (external) dimensions of the literature. Furthermore, I hypothesized that, to understand and tackle sustainability in a deeper way, it would be necessary to focus attention on inner sustainability, in addition to outer sustainability. On this basis, I analyzed the interviewees' answers thoroughly and found moments of clarity amongst the answers. I also reflected on ways to develop inner sustainability.

This research has been inspired by the approach of hermeneutical analysis (Gadamer, 2013; Heidegger, 2010; Ricoeur, 2016). Also, I use a dance-based metaphor (Ricoeur, 1974, 1974b) throughout this paper to describe the process of insight as it occurred in the course of the research. The results have academic implications: I suggest broadening the understanding of sustainability concepts, by considering the "dance within". It also has practical implications for organizations and universities: I propose that attention should be paid to including awareness of inner sustainability as well as outer sustainability. Including this "dance within" as an approach to understanding sustainability might be the key to moving forward in tackling the sustainability challenge.

3.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES



3.2.1 Definitions of Sustainability

Sustainability is a concept used in different sectors worldwide. However, we must consider what exactly academics and practitioners are referring to when they discuss sustainability. In the literature there are many definitions of sustainability. Additionally, different terminologies are used, such as sustainable development, corporate sustainability, and ecological sustainability. Table 3.1 shows a summary

of the different definitions of sustainability described in management literature, demonstrating that there is no standard definition for sustainability (Bansal & Song, 2017; Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). However, despite all the different definitions of sustainability, they seem mainly related to the Brundtland report's (WCED, 1987) definition of sustainable development, which is as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). However, this definition has been criticized by various academics. An example is Banerjee (2003), who states that the "Brundtland definition is not really a definition; it is a slogan" (pp. 151–152). One of the problems of the Brundtland definition is that it is based on needs, which are relative and difficult to address. The question therefore becomes, in a planet of scarce resources combined with societies of people with significant socio-economic differences, how we can differentiate between needs and wants. Given that the wealthiest people on the planet have their own needs that they aim to satisfy, it can be assumed that they have different "needs" than the poorest ones. The wealthiest people need still more to meet their needs, while the poorest people need more just to stay alive. In the end, neither group has their needs met. To further complicate the issue, the operationalization of the needs of future generations is also problematic. In words attributed to Juan Martinez-Alier, "individuals not yet born have ontological difficulties in making their presence felt in today's market for exhaustible resources" (Banerjee, 2003, p. 152). It is difficult to consider what the future needs of individuals could be, and how to make the unknown needs of future generations present in current decisions, especially when the truth is that we cannot even satisfy the needs of the people currently living on this planet.

Despite the criticisms and its limitations, the Brundtland definition of sustainable development has continued to be explored by a number of researchers, who have proposed various constructions and meanings, as shown in Table 3.1. For example, Sharma and Henriques (2005) proposed a definition of corporate sustainability based on the Brundtland definition. Khavul and Bruton (2013) used the Brundtland definition of sustainable development to define sustainability, using both terms interchangeably, as synonyms. However, when considering the concept of sustainable development as the basis for the definition of sustainability, it considers the environment as a means for achieving the end of providing the needs of people, now and for future generations. This contributes to our relating with the environment in an instrumental way, considering the environment as just a means to some end.





In the organizational dimension, this implies that the environment is considered as an instrument for achieving the means of the organization's development. For example, Neubaum and Zahra (2006) defined corporate sustainability based on growth of the organization. This means that, "despite claims of a paradigm shift, the sustainable development paradigm is based on an economic, not ecological, rationality" (Banerjee, 2003, p. 141). In fact, it seems that development in terms of the sustainable development definition is almost another name for economic growth, i.e., whether the economy will grow enough to provide for the needs of present and future generations. This looks like the logic of instrumentalism, the "business as usual", applied to the environment. Thus, applying the concept of sustainability through the concept of sustainable development seems to neglect the environment itself.

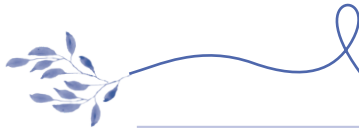
3.2.2 Outer Sustainability

After further analyzing the different definitions of sustainability in the management literature (Table 3.1), I realized that the outer (external aspects) of sustainability were clearly represented; however, inner sustainability ("dance within", to use the dance metaphor) was not very present. This means that the concept of inner sustainability that I had experienced through talking to numerous people about sustainability over many years, were not represented in the sustainability concepts in the literature. In analyzing the existing sustainability concepts more thoroughly, I noticed that some authors mention this human dimension of sustainability, but without developing it further. Gladwin, Kennelly, and Krause (1995) defined sustainable development as "a process of achieving human development" (p. 878), but from an external point of view (related to individuals' choices), not in terms of inner, human development. Shrivastava (1995), on the definition of ecologically sustainable development, refers to people "who are conscious of limits of the natural environment to support growth" (p. 938), but also without advancing the idea of inner sustainability; not delving deeper into what it means to be conscious of our natural limits. Starik and Rands (1995) have defined ecological sustainability as "the ability of one or more entities, either individually or collectively, to exist and flourish" (p. 909), but without developing further on this inner flourishing of humans. Further, the most current definitions of sustainability (e.g., Hart & Dowell, 2011; Khavul & Bruton, 2013; Scherer, Palazzo, & Seidl 2013) do not even mention inner sustainability; the current focus is primarily and solely on external dimensions of sustainability.

TABLE 3.1 | Sustainability related definitions in literature

TERMINOLOGY	DEFINITION	REFERENCE
Sustainable development	"is a process of achieving human development (widening or enlarging the range of people's choices; United Nations Development Programme, 1994) in an inclusive, connected, equitable, prudent, and secure manner. Inclusiveness implies human development over time and space. Connectivity entails an embrace of ecological, social, and economic interdependence. Equity suggests intergenerational, intragenerational, and interspecies fairness. Prudence connotes duties of care and prevention: technologically, scientifically, and politically. Security demands safety from chronic threats and protection from harmful disruption" (p. 878).	Gladwin, Kennelly and Krause (1995)
Ecologically sustainable development	"refers to people behind economic development who are conscious of limits of the natural environment to support growth. It is 'development that allows the present generation to meet our current needs, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs'" (p. 938).	Shrivastava (1995)
Ecological sustainability	"is the ability of one or more entities, either individually or collectively, to exist and flourish (either unchanged or in evolved forms) for lengthy timeframes, in such a manner that the existence and flourishing of other collectivities of entities is permitted at related levels and in related systems" (p. 909).	Starik and Rands (1995)
Sustainable development	"The Brundtland definition is not really a definition; it is a slogan, and slogans, however pretty, do not make theory" (p. 151-152).	Banerjee (2003)
Ecologically sustainable industry	"is a collection of organizations, with a commitment to economic and environmental goals, whose members can exist and flourish (either unchanged or in evolved forms) for lengthy time-frames, in such a manner that the existing and flourishing of other collectivities of entities is permitted at related levels and in related systems" (p. 319).	Russo (2003)
Corporate sustainability	Uses the Brundtland definition: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.	Sharma and Henriques (2005)





Corporate sustainable development	Based on extending the principles underpinning sustainable development to the level of the firm: 1. Environmental integrity through corporate environmental management; 2. Social equity through corporate social responsibility; 3. Economic prosperity through value creation (p. 199-200).	Bansal (2005)
Sustainability	Building a society in which a proper balance is created between economic, social, and ecological aims. For businesses, this involves sustaining and expanding economic growth, shareholder value, prestige, corporate reputation, customer relationships, and the quality of products and services. It also means adopting and pursuing ethical business practices, creating sustainable jobs, building value for all of the company's stakeholders, and attending to the needs of the underserved (p. 628).	Szekely and Knirsch (2005)
Corporate sustainability	The ability of a firm to nurture and support growth over time by effectively meeting the expectations of diverse stakeholders (p. 121).	Neubaum and Zahra (2006)
Sustainable development	One of the three key strategic capabilities in the natural resource-based view (NRBV) (along with pollution prevention and product stewardship); has evolved in two distinct areas: clean technology and base of the pyramid (BoP) strategies (p. 1470).	Hart and Dowell (2011)
Sustainable development	"rests on three principles: environmental integrity, social equity, and economic prosperity" (p. 259).	Scherer, Palazzo, and Seidl (2013)
Sustainability	"meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (p. 287).	Khavul and Bruton (2013)

While conducting this literature review, I realized that the sustainability concepts that are used worldwide, by companies and on the level of whole countries, seem incomplete. Using the dance metaphor, it is like we have been taught some rules of dancing that make no sense in the dance of life: the rules themselves could be interesting, but when they are included in a dance, they are not beautiful. I therefore decided to experience this dance through analyzing different dancers, to explore their understanding of it. These dancers of life—the interviewees in this research—are entrepreneurs, executives and professors.

3.3 TRUTH OR METHOD

[E]ither we adopt the methodological attitude and lose ontological density of the reality we study, or we adopt the attitude of truth and must then renounce the objectivity of human sciences.

(Ricoeur, 2016, p. 93)

3.3.1 Hermeneutics

This research is inspired by hermeneutics, more as an ontology than as an epistemology. I aim to be as transparent and clear as possible about the findings and insights encountered during this research. However, in the search for a deep understanding, I am aware that this study is not completely objective. I have written this section with the aim of clarity and transparency.

Hermeneutics derives from the Greek term *hermeneuein*, which means “to interpret”. Hermeneutics is considered to be an important reflecting reference, where a multiplicity of interpretations and understandings can collide and bring inspiration (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Ricoeur, 1974b). This multiplicity of interpretations and understandings is what I was searching for in the interviews conducted for this study. To interpret these interviews, I used as inspirations the following principles of hermeneutics:

Part and whole: also denominated as the “hermeneutic circle”, where the part can be understood from the whole, and the whole can be understood from its parts.

Pre-understanding and understanding: the process of understanding as more important than its results, or the process as its own result (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

It is also important to emphasize that there are different types of hermeneutics; for this research, I draw upon the alethic approach (Gadamer, 2013; Heidegger, 2010; Ricoeur, 2016). Alethic hermeneutics is based on the idea of “revelation of something hidden, rather than the correspondence between subjective thinking and objective reality” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 95). More specifically,





I focus on the field of poetic hermeneutics, where this idea of the hidden forms an underlying pattern of metaphor. Additionally, according to Ricoeur, "whereas texts may be identified on the basis of their maximal length, metaphors may be identified on the basis of their minimal length, that of the words" (1974, p. 96). Therefore, a metaphor can help to understand the meanings of long texts, which in this research are the transcribed interviews, which I analyzed through the dance metaphor outlined above.

3.3.2 Research Setting

To comprehend and tackle the sustainability challenge is important worldwide, but even more urgent and relevant for specific regions, such as the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), where the urgency to deal with the complexity of this challenge is augmented by the intense economic activities and the fast pace of growth. Brazil offers a clear illustration of such developments, serving as a representative for the BRICS area. Brazil is a growing economy that also holds an important part of the planet's remaining natural ecosystems. Nonetheless, Brazil is unlikely to meet the future effectively; given the current complex sustainability challenge it faces, such as the deforestation of the Amazon, the huge socio-economic differences, the pollution of air, water and soil, all related to economic activity. Therefore, Brazil as a research setting represents an important example of the sustainability challenge in a complex environment.

3.3.3 Interviewees

To understand how sustainability is perceived by individuals, I interviewed entrepreneurs, executives and professors. The interviews with entrepreneurs and executives aimed to understand the sustainability challenges through the "lens" of companies. The interviews with professors aimed at understanding the sustainability challenges through the point of view of universities, which help build current and future paradigms.

Twenty people were interviewed all in all; fourteen of them were entrepreneurs, six were executives, nine were professors. It is noteworthy that some of the respondents belong to more than one group; for example, some are both entrepreneur and professor. The respondents come from a variety of national, ethnic

and educational backgrounds and age groups (33 to 74 years). Although most of the participants are Brazilians, there was also an Argentine, a German, a Mexican, a Peruvian and a Portuguese, all living and working in Brazil. One interview was conducted in English, three in a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish; all the other interviews were in Portuguese. Nine interviewees were men and eleven were women. All respondents have at least a bachelor degree and some of the professors have a PhD degree. The interviewees' educational backgrounds are: anthropology (one interviewee), business administration (three), chemistry (one), economics (one), engineering (five), fine arts (one), journalism (one), law (two), mathematics (one), psychology (two), social work (one), veterinary medicine (one).

Interviewees were recruited from my professional network and also from recommendations that some interviewees then made. Eleven interviewees are from my professional network and nine were recommended by other interviewees. I invited people via email or direct phone calls. I conducted all the interviews in person, in Brazil. The complete interviews consisted of nine open-ended questions. The interviews were all voice-recorded and video-recorded, and were transcribed in full. To protect the respondents' identity, they were all assigned pseudonyms when quoted. Also, particular personal episodes were concealed and only their principal groups were mentioned (entrepreneur, executive or professor).

3.4 ANALYSIS

The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes, in seeing the universe with the eyes of another, of hundreds of others, in seeing the hundreds of universes that each of them sees.

(Marcel Proust)

I interviewed entrepreneurs, executives and professors. Based on the literature and my professional experience, I asked questions, in the interviews I conducted, about each interviewee's own definition of sustainability, the importance of sustainability for them, their professional relationship with sustainability, their thoughts about

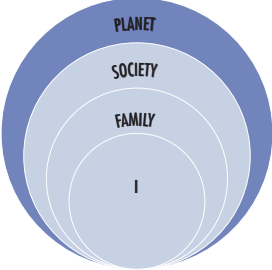
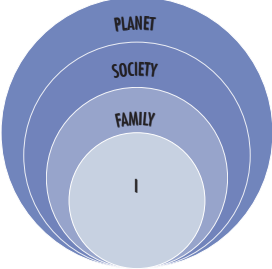
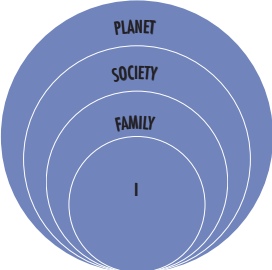
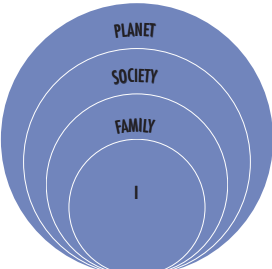


corporate sustainability in Brazil, their understanding of the motives of corporate sustainability in Brazil, their ideals in terms of corporate sustainability, their thoughts on sustainability development in Brazil and abroad, and finally their ideas on people development for sustainability. To analyze the interviews deeply, I transcribed them in their entirety, and following I proceeded with the analysis. This phase consisted in selecting interview quotes manually, interpreting and structuring the text from the interview transcripts.

3.4.1 Analysis of the Meaning of Sustainability for the Interviewees

I asked the respondents: what is sustainability for you? The answers to this question have shown that nearly all respondents place environmental issues in the definition, either directly or indirectly. Moreover, considering the dimensions of sustainability, there are divergences in the answers. Some consider just the environmental dimension, while others consider other dimensions. To analyze this more clearly, I did schematic drawings, putting in stronger colors the dimensions presented in each answer. I used the part and whole principle of hermeneutics, which brought the pattern of interpretation as these concentric circles, with the sustainability related dimensions growing from the center, from a small part like "I" to "Family", "Society" and "Planet". And vice versa, from the whole as the "Planet" to the part as "I". This led to the "Planet" dimension, when the interviewees mentioned something about the environment in their definition of sustainability. Similarly, when the interviewees mentioned some related concept of humanity/people, I considered it in the "Society" dimension. Additionally, "Family" and "I" dimensions were related to the mention of something related about the family of the interviewees, and the interviewees themselves, respectively. Table 3.2 shows these dimensions with sustainability definitions of the interviewees.

TABLE 3.2 | Sustainability definitions by the interviewees and the corresponding dimensions

SUSTAINABILITY DEFINITIONS OF THE INTERVIEWEES	RELATED DIMENSIONS
I view sustainability as an attitude of using the products generated from natural resources at least once more , always with a view to minimising the extraction of virgin natural resources . (Cesar, professor, January 2015)	
Gro Brundtland [...], which is the idea that you must produce and consume today without exhausting resources, so that future generations will also consume and produce. (Diego, entrepreneur, April 2015)	
Sustainability for me is you take care of yourself ; thereafter you take care of your surroundings. It has to do with care for the planet , care for people , respect. Mostly I think it has to do with respect; you live in a way that respects yourself and respects each other. (Beatriz, entrepreneur, January 2015)	
Sustainability for me is to join internal work , is to know how this 'internal home' runs, in terms of thoughts, feelings, desires and emotions. And from that I can create a being, I can be a human being who will take care of the external environment as well. So without taking care of this internal ecology, which means taking care of my internal landscapes, there's no way I can take care of the external. (Sofia, professor, January 2015)	



The interviewees' answers varied from the technical, considering sustainability from an external perspective, to the inclusion of the interviewees themselves, becoming part of the definition of sustainability in the form of taking care of their inner sustainability. In comparing these responses combining with the answers of thousands of people on sustainability for over 20 years, I felt that there was something bigger than just the differences on them. An internal cause seemed to exist in these responses, greater than simply attributing them to a difference in responses. It seemed like each person had a different "lens" with which he/she saw the world. It appeared as if each respondent had adopted their own epistemology, their very own way of seeing and understanding the world. Interestingly, all these respondents were highly educated; at the very least, they had a bachelor's degree. Some had a PhD degree earned from top international universities. All these interviewees also had professional experience that was, in some way, related to sustainability. Thus, what seems important is not what respondents know, but their way of knowing, namely their epistemologies (Kegan, 1982, 2000). In the words of Kegan (2000) "we do not only form meaning, and we do not only change our meanings; we change the very form by which we are making our meanings, we change our epistemologies" (p. 52).

3.4.2 The Epistemology of Sustainability

Epistemology is related to the philosophical grounds of knowledge. The knowing of sustainability depends on the relationship between what is object and to what one is subject to. "Any way of knowing can be described with respect to that which it can look at (object) and that with it looks through (the "filter" or "lens" to which it is subject)" (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 51).

On the other hand, ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and being. What is reality? And how do we perceive this reality? It is noteworthy that "the word 'perception' comes from the Latin expression *per capire* which means 'through capture' and carries with it the implicit understanding that to perceive is to capture the features of a world independent of the observer" (Maturana, 1998, p. 6). This world independent of the observer is related to the relationship between subject (the observer and the filters that one is subject to) and the object (what is perceived). However, scholars (e.g. Gadamer, 2013; Maturana, 1978; Maturana & Varela, 1987) argue that this duality between subject and object, i.e., the

independent world of the observer is constructed through language. This is known as linguistic turn, where instead of language being used to describe reality, language is seen as the constructor of the so-called reality (Flory, 2008).

If language constructs reality, then language is also where the subject and object meet. In the words of Gadamer (2013): “Language is a medium, where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together” (p. 490). Thus this research focuses on this meeting point, i.e., language, and more specifically it focuses on the understanding on sustainability. Finally, understanding sustainability in this research is an inner dance, from epistemology to ontology, from knowing to being. Then, “understanding ceases to appear as a simple mode of knowing in order to become a way of being and a way of relating to beings and to being” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 4).

3.4.3 *A Moment of Clarity*

“Sustainable development is not a way of doing; it is a way of being” (Nogueira, 2011). This is a statement made by Marina Silva, former environmental minister of Brazil. So, what if sustainability is indeed not just a way to make better use of technology (e.g. cleaner energy) but is also a form of “being” in a different way? In this way, Jo Confino (Editor of *Guardian Sustainable Business*) argues that when an individual is woken up to a new reality, a great organizational transformation happens (Confino, 2014). He refers to a study by Professor Lynda Gratton, a British organizational theorist who has conducted research in more than 60 companies that have initiated sustainability programs. “She found that in almost every one of the companies she studied, at least one person had gone through a personal epiphany. There was a moment of clarity, where they realized that their power and ego meant far less than their responsibility to do the right thing and not carry on with business as usual” (Confino, 2014: 100). In Gratton’s own words:

What do we know about those people? [...] When I look at those leaders, they are people who I would say have taken both an outer journey and an inner journey. Now business schools and corporations are very good at the outer journey. You know, we are very good at training people in business strategy, on how they do accounts and so on. And that, by the way, is really important because if a leader can’t do that, then we don’t





have a corporation. The inner journey is really about how the leaders have found their voice, their courage, their authenticity. And what we found is that the inner journey seems to be really important to people who have been prepared to stand up. (Confino, 2012, 5:23-6:09)

This means that the inner journey (or the dance within) is important in order to embrace sustainability. The development of this dance within in the words of Kegan (2000): "if one is not to be forever captive of one's own theory, system, script, framework, or ideology, one needs to develop an even more complex way of knowing that permits one to look at, rather than choicelessly through, one's own framework" (Kegan, 2000, p. 53). To do it one needs to disturb the balance of the subject-object relationship, as example are the moments of clarity. Following are some moments of clarity, part of the interviewees' dance within.

3.4.4 Moments of Clarity with the Interviewees

Following are sustainability through some moments of clarity of the interviewees, looking at things through their eyes. The first statement is from a professor, who says that humanity has lost the path of sustainability at some point in history. However, ancient human communities already were aware of the notion of sustainability, in an unconscious way.

At some point we lost the way, but human communities from certain ancient cultures were already aware of the notion of sustainability. Perhaps it was not through rational consciousness, but with an empirical consciousness, a more organic one. (Davi, Professor, January 2015)

However, it seems that some people are in the process of finding this path again, in a more aware way, through moments of clarity. What follows is a description of moments of clarity from a former president of international companies, and also from an entrepreneur:

What I went through, my experience, my walk through the corporate world, came to me in a moment when my body and my conscience told me stop! I do not know how or when, because I think it was not one moment, it was a traveled path, but for two years I was in [...] in a challenge that led me to raise my awareness of being. You have to change what you're doing and

have to do something else, different, and that is when I changed. (Arthur, entrepreneur, January 2015)

I was part of this rush of everyday; I did not care much in terms of stopping to think about restoring balance [...]. So recently I decided I had to stop, had to stop because in this rush, where was all that I was beginning to criticize in others and in myself? Where was this balance? [...] And then I changed everything, restructured everything, although kept doing the same things [but differently]. (Fernanda, entrepreneur, January 2015)

In these examples, through new ways of seeing the world, both individuals showed how they changed their ways of working. The former company president decided to completely change his job and build his own company, in which he was able to work sustainably, the way he believes. The entrepreneur changed the way she works in her own company, applying new concepts of sustainability, or as she says, working towards restoring balance.

Next, I will present the aggregated moments of clarity from answers of interviewees, in themes related to sustainability. The process of identification of these themes (or patterns of interpretation) involved the following steps: I first searched for main patterns in the interviews. Patterns of interpretation refers to the general set of interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) of the transcribed interviews. This involved exploring individual interviews for the patterns that were explicitly stated or assumed and then comparing the results intertextually to discover the patterns that transcended individual interviews and were present in other interviews. I moved from the part (single interviews) to the whole (all the interviews, their context and my own experience on sustainability) and vice versa, inspired by a hermeneutic analytical process in order to search for main patterns. These main patterns are described below.

Sustainability from different dimensions: the interviewees mentioned sustainability from different points of view. The micro-level of the individual was mentioned; as well as the macro-levels like the organization, the society and the planet. The following are examples of such answers:

I cannot stop thinking about sustainability levels; you have the micro-level, which is the individual, the individual with his attitudes and his mindset that contribute to society, and can contribute towards a more sustainable





community [...]. And then you go to the level of greater unity, that is to say the level of organizations. And the sustainable organization would have stability in terms of environmental issues, economic issues and social issues [...]. And then you ascend towards a larger plan that would refer to a country, a society and a territory where these issues also have to be harmonized. [...]. So from the point of view of sustainability, you need to have your supporters well settled, well attended in the various dimensions of sustainability. So that's one point, this is how I see it, sustainability is multidimensional. (Gabriel, professor, January 2015)

I think that there are certain levels. First of all, I want to live well in my immediate environment. And so, I also have to influence my environment, to some degree. So, what can I do? And then I also have other people in mind. And so, I think that it is a core aspect. I really want to keep in mind, this is very difficult, but what I want to do is to keep in mind...what the best manner is with which to live and to be, to live with other people and in the environment, so, I think this is one thing. There is also a spiritual aspect to this. So, it is very important for me not to do things that are harmful, in a sense not to create bad karma. (Paulo, entrepreneur, January 2015)

Sustainability as a direction, not a clear path: some respondents mentioned sustainability without ready-made models, with challenges that are different every time. So, pre-established models may not work for situations that are nonlinear. Following are some examples of these answers:

When it comes to sustainability, we seek a ready recipe, but we do not know how to be sustainable; it is a process. We have examples, we have ways and directions. But I usually also say that sustainability is like the horizon: it does not exist, it is not touchable. However, it's something I know I can walk towards, as it inspires me to step beyond. (Amelia, entrepreneur, January 2015)

I think sustainability is in line with natural self-organization. What does this mean, only at the moment we'll know, so I think sustainability is not linear because it is an observation in the present, you do not have more models, you will have to leave models. You'll have to have a look at it, enter as if in a dance to see what's going on, and go in that direction or that or that, watching the endless possibilities it has. (Eva, entrepreneur, January 2015)

Concluding, sustainability is complex, it has a nonlinear dynamics, which changes all the time. Then, recipes for static situations may not work, because the relationships of a dynamic situation change all the time (Wheatley, 2006).

Nature's principles: although sustainability may not have a clear path and may not have ready-made recipes, some respondents mentioned concepts having to do with nature, such as tips that can be used along the path. Thus, several respondents mentioned the concept of interdependence. Some respondents also mentioned other principles having to do with nature, such as diversity. Here are some examples of these responses:

Sustainability for me is closely linked to the question of how ecosystems function. An ecosystem follows certain principles. [...] First, all life happens in the network that is a series of interconnected elements. [...] Interdependence has to do with this interconnection, that is the function of an element which cannot be fully replaced by another element. [...] There is diversity, nature is expressed in different ways, and when we speak in terms of human community, then we have cultural diversity. [...] These various animals and plants are associated sometimes with competing and sometimes with cooperating. [...]. Energy flows and cycles of materials exist, so there is no waste in nature, everything is recycled, closed loops, except that these cycles have duration that is often much bigger than a human existence. (Amelia, entrepreneur, January 2015)

I think if the person understands the amplitude of solutions... because from the moment the person understands that he is part of a larger cycle in the world, which he influences and is influenced by everyone, then I think he can choose their sustainability, he can choose what level he wants to accept. (Victor, entrepreneur, April 2015)

There is no exaggeration of accumulation and there is no feeling of lack. There is a feeling that the forest gives according to what is needed, according to the cycles, then we respect needs and cycles. So that to me is sustainability. (Davi, professor, January 2015)

Taking into account the experience of over three billion years of evolution of Earth's ecosystems, the basic principles of nature might be used to understand and tackle the sustainability challenge. These basic principles are described by the





living systems theory as composed by interdependence, recycling, cooperation, flexibility and diversity (Capra, 2006). These principles were intuitively mentioned by some interviewees.

To take care of the external environment, it is important to take care of the internal environment: this conclusion appeared in the respondents' answers. It seems that the unsustainable way we are relating with the planet is an externalisation of what is inside us. Following are some examples of this finding:

Take care of the environment, which usually people say, which refers to the external environment. And for this to become integrated, complete, you have to take care of the internal environment as well. That's what creates an entire environment, organized and harmonious. So sustainability for me has to do with adding this internal work. (Sofia, professor, January 2015)

Sustainability has to do with this, taking care of all that I do and of who I am so that I can perpetuate it. (Eva, entrepreneur, January 2015)

What we do with the body of the earth is what we do with our own body, so it's important to me because it guides me in my work of consciousness. In this sense of what I do with my body, is what I'll do with nature, what I'm doing with nature that is outside. Because the visible behavior, what is manifest, is not only here, it is the result of a tendency that is also inside. So for me it's also a guide because I'm doing it. What's inside of me that is not harmonious? So then I end up not caring when I throw trash on the floor. (Camila, professor, January 2015)

In some way the respondents were referring to what has been found before by great leaders of humanity, such as Gandhi: "Be the change you want to see in the world". This conclusion seems to imply an externalization of what is inside people. Therefore, when people have troubled relationships with themselves, they may lack harmony as human beings, in regard to themselves and to their bodies. Then people may remain in the same troubled relationship with what is outside them, too. Thus, to take care of the external environment, would be important to take care of the internal one.

3.4.5 Moments of Clarity within the Researcher

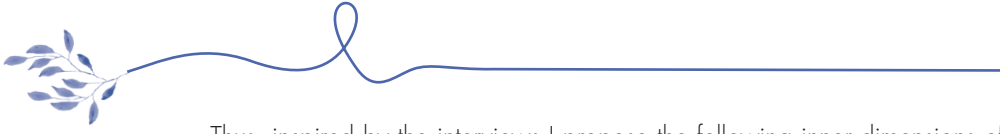
This research started nearly 20 years ago. As an expert in sustainability I advised and also learned from thousands of people and hundreds of organizations in Brazil and South America. This experience has offered me insight about sustainability from many different perspectives. And despite having a background in engineering, after some time I began to realize that sustainability is not just as a way of knowing or developing technologies for it, but also a way of being. After talking for some years with different people, in different contexts and organizations, I started to realize that some people understand sustainability in a deeper, ontological way. This study aimed to understand it better. Then, to understand the inner dimensions of sustainability more deeply, I further analyzed the interviews. As stated by Alvesson & Käréman “the empirical material, carefully constructed, thus forms a strong impetus to rethink conventional wisdom” (2007: 1266). I then proceeded in selecting interview keywords manually, interpreting and structuring the data from the interview transcripts. Every time I found a keyword related to the human, internal dimension of sustainability, I put this keyword in a mind-mapping. I also added in the mind-mapping the phrase referring to this keyword, and the name of the interviewee who told it. Table 3.3 presents the initial results of this analysis, showing the inner dimensions of sustainability found with their related interview quotes.



TABLE 3.3 | Inner dimensions of sustainability and interview quotes

INNER DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY	INTERVIEW QUOTES
BALANCE	<p>That each of us look for this balance, to start first by me, for those who are next to me, and then all this organizational culture that will generate around this sustainability. (Fernanda, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p> <p>For me sustainability is a balance, it is the respect and balance of both the person and the group, in the part where you can maintain or achieve this balance, it is a cascade effect. [...] And this for me is the basis of sustaining something, has to have this balance to be able to grow and evolve. So, this is something that I apply in my personal life, in my professional life, but also in my personal life. (Patricia, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p> <p>I think the word that links the concept for me is balance, dynamic balance, not a static balance. That's when several sources, various resources, several elements of various realms have an interaction that has movement, but where there is no disrespect, no exaggeration, where it is not too much for one part and less to the other part. It applies also to internal sustainability, to one's quality of life. When you have dynamic balance, everything is in a right measure, things do not overlap excessively, one part does not enslave the other part. When you see this within business management, it is the company interacting with the environment, the inner world and the outside world in a way that does not prey, neither what is outside, nor what is inside, not to sacrifice a part in function of another. (Camila, professor, January 2015)</p>
CARE	<p>Is to take care of the environment, which usually people talk about, that is this external environment. And for this to be integrated, complete, has to take care of the internal environment as well. So that's what creates an entire, organized and harmonious environment. So, sustainability for me is to join this inner work [...]. And from that I can create a being, I can be a human being who will take care of the external environment as well. So, without taking care of this internal ecology, which means taking care of my internal landscapes, there's no way I can take care of the external. So, this for me is the essence of sustainability. (Sofia, professor, January 2015)</p> <p>Because if you do not take care of yourself, of your universe, how can you care for the planet? So, I think this awareness, it is interconnected so you really have a life linked to sustainability, then you really understand what this concept is. (Alice, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p> <p>Sustainability for me is you take care of yourself; thereafter you take care of your surroundings. It has to do with care for the planet, care for people, respect. (Beatriz, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p>

LOVE	<p>Sustainability for me is this, it's love to live, love to all forms of life (Alice, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p> <p>Sustainability passes through love. [...] because it cannot be just intelligence, because then you cannot have close relations with the other. So I think love is compassion, it's a good way. (Helena, entrepreneur, February 2015)</p> <p>We do not need arrogant professionals, we need more cooperative professionals, more loving with each other, more loving with nature. (Amelia, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p>
RESPECT	<p>So, in order to have this awareness, you have to first respect life within yourself. So, what you ingest, your thoughts, your attitudes, all this is sustainability for me. It's the way you live, it's the quality of being human that you are. (Alice, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p> <p>So, we do not have a real respect for our ancestry, which includes the planet and the earth. So, it's a different source, we have a different root, we would need another approach to bring sustainability that would help us heal this sick root. (Sofia, professor, January 2015)</p> <p>This respect for the other, respect for life itself. People are dying inside, and they do not realize it. And there's no way you can value life if you do not value your own life. (Amelia, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p>
WISDOM	<p>It's something I believe a lot, I think when we can unite intelligence with love, intelligence with wisdom, intelligence with care of the other. Because intelligence alone is not enough for us, it needs to be united with other things so that we are an integral human being. (Helena, entrepreneur, February 2015)</p> <p>The main problem, I think, is still how people think and how they see the world. Because to understand sustainability at heart, in my opinion you have to be open to other things. And if you are educated following directions or following the same thinking or following processes without thinking, then it is very difficult to understand sustainability, because it is too abstract. So, you do not care if the world ends in 50 years if you use so many things or bio-things because you want to enjoy the moment now. If you are not connected, if you do not know that what you do now can influence the future, it is very difficult to act with this wisdom. (Paulo, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p> <p>The human being does not move just to have food, car, apartment, shares on the stock marketing; there is something more. Values, principles, wisdom and all this nourishes. So, I see people who engage with sustainability in a deeper way, they combine business with these areas. (Amelia, entrepreneur, January 2015)</p>



Thus, inspired by the interviews I propose the following inner dimensions of sustainability: balance, care, love, respect, wisdom. This does not mean that they are the only ones. It just mean that these dimensions are the ones that I found through my interpretation of the interviews. To understand how these dimensions correlated, I put the names of these dimensions in post-its and randomly distribute them on a wall. Then, I reorganized these post-its in several different forms. Following, I found the form that seemed to make the most sense intuitively, with the dimension “love” in the center and the other dimensions (balance, care, respect, wisdom) around it. The image of a solar system came first, with the analogy of “love”, as the “sun” of this solar system, which illuminates the others. Thereafter, I rethought this model as an atom, where love would be the nucleus, which keeps the other dimensions together in “balance”. Then I reflected that the dimension balance would not be a separate dimension, but is what kept the system cohesive, as if they were the orbits of the other dimensions. Figure 3.1 shows the schematic model of it:

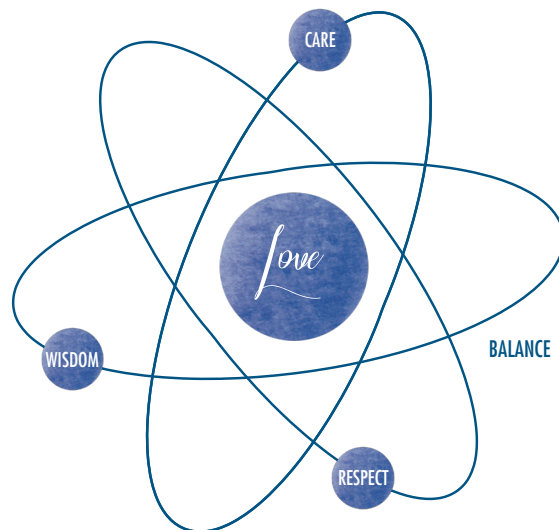


FIGURE 3.1 | Schematic model of the proposed inner dimensions of sustainability

3.5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The real change takes place within our souls; the real change takes place when the unfolding of our souls reflects in some deep, mysterious way the unfolding of the universe. Then it is—when an individual person dares to live within his or her truth—that the world is changed, forever.

(Vaclav Havel, 1936-2011)

3.5.1 Sustainability as More than Technical Challenges

At the beginning of this paper, I reflected on the different definitions of sustainability and realized that they mostly focus on the external, i.e., on the technical challenges of sustainability. However, there are different kinds of sustainability challenges. Heifetz and Laurie (1997) distinguish between two kinds of challenges, those they call “technical” and those they call “adaptive”. Technical challenges are not necessarily easy, nor are their results necessarily unimportant or insignificant (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). For example, learning how to understand the complex calculation of a country’s greenhouse-gas emissions or how to interpret a product’s intricate environmental life-cycle analysis are examples of technical challenges, and accomplishing these tasks are very important for sustainability. They are nonetheless “technical”, because the skill set that is necessary in order to perform these complicated tasks is well known. However, many, if not most, of the sustainability challenges that we face today require something more than just incorporating technical skills. For instance, understanding how to go beyond facts and logics to manage stakeholders with seemingly conflicting demands, or how to go beyond instrumentality to relate to people and the planet in a deeper way, are examples of adaptive challenges. To meet the adaptive challenges of sustainability, I suggest that it is important to transform individuals’ ways of knowing, i.e., to develop their inner sustainability, which is related to the subject-object relationship.



3.5.2 *Inner Sustainability*

Mauro Pozatti (2007), a Brazilian professor of medicine, states that the many challenges presented by the world are a reflection of our personal fragmentation. Individuals may think that it is “outside” (externally) that all sustainability challenges are occurring. However, on projecting them to the external level, individuals are perhaps just running away from the responsibility of creating a world critical to life’s survival. This means that the development of inner sustainability is important for embracing sustainability; however, how can we develop this inner sustainability?

Relatively new understanding in terms of adult development has come through constructive developmental theory (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Kegan, 1980, 1982, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). This theory builds on the work of Piaget (1954), thus it can be referred to as a neo-Piagetian theory (McCauley et al., 2006). Constructive developmental theory studies the subject-object relationship. This theory “looks at the process it calls development as the gradual process by which what was ‘subject’ in our knowing becomes ‘object’” (Kegan, 2000, p. 53). This means, in terms of our metaphor, a dance within, the development of inner sustainability: a process by which what was subject (the filters we look through) becomes object (we recognize and look at those filters, without choicelessly being defined by them).

Constructive developmental theory is part of the theoretical basis of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000, 2009). Transformative learning aims at “changes not only in what we know but changes in how we know” (Kegan, 2000, p. 49), i.e., changes in epistemology. It is noteworthy that transformative learning is different of informative learning, which “seeks to bring valuable new contents into the existing form of our way of knowing” (Kegan, 2000, p. 49). Thus, while informative learning aims to bring new contents to a way of knowing, transformative learning aims at changing our very way of knowing. Additionally, according to Paulo Freire (1973, 2002), a Brazilian scholar, the more conscious we become, the more commitment to transformation we assume. This has to do with adopting the most critical approach toward reality that we possibly can and involves an “unveiling” in order to understand it and to come to know the myths that deceive us and that help maintain the structure of our dominant reality. Thus, I argue that is important to foment learning that is transformative in order to develop inner sustainability.

"Transformation refers to a movement through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). These reified structures of meaning are changed through a movement in the subject-object relationship: "Transformative learning is often prompted by a disorientating dilemma, an experience that causes a person to question what he or she has previously believed to be unquestionable" (Wiessner and Mezirow, 2000, p. 333). This can happen through a life crisis or personal choice. In a life crisis, the dominant narratives that previously made sense to the individual can suddenly become meaningless. This is because, due to the moment of crisis, the narratives are questioned and can be deconstructed. Thus, what was subject (the individual "is had" by what it is subject to) can become object (the individual can "have it," or consider it in an independent way). The same happens in the case of personal choice, but in this case, it is through one's willingness to reflect deeply on one's dominant narratives. Transformative learning studies how to foster this process of inner transformation. As human reality is intersubjective, reflective discourse can lead "towards a clearer understanding by tapping collective experience to arrive at a tentative best judgment" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 11). There are certain conditions that can facilitate this kind of discourse. According to Mezirow (2000), examples of these conditions for the participants are: freedom from coercion and distortion; openness to different perspectives (empathy and caring about others' thoughts and feelings); awareness about the context of ideas and ability to critically reflect on assumptions (including their own); equality of opportunity to participate in the different roles of discourse; willingness to look for understanding, etc. Additionally, according to Mezirow (2000), examples of conditions for the educator to facilitate the transformative learning include: creating a secure learning environment through empathy, emotional support and blocking out power relationships in communication; fostering autonomy in thinking, supporting free and full participation in discourse; thinking critically, assessing the validity of their own assumptions and helping assess those of the participants, etc.

In summary, using the dance metaphor, we are all dancers of life. The development of inner sustainability is a natural process of human development, but each person has his or her own speed, depending on how the person has internalized what they have learned during every life event. As Aldous Huxley has said that our experience is less what happens to us and more what we make of what happens to us. There are of course ways to encourage and thus speed up people's





development, but these are not straightforward: they require that the person wants to develop and engages in development with their body and soul, like a dancer does in order to improve. Perhaps this is the main task of leaders and educators, helping people to develop not only new skills, but also new ways of “being”, in order to understand the world with new eyes. This is similar to a dancer who becomes one with the dance and also becomes one with life, with the whole. In this process of evolution, people can increasingly understand and tackle sustainability challenges, which ultimately are the great challenges of life.

3.5.3 Final Reflections and Implications

This paper has explored the sustainability challenge through a different perspective. It takes into account a combination of inner sustainability and moments of clarity. During those moments of clarity with the interviewees, I identified some ideas in terms of sustainability:

- Sustainability from different dimensions: from the inner, human dimension to outer dimensions, such as those of organizations, societies, and the planet;
- Sustainability as a direction, not a clear path: the importance of openness to vulnerability and uncertainty to discover the path while walking;
- Nature-based principles: although sustainability does not have a clear path and does not have ready-made recipes, the principles of nature might be used as guiding points along the path;
- To take care of the external environment, it is important to take care of the internal environment: this concerns the concept of “inner sustainability” and the importance of taking care of the inner, human dimensions of sustainability.

In terms of my own moments of clarity as a researcher, I have argued that sustainability amounts to more than its outer dimensions. From the interview analysis, I have proposed the inner dimensions of sustainability as: balance; care; love; respect, and wisdom. I have also proposed a model for these inner dimensions of sustainability, with the dimension “love” in the center and the other dimensions arranged around it.


I suggest that academics should address, in sustainability concepts and studies, inner sustainability in a complementary way to outer sustainability. Another implication of this study concerns business schools: as highlighted by scholars, what is currently taught in business schools does not lead to sustainability in business, nor in society (Ghoshal, 2005; Waddock & McIntosh, 2009). I therefore suggest that a more fruitful approach would be to engage the humanity of the students, inspiring them to develop their inner sustainability. An additional implication of this study concerns practitioners: the sustainability challenge is complex, but I argue that it could be tackled by the consideration of different perspectives, allowing the occurrence of moments of clarity to be experienced by people working within organizations. I suggest that is important to help people develop not only their technical skills or their external world, but also their internal world, their inner sustainability.

Finally, sustainability is a complicated issue, presenting a range of complex challenges. However, to effectively tackle these challenges, I suggest broadening our viewpoint, looking not only outward but above all within ourselves. As the thirteenth-century poet Rumi once wrote:

*“I have lived on the edge of insanity
Wanting to know reasons
Knocking on a door
It opens
I’ve been knocking from the inside.”*

Chapter 4





We need red blood cells to live, and in the same way a business needs profits to live. However, the purpose of our life is more than to make red blood cells, and in the same way the purpose of business is more than simply to generate profits.

(Freeman, 2008)





Organizational Dimension

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SILENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE:

An Analysis of Sustainability Reports

* This paper has been accepted in a research publication, as follows:

Marques, A.C.C. (2018). "The Interplay Between Silence and Significance: An Analysis of Sustainability Reports". In C. Stehr, N. Dzialtzo & F. Struve (eds.), *Corporate Social Responsibility in Brazil: The Future is Now. CSR, Sustainability, Ethics & Governance*. Cham: Springer. ISBN 978-3-319-90604-1. Chapter DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-90605-8_4

Additionally, previous versions of this paper were presented at:

12th International Conference on Organizational Discourse, held at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on July 2016 in the Netherlands;

7th International Conference on Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility, held at Humboldt- Universität in September 2016 in Berlin - Germany.



Guidance: this chapter studies the organizational dimension of the sustainability narratives. Thus, I reflect on the deeper levels of its narratives; namely, antenarrative and fractal narrative.

Abstract

“Music is the silence between the notes”, Claude Debussy once wrote. It is through silence that we understand what is said. In this study, I have analyzed the meanings of what is not written (silences) in the sustainability reports of the benchmarking organizations on sustainability in Brazil. This analysis was conducted through reflexivity at different levels: the narrative, the antenarrative and the fractal level. It seems that the silences in these sustainability reports are related to the underlying antenarrative regarding the business case for sustainability. At an even deeper level, this suggests that the antenarrative on the business case for sustainability is related to the fractal narrative regarding the fear of scarcity and the competition for survival. This study offers a call to organizations, researchers and practitioners, that may be trapped in past paradigms and assumptions. It shows that a more fruitful approach would be making time for reflection and introspection.

Keywords: sustainability report, silence, narrative, antenarrative, fractal, Brazil, business case, benchmarking organizations, corporate sustainability, GRI

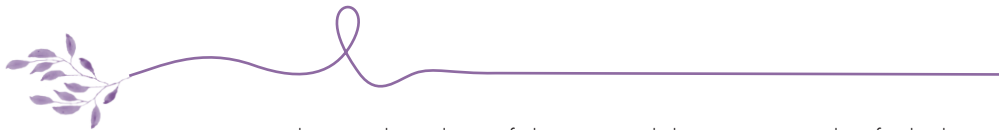
4.1 INTRODUCTION

It is through silence that we understand what is said. So, what do the silences in the examined sustainability reports mean? What do these silences reveal about the underlying narratives on sustainability by organizations? These are some of the questions that I aimed to answer through this study. To do this, I have first analyzed the meanings of what is not written (silences) in the sustainability reports under examination. Then, I have gone further in terms of the aims of this study, in order to understand the deep meanings of the main narratives on sustainability by organizations.

In a world with so many sustainability challenges, sustainability reports are a way to disclose to society how organizations deal with these challenges. Comprehending and tackling the existing sustainability challenges is important worldwide. It is even more urgent and relevant for specific regions, such as the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), where the urgency in terms of dealing with the complexity of these challenges is augmented by the intense economic activities in these countries and the fast growth pace. Brazil offers a clear illustration of these developments, serving as a representative for the BRICS area. Brazil is a growing economy that also holds an important part of the planet's remaining natural ecosystems. In addition, it is a country that is unlikely to meet the future effectively, given the current complex sustainability challenges it faces. These challenges include the deforestation of the Amazon forest, the widespread political and business corruption, the existence of large socio-economic differences, and the pollution of the water, soil and air, all due to economic activity. Therefore, Brazil as a research setting, represents an important example of sustainability challenges in a complex environment.

In this study, I have analyzed a number of sustainability reports by organizations in Brazil, which are part of the ISE (Brazilian Corporate Sustainability Index). Theoretically, these are the benchmarking organizations on sustainability in Brazil. These are large organizations listed on the São Paulo Stock Exchange, comprising of 33 organizations that represent sixteen sectors. All of them have followed the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards on sustainability reporting and disclosure (GRI, 2013, 2013a). Thus, I have used the GRI's standards as a reference for the analysis. Additionally, I have focused on the following GRI's principles, in defining the reported content: stakeholders' inclusiveness; sustainability context; materiality; and completeness (GRI, 2013).





During the initial analysis of the sustainability reports, I identified silences that did not seem to be in accordance with the current sustainability challenges that Brazil and the world face. These findings seem like a decoupling from the sustainability context, where these organizations operate. Then, I went even deeper into the analysis through reflexivity, which is an open way of reflection through different levels of interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). I analyzed the meanings of these findings at different levels: narrative, antenarrative and fractal. The narratives in this study are the sustainability reports themselves. Antenarratives are fragmentary formative ideas, which are earlier than narratives (Boje, 2001). Fractals are patterns found at various levels (Mandelbrot, 1977). It seems that the silences in the sustainability reports are related to the underlying antenarrative on the business case for sustainability. At an even deeper level, this suggests that the antenarrative on the business case for sustainability is related to the fractal narratives on the fear of scarcity and the competition for survival.

In terms of the implications for this study; first, it offers a call to organizations that may be trapped in past paradigms and assumptions. This study reveals that a more fruitful approach might be to embrace reflection and introspection in organizations, allowing ongoing conversations on purpose, values, and praxis. Another implication of this research concerns researchers and practitioners, in terms of making time to reflect on what is important to them as human beings, professionals, and citizens; then, it is important to valorize that, working to make it real in research and practice.

4.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences are usually the slaves of some defunct economist... it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.

(Keynes, 1936, p.384)

4.2.1 Sustainability and Corporate (Social) Responsibility

Although sustainability and corporate social responsibility focus on similar issues, this research focuses solely on sustainability. The reason is that I want to explore in depth the underlying meanings of the main narratives on sustainability by organizations, and have chosen the sustainability lens to conduct this investigation. However, as this book is related to corporate social responsibility (CSR), I will provide a brief description of my view on it.

I see two ways of understanding CSR: disintegrated or integrated in the business purpose. The disintegrated way sees the purpose of business as mainly involving profits, and then the companies that follow this view normally integrate CSR to balance it. This disintegrated way, in the words of Edward Freeman, is “a little bit like the story of gangsters who are bad during the week, they do bad things, but they are on church on Sunday so they’re ok” (Marques, 2016). On the other hand, the integrated way of understanding CSR refers to an organization going deep in their purpose, in terms of understanding how to create value for all its stakeholders (including the planet). I think that this way is more related to the idea of corporate responsibility, because the “social” in the middle can give an idea of the social’s separation from the business model. In conclusion, I think that what is important is how an organization integrates CSR in their business model, in their purpose, and in their ideas about creating value for stakeholders.

Next, I will return to the focus of this study and will explore the foundations of sustainability reporting.

4.2.2 Sustainability Reporting

“Reports should explain how business strategy and plans help tackle society’s urgent issues and build a prosperous future”. This is the conclusion reached by a group of civil society leaders and experts, in a research study conducted by Global Reporting Initiative (GRI, 2015, p. 21). GRI is an international independent organization that provides one of the world’s most widely used standards on sustainability reporting and disclosure (Fernandez-Feijoo, Romero and Ruiz, 2014). GRI standards are some of the most used for organizations worldwide; all the sustainability reports I have evaluated for this research use them. Thus, I have used these standards



on sustainability reporting and disclosure as a basis for the analysis (GRI, 2013, 2013a). The latest version of these standards is the G4, which describes the following principles for defining reporting content: stakeholder's inclusiveness, sustainability context, materiality and completeness (GRI, 2013). Next, I present and discuss every one of these GRI's principles.

Stakeholders' inclusiveness: according to GRI (2013), "the organization should identify its stakeholders, and explain how it has responded to their reasonable expectations and interests" (p. 16). This principle focuses on processes of engagement that the organization can realize with its stakeholders, to understand and respond to their expectations and interests. The stakeholders' engagements must be described in the sustainability report, including the organization's criteria for defining which stakeholders to engage, and how these engagements influence the report's content and the sustainability practices of the organization (GRI, 2013).

Problems: Adams and Frost (2008) have argued that this accountability to stakeholders is undermined when data reflect negatively on the organization, because there is an apparent self-interest for the business case for sustainability, involving what the gains / losses for the organization would be. O'Neill (2016) has reinforced the idea of the business case for sustainability, by stating that sustainability reports have to become more relevant to shareholders, emphasizing the financial value of an organization's sustainability efforts. Similarly, a study conducted by GRI (2015) concluded that sustainability reports have to focus on shareholders' needs, thereby contradicting their own principle of stakeholders' inclusiveness. On the other hand, Sandberg and Holmlund (2015) have highlighted that the purpose of sustainability reports is to give stakeholders information about the performance of the company more than just financial discretion. Additionally, some scholars (e.g. Coupland, 2005; Waddock, 2007) have argued that organizations are social creations; therefore, they depend on society's willingness in order to continue their existence. In the analysis of sustainability reports, I have evaluated the way that organizations address the expectations of their stakeholders, and not just their shareholders; thus, this analysis goes beyond the business case and is in accordance with the principle of stakeholders' inclusiveness in GRI standards.

Sustainability context: according to GRI (2013), "the report should present the organization's performance in the wider context of sustainability" (p. 17). This means that the performance of the organization has to consider the existing

environmental and social thresholds, on both a local and a global level. The essence of sustainability reporting involves the way that an “organization contributes, or aims to contribute in the future, to the improvement or deterioration of economic, environmental and social conditions, developments, and trends at the local, regional or global level” (GRI, 2013, p. 17).

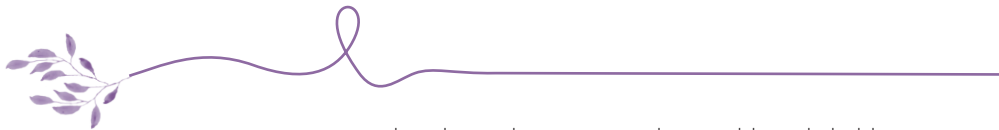
Problems: according to Baue (2014), “the problem is, most so-called corporate sustainability programs focus just on the micro level, advancing incremental improvements in company social and environmental performance, as compared to past years or to peers – but not as compared to limits and thresholds in the broader social and environmental levels”. In the sustainability reports that I analyzed for this study, I considered the sustainability context, as defined for the GRI standards. Thus, I analyzed whether organizations consider their performance in the wider context of sustainability, not just on the micro level of the organizations themselves.

Materiality: this “is the threshold at which Aspects become sufficiently important that they should be reported” (GRI, 2013, p. 17). Materiality is a GRI principle, focusing on the aspects that should be reported because they are relevant (according to their impacts) and important to an organization and its stakeholders. According to GRI (2013), “the report should cover Aspects that reflect the organization’s significant economic, environmental and social impacts; or substantively influence the assessments and decisions of stakeholders” (p. 17). It is worth noting that for GRI, materiality also goes beyond the business case. Thus, for GRI (2013a), “materiality for sustainability reporting is not limited only to those Aspects that have a significant financial impact on the organization” (p. 11).

Problems: several scholars, such as Adams and Frost (2008), have questioned whether most sustainability reports accurately and completely disclose the social and environmental impacts of organizations. Therefore, companies’ stakeholders are not always provided with all the needed information for their assessments and decisions. In the analysis of sustainability reports, I have evaluated whether the materiality of organizations reflects their main impacts. I also evaluate whether their materiality reflects the themes that can influence the assessments and decisions of stakeholders. I have used the GRI as guidance (2013b), as it is a document that identifies the material themes that are relevant to stakeholders, in relation to different sectors.

Completeness: according to GRI (2013), “the report should include coverage of material Aspects and their Boundaries, sufficient to reflect significant





economic, environmental and social impacts, and to enable stakeholders to assess the organization's performance in the reporting period" (p. 17). Therefore, this GRI principle focuses on how much of all the information that has been identified as material to an organization and its stakeholders is reported. In the sustainability reports that I have analyzed for this study, I have evaluated this principle in an indirect way, mainly through analyzing the principles of materiality, sustainability context and stakeholders' inclusiveness.

These are the GRI's principles for defining reporting content. They provide some directions and advice. Summarizing the core of the main issues of an organization in a short sustainability report is not an easy task. There are questions such as: what to report? what not to report? In the end, an organization chooses what it conceives as important to report, and what they should be silent about. This decision is based on the organization's understanding of concepts of sustainability, and on its own paradigm on business. All this is aligned with stakeholders' engagements and consultations, who share with the company what they think is important to report. Thus, stakeholders help a company define its materiality. Nevertheless, besides the inspiration that is provided through the stakeholders' consultations, in the end a company defines what will be silenced and what will be reported.

Using the metaphor of music, harmony is a musical concept where the notes are different, but need to sound well together in order to create good music. If the sustainability report is referred to as the overall "music" of an organization, then the musical notes of the company include what the company finds important to report, combined with the notes of stakeholders - what they consider important to report and combined also with the notes of the sustainability context - what is important for the planet's sustainability. All these elements have to become harmonious, beautiful music. Furthermore, the silences in the music also help in the harmony; but too much silence and the absence of important notes (information) can mean that the music is not beautiful. In the same way, the absence of important information in a company's sustainability report can mean that it becomes disharmonious.

In the next section, I will present the methods that I have used to analyze and understand these silences in the sustainability reports.

4.3 METHODS

Nothing is gained from clinging to the Scientific Method, or to any methodology except honesty, clarity, and tolerance.

(McCloskey, 1983, p. 482)

4.3.1 Data Sources

For this study, I have analyzed a number of sustainability reports of companies in Brazil that are part of the ISE (Brazilian Corporate Sustainability Index). ISE is a tool for benchmarking the performance of companies listed on the BM & F Bovespa (São Paulo Stock Exchange), in the context of corporate sustainability. I have chosen to analyze ISE's companies, as they represent the organizations that theoretically would have the best management of sustainability in Brazil. In addition, these are large companies, which have a significant environmental and social impact throughout Brazil. The ISE portfolio that I have studied ran from January to December 2016. This portfolio comprises of 33 companies, representing sixteen sectors (classified according to sectors of GRI, 2013b). The number and name of the organizations by sectors are shown in Table 4.1. It is worth mentioning that some of the companies belong to more than one sector.



TABLE 4.1 | Sectors*, numbers and names of the analyzed organizations

SECTOR	NUMBER	ORGANIZATIONS
Electric Utilities and Independent Power Producers and Energy Traders	10	AES Tietê, Cemig, Cesp, Copel, CPFL, EDP, Eletrobrás, Eletropaulo, Engie, Light
Banks, Diverse Financials and Insurance	6	Banco do Brasil, Bradesco, Cielo, Itaú, Santander, SulAmerica
Forest and Paper Products	3	Duratex, Fibria, Klabin
Retailing	3	B2W, Lojas Americanas, Lojas Renner
Chemicals	2	Braskem, Weg
Ground Transportation	2	CCR, Ecorodovias
Telecommunication Services	2	Telefônica, Tim
Aerospace and Defense	1	Embraer
Building Products	1	Duratex
Consumer Durables, Household and Personal Products	1	Natura
Construction and Home Building	1	Even
Electrical Equipment and Machinery	1	Weg
Healthcare Providers and Services, and Healthcare Technology	1	Fleury
Food and Beverage Processing	1	BRF

*Classified according to sectors of GRI (2013b).

4.3.2 Data Collection

I identified the sustainability reports by searching on the website of the GRI database (2017), and on the websites of the organizations themselves. It is noteworthy that I found the sustainability reports mainly in the area of 'Investor Relations' of the organizations' websites. Therefore, it seems that these reports consider investors their main target audience. Additionally, most organizations have sustainability reports that could be downloaded as PDF files. The only exception was the company SulAmerica, which just had information on its website, but did not include any sustainability report that could be downloaded. As I studied the organizations which were in ISE in 2016, I analyzed the sustainability reports from 2015. The reason for this is that the organizations that entered the ISE 2016 had been evaluated by ISE with information from 2015. The exception here was the company B2W that did not have the 2015 sustainability report; so, I studied its 2014 sustainability report. The other exception was the company Oi, which involved a special situation as it left the ISE's portfolio in the middle of 2016. So, I did not evaluate this company's report.

4.3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis was inspired by Alvesson and Sköldbberg's idea of reflexivity, as "the very ability to break away from a frame of reference and to look at what it is not capable of saying" (2000, p. 270). Then, I broke away from the frame of reference of 'business as usual' (the business case), being conscious of my own frame of reference (as described below). With this awareness on the existing frames of reference, I looked through the narratives within the sustainability reports, to understand what was not being said, i.e. the silences they included.

The researcher as an insider: I have been working with sustainability and corporate responsibility in private, non-profit and government sectors in Brazil and South America for a long time. This work of nearly twenty years has offered me insight into sustainability practices and concepts from many different perspectives. Additionally, during the last seven years, I have worked specifically with sustainability reports in various organizations in Brazil. I have helped to improve the quality of what informs these reports through assessment processes. So, I am an insider of the sustainability reporting business.





This is both an advantage and a disadvantage in my role as a scientific researcher. It is an advantage because I am able to read a report and can easily understand its intrinsic issues, the technical and business concepts it refers to, the plays on words included, and the reporting amplitude, amongst many other issues. My experience in the field is also a disadvantage, as it inevitably means I have already constructed beliefs, pre-assumptions and paradigms that I refer to. So, in this research, I have used reflexivity to balance all these issues.

4.4 THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

*People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dared
Disturb the sound of silence.*

(Simon & Garfunkel, 1964)

4.4.1 Setting the Stage

The world is experiencing a time of sustainability challenges that are unprecedented in the history of humankind. These sustainability challenges range from climate change, war refugees, poverty, the loss of biodiversity, to instabilities in the global political context. In this scenario, organizations are at a crossroad. They can help society to solve these challenges, or they can contribute to making them even worse. This research aims to contribute through adopting a reflexive approach on these issues, shedding light on the underlying meanings of the main narratives on sustainability by organizations. To achieve this goal, first I have analyzed the silences in the sustainability reports. After that, I have gone deeper into the meanings of these silences, trying to identify the underlying narratives.

4.4.2 *The Approach of the Analysis*

This analysis was inspired by the document “Sustainability Topic by Sectors: What do Stakeholders want to Know?” (GRI, 2013b), which proposed some material aspects for each specific sector. The document is a contribution of GRI to help organizations identify some relevant material aspects. Then, I verified in this document (GRI, 2013b) the inventory of material aspects for each sector of the companies in this study (see the sectors in Table 4.1). Next, I combined these material aspects identified in the GRI document within the context of sustainability of each sector in Brazil. This resulted in a list of the relevant material aspects for each sector in the context of Brazil. However, the purpose of this study was not to go through each possible material aspect in each sector in the Brazilian context, but to shed light on the basis of the narratives within sustainability reports, through an analysis of the silences they include. Therefore, from that initial list, in this study I chose to focus on three material aspects that I considered the most relevant ones for each sector. The motives for choosing each one of the material aspects is described within each sector below. After choosing the three relevant material aspects for each sector, I began evaluating the silences regarding these particular aspects found in the sustainability reports. For this, I evaluated whether a company had considered a specific material aspect, and the form in which it was considered. Then, if a company had considered a particular material aspect, I verified whether it expressed the material aspect itself (in a written direct way), or within a broader material aspect, or whether it had just been considered partly. The reason for this was to understand how silent a company was for each material aspect.

What follows is my analysis of such silences found in the sustainability reports.

4.4.3 *Electric Utilities and Independent Power Producers and Energy Traders*

I started the analysis with the sector that had the largest number of companies in the ISE in 2015/2016. Ten companies of ISE 2015/2016 were part of the sector ‘electric utilities and independent power producers and energy traders’; these were: AES Tietê, CEMIG, CESP, COPEL, CPFL, EDP, Eletrobrás, Eletropaulo, Engie, Light. I will now present the Brazilian context of this sector and an analysis of each of the chosen three relevant material aspects.



Context: these companies operate mainly with hydropower (hydroelectric), which represents the largest part of the Brazilian energy matrix (ANEEL, 2017). This is followed by these energy sources: fossil, biomass, wind, nuclear and solar. A small fraction of Brazilian electricity is imported from neighboring countries. Table 4.2 shows the composition of electric power sources in Brazil.

TABLE 4.2 | Electric power sources in Brazil*

SOURCE	%
Hydric	61,546
Fossil	16,8332
Biomass	8,7433
Wind	6,5289
Nuclear	1,2404
Solar	0,0148
Import	5,0926

*According to ANEEL, 2017 (ANEEL is the National Electric Energy Agency in Brazil)

It seems that the sustainability impact of the companies within this sector is mainly related to the impact of hydroelectric endeavors, followed by thermoelectric, cogeneration, wind farms, nuclear power plants and solar power plants. These endeavors have significant environmental consequences, and it is because of this that I chose to evaluate the environmental dimensions of this sector. Analyzing the GRI (2013b) document regarding the material aspects involved in this sector, and more specifically looking at its environmental dimension, combined with the context of sustainability in Brazil, I came up with the following three relevant material aspects to verify in this sector: water management, GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions, and biodiversity and habitat management. Table 4.3 presents a summary of the analysis.

Next, I will explain the reasons that I chose each of these material aspects, along with the analysis of this sector's sustainability reports.

Water management: most of the companies in this sector have hydroelectric plants, representing approximately 61% of the electric power sources in Brazil (ANEEL, 2017). These hydroelectric plants use the energy produced by the movement of large amounts of water to generate electricity. As water is an important and scarce natural resource worldwide, I analyzed how and whether these companies consider material the management of the impact of water use.

Silences: the company Light considers this aspect within the material item of energy supply. In this case, the sustainability context is not completely considered; it is more an instrumental consideration, i.e., a means to achieve an end. Then, water management aims to achieve the end of issues related to energy security, with an impact on distribution. In the form that this is reported, it does not seem to be related to caring for natural systems. Additionally, there are two companies that do not consider water management a material aspect. However, one company (Eletropaulo) is only a distributor of the energy generated by other companies. The other company (CPFL) considers water relevant for stakeholders, but does not consider water management material, remaining silent about it. This is an awkward silence, because CPFL has several hydroelectric plants and dozens of SHPs (small hydropower) in several regions of Brazil.

GHG (Greenhouse Gas) Emissions: this is a theme of global importance, combined with the impact of this sector, especially in the case of thermoelectric plants (burning of fossil fuels) and cogeneration (burning of biomass). Thus, I verified the materiality of emissions of GHG.

Silences: Two companies (Cesp, Light) do not consider this item as material. It is worth pointing out that regardless of whether the materiality of this aspect is considered or not, all companies disclosed their emissions of GHG in their sustainability reports.

Biodiversity and habitat management: the construction and operation of power plants (mainly hydroelectric power plants) impact large natural areas and their corresponding biodiversity and habitat. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Environment (MMA), Brazil is considered home to the greatest biodiversity on the planet, translating into more than 20% of the total number of species on earth. Thus,





I have verified how and whether these companies consider material the aspects of biodiversity and habitat management.

Silences: Five companies (AES Tietê, CPFL, Eletrobrás, Eletropaulo, Light) do not consider this aspect material. In its report, AES Tietê describes that their plants are in areas of the Atlantic Forest and Cerrado, which are extremely important biomes in Brazil. Therefore, AES Tietê recognizes the importance of those biomes to the country, but does not consider this factor important enough for the company to be seen as a material aspect, remaining silent on its materiality.

Similarly, in its report CPFL recognizes biodiversity as an aspect that is relevant for stakeholders, but not relevant enough for the company to be considered material.

Likewise, Eletrobrás, the largest Brazilian electric power generation company, responsible for managing the largest hydroelectric plant in Brazil and the two Brazilian nuclear power plants, does not consider biodiversity a material aspect.

Light, once again, does not consider this aspect material; in fact, this company is basically silent on the materiality of any environmental aspect. Light's materiality is focused almost exclusively on the economic dimension.

Companies in this sector have a significant impact overall on biodiversity and habitat management, and therefore their silence on materiality regarding this aspect are loud. These silences signify a lot for Brazil, a country which is home to the planet's greatest biodiversity. Table 4.3 presents a summary of the analysis of the companies in this sector.

TABLE 4.3 | Analysis of material aspects in the sectors of electric utilities and independent power producers and energy traders

ORGANIZATION	MATERIAL ASPECTS ANALYZED		
	WATER MANAGEMENT	GHG EMISSIONS	BIODIVERSITY AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT
AES Tietê	+++	+++	-
Cemig	+++	+++	+++
Cesp	+++	-	+++
Copel	++	+++	+++
CPFL	-	+++	-
EDP	+++	+++	+++
Eletrobrás	+++	+++	-
Eletropaulo	-*	+++	-*
Engie	++	++	++
Light	++	-	-

Legend:

+++ : The organization considers this aspect material in a written, direct way.

++ : The organization considers this aspect material, but it is mentioned within a broader material aspect.

- : The organization does not consider this aspect material, it remains silent about it.

* Eletropaulo is a distributor of the energy generated by other companies; it does not produce energy.





4.4.4 Banks, Diverse Financials and Insurance

I continue the analysis by focusing on the sector with the second largest number of companies in ISE 2015/2016. Six companies in ISE 2015/2016 were part of the sector involving banks, diverse financials and insurance: Banco do Brasil, Bradesco, Cielo, Itaú, Santander, and SulAmerica.

Context: Brazil is one of the largest economies in the world, but also one of the countries with the most significant social and economic inequalities, according to The World Bank (2017). In view of this, organizations in this sector are often questioned about the high level of profitability that would result in economic distortions for society (Dantas, Medeiros and Paulo, 2011), taking up the argument that a high return would be achieved by charging high interest rates for people lacking resources and financial education. Representatives of these organizations commonly react to this view, by arguing that the reason for high interest rates would be due to the tax burden, the risk of default, and the administrative cost of maintaining an integrated and automated financial system (Dantas, Medeiros and Paulo, 2011). Therefore, as this sector has an important economic impact in Brazil, I evaluated its economic dimension.

I started the analysis with the material aspects involved in this sector, as proposed by this GRI's document (GRI, 2013b). Then, I combined these material aspects with the context of the sector's sustainability in Brazil. Thus, I analyzed the following material aspects in the economic dimension: social responsible investment (SRI) and local development; political funding and corruption; financial inclusion, accessibility and financial education. Table 4.4 presents a summary of this analysis. In what follows, I explain more about each of these material aspects, along with the analysis of this sector's sustainability reports.

Social Responsible Investment (SRI) and local development: Brazil is a country with huge social and economic differences, considered one of the most unequal countries in the world (The World Bank, 2017). In this context, social responsible investment and local development are important aspects for a more balanced society. Therefore, I analyzed how and whether these companies consider this aspect material.

Silences: Four companies (Bradesco, Cielo, Itaú, SulAmerica) do not consider this aspect material. Considering the context of Brazil, there are some awkward silences regarding this aspect's materiality.

Financial inclusion, accessibility and financial education: I have considered the context of Brazil, along with the finding that the majority of the companies in this sector does not consider the aspect evaluated material before, i.e., social responsible investment (SRI) and local development. Then, I analyzed whether these companies reported financial inclusion, accessibility and financial education as material.

Silences: Bradesco, Itaú and Santander do not consider accessibility material. Cielo does not consider material accessibility and financial education. SulAmerica does not consider material financial inclusion and accessibility. Again, considering the context of Brazil, these are awkward silences regarding these aspects' materiality.

Ethics, transparency and political funding: I have chosen this aspect because of the situation of corruption in Brazil, involving political funding by companies, which arguably has been one of the biggest corruption scandals in history (Watts, 2017). During the last few years, an extensive investigation on corruption has been conducted in Brazil, an operation that has been denominated "carwash". The carwash investigation discovered has involved "illegal payments of more than \$5 bn to company executives and political parties, (has) put billionaires in jail, (has dragged) a president into court and (has caused) irreparable damage to the finances and reputation of some of the world's biggest companies" (Watts, 2017). Thus, I wanted to verify how and whether these companies consider the aspects of ethics, transparency and political funding material.

Silences: SulAmerica does not consider ethics or transparency material. It is worth noting that the materiality matrix available on the SulAmerica website considers corporate governance and transparency important for the stakeholders and for the company, but it was not considered material, involving silence regarding these important aspects. Banco do Brasil, Cielo and Santander do not consider transparency material. Bradesco does not consider ethics material. Furthermore, as no company seemed to consider aspects related to political funding in their materiality, I analyzed whether they reported the GRI indicator G4-SO6, that is the "total value of political contributions by country and recipient / beneficiary" (GRI, 2013, p. 78). Two companies (Bradesco and SulAmerica) did not include a report on this indicator. These can be considered loud silences for Brazilian society. Table 4.4 presents a summary of the analysis of the companies in this sector.



TABLE 4.4 | Analysis of material aspects in the sectors of banks, diverse financials and insurance

ORGANIZATION	MATERIAL ASPECTS ANALYZED		
	SOCIAL RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT (SRI) AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT	FINANCIAL INCLUSION, ACCESSIBILITY AND FINANCIAL EDUCATION	ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY AND POLITICAL FUNDING
Banco do Brasil	+++	+++	+
Bradesco	-	+	+
Cielo	-	+	+
Itaú	-	+	+++
Santander	++	+	+
SulAmerica	-	+++	-

Legend:

+++ : The organization considers this aspect as material in a written direct way.

++ : The organization considers this aspect as material, but written inside a broader material aspect.

+ : The organization considers just a part of this aspect as material.

- : The organization does not consider this aspect as material, it remains silent about it.

4.4.5 Retailing, Forest and Paper Products

I continued the analysis by combining the remaining sectors with the largest number of companies in ISE 2015/2016, which involved Retailing and Forest and Paper Products.

Context: both sectors have a huge influence in a large number of suppliers, spread throughout Brazil. Additionally, both sectors employ a big number of people, in a direct and indirect way. Therefore, the work of these sectors involves important social repercussions; because of this, I chose to evaluate this sector's social dimensions. Analyzing the GRI (2013b) document about the material aspects of this sector, and more specifically looking at its social dimensions, combined with the context of sustainability in Brazil, I came up with the following three relevant

material aspects, to be verified in the context of this sector: relations with suppliers; occupational health and safety management; and people development. Table 4.5 presents a summary of this analysis.

Next, I will explain the reasons that I chose each one of these material aspects, along with an analysis of the sustainability reports of this sector.

Relations with suppliers: both sectors involve a supply chain as an important part of their business. Retailing involves a large number of suppliers for its large variety of products, while the field of forest and paper products normally involves a big number of suppliers for wood and other materials. Their impact in the supply chain is immense; therefore, I analyzed whether they consider their relations with suppliers' material.

Silences: One company (Klabin) directly considered relations with wood suppliers only material.

Occupational health and safety management: I chose to analyze this aspect, because the retailing sector employs a huge number of people who perform repetitive tasks. Additionally, the companies that produce forest and paper employ people who perform tasks that need intense health and safety care.

Silences: One company (Fibria) does not consider occupational health and safety management material. It is noteworthy that Fibria reported fatalities in its operations, during the last three years. This meant a very loud silence on the materiality of occupational health and safety management.

People development: I analyzed this aspect, due to the high number of people that these sectors employ. Additionally, people's development is an important social contribution from companies to society, especially in Brazil, as one of the most unequal countries in the world (The World Bank, 2017).

Silences: All the forest and paper companies (Duratex, Fibria, Klabin) consider this aspect in the context of broader material aspects. Table 4.5 presents a summary of the analysis of the companies in this sector.





TABLE 4.5 | Analysis of material aspects in the sectors of retailing & forest and paper products

ORGANIZATION	MATERIAL ASPECTS ANALYZED		
	RELATIONS WITH SUPPLIERS	OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT	PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT
B2W Digital	+++	++	+++
Lojas Americanas	+++	++	+++
Lojas Renner	+++	+++	+++
Duratex	+++	++	++
Fibria	+++	-	++
Klabin	+	+++	++

Legend:

+++ : The organization considers this aspect as material in a written direct way.

++ : The organization considers this aspect as material, but written inside a broader material aspect.

+ : The organization considers just a part of this aspect as material.

- : The organization does not consider this aspect as material, it remains silent about it.

4.4.6 All Remaining Sectors

To analyze all the remaining sectors, I analyzed the materiality of one aspect of each dimension: environmental, economic and social. Table 4.6 presents a summary of this analysis. Next, I will explain the analysis of the sustainability reports of all the remaining sectors.

GHG (Greenhouse Gas) Emissions: *Silences:* Two companies (Ecorodovias, TIM) do not consider this aspect material, they are silent in their materiality.

People development: *Silences:* Two companies (CCR, TIM) do not consider this aspect material, they are silent in their materiality.

Ethics, transparency and political funding - *Silences:* The company WEG does not consider ethics nor transparency material. Braskem, BRF, Even and Telefônica do not consider ethics material, which represents an awkward silence for the Brazilian context on corruption. Next, I analyzed whether the companies

reported the GRI indicator G4-SO6, that is the “total value of political contributions by country and recipient / beneficiary” (GRI, 2013, p. 78). Four companies (CCR, Embraer, Even, WEG) did not report this indicator, a very loud silent about this important aspect for Brazilian society. Table 4.6 presents a summary of the analysis of the companies in all remaining sectors.

TABLE 4.6 | Analysis of material aspects in all remaining sectors

ORGANIZATION	MATERIAL ASPECTS ANALYZED		
	GHG EMISSIONS	PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT	ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY AND POLITICAL FUNDING
Braskem	+++	++	+
BRF	++	++	+
CCR	+++	-	+
Ecorodovias	-	++	++
Embraer	++	+++	+
Even	+++	+++	+
Fleury	++	+++	++
Natura	+++	+++	+++
Telefônica	++	+++	+
TIM	-	-	+++
WEG	++	+++	-

Legend:

+++ : The organization considers this aspect as material in a written direct way.

++ : The organization considers this aspect as material, but written inside a broader material aspect.

+ : The organization considers just a part of this aspect as material.

- : The organization does not consider this aspect as material, it remains silent about it.



4.5 THE LEVELS OF SIGNIFICANCE

In the last section, some silences in the sustainability reports were presented, i.e., relevant information that had not been written there. Now, I will analyze their meanings through reflexive interpretation, which is considered a quadri-hermeneutics, as it is an open way of reflection through different levels of interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). The word reflexive indicates that the levels are reflected in one another (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 271). Then, the analysis is conducted at different levels of these silences, to understand how they are reflected in one another. To understand these levels, I will next present the concepts of living story, narrative, antenarratives and fractals. Figure 1 schematizes these levels.

Living story, narrative and antenarrative: living stories unfold in-the-moment-of-beingness (Bakhtin, 1993), i.e., they happen at this moment. Therefore, sustainability reports are not living stories; they are narratives that are narrated in retrospective sense-making (Boje, 2001). Another important concept is antenarratives, which are earlier than narratives (Boje, 2001). In this study, antenarratives are the fragmentary formative ideas in the sustainability reports, the building blocks of stories and narratives people construct in their organizations and the means by which people make retrospective sense of the world or anticipate the future (Boje, 2001; Perey, 2014). Additionally, to go even deeper, in what follows I will present the concept of fractal, which is dispersed in the antenarratives (Boje, 2001; Perey, 2014).

Fractal: the concept of fractal was developed by the mathematician Mandelbrot (1977). The most notable property of fractals is that their characteristic patterns are repeatedly found on any scale, so that their parts are similar to the whole (Capra, 1996). An example of fractals are the patterns of cauliflowers, with a small piece looking exactly like an entire cauliflower. Another example might be the small rocks in mountains, which resemble whole mountains. In short, nature is rich when it comes to fractals. The concept of a fractal is applied by scientists in different areas. One example is the work of Plowman et al. (2007), who applied the concept in organizations. In their own words: "the concepts of fractal patterns and scalability mean that, as in nature, similar patterns appear at various levels—the individual, group, and organizational" (p. 521). Another example is Perey's work (2014). Perey applied the concept of fractals in the field of sustainability, arguing that "when a perturbation is visited on a fractal, it affects all scales simultaneously". The analysis of the fractal in sustainability reports involves the understanding of

themes, concepts, assumptions, and rules that frame the basis of decision-making by people in the organizations (Perey, 2014). For these reasons, my first aim in this study was to shed light on the basis (fractal) of the narratives in sustainability reports. Then, practitioners and academics can be aware of these narratives, reflecting and acting upon them. Because according to the concept of fractals, when the basis of these narratives is changed, the whole system can be changed.

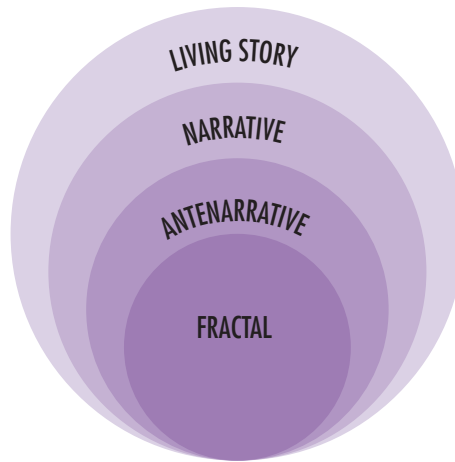


FIGURE 4.1 | Levels of significance in sustainability reports

4.5.1 *Reflexive interpretation of the silences*

I began by analyzing the narratives, which are the sustainability reports themselves. I verified the reporting by organizations on environmental, social, and economic aspects. I found some silences in the reporting of material aspects that are related to the sustainability context of the organizations. It is noteworthy that these organizations are all part of ISE (Brazilian Corporate Sustainability Index), and are then theoretically the benchmarking organizations on sustainability in Brazil. Therefore, these silences can influence all the other organizations there. Furthermore, these silences regarding important aspects seem like a decoupling from the sustainability context, where these organizations operate. At a deeper level, the main narratives in the sustainability reports are reflections of their antenarratives. To better understand the antenarratives, in what follows I will present the concepts of instrumental reasoning and substantive reasoning.



Instrumental reasoning is related to the means to achieve an end, the focus being more on the end and not much on the means. One example would be using any means to achieve the end of maximizing profits. On the other hand, substantive reasoning “focuses on what is important, on values and also on what is worth striving for” (Klamer, 2016, p. X). Substantive reasoning relies on *phronesis*, a term from Aristotle that means “practical wisdom”. Klamer (2016) remind us that it is “by *phronesis* that we figure out what is the right thing to do” (p. 25).

A number of scholars (e.g. Adams, 2002; Adams, Potter, Singh & York, 2016) have argued that the different motivations for companies undertaking sustainability and corporate responsibility practices tend to converge in two groups: first, it’s the right thing to do (consistent with substantive reasoning and *phronesis*); second, it’s good for business (consistent with instrumental reasoning and the business case). The analysis of the organizations’ sustainability reports from ISE 2015/2016 included references to both antenarratives. Companies like Cemig, EDP, Lojas Renner and Natura, which consider all three aspects of the analysis material in their sectors, in a written and direct way, maybe rely on substantive reasoning or *phronesis*, when considering their materiality. On the other hand, companies like CPFL, Light, SulAmerica and TIM that do not consider two of the three aspects of the analysis material, may base their decision on instrumental reasoning or on the business case for sustainability. In between are the other companies, that are maybe trying to find their voice and their harmony; maybe they struggle between substantive and instrumental reasoning. I understand that writing a sustainability report is not an easy task; I praise all the companies for writing this document. This analysis is just a reflection on three material topics, and does not claim to be the “truth”; I do not believe in an ultimate truth when it comes to sustainability reporting. My purpose is just to shed light on some silences, inspiring practitioners and scholars to rely more on substantive reasoning and *phronesis*, in order to figure out what is the right thing to do. Additionally, as the business case for sustainability was a persistent antenarrative in the sustainability reports that were analyzed, I will focus on more reflexive interpretation about it.

4.5.2 Beyond the business case

Several scholars (e.g. Ghoshal, 2005; Klamer, 2016; McCloskey, 1983) have questioned the business case. Barnett (2016) has stated that “the voluminous

literature supporting firms' ability to profit from corporate social responsibility (CSR)—the “business case” for CSR—has had the perverse effect of limiting firms' efforts to resolve critical issues facing society” (p. 2). Similarly, other scholars have questioned why companies just aim to increase shareholders' value. Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey and George (2014) have argued that “although adding shareholder value might be seen as part of the purpose of most businesses, shareholder value might be better positioned as a legitimate expectation of one segment of society” (p. 1228). In such a model, the increase in shareholder value would just be one part of a business's purpose. Waddock and McIntosh (2009) have added to this idea, by arguing that “shifting the purpose of the firm to encompass not just shareholder needs, but also societal, stakeholder, and ecological needs and interests” (p. 296).

These are new narratives for business that have been emerging worldwide, which involve an expanded idea on the purpose of a business, going beyond profit. However, can these new narratives be a possibility in the real world of business? Can organizations with a larger purpose be feasible, encompassing not only the interests of shareholders but of all stakeholders? These are questions that may emerge. It seems that the business paradigm involving a focus only on increasing shareholders' value is in the process of profound change. This paradigm, which in the past used to be the only possible one, has been changing, making more human organizations possible; this model is becoming a trend. There are however obstacles to it; in the words of Edward Freeman: “*The obstacles to a new narrative are simply our mindset from the old narrative*” (Marques, 2016). To go further with this, in what follows I will analyze the fractal of the business case for sustainability.

4.5.3 Understanding the fractal narrative

In a more profound level, antenarratives are reflections of fractals (Boje, 2001). Like in nature, the fractal patterns appear at various levels in organizations (Plowman et al., 2007). Then, what is the fractal narrative of the antenarratives on the business case for sustainability? Or, why do some companies still see their main purpose as maximizing profits? It seems that the antenarratives of the business case for sustainability are reflections of the fractal narratives on the fear of scarcity and the competition for survival, which at an organizational level are related to having the maximum resources to survive, to sustain oneself. To understand this better, I looked through a number of perspectives and disciplines.





In biology, Charles Darwin in his work "On the origin of species" (1859) wrote about the process of evolution, involving the natural selection of the strongest individuals, which was widely used in the business world to justify that only the strongest would survive, that this would be natural. Therefore, in the struggle for life, it was important to compete, in order to get the maximum resources to survive. Additionally, Adam Smith, in "The Wealth of Nations" (1776), wrote about the way that self-interest and competition can lead to wealth, and therefore to better survival.

It seems that this fractal narrative about the fear of scarcity, as well as about competition and survival, is deeply rooted in society, through the interpretation of some classics, as above. However, these earlier interpretations are now being questioned and reinterpreted. The new reinterpretations call attention to the meaning of the complete work of these scientists, not just some parts. For example, Adam Smith also wrote "The Theory of Moral Sentiments" (1759), reflecting on the importance of sympathy for others, and of being virtuous. Charles Darwin also wrote "The descent of man" (1871), where he argued about the importance of cooperation for the survival of the species, especially regarding mammals. Additionally, the winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences Elinor Ostrom (1990) analyzed societies that, instead of competing for the same natural resources until extinction, learned to cooperate to survive. Ostrom's work demonstrates that societies can thrive when cooperation exists.

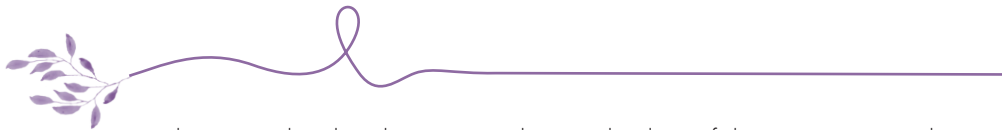
The fear of scarcity and the competition for survival are persistent fractal narratives, built both collectively and individually. This idea might be surprising, because for a very long time it was questioned: how can organizations survive if they do not maximize profits. It is not the case that maximizing shareholders' value is the real purpose of organizations? There is an interesting analogy between our purpose as human beings, and the purpose of organizations: "We need red blood cells to live, and in the same way a business needs profits to live. However, the purpose of our life is more than to make red blood cells, and in the same way the purpose of business is more than simply to generate profits" (Freeman, 2008). If one imagines our whole life, our dreams, our ideals, our relationships, our feelings, our accomplishments, in short, everything that can be imagined regarding the purpose of our life being reduced to simply focusing on producing red blood cells, this would sound strange or even absurd. However, maybe in the near future, it would also seem strange to reduce the purpose of organizations simply to the generation of profits.

Furthermore, at present, there are already people working in a different fractal narrative. One example involves a Brazilian businessman who is highly respected worldwide, the co-founder of Natura. Guilherme Leal has argued that “corporations are living beings, a dynamic set of relationships, and their longevity will depend on serving society and people” (The B Team, 2017). Additionally, McCloskey (1983), an economist and scholar, has argued that the “maximizing shareholder value” has been presented as a scientific theory by some ideological economists. However, it is not a neutral theory; it has a lot of ideological content, which is something that now may be corrected. Ghoshal (2005) has added to this, by arguing that “in essence, social scientists carry an even greater social and moral responsibility than those who work in the physical sciences because, if they hide ideology in the pretense of science, they can cause much more harm” (p. 87). Freeman, Wicks and Parmar (2004) have concluded that the “concern for profits is the result rather than the driver in the process of value creation” (p. 364). This is a sample of what scientific researchers and business people have been rethinking regarding the purpose of business. In what follows, I will discuss the purpose of organizations.

4.5.4 *Finding purpose and harmony*

In the previous section, it was shown that the purpose of organizations is being expanded, moving from just focusing on generating profits, i.e., increasing shareholders’ value, to something more. But what is this ‘more’? According to Klammer (2016a), this also involves organizations valorizing what is important to them, which is a process based on *phronesis*. It is not a rational process, therefore it “is often a chaotic process with a lot of talk, a going back and forth, the making of mistakes, and more talk and deliberation” (p. 372). Auster and Freeman (2013) added to this by arguing that “organizational values should be viewed as an opportunity for ongoing conversations about who we are and how we connect” (p. 39). It is understandable that organizations have little time for reflection and introspection but, as it is important for individuals to find their values and purpose, it may also be important for organizations to do the same.

Finally, to produce a harmonic sustainability report, the metaphor of music is helpful. I suggest that first, the organization needs to find its own musical notes, i.e., to understand in depth what is important, asking questions about its own purpose as an organization. The GRI’s standards do not have much of an influence at this stage,



as they are related to the intrinsic ideas and values of the organization. The next step would be to engage in a meaningful way with the stakeholders, being open to understanding what is important for them, finding their musical notes. Here, the GRI's standards and guidelines can help an organization understand the expectations of stakeholders. Alongside with understanding the 'notes' of stakeholders, the organization would also need to understand the notes of its environment, the planet itself, or in the GRI's vocabulary, the sustainability context. Then, the sustainability report would involve a combination of the musical notes of the organization, its stakeholders, and the wider sustainability context. All would be combined with some silence, in a beautiful and harmonic way.

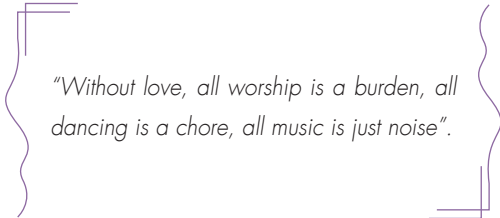
4.6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In a world with so many sustainability challenges, the role of organizations in them is being questioned. This study has explored some of the in-depth meanings of the main narratives on sustainability by organizations. The results suggest that the silences of relevant material aspects in organizations' sustainability reports are related to the underlying antenarrative regarding the business case for sustainability. In a more profound level, the antenarrative on the business case for sustainability seems related to the fractal narrative on the fear of scarcity and the competition for survival, old beliefs in a society constructed individually and collectively. This construction seems to be based on misinterpretations of studies from different fields, from economy to biology.

In terms of implications for this study, this suggests the importance of time for reflection and introspection, at both the individual and the organizational levels. To find what is important, the values, qualities, purpose, and praxis all need to be taken into account. Following that, these findings need to be put in practice. This may not be a rational process, but *phronesis* can help in the way. According to Klammer (2016), "*Phronesis* involves the weighing of values, conditions, interests and findings in order to do the right thing. It is often a chaotic process with a lot of talk, a going back and forth, the making of mistakes, and more talk and deliberation" (p. 372).

More specifically for researchers, the time for reflection and introspection may lead to research beyond the business case for sustainability, asking questions beyond the usual ones, for example: is there a return on investment to sustainability?


and what are the bottom-line benefits of corporate responsibility? According to Perey (2014), “when a perturbation is visited on a fractal, it affects all scales simultaneously” (p. 216). Then, I also suggest that, by deeply reflecting on new ways of research and practice, and making them real, the fractal narrative on the fear of scarcity and the competition for survival can be modified for a more fulfilling one. Finally, my sincere expectation is that researchers and practitioners can help construct new narratives, making organizations more fit for human beings, making them into organizations that work to create value for all stakeholders (including the planet). To conclude, according again to the music metaphor, the following words of the 13th century poet Rumi seem relevant:



“Without love, all worship is a burden, all dancing is a chore, all music is just noise”.

Chapter 5





*So I repeat we never can have a true
view of man unless we have a love for
him. Civilisation must be judged and
prized, not by the amount of power it has
developed, but by how much it has evolved
and given expression to, by its laws and
institutions, the love of humanity.*

*(Rabindranath Tagore, 1916 -
Nobel Laureate in Literature)*





Societal Dimension

A SILENT EVOLUTION:

*Innovative and Inclusive Narratives
on Sustainability*

* This paper has been accepted in a research publication, as follows:

Marques, A.C.C. (forthcoming 2019). "A silent evolution: Innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability". In G. George, T. Baker, P. Tracey, H. Joshi (eds.), Handbook of inclusive innovation: The role of organizations, markets and communities in social innovation. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.



Guidance: this chapter studies the societal dimension of the sustainability narratives. Thus, I reflect on the emerging narratives and their deeper levels, i.e., antenarrative and social attractor.

Abstract

Mainstream media focuses on the mass dissemination of the idea of chaos on sustainability in every region of the globe, from local to global pollution, poverty, corruption, conflicts and catastrophes. The sustainability crises are so numerous that it seems as though chaos has taken hold of the world, and that the next step will be the collapse of human society, as well as the destruction of the planet's natural systems. However, a different narrative is also emerging in worldwide society, like a silent evolution, with innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability. This evolution does not appear on the front covers of newspapers and is not widely disseminated in scientific journals. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to shed light on these emerging narratives and to understand their patterns. With this aim, this study draws on complexity and chaos theories. I began this study by interviewing sustainability experts and change makers. Based on the initial insights I gained, the research was broadened to include analysis of the available information on these narratives worldwide. Patterns were found in these narratives and I proposed the main pattern, which I term the "social attractor". Finally, from the emerging patterns, I developed a research agenda to tackle the sustainability challenge by innovative and inclusive means.

Keywords: innovation, inclusion, narrative, antenarrative, sustainability, social attractor, complexity, chaos theory, silent evolution, sustainability challenge

5.1 INTRODUCTION

We hear the noise of the falling oak, but we do not hear the noise of the growing forest. Today, much is said about things that are falling apart, that make noise, but the most important is what we do not hear. We need to pay attention to the seeds of awareness that are sprouting.

(Jean-Yves Leloup)

Humanity is in the midst of a unique era, facing a sustainability challenge so complex that it could influence all life on the planet. Scholars have named this epoch the Anthropocene (Lewis & Maslin, 2015) because of the likely influence of humankind on the earth's natural systems. This sustainability challenge is manifested in many interdependent social, environmental and economic crises. Examples include loss of biodiversity, poverty, climate change, corruption, refugees, pollution, and natural disasters, among many others. In view of all of these crises, it seems as though the world has been engulfed in chaos, and that the challenges are so complex that it will not be possible to solve them. To complicate the issue further, the mainstream media focuses primarily on narrating these challenges in such a way that they appear even more complex and impossible to tackle. It is possible that the mainstream media does not focus on different emerging narratives because, as these are still sparse and not widely known, they seem to have little impact on solving the complex sustainability challenge. Additionally, mainstream research on sustainability is attempting to tackle the challenges; however, due to the complexity of these challenges, results are not generated quickly enough to be applied in society. These complex challenges call for different scientific approaches.

At the same time, new different narratives on sustainability are emerging worldwide. Small groups of people are silently innovating and solving various challenges within society in an inclusive way. This is a silent evolution, which does not appear on the front covers of newspapers and is not widely disseminated in scientific journals. One of the purposes of this study is to shed light on the new narratives on sustainability that are emerging from the social field in business, civil society



and education/science. Additionally, in order to study the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, this research focuses on narratives that simultaneously benefit individuals, society and the planet. To understand these narratives, as well as the actual chaos within social systems, the theoretical basis of this study lies in complexity and chaos theories. These theories show that change emerges at the micro to the macro levels. Accordingly, this research focuses on change that emerges at the micro level, i.e. narratives from small groups of people, which are not part of the mainstream narratives. In other words, this research is about microstoria (Boje, 2001), as it focuses on the emerging narratives on sustainability rather than the mainstream narratives. To understand the emerging narratives, I interviewed sustainability experts and change makers. I also attended various conferences and gained insights into sustainability and management.

In addition to shedding light on the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, another purpose of this study is to understand the deeper patterns of the emerging narratives. The reason for this is that, once these patterns are understood, awareness will increase and more people could be inspired to make positive changes in their communities. Moreover, according to complexity and chaos theories, the effects of small changes can be amplified through phenomena such as the butterfly effect (Lorenz, 1963), positive feedback and self-organizing systems. Therefore, inspired by the language of this relatively new science of chaos, I term the main framework, which is a combination of the patterns in the emerging narratives, the “social attractor”. To understand the narratives and their patterns, I use hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2013; Heidegger, 2010; Ricoeur, 2016). Then, by combining my observations with key constructs from complexity science, I present a number of initial ideas regarding these patterns. Finally, I develop a research agenda, using the emerging patterns, to tackling the sustainability challenge using more innovative and inclusive means.

5.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

*He who wants to have right without wrong,
Order without disorder,
Does not understand the principles
Of heaven and earth.
He does not know how
Things hang together.*

(Chuang Tzu, Chinese philosopher, fourth century B.C.)

5.2.1 Narratives on Sustainability

Narratives develop after living stories: they narrate them. According to Boje (2001), narrative "adds 'plot' and 'coherence' to the story line" (p. 1). Flory (2008) complements this by defining narrative as the "reflective product of looking back and making sense of stories constructed to making sense of life" (p. 70). This study focuses on the narratives related to sustainability. Scharmer (2017) classifies these narratives as "muddling through", "moving backward" and "moving forward".

The muddling through narratives are those that maintain the status quo or "business as usual" (Scharmer, 2017). Examples of muddling through narratives on sustainability are corporate social responsibility and sustainability as small practices, i.e. practices that are not integrated into the core business of the company. Another example is research on the business case for sustainability, which aims to understand whether or not sustainability pays off, maintaining the narrative of business as usual. This narrative seems to understand planetary boundaries but does not make the necessary changes to sustain life within these planet limits. Elkington and Braun (2013) term this type of narrative "change as usual", stating that it "works for 30-40% of 7 billion people" (p. 47). Therefore, it is an exclusive narrative, as it works for neither the majority of people nor the planet.

The moving backward narratives are those that suggest "making [something] great again" (Scharmer, 2017). This type of narrative aims to bring back a narrative



from the past. Moving backward narratives on sustainability include: climate change denial, which leads to cuts in investment in clean energy and allocates investments to “dirty” energy such as oil and coal. This narrative denies the planetary boundaries and assumes that endless resource use is possible, which could be because users of this type of narrative believe in fast and “miraculous” technological solutions to address the challenges. Elkington and Braun (2013) term this narrative “breakdown” and state that it has worked for the “wealthy 1% of 1-2 billion of people” (p. 47) in the past. Therefore, it is an extremely exclusive narrative as it excludes the vast majority of people and also denies the limits of the planet.

The moving forward narratives are those that suggest disruption and breakthrough (Elkington and Braun, 2013). According to Scharmer (2017), these narratives lean “into the unknown to co-sense and co-create the future”. Examples of moving forward narratives on sustainability include: circular economy, collaborative consumption, new technologies contributing to positive externalities, etc. The moving forward narratives understand the planetary boundaries and change the paradigms to sustain life within these limits. According to Elkington and Braun (2013), this type of narrative will work for a “growing majority of 9-10 billion people” (p. 47). Therefore, this is a more inclusive narrative as it works for the people and the planet. As such, the moving forward narratives are the focus of this study. To understand the moving forward narratives in greater depth, in the following, I present the concept of social innovation.

Social innovation can be defined as “a broad range of organizational and inter-organizational activity that is ostensibly designed to address the most deep-rooted ‘problems’ of society, such as poverty, inequality and environmental degradation” (Tracey and Stott, 2017, p. 51). This research studies the narratives of this type of innovation implemented by small groups of people. Furthermore, this research focuses on the innovative narratives that are inclusive, i.e. those that simultaneously benefit individuals, society and the planet. Figure 5.1 presents these inclusive dimensions. It is noteworthy that, although this study focuses on the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, a broad range of different narratives currently co-exist in the chaos of society. I discuss this in more depth in the following sections.

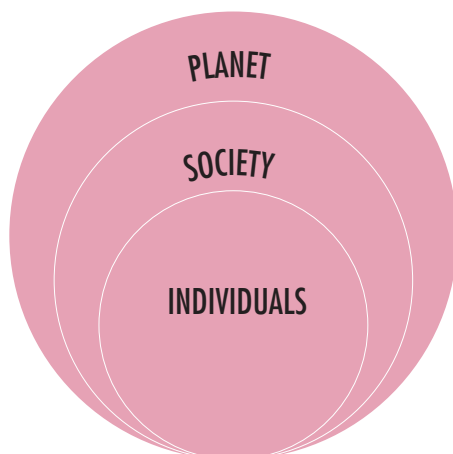


FIGURE 5.1 | Inclusive dimensions of the narratives in this study

5.2.2 The Dance of Chaos and Order

New ways of understanding chaos and change have emerged from the study of complex systems (Wheatley, 2006). Complexity science “seeks to understand how the complex behavior of a whole system arises from its interacting parts” (Complexity Explorer, 2017). In this study, the whole system is society in its entirety and the interacting parts are small groups of people. Additionally, for complexity theorists, change emerges from the micro to the macro. According to Auster and Freeman (2013), “What seem to be more macro issues, whether they are external ‘forces,’ ‘big challenges’ or ‘them’ or positive change, are actually the aggregated result of people making choices” (p. 43). In this research, I study the changes that are occurring in society as a whole through the analysis of innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, which are emerging from small groups of people.

Although this study focuses on the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, there are different narratives that metaphorically dance with one another. Examples of these different narratives are presented above as the muddling through and moving backward narratives. These diverse narratives also help the chaotic societal system to experience itself and may provide the information required for the entire system to evolve, or not. The dance of these contrasting narratives is full of possibilities, and the chaotic system experiences itself in different ways. Thus,



each person in the social field make choices, moment by moment. From thousands of seemingly antagonistic choices, the human system dances and develops. This is not a new phenomenon. The difference now is what some scholars call the Anthropocene (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). We are in an era in which humankind has sufficient technology to unbalance the systems that sustain life on the planet, including human life. However, this incredible moment of chaos can be used in other ways. With the technology and knowledge currently at our disposal, this chaos could be used to enable society to evolve in ways that have never before been imagined. We could have the opportunity to end hunger and misery, and to live in harmony with the systems that sustain life on the planet. Chaotic moments can shake old assumptions and paradigms, presenting opportunities for new possibilities to materialize in the social field.

That said, the purpose of this study is not to deny the importance of all of the different narratives in this moment of societal chaos, but to shed light on the inclusive and innovative narratives in order to inspire people to see other possibilities. The other narratives (e.g. muddling through and moving backward narratives) are very well noticed in the mainstream media and research. This study aims to give voice to the inclusive and innovative narratives on sustainability that are silently emerging in different parts of the world. To understand these innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability in greater depth, I present the concepts of the antenarrative and the social attractor in the following section.

5.2.3 Antenarrative and Social Attractor

The antenarrative is before the narrative (Boje, 2001). In this study, the antenarratives are the fragmentary formative ideas in the interviews, lectures and documents analyzed, acting as the building blocks of stories and narratives (Boje, 2001; Perey, 2014). Figure 5.2 presents the antenarratives in reference to living stories and narratives. Next, I present the deeper level of the antenarratives, as part of the complexity and chaos theories, which, in this study, I term social attractor.

Complexity theory is technically known as nonlinear dynamics, which is a computer-based mathematics system that enables scientists to handle the enormous complexity of certain systems (Capra & Luisi, 2016). An important aspect of complexity theory is that it involves nonlinear mathematics. When a nonlinear

equation is solved, the result is not a formula but a geometric pattern (Capra, 2016). As such, the theory involves more qualitative mathematics than quantitative. It is a mathematics of relationships and patterns (Capra, 1996). In the case of chaotic systems, the patterns formed are termed “strange attractors”, which can be defined as trajectories in the phase space that exhibit fractal geometry (Capra, 1996). If we observe a chaotic system over time, it demonstrates an inherent state of order; its actions remain within an invisible boundary. It is worth mentioning that, in a chaotic system, it is impossible to predict the values of the variables at a given moment, but it is possible to predict the qualitative characteristics of the system (Capra, 1996), which is the objective of this study. For this reason, this study is qualitative: it does not focus on the quantitative characteristics of the narratives studied (e.g. statistics) but on their qualitative characteristics and their main pattern, which are referred to as the social attractor.

Social science researchers (e.g. Boje, 2001; Perey, 2014) have studied patterns in the antenarratives of systems in a normal state. Following new discoveries of mathematics, physics and natural sciences, these patterns became known as fractals. However, according to the relatively new discoveries in these sciences, in the case of chaotic systems, another kind of pattern has formed, the strange attractor. I termed the main pattern the social attractor because this research focuses on the new narratives emerging from the social field, which seems attracted by the actual moment of chaos in society. Like fractals, I assume that the social attractor is dispersed in the antenarratives (Boje, 2001; Perey, 2014). Figure 5.2 illustrates the position of the social attractor in relation to the concepts of the living story, the narrative and the antenarrative. In this research, I aim to understand the social attractor, i.e. the patterns of innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability developed by small groups of people. Once the pattern is understood, this could inspire people to make more positive changes in their communities. In the following sections, I discuss the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, which are the focus of this study.

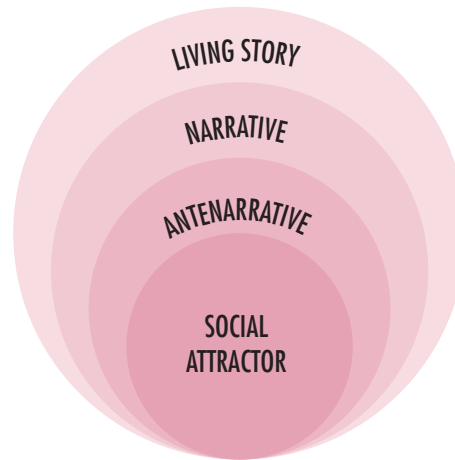


FIGURE 5.2 | Social attractor pattern in reference to living story, narrative and antenarrative

5.3 INNOVATIVE AND INCLUSIVE NARRATIVES

But, caution is in order. If we just replace one centre with our own authoritative centre, we have fallen into our own trap. The point then is not to replace one centre with another, but to show how each centre is in a constant state of change and disintegration.

(David Boje, 2001, p. 19)

5.3.1 A Time of Transition and Change?

This study was inspired by the surprising and increasing number of moments in which I have had contact with innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability. This type of narrative seems to have increased in recent years. In this section, I present some examples of these narratives.

In 2016, during the organization of an online conference on sustainability and corporate responsibility (Cosustentare, 2016) for Portuguese-speaking countries, several time, I heard mention of transition and change through innovative and inclusive narratives. The following are some examples of these narratives:

I assume that we are facing a major transition that is complete and goes through different spheres. (Leticia, professor, October 2016)

But have no doubt that I think this change is occurring, it leads us to give up some things, to leave the old, and this doesn't necessarily have suffering, but it has pain. It's almost a movement of death, a feeling that something must die. (Eva, entrepreneur, January 2015)

Similarly, I heard these narratives again in the recent conferences in which I participated:

If we know where to look, we can see the new emerging. (Frederic Laloux, Power & Care, September 2016)

Additionally, reading a new article, this narrative appears again:

Everyone knows that we live in a moment of profound disruption. An old order is about to end. And something new is about to be born. (Otto Scharmer, 2017)

As mentioned above, innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability are the focus of this study. Of course, narratives such as muddling through and moving backward continue to be present in the mainstream media and society. These narratives dance with one another, and they are all part of the current chaos of the societal system. In the following, I present the concept of the microstoria, which is the basis of the narratives discussed in this study.

5.3.2 *Microstoria*

Innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability are not the mainstream narratives or, according to Boje (2001), the "grand narratives" (p. 45). Therefore, this study concerns the microstories of small groups of people. It is noteworthy that "microstory is often about resisting a grand narrative" (Boje, 2001, p. 60). Thus, this study aims to broaden the perspectives of the mainstream narratives on sustainability.





Microstorians do not select the narratives “for their statistical frequency, but because they constitute the ‘apparently exceptional’” (Boje, 2001, p. 45). In this study, I select the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, not for their statistical frequency but because they potentially work better for the people and the planet (Elkington and Braun, 2013). Additionally, I would like to be clear that the purpose of this study is not to impose these innovative and inclusive narratives on the grand narratives on sustainability. Boje (2001) states that, the “more a narrative works to control a centre, even one with a grain of truth, the more the narrative spirals out of control” (p. 19). In view of this, the purpose of this study is to shed light on these innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability and their metaphorical dance with other types of narrative, but not to control or impose any type of narrative. Although I neither want to control nor impose any type of narrative, I do hope that society will develop in a breakthrough way. In the following section, I present the basis for this hope.

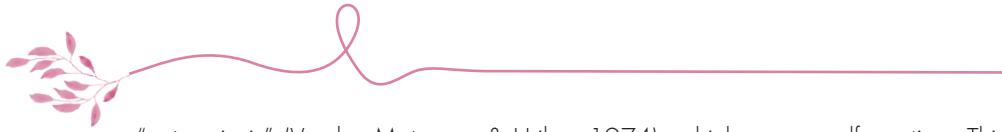
5.3.3 Hope through Complexity and Chaos Theories?

The new understandings of complexity and chaos theories may give some hope regarding the evolution of the societal system. The following are some concepts that stem from these theories.

The Butterfly Effect: chaotic systems are characterized by extreme sensitivity to the initial conditions, which means that small changes in the initial state of the system can lead to large-scale consequences over time (Capra, 1996). This is known as the butterfly effect, taken from the concept proposed by meteorologist Edward Lorenz (1963), who suggested that the flap of a butterfly’s wings in one part of the world could create a storm somewhere else (Capra, 1996). Chaotic systems are nonlinear, which means that small events can have huge consequences. Conversely, sometimes, big events can have small consequences. This is the beauty and also the difficulty of a chaotic system, which is full of possibilities, for better or worse. After the chaos, the societal system has two main possibilities: self-transcendence or self-dissolution (Pozzati, 2007). In self-transcendence, the system comes back to equilibrium, but in a different form that is generally more complex and evolved than the previous one. In self-dissolution, the system disintegrates. Perhaps the tiny contribution made by this study will help the chaotic system of society to self-transcend in a breakthrough way.

Feedback and Amplification: in a nonlinear system, such as the chaotic system, very tiny variations can be amplified into completely unexpected results (Wheatley, 2006), as in the butterfly effect. This is due to the repeated amplification by means of self-reinforcing feedback (Capra, 1996). The feedback effect is studied in cybernetics, and it uses negative feedback to bring a system back to equilibrium. However, in the case of non-linear systems, the focus is on the positive feedback that amplifies the change and moves the system even further from equilibrium. Exemplifying this effect of positive feedback in social systems, Plowman et al. (2007) state that, "When social systems experience stress, people or groups that were independent become highly interdependent, often as the result of a crisis or turbulence of some sort. In highly interconnected systems, positive feedback reinforces an initial signal and can amplify small changes" (p. 520). These nonlinear feedback processes are the basis of the evolution of systems for new forms of organization (Capra, 1996), as described below.

Self-organizing Systems: when a nonlinear system receives positive feedback, it chooses whether or not to react to it. However, if this positive feedback becomes a disturbance of such magnitude that the system can no longer ignore it, there is a real change. At a point with many internal disturbances that is far from equilibrium, the system disintegrates, but this disintegration does not mean its end (Wheatley, 2006). If it can maintain its own identity, the system can reconfigure itself at a higher level of complexity (Capra, 1996), i.e. in an evolved form. This characteristic of nonlinear systems is studied in different areas of science. The following are examples from the fields of chemistry, physics and neuroscience. In chemistry, Ilya Prigogine received the Nobel Prize in 1977 for his work demonstrating how certain chemical systems reorganize themselves in a more complex order when faced with changes. Prigogine (1984) created the term "dissipative structures" to describe the contradictory nature of these systems. The dissipation describes a loss, a process of the gradual flow of energy, while the structure describes the order embodied (Wheatley, 2006). In a dissipative structure, anything that disturbs the system (positive feedback) has the crucial role of helping the system to self-organize into a new and evolved form. In physics, Hermann Haken studied the laser. He discovered that, when a beam of light is bombarded energetically (positive feedback) to move out of equilibrium, it self-organizes into a new and evolved form, the laser light (Capra, 1996). In neuroscience, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela coined the term



"autopoiesis" (Varela, Maturana & Uribe, 1974), which means self-creation. This means that a living system modifies itself for self-preservation (Wheatley, 2006).

The chaos of the societal system with its different and seemingly opposite narratives may help the system, through positive feedback, to self-organize into a new form. The following patterns observed in the analysis of the microstories in this study could be a preview to what will emerge as the next main narratives in our society. Of course, there are no guarantees that this will happen, but the innovative and inclusive narratives assessed in this study, combined with complexity and chaos theories, suggest that there is some hope.

5.4 THE SOCIAL ATTRACTOR FRAMEWORK

In the following sections, I describe how I found patterns in the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability. Then, combining these patterns with chaos and complexity theories, I develop a comprehensive pattern, the social attractor framework.

5.4.1 Data Sources

The initial insights on the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability were obtained through interviews with sustainability experts and change makers. Additionally, I also collected insights from a number of international sustainability and management conferences that I attended over the past two years. This study aims to understand the patterns in these narratives from the following perspectives: business, civil society and science/education. I chose these perspectives because, generally, these are where sustainability narratives are originally formed, before the mainstream media has been able to form an interpretation. In the following sections, I describe the sources of the narratives in this study.

Interviewees: I interviewed 42 sustainability experts and change makers. These respondents work as consultants, entrepreneurs, executives and professors. Some of the interviews were conducted using questions and others through lectures on a theme relating to sustainability. The lectures were initially intended for an online conference on sustainability and corporate responsibility (Cosustentare, 2016), which I organized. The respondents come from a variety of national, ethnic and educational backgrounds and age groups. Although most of the interviewees were

with Brazilians, there were also four Americans (Central, North and South America) and seven Europeans. 19 interviewees were men and 23 were women. All respondents hold at least a bachelor's degree and eight have a Ph.D. The interviews were all voice recorded, most were video recorded, and all were transcribed in full. To protect the respondents' identities, each was assigned a pseudonym. Also, particular personal episodes were concealed and only principal groups were mentioned (consultant, entrepreneur, executive or professor).

Conferences: I also collected insights on the patterns from the following conferences:

- 7th International Conference on Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility (CSR) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, September 14–16, 2016.
- Power & Care – A Mind & Life Dialogue with H.H. The Dalai Lama, at Bozar Center for Fine Arts in Brussels, September 9–11, 2016.
- Academy of Management Conference at Anaheim, California, August 4–9, 2016.

It is worth pointing out that, although I have almost 20 years of experience in the field of sustainability and have had access to a large diversity (people, cultures and countries) of narratives in this area, this study is limited to my experience and interpretation of these narratives.

5.4.2 *Hermeneutics*

The analysis was guided by hermeneutics, which derives from the Greek term *hermeneuein*, meaning “to interpret”. In this research, I use hermeneutics to gain a more in-depth understanding of the deep patterns within the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability. Therefore, to interpret the patterns in these narratives, I use the following principles of hermeneutics:

Part and whole: in a chaotic system, according to Wheatley (2006), it is important to focus on the whole to understand how these systems reveal their patterns.





Moreover, since a large amount of information is analyzed in this study, particular care was required to ensure I did not become lost in the details of the narratives and see only the chaos. Therefore, in this study, I use the hermeneutics principle of part and whole, considering the parts as the single narratives and the whole as all of the analyzed narratives, their contexts and my own experience on sustainability. To find the patterns, I searched the analyzed narratives to find the themes that were repeated. I agree with Wheatley (2006), who suggest that, to find patterns in chaotic systems, one must assume an attitude of reflection and patience. The reason for this is that it is difficult to see a pattern when one is very close to the details of the narrative as patterns take time to reveal themselves. However, with patience and reflection, patterns do begin to reveal themselves and elegantly show another way of viewing the chaos. Table 5.1 shows each of the thirteen patterns found, as well as some illustrative quotes. It is noteworthy that these patterns were not developed by any central organization (e.g. government, business, etc.), but are emerging from the social field in different parts of the world.

Pre-understanding and understanding: the process of understanding is more important than the results; or, in other words, the process is its own result (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Additionally, introducing the Paul Ricoeur's (1974a, 1974b, 2016) hermeneutic arc between explanation and understanding (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009), in this study, I combine complexity and chaos theories with the narratives on sustainability. In this way, I combine scientific theories (explanation) with narratives (understanding).

Pattern of interpretation: according to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), pattern of interpretation is "the coherent whole of partial interpretations" (p. 99). In this study, the global pattern of interpretation is the social attractor, which I looked for within the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability. In the following section, I present the social attractor.

5.4.3 The Main Pattern – the Social Attractor

From my analysis of the data (from the sources described above) using hermeneutics, I found thirteen patterns emerging from the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability (Table 5.1). Then, I focused on understanding how these patterns combined into one main pattern, which was a difficult task. First, inspired by the dissipative structures of the Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine (1984), I arranged the patterns in an initial framework resembling the dissipative structures. However, based

on feedback from fellow researchers, I realized that this framework considered neither the relationships between the patterns nor the resemblance to a strange attractor, the main pattern within complex systems. Therefore, I experimented with different combinations of the patterns, but was not successful in finding a comprehensive combination. Then, I focused more on the attractor, which is a set of states (patterns in this study) to which a system tends towards, cycling through it for some time (Complexity Explorer, 2017; Complexity Labs, 2018). Thus, a social attractor in this research is the set of patterns which a societal system tends towards, cycling through it for some time (Complexity Labs, 2018). Then, by combining the definition of the social attractor and the shapes of the chaotic attractors (mainly inspired by Lorenz’s (1963) attractor) and the patterns emerging from the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, I developed the comprehensive pattern in this study, as shown in Figure 5.3. The patterns on the left of Figure 5.3 are related more to the inner dimensions of society; the patterns on the right relate more to the outer dimensions of society. “Openness to review beliefs and to evolve” lies between the inner and outer patterns, which I suggest “attracts” the other patterns. Then, the pattern moves from the inner dimensions (inner developments) to the outer dimensions (outer expressions), and so on, cycling through both sides of the social attractor framework. Through the openness to review beliefs and to evolve, the patterns continuously evolve until the balance of the social attractor breaks again to open in a way that reviews itself and evolves into new forms and dimensions.

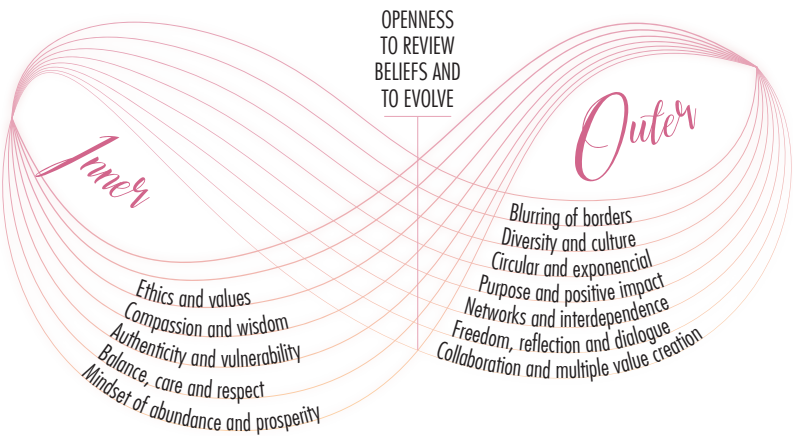


FIGURE 5.3 | The social attractor framework



5.5 REFLECTIONS ON A RESEARCH AGENDA

This time of chaos, in both the social and natural systems, is an opportune moment to rethink the current methods of tackling the sustainability challenge, to instead face the challenge in a more innovative and inclusive way. In this section, I propose a number of ideas for reflection. However, it is worth mentioning that these ideas aim to inspire and broaden the possibilities and perspectives, not to act as restrictive models. I do not believe in restrictive models, especially in relation to the complex and chaotic sustainability challenge. One interviewee described about restrictive models in an interesting way:

I think it comes out of the linear, because it's an observation in the present, you do not have more models, you're going to have to drop models. You'll have to have a look at it, go in like a dance, see what's going on, and go that way or that or that one, watch the endless possibilities you have. (Eva, entrepreneur, January 2015)

5.5.1 *Tackling the Sustainability Challenge in Innovative and Inclusive Ways*

The following ideas for reflection were inspired by the 13 patterns emerging from the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, and the comprehensive pattern as the social attractor framework. For a comprehensive understanding of this section, it should be considered together with Table 5.1 and Figure 5.3. In the following, I present a number of reflections on research insights and inspirations.

Openness to review beliefs and to evolve: according to complexity and chaos theories, when a system is in a state of chaos, it is experimenting with different configurations of itself. This chaos may also help the societal system to be open in a way that allows to review itself and evolve. It is noteworthy that this openness can be both involuntary (through crisis and chaos) or voluntary (through collective choice). I considered this pattern between the inner and outer dimensions of the strange attractor framework because it is through this openness to review beliefs that society and science evolve. Thus, I suggest that it is important for the researchers to question often how open they are to new ways of understanding the so-called reality. According to the following scholars:

The theory of progress is the process of revising beliefs. (Edward Freeman, Academy of Management Conference – AOM, 2016)

We can't create health organizations if we can't imagine health organizations. We continue to create social systems that require us to be aggressive, because this is what we believe. (Robert Quinn, AOM, 2016)

To undertake research that helps society to tackle the sustainability challenge in an innovative and inclusive way, it is also important for the researchers to be open to reviewing their own beliefs and to evolve. Examples of instruments to assist in this process of opening up are appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) and theory U (Scharmer, 2018). Appreciative inquiry can help to access new possibilities for change and transformation in a positive way. Theory U can help to understand what is trying to emerge as a future possibility to tackle the sustainability challenge. According to Scharmer (2018), this emerging of the future possibility can be done through “presencing” (a combination of “presence” and “sensing”), which means a connection with the deepest inner source through an open mind, open heart and open will (Scharmer, 2018).

I also suggest that the researcher should be open to self-development, to improve as a human being, thereby discovering the inner truths and reviewing their own beliefs. According to an interviewee:

Our limit of mind is the limit that we think it is, so we have to have a more extensive limit, think of other possibilities, so that other possibilities are constructed. (Helena, consultant, 2015)

Authenticity and vulnerability: authenticity can be tracked back from millennia aphorisms (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis & Dickens, 2011). Examples are “know thyself”, inscribed at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, and “an unexamined life is not worth living”, stated by the philosopher Socrates. Authenticity means that the researcher should delve deeper in their self-knowledge and find their own voice to develop research that is more valuable for both society and the planet. This is not an easy process and it can involve vulnerability through life. However, researchers who embrace this challenge tend to engage in and have more fulfilling work and lives. For example, Waddock (2015), an important researcher on sustainability, in her book about scholars making a difference, describes the narratives of several successful researchers who followed the path of authenticity and vulnerability:





We “simply” need to have the courage to answer the call to become who we really are, to work in service of something beyond ourselves that tries to make the world or something in it better, and follow that call in our life’s work by doing work that matters, makes a difference. (Waddock, 2015, p. 7)

In addition, authenticity and vulnerability could be interesting areas for sustainability research by, for example, understanding how to help sustainability professionals (e.g. experts, researchers, teachers and practitioners) to become increasingly authentic and open to vulnerability. Research could also be conducted on how this authenticity and vulnerability could help people around sustainability professionals to strengthen ties in order to jointly develop solutions to the sustainability challenge. An interviewee described vulnerability in the following way:

What is a leader’s ability to be vulnerable? [...] And being vulnerable in a scenario of transition, uncertainty, complexity, it also opens space for other people to contribute and bring their best to help, since he [the leader] will not handle everything alone. (Leticia, professor, 2016)

Additionally, I suggest research on understanding how would be an authentic and vulnerable organization; and the gains for people, society and planet of such kind of organization.

Balance, care and respect: sustainability is related to balance – not a static balance but a dynamic one. One interviewee stated:

When you have dynamic balance, everything is in a right measure, things do not overlap excessively, one part does not enslave the other part. When you see this within business management, it is the company interacting with the environment, the inner world and the outside world in a way that does not prey, neither what is outside, nor what is inside, not to sacrifice a part in function of another. (Camila, consultant, 2015)

This balance includes care and respect for both people and the planet. Therefore, as a suggestion for research: how can organizations, through care and respect, restore balance for individuals, society and the planet? Also, I suggest research on how to enhance balance, care and respect for employees, supply chains, different cultures, natural systems, etc.

Ethics and values: to realize values, it is important first to be aware of one's own values, as discussed by Klamer (2016):

Realizing values in the sense of being aware of them, and the actions that follow as the realization of those values in the sense of valorizing them or making them real. (Klamer, 2016, p. 19)

Then, I suggest investigating how organizations and individuals understand their own values, and how they can make these values real while making contributions to tackle the sustainability challenge. Additionally, I suggest that academics could develop at university education programs for values, ethics, etc. Also, I recommend research on how organizations can help to strengthen societal values, as one interviewee stated:

So, the company has this obligation because it is occupying a space in society, it is occupying an economic space. So, I think the company has an obligation to have an emblematic and symbolic role of values that help build society. (Gabriel, professor, 2015)

Compassion and wisdom: According to Jeff Weiner, CEO of LinkedIn:

Wisdom without compassion is ruthlessness, and compassion without wisdom is folly. (Weiner and Gordhamer, 2013)

Wisdom here is what Aristotle terms *phronesis*, which "involves the weighing of values, conditions, interests and findings in order to do the right thing" (Klamer, 2016a, p. 372). I suggest that universities should also include education on compassion and wisdom in their programs. Another interviewee stated:

One of the things master's, MBAs and doctoral degrees in management [...] are forgetting. They have turned a lot to the technical side and have forgotten the human part. (Arthur, entrepreneur, 2015)

Additionally, I argue that research on tackling the sustainability challenge through compassion and wisdom could perhaps access inclusive and innovative ways of achieving this.

Mindset of abundance and prosperity: One interviewee stated:



Several people don't know, but there's enough for everyone. Then, collaborate, do not compete; share, do not hold knowledge, share. Why do I suggest this? Because we work together and it's these paradoxical things or paradigms that are changing. (Arthur, entrepreneur, 2015)

I suggest research on how to help people to change their paradigms and beliefs, from scarcity and competition to abundance and prosperity for all. Additionally, I encourage research on new ways of understanding organizations and growth, as another interviewee stated:

There is much talk today about sustainable prosperity and not just about sustainable development. What is the point of prosperity and not running after development, perhaps growth, which in the long run is unsustainable? I believe that the word prosperity reflects this much more. We have a prosperous company, which does not mean that it is a company that is growing at a rate of 20% or 30% a year. The prosperous company is the one that manages to compensate the people who are there, manages to deliver a positive thing to society, it manages to make the world better. (Airton, Professor, 2016)

Collaboration and multiple value creation: research themes could include how different organizations can collaborate to solve the sustainability challenge rather than competing among themselves. Also, research on understanding new social contracts between business and society, such as sustainability beyond the business case and beyond eco-efficiency, to a means of multiple value creation. According to Volans (2016):

There is a growing shift in focus away from the business case and towards the role of business models in delivering multiple forms of value. (p. 12)

As a practical example, Jeff Weiner, CEO of LinkedIn, explains:

The creation of long-term value is aligned with creating value for our membership, for our customers and that ultimately creates value for the entire ecosystem which we all operate. (Weiner and Gordhamer, 2013)

Freedom, reflection and dialogue: as research topics in this area, I would suggest that it is important to better understand how freedom, reflection and dialogue can be facilitated to tackle the sustainability challenge. Additionally, according to Freeman:

If you take care of freedom, truth will take care of itself. (Edward Freeman, AOM, 2016)

I also suggest that universities should give more freedom to researchers to research issues that matter for themselves, society and the planet. To ensure this, the pressure to publish in first-class journals should be rethought, as the goal should be to develop research that matters and not to collect points from articles in publications that will possibly be forgotten and not used. In this way, reflection and dialogue would concentrate on ideas, not on the first-class journals themselves. I believe that, if universities, and specifically business schools, continue to focus on this type of publication rather than research that matters, they could be in danger of becoming irrelevant to society. According to Dee W. Hock (2017), founder of the VISA organization:

Science should be judged by whether it has diminished violence, eliminated war, enhanced justice, ensured freedom, improved happiness, equitably distributed power and wealth, and protected the environment. By any such standard it has been an abysmal failure.

Networks and interdependence: this pattern seems to have strengthened with new technologies such as the internet. One example of this pattern is the Nobel Peace Prize 2017, which was awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). ICAN is a network of 468 non-governmental organizations in 101 countries (Nobel Prize, 2017). Additionally, according to complexity theory, change emerges from the micro to the macro. Rather than concentrating sustainability studies on top-down approaches, I suggest that networks and the interdependence of people should be studied in relation to sustainability. The reason for this is that the role of leadership in sustainability is overrated, and the role of networks and the interdependence of people in tackling the sustainability challenge are more significant, yet rarely studied. I also suggest the following themes to be studied: networks of trust and interdependence, like supply chain beyond audit and control; and multi-stakeholders' approaches to tackle the sustainability challenge. Additionally, I suggest research on understanding ways of empowering poor people, women and the vulnerable. Also, studying decentralized and self-organizing social systems for sustainability. Finally, instead of externalities, I suggest studying how to solve the sustainability problems as a whole, as an interviewee argued:





Interdependence, which means the following: we are all interconnected and what I do here in my company, it will have an effect on my community, my neighborhood, my city, my country and maybe even the world. Thus, there is no longer the outside and the inside and there is no longer what we once called externality. (Mauro, consultant, 2016)

Blurring of borders: there appears to be a removal of borders between different aspects of people, organizations and society. One example is the blurring of borders between the professional and personal life. The blurring of borders between disciplines, and even countries, are further examples. Scholar Josep Lozano terms this “creating bridges”:

I’m strongly interested in understanding education as creating bridges between organizations, creating bridges between disciplines, creating bridges between ideologies and mindsets, or religions, and so on. (Waddock, 2015, p. 305)

There are important and unexplored possibilities within sustainability research in the interactions between disciplines. Multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research is important to tackle the complex sustainability challenge. Gladwin, Kennelly and Krause (1995) argue that the “idea of sustainable development pushes management research toward interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary modes of inquiry” (p. 897). Research to tackle the sustainability challenge could include different areas of knowledge, such as understanding the same sustainability challenge from different perspectives, including philosophy and the natural and social sciences. Research could also include a combination of methods to understand the sustainability challenge, such as philosophical, qualitative and quantitative. I also suggest that different ontologies and epistemologies could also be combined in the same research.

Diversity and culture: I suggest research that celebrates diversity and honors different cultures. Mainstream research concentrates mainly on the western worldview and paradigms. One interviewee stated:

I think the first thing in terms of organizational management, which is essential for sustainability, is dealing with differences. Because three people in a room already have diversity; imagine two thousand. And our organizational model – which is still a patriarchal, military, industrial revolution – is to flatten diversity and homogenize people. (Camila, consultant, 2015)

It is possible that we are not seeing the solution to our most challenging sustainability problems because we are not looking from the perspectives of different cultures and traditions in the world. Additionally, research that celebrates diversity and honors different cultures does not suggest that only one way is the truth, nor does it suggest that all other perspectives are irrelevant or wrong. I would argue that research should broaden horizons and not homogenize people or limit worldviews.

Circular and exponential: to tackle the sustainability challenge in an inclusive way, we must respect the natural systems, being circular (cradle to cradle), as in nature. Also, we should include all people in the solutions, so that the solutions will be exponential. I suggest that further research should be conducted to better understand the circular economy:

A circular economy is one that is restorative and regenerative by design and aims to keep products, components, and materials at their highest utility and value at all times, distinguishing between technical and biological cycles. (MacArthur Foundation, 2015, p. 3)

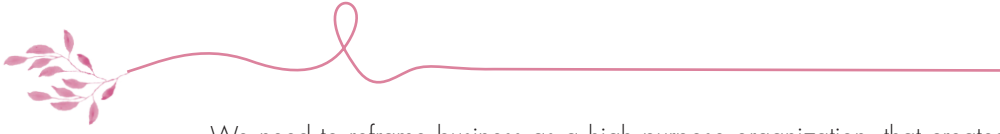
Research should also be conducted to help organizations to become circular:

All businesses must strive to become completely circular, their operations designed to sustain products, components, and material inputs and outputs at their highest utility and value at key points in the cycle. (Volans, 2016, p. 7)

Additionally, research should be conducted on exponential solutions:

A shift from incremental to exponential mindsets and ambitions; from our current focus on the negative impacts of economic activity to the deliberate generation of positive impacts; and from the business case for action to a reconsideration of business models that ensures industries are fit for tomorrow's very different market and geopolitical realities. (Volans, 2016, p. 3)

Purpose and positive impact: research that matters creates a positive impact on individuals, society and the planet. Research possibilities for purpose and positive impact abound in the chaos of societal and natural systems. For example, research should aim to better understand how the narrative of business can be changed to become more purposeful in generating positive impact:



We need to reframe business as a high purpose organization, that creates value for the stakeholders. And we need to figure out how to create millions of new entrepreneurs who start with a high purpose orientation. (Edward Freeman, Conference on Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility – CSR, Berlin, 2016)

Additionally, research should be conducted to understand business models that are more fit for human beings and have a positive impact. For example:

Tomorrow's business models must deliver financial and extra-financial value by generating positive social impact. (Volans, 2016, p. 7)

5.5.2 A Brief Conclusion

This chapter has presented reflections on the different possibilities of developing research to tackle the sustainability challenge in inclusive and innovative ways. These reflections are based in the social attractor pattern (Figure 5.3) on innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability that are emerging worldwide. This pattern was inspired by complexity and chaos theories, which indicate that human society already seems to be evolving silently. These reflections aim to inspire and broaden research perspectives. However, there are infinite possibilities to develop research that matters for individuals, society and the planet. The words of 13th-century poet Rumi seem relevant here:

*There is a voice that doesn't use words.
Listen.*

TABLE 5.1 | Patterns in the inclusive and innovative narratives on sustainability

PATTERN	EXAMPLES OF NARRATIVES
Openness to Review Beliefs and to Evolve	<p><i>We can't create health organizations if we can't imagine health organizations. We continue to create social systems that require us to be aggressive, because this is what we believe. (Robert Quinn, AOM, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>If an organization wants to attract talent and bring in people who are capable of promoting transformation and responding in the context of sustainability, but it is not willing to change, then it will not work. So, organizations also need to be open to transforming themselves in this process. (Leticia, professor, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Most CEOs who are purpose driven did not start with this mindset; they were mainly in the mindset of economics. They become purpose driven through crisis, personal transformation. (Robert Quinn, AOM, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Instead of continuing to look outside, look at the objective aspects — which are important. There is a fundamental dimension to happen, which is how each person undertakes his evolutionary process, enters and honors his journey of personal transformation. (Andre, consultant, 2016)</i></p>
Authenticity and Vulnerability	<p><i>We see being authentic as an ongoing process of conversation that not only starts with perceived values but also involves one's history, relationships with others, and aspirations. Authenticity entails acting on these values for individuals and organizations and thus also becomes a necessary starting point for ethics. (Freeman and Auster, 2011, p. 15)</i></p> <p><i>One side effect of a purpose driven company is that CEOs open themselves and become vulnerable. (Robert Quinn, AOM, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>What is a leader's ability to be vulnerable? We leave a little of that history, that model, the leader who is a hero, who knows everything, who will solve everything, who will account, who will teach, and come to a leader who is vulnerable after all. And being vulnerable in a scenario of transition, uncertainty, complexity, it also opens space for other people to contribute and bring their best to help, since he [the leader] will not handle everything alone. (Leticia, professor, 2016)</i></p>



Balance, Care and Respect	<p><i>If you do not have balance you do not sustain, because the support has to be in time, it has a time, it cannot sink in the moment, so, you see that there is no sustainability. You see that the basis, the fundamentals are very solid, are balanced, so will sustain. (Gabriel, professor, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Because if you do not take care of yourself, of your universe, how can you care for the planet? (Alice, entrepreneur, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>I need to work to make my business fit into nature. (Amelia, consultant, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>I cannot say that I will call my employees to save energy; it is not because I want to get richer, it's because I want to make my company steal less energy from the collective. (Gabriel, professor, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>I work a lot from the human point of view, from respect, from opening the spaces, from respecting the local culture, the local infrastructure. And logically, I bring out what is the original culture of the parent company of the country, where this company comes from, but harmonize with what there is here. That is, you have to have this respect, this bridge. (Patricia, consultant, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Responsibility to ensure a balance in the source and the resource from where it comes [...] So, I think you have to figure out a formula to understand how far an enterprise, a project, an action can grow. Respecting a cycle and giving space to others, transforming what could be competition into partnerships, in cooperation. (Davi, professor, 2015)</i></p>
Ethics and Values	<p><i>Therefore, I advise students everywhere that, if they cannot find the company that matches their way of seeing the world, their purpose and values, start a new one! (Genaro, professor, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>So, the company has this obligation because it is occupying a space in society, it is occupying an economic space. So, I think the company has an obligation to have an emblematic and symbolic role of values that help build society. (Gabriel, professor, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>There is a disintegration agreement, let's put it this way, between people and business. I invite you to investigate a little better where these points of attention are and to think together of ways to get out of this corporate hypocrisy towards people. These are the practices that invite people to disintegrate in the name of sustaining their vacancies and the progression of their careers, based on incredible personal, family and social sacrifice. (Sandra, consultant, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Economic growth by growth alone does not make sense. We have already seen this. So, if we could think of a growth of value, if we were more aware of our own existence on this planet, how should you cohabit with your fellows on this planet, I think there would be a big step. (Gabriel, professor, 2015)</i></p>

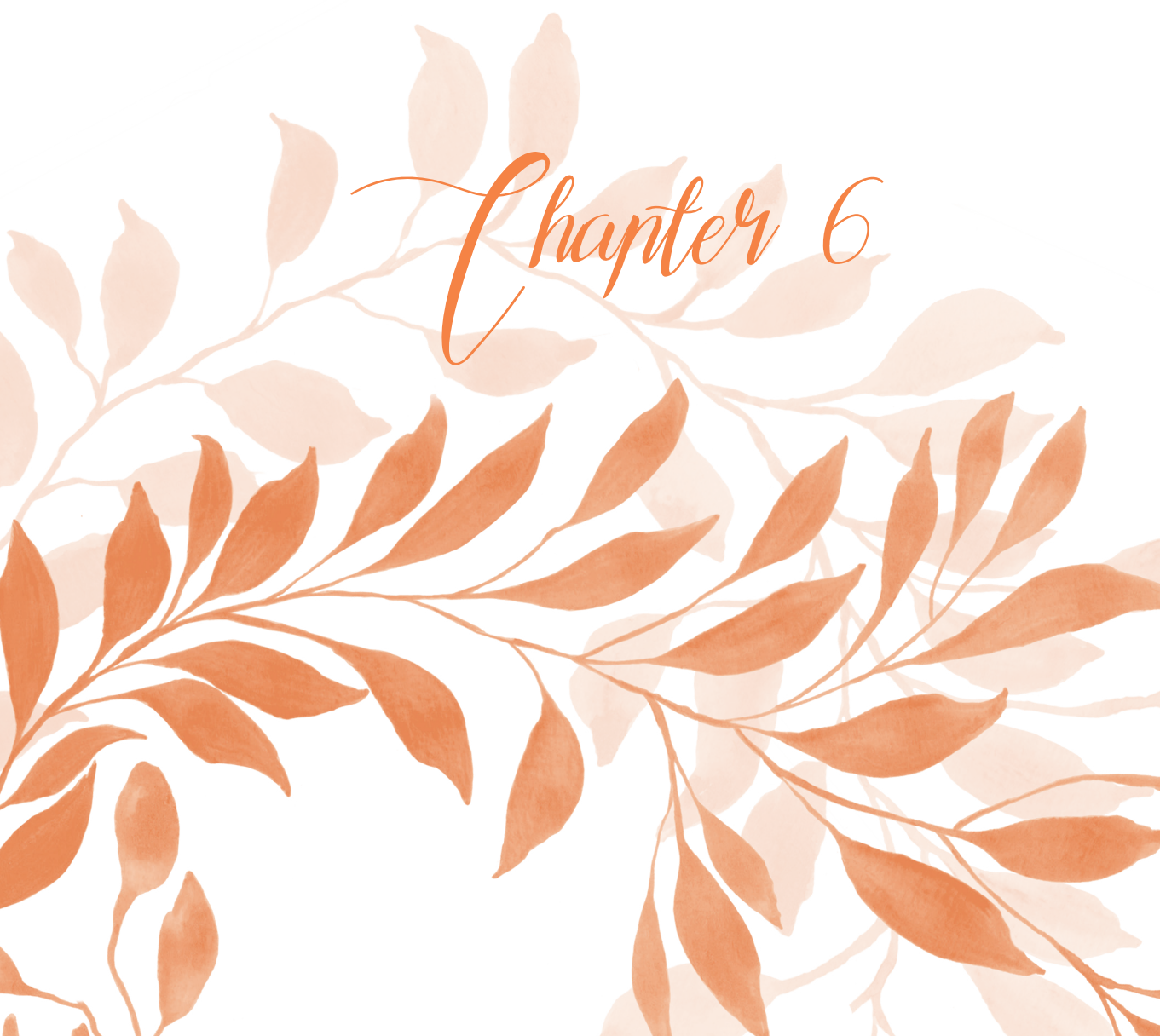
Compassion and Wisdom	<p><i>My first principle or personal vision statement, in few words, is to expand the world's collective wisdom and compassion [...] Wisdom without compassion is ruthlessness, and compassion without wisdom is folly. (Weiner and Gordhamer, 2013)</i></p> <p><i>I have to meditate, but I also have to learn differential and integral calculus. (Amelia, consultant, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>The exact sciences must leave this Cartesian view and integrate more in the one of natural capitalism; this is no longer only technology, money, but it's people and it's environment. (Cesar, professor, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>So, the university is very good and improving for the knowledge of the rational and intellectual world. But, let's put to people the importance of self-knowledge too, take care of the inner landscapes. If you do not have these two things balanced, neither process is sustainable. Neither do I just grow self-knowledge, spiritual elevation, stay in that unsustainable lightness of being. That's sustainable, these two things go together. (Sofia, professor, 2015)</i></p>
Mindset of Abundance and Prosperity	<p><i>What we want is to live in a happy world, to live in a world that has enough for all and that has abundance for all. (Beatriz, entrepreneur, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Several people don't know, but there's enough for everyone. Then, collaborate, do not compete; share, do not hold knowledge, share. Why do I suggest this? Because we work together and it's these paradoxical things or paradigms that are changing. (Arthur, entrepreneur, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>There is much talk today about sustainable prosperity and not just about sustainable development. What is the point of prosperity and not running after development, perhaps growth, which in the long run is unsustainable? I believe that the word prosperity reflects this much more. We have a prosperous company, which does not mean that it is a company that is growing at a rate of 20% or 30% a year. The prosperous company is the one that manages to compensate the people who are there, manages to deliver a positive thing to society, it manages to make the world better. (Airtón, Professor, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>I have a company, I am prosperous, but the country is not prosperous. I am prosperous and the country is miserable, it's not nice, what can I do to help? (Diego, consultant, 2015)</i></p>
Collaboration and Multiple Value Creation	<p><i>I am not a competitive being, I am a collaborative being. Also, if I am a collaborative being, I live more in peace. (Helena, consultant, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>We are moving from a modus operandi of serving myself to a modus operandi of contribution. Where I can contribute individually with my talent, with my competencies and we, collectively, within the organization, with the talents and competencies of the organization, with the essence and purpose of the organization. (Samuel, consultant, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>I have learned to do a lot with little, to listen more than to talk, to work cooperatively, to think along with people. And I have freed myself from my arrogance to think that I know everything and I have all the answers and have started to build the answers collaboratively. (Mauro, consultant, 2016)</i></p>




<p>Freedom, Reflection and Dialogue</p>	<p><i>If you take care for freedom, truth will take care of itself. (Edward Freeman, AOM, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>I am becoming more willing to promote reflection spaces, where people can work and rescue this kind of reflective and autonomous human. (Manuela, consultant, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Reflection allows you to open up possible paths that you can choose because you begin to think of everything that you are generating. Why am I here? Or why do I make a lot of sustainable waste or not? What do I do? This question of how we do what we do in a way that manages a more sustainable world or not? [...] How do we live in a way that generates suffering? (Manuela, consultant, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>There is no time when people are debating this issue, wondering what action we should take now, what impacts it has on the future. In an ideal organization, you should have more time for this. (Carlos, executive, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>So, I believe that sustainability is with this deep look, beyond the surface. (Eva, entrepreneur, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>The sustainability of an organization, it has to go through the review of power models, basically, is the history of dialogue, co-creation. (Camila, consultant, 2015)</i></p>
<p>Networks and Interdependence</p>	<p><i>I believe a lot in networks, and networks in different ways. I do not believe there has to be a person who decides everything, I believe the whole knows more than the unit. (Arthur, entrepreneur, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>I think the correct way would be for small or medium enterprises and organizations to act in a network. But each respecting a sustainable limit, not only in the sense of profit. Sustainable in the sense of the greater imbalance it can cause, including economic. (Davi, professor, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>If I try to pull a supplier a lot, if I try to make the most out of it, he will have to take it from someone, and that's not a win-win relationship [...] And it's important that both grow together, so that I can have long-term maintenance of a company [...] If I make win-lose relationships, in which only I win, they are not sustainable relationships and I cannot grow. (Helena, consultant, 2015)</i></p>
<p>Blurring of borders</p>	<p><i>I believe that I cannot really differentiate my professional from my personal life. As I told you, we begin to realize this relationship in everything, which you will hardly be able to separate into fragments, you will have to understand the dynamics. So, every customer that comes generates a new dynamic and that's life! There is a movement for sustainability because, when it comes, we both create a new relational dynamic. (Eva, entrepreneur, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>These identity issues are very dangerous. Who am I? I am important, I am the employer, and you are the employee. I am the contractor and you are the staff. I am the owner of the company and the rest is stone, the rest is tree. So, this type of relationship that makes us distant, they cannot keep up, they cannot handle long-term maintenance. (Helena, consultant, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>So, I also see that all this is going to have to make people move, multidisciplinary, is going to have to have this look, call several people to look at different possibilities. (Eva, entrepreneur, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Because this story of speaking in terms of countries also no longer makes much sense. Sustainability no longer depends on one country. Economically, everything is so interconnected; socially, everything is so connected; and environmentally, everything is so connected, that it no longer makes sense if you talk about country policies. It makes sense to talk about global policies. (Carlos, executive, 2015)</i></p>

Diversity and Culture	<p><i>I think the first thing in terms of organizational management, which is essential for sustainability, is dealing with differences. Because three people in a room already have diversity; imagine two thousand. And our organizational model – which is still a patriarchal, military, industrial revolution – is to flatten diversity and homogenize people. (Camila, consultant, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Much emphasis was given to the external issue, to the technical question of sustainability, which is important. But an important question, which is the internal question, both individual and collective, has been left aside. So, now is the time to develop the inner self, the awareness of sustainability. And in a collective way, we work on the sustainability culture of organizations. (Airtón, professor, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>And we humans think we can go to any system with the same posture, and sometimes it is not possible. You need to find your place within that new system, that it has another story, another pattern. So, this is how I find a respect for life, you fit in, you dance with the system. (Eva, entrepreneur, 2015)</i></p>
Circular and Exponential	<p><i>All businesses must strive to become completely circular. (Volans, 2016, p. 7)</i></p> <p><i>A circular economy is one that is restorative and regenerative by design and aims to keep products, components, and materials at their highest utility and value at all times, distinguishing between technical and biological cycles. (MacArthur Foundation, 2015, p. 3)</i></p> <p><i>Circular economy is much more than waste; it is about: wasted resources, wasted capacity, wasted embedded values, wasted lifecycles. (CSR Berlin, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Use of the forest what is necessary for a given cycle [...] There is no exaggeration of accumulation and there is no feeling of lack. There is a feeling that the forest gives according to what is needed, according to the cycles, then we respect needs and cycles. (Davi, professor, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>A shift from incremental to exponential mindsets and ambitions; from our current focus on the negative impacts of economic activity to the deliberate generation of positive impacts; and from the business case for action to a reconsideration of business models that ensures industries are fit for tomorrow's very different market and geopolitical realities. (Volans, 2016, p. 3)</i></p>
Purpose and Positive Impact	<p><i>[The purpose of] organizations is for us to create the conditions for societies to develop. (Carlos, executive, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>What enables transformation is resilient and healthy communities. That is to say, the sense of community, of being together at the service of a cause, of a purpose, and of making that cause and purpose the agglutinating element that makes the whole greater than the sum of the parts, this is a key step in the sustainability agenda. (Andre, consultant, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>What good is it to sell my time to this company in exchange for a salary? Does that dignify my life? Does this accomplish my purpose? What is my purpose? How much is there a connection between my personal purposes, my personal values, the way I want to live my life and the values of the company where I am hired? (Sandra, consultant, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>The company is a means to find solutions to society. (Gabriel, professor, 2015)</i></p>

Chapter 6





*We have only the world
that we bring forth with others,
and only love
helps us bring it forth.*

(Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 248)





Reflections

* Previous versions of this research were presented at:

Oslo Innovation Week, held at Oslo City Hall in October 2013 in Norway;

Doctoral Colloquium of the 14th EURAM (European Academy of Management) Conference, held in June 2014 in Valencia – Spain;

Doctoral Workshop of the 6th International Conference on Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility, held at Humboldt- Universität in October 2014 in Berlin – Germany;

Doctoral Consortium of the Spirituality & Creativity in Management World Congress, held at ESADE in April 2015 in Barcelona – Spain;

Doctoral Workshop of the 7th International Conference on Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility, held at Microsoft in September 2016 in Berlin – Germany.

8th International Conference on Sustainability and Responsibility, held in November 2018 in Cologne – Germany.

A preliminary version of this research received the recognition of best PhD research during the Doctoral Consortium of the Spirituality & Creativity in Management World Congress, held at ESADE in April 2015 in Barcelona – Spain.



Guidance: this chapter presents practical and philosophical reflections about the entire research.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Love is the most important thing in the world. It may be important to great thinkers to examine the world, to explain and despise it. But I think it is only important to love the world.

(Herman Hesse, 1951 - Nobel Laureate in Literature)

6.1.1 The Interplay Between Love and Sustainability

"A world without love would be no world", Goethe (1749-1832) has already warned. However, we have built our own world with a series of narratives without love. Narratives that consider money and the economy more important than life itself. Narratives that prize the "business as usual" of prioritizing the maximization of profits, regardless of whether this form of business could contribute to the deaths of millions of people and other species on the planet. Narratives that deride love, which promotes life; but that consider honorable the wars that destroy lives. With these loveless narratives, we are destroying various forms of life on earth, including our own. The effects of these narratives without love are materialized in the aspects of the complex sustainability challenge: pollution; global warming; hunger; misery; refugee crises; and environmental wars, among many others.

To solve the sustainability challenge, we, as humankind, have placed a great deal of faith in the development of new technologies, with a belief that they will miraculously solve this complex issue. The problem is that technology is a double-edged sword: it can help to address the sustainability challenge, but it could also lead to the situation deteriorating further. This all depends on the narrative basis on which the technology is developed and is subsequently used. So, when considering narratives without love in terms of developing and using new technologies, these can become, once again, more important than life itself. We are at a point in our history where we have enough technology to destroy all life on earth with a simple push of a button, and thus to destroy our own world. Unfortunately, several destructive technologies are still being developed on the basis of the dominant, loveless narratives of the human



world. Additionally, due to the rapid pace of current technological development, a singularity is predicted within the next few years (Gawdat & Daher, 2018): a moment when technologies, such as artificial intelligence, become so advanced that nobody can forecast what will happen. A moment in which such critical changes may happen that it would no longer be possible to reverse them. A moment that would no longer require a person to push a button to destroy life on earth, as a technology could decide this for itself. After all, technologies like artificial intelligence do not learn by themselves; rather, they learn from the dominant narratives in the human world, which are still predominantly loveless. Thus, the great faith of humankind in new technologies to solve the complex sustainability challenge could ultimately contribute to ending all life on earth, including human life.

Meanwhile, narratives without love continue to create meaning through people's intersubjective reality. An intersubjective reality is one that is created through the interaction of narratives between people (Harari, 2016). It is not closely correlated with the so-called "objective" reality of facts and logics; however, it is in intersubjective reality that, through narratives, we construct our human world. Due to the current massive exponential rate of technological development, intersubjective reality may even become more powerful than the reality of facts and logic. In the words of Harari, "the intersubjective reality will swallow up the objective reality" (2016, p. 177). This is because of the destructive power of technologies that have been developed on the basis of narratives without love. Thus, while sustainability research typically focuses on facts and logic, like the technologies used to tackle the sustainability challenge, the current research proposes another perspective on this discussion. This study has focused on the very narratives that construct the human world, specifically on those regarding sustainability. As a way to understand the basis of the formation of these sustainability narratives, this research has reflected on the underlying layers, i.e., the philosophical underpinnings of these narratives. The main research question was: What are the philosophical underpinnings of today's sustainability narratives? The philosophical underpinnings found in this research were: beliefs about reality and existence, i.e, ontology (Chapter 2); antenarratives (Chapters 4 and 5); fractal narratives (Chapter 4), and social attractor (Chapter 5). Additionally, I reflected on the process by which these philosophical underpinnings operate; that is, the subject-object relationship (Chapter 3). The following sections elaborate on the methods used in this research and then present my own practical and philosophical reflections about the findings.

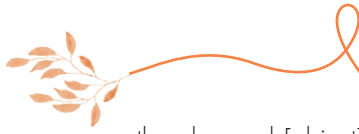
6.1.2 On Method and Truth

Against that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying "there are only facts", I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations.

(Nietzsche, 1968, p. 458)

Mainstream sustainability research usually concentrates on facts and logic: the so-called objective reality. The purpose of the current research was to study another perspective on sustainability: one based not on facts and logic, but on a myriad of different sustainability narratives; not on objective reality, but more on subjective and intersubjective realities. Thus, conventional research methods, developed for the study of so-called objective reality, were not suitable for this kind of research. I should note that I, in the course of this research, explored different methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative ones; however, none of them worked for this study. None of them seemed to encompass the ontological density of my more than 20 years' work in the area of sustainability. I felt limited and constrained by analytical methodologies. After much reflection, I decided to detach from these methodologies and to use a hermeneutic approach instead. This was liberating for me, and led to insights that I had not encountered before. This research is a narrative that did not attach to pre-described methods. In this case, I have applied my own narrative, which has been assessed by several academic researchers. Therefore, it is subjective and intersubjective. I agree with Ricoeur (2016), that "either we adopt the methodological attitude and lose ontological density of the reality we study, or we adopt the attitude of truth and must then renounce the objectivity of human sciences" (p. 93).

In this research I have drawn upon the alethic hermeneutic approach. In this type of hermeneutics, there is a mutual belonging of subject and object, a belonging of being and the environment (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Gadamer, 2013; Heidegger, 2010; Ricoeur, 2016). Therefore, in this research the subject (the researcher) and the object (what is being interpreted) are embedded. This view is also shared by social constructivism, where meaning "is less a property of



the observed [object] than a property of the observer [the researcher] and of the language that frames the interpretation" (Flory, 2008, p. 48). It is worth pointing out that the mainstream philosophical assumptions involves the separation of subject and object, of being and the environment. This means that, in most mainstream sustainability research, researchers distance themselves from what they study. However, by losing ontological density, researchers risk losing a sense of what the object of study really is. In this study, I decided to explore an alternative perspective. This decision was taken after seeing so many difficulties and harmful effects in terms of the tackling of the sustainability challenge while working with technologies as an engineer. Thus, I have invited the reader to be open to this different perspective, following all the distinctive reflections that this approach entails.

Finally, my purpose in this study was to restore the awareness of being. As time, i.e., the present moment, is essential for this awareness, then this concept also needs to be restored. In most mainstream research, time is suppressed, "in the form of timeless scientific models or timeless philosophical concepts, which would supposedly constitute the true reality behind occurrences in time" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 127). By forgetting about the significance of time and developing research in the form of timeless abstract models and concepts, most mainstream research thus forgets the being. Evidently, models and concepts are fine for analysis, to get a clear perspective of the interdependence of variables and to help make some sense of the world, but they are not to be blindly trusted as true representations of reality in the present moment. The current research has addressed time through narratives, because "every narrative moves through the fundamental medium of time" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 128). The purpose of this study was not to claim any absolute "Truth", but to reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of current sustainability narratives. This approach was adopted as a way to contribute to awareness of that which can be unconscious, through reflecting on the basis of the construction of "truths" in sustainability research and practice.

6.2 PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

*Because a child doesn't understand a chain of reasoning,
should adults give up being rational?
If reasonable people don't feel the presence of love
within the universe, that doesn't mean it's not there.*

(Rumi, 1996, p. 58)

In this section, I reflect on how this study can be used by academics and practitioners (including sustainability professionals, business leaders, and policy makers) in both therapeutic and edifying ways (Klamer, 2016). I propose some therapeutic implications of this study through questioning the basis of our sustainability narratives, as well as by inviting academics and practitioners to continue questioning the narratives of our world. Additionally, I share some insights to allow academics and practitioners to see and act beyond the currently mainstream sustainability narratives. Table 6.1 presents a summary of the main insights of this research.

6.2.1 Do Not Stop Questioning

*The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity
has its own reason for existence. One cannot help
but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of
eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is
enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this
mystery each day. Never lose a holy curiosity.*

(Einstein, 1955, p. 64)

Mainstream sustainability research and practice seem to have stopped questioning the structure of reality, and to now consider humankind as separate from the environment. After all, filtering a reality that seems so certain and concrete through human senses hinders the questioning of its structure. Unfortunately, this lack of



questioning contributes to humankind's relation with the environment in an instrumental and loveless way, which could even lead to the ultimate consequence of destroying humankind as a result of not dealing appropriately with the sustainability challenge. This research has proposed a way to return to these, largely forgotten, types of questioning. I have invited academics and practitioners to open up space for more of these lines of questioning, in ways such as those listed below.

- To question the ontological basis of sustainability research and practice, through questions such as: what are the limitations of conducting research or practice through the ontology considered (either realism or relativism)? What would be the results if the research or practice were conducted using another ontology? This questioning may inspire more reflection, before considering sustainability research and practice that takes either realism or relativism to represent the absolute truth. It might also contribute to seeing sustainability research and practice from different perspectives, and thus to finding new ways to tackle complex sustainability challenges.
- To question the current process of people's development toward sustainability: what can be done to help people to understand sustainability more thoroughly? How can the process of developing toward supporting sustainability go beyond just technical sustainability concepts? This reflection could contribute to academics and practitioners maintaining an awareness that, to understand and tackle sustainability in a more deep way, it is not enough to teach individuals simply technical knowledge about sustainability; it is also important to support the development of individuals' inner sustainability. I have suggested that this can be achieved through reflecting on the philosophical underpinnings of sustainability narratives to which one is subject, thus facilitating development of the subject-object relationship, and re-locating the philosophical underpinnings from inside ("being then") to outside ("having then"). This could enable

individuals to tackle the complex sustainability challenge from a deeper, inner space, i.e., closer to the being. I call the combination of this whole process "InsideOut Sustainability."

- To question the philosophical underpinnings of organizational sustainability research and practice: is the basis of these approaches more related to love than fear? Is it the right thing to do, or it is just "good" for the business? This may inspire more reflection on new ways in which organizations can tackle the sustainability challenge, making time for careful reflection about the sustainability context within which they operate. This type of reflection could also contribute to academics and practitioners becoming aware that even benchmarking organizations encounter difficulties in tackling the sustainability challenge; therefore, despite all the efforts of these organizations, they cannot blindly be considered as a reference point for how to tackle this issue.
- To question the philosophical underpinnings of societal sustainability narratives: are they based more on love than fear? Are these narratives related to a breakthrough in sustainability, or they are just "good" for the maintenance of past narratives, like infinite economic growth? What are the emerging innovative and inclusive sustainability narratives? It should be noted that these emerging narratives are not the mainstream ones, nor are they related to large groups of people. However, for complexity theorists, change develops from micro to macro, which is based on concepts like the butterfly effect, feedback and amplification, and self-organizing systems. This type of reflection can contribute to academics and practitioners having more hope when developing seemingly minor contributions to sustainability research and practice. In words attributed to the cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead (1901-1978):



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Finally, it should be added that scientific thinking is limited: it cannot be certain of everything. Thus, continuing to question in the right ways may contribute to more care and humility in the development of sustainability research and practice. It may also contribute to our consideration of the profound mysteries of life and the universe.

6.2.2 *Some Insights*

With the aim of contributing in an edifying way, I share some insights from this study that can contribute to tackling the sustainability challenge in ways beyond the currently mainstream sustainability narratives.

First, it is important to be aware that ontologies are just limited representations of so-called reality; a reality that, possibly, we can never entirely understand. Thus, to venture deeper in sustainability research and practice, I propose reflection through hermeneutics, fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013), and *phronesis* (Aristotle, 2009). Hermeneutical reflection can contribute to encouraging deep reflection on the results and narratives of realism or relativism, rather than taking them for granted. Fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013) can contribute to considering different perspectives in an open way, then asking different questions, based on multiple philosophical assumptions and detaching from absolute certainties of a single version of so-called reality. *Phronesis* (Aristotle, 2009) can help us to understand the right thing to do (Klamer, 2016); thus, sustainability academics and practitioners might go further on being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 2010), having concern, and caring for it.

To develop individuals toward sustainability, I argue that it is important to foment learning that is transformative, not just informative. Transformative learning aims at “changes not only in what we know but changes in how we know” (Kegan, 2000, p. 49); i.e., changes in epistemology. During transformation in the way of knowing, there is a “movement of what had been subject in the old epistemology to object in the new epistemology” (Kegan, 2000, p. 60). I suggest that this transformation can be facilitated by reflecting on the philosophical underpinnings of sustainability narratives of which one is subject.

Regarding sustainability itself, I suggest that it is important to consider different dimensions when tackling sustainability challenges: from the inner, human dimensions, to outer dimensions like organizations, societies, and the planet. Also, because sustainability does not have a clear path (due to its complexity it is constantly changing), fixed models constructed based on past realities might not work in the context of the reality of the present moment. Thus, during research on sustainability it is important to be open to the unknown, to the uncertainty in the development of relevant models and tools, and to not taking for granted fixed models or tools for tackling the sustainability challenge. For organizations, it is important to open up space for vulnerability, uncertainty, and discovering the sustainable path in each decision. Although sustainability does not have a clear path or ready-made instructions, the principles of nature might be used as helpful signals along the path. This could contribute to academics and practitioners developing a deeper understanding of natural principles and applying this to sustainability research and practice.

Additionally, as a practical way to base organizational decisions on what is the right thing to do, I suggest substantive reasoning and *phronesis* (practical wisdom). Substantive reasoning can contribute by focusing “on what is important, on values and also on what is worth striving for” (Klamer, 2016, p. X). To reveal what is important, values, qualities, purpose, and praxis all need to be taken into account. This may not be a rational process, but *phronesis* can help along the way. According to Klamer (2016): “*Phronesis* involves the weighing of values, conditions, interests and findings in order to do the right thing. It is often a chaotic process with a lot of talk, a going back and forth, the making of mistakes, and more talk and deliberation” (p. 372). Furthermore, I have found that the antenarrative of the business case for sustainability is, arguably, related to the fractal narratives of the fear of scarcity and competition for survival. This reflection can be of use to those academics and practitioners who perhaps are trapped in past paradigms and philosophical assumptions. It indicates that a more fruitful approach would be to make time for reflection and introspection. This may contribute to sustainability research and practice beyond the business case for sustainability.

Regarding the new sustainability narratives emerging in society, I identified 13 patterns emerging in those that are innovative and inclusive. The comprehensive pattern I called social attractor (Figure 5.3). These 13 patterns can be used as inspirations to tackle the challenges of sustainability in innovative and inclusive ways. It is worth noting that these patterns are emerging phenomena, meaning that





they are not planned by a central organization. This insight could give academics and practitioners more confidence in the wisdom and resilience of societal systems, independent of restrictive external policies. Moreover, reflecting on a research agenda for each one of the patterns could encourage sustainability research beyond the mainstream approaches.

Finally, I invite academics and practitioners to develop sustainability research and practice based on a closer connection with the environment, in a more interdependent way. Additionally, since the human world is constructed in language, it is through language that academics and practitioners can jointly construct a more sustainable world for all. To achieve this, it is important to understand how we construct our own world and how, together, we can transform it through reflection and dialogue.

6.3 PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

[I do not walk to the end, I walk to the origins.]

Eu não caminho para o fim, eu caminho para as origens.

(Manoel de Barros - Brazilian Poet, 1916-2014)

In this research, I have reflected on the origins of current sustainability narratives; i.e., their philosophical underpinnings. These origins have been analyzed in terms of different dimensions: personal (the researcher); individual (entrepreneurs, executives and professors); organizational, and societal. Table 6.1 presents a summary of the main insights of this research.

6.3.1 Concluding Philosophical Reflections

To consider the origins of sustainability narratives in more depth, throughout this research I reflected on how the apparent separation of being and the environment contributes to our instrumental relationship with the environment, thus contributing to loveless sustainability narratives and consequently to the complexity of the

sustainability challenge. Gadamer (2013) refers to this separation of being and the environment through language, as humankind rising above the environment: “To rise above the environment has from the outset a human – i.e., a verbal significance. Animals can leave their environment and move over the whole earth without severing their environmental dependence” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 461). This means that the separation between being and the environment contributes to a position that is distanced from the environment, which is realized through language. In this way, humankind, unlike animals, can sever its environmental dependence. Figure 6.1 illustrates this separation of being and the environment, a distance between subject and object, constructed by language. In the left-hand side of this figure, the being is embedded in the environment; there is neither subject nor object. Arguably, a separation is constructed through language: the being relates to the environment as an object, which is represented in the right-hand side of the figure. As noted before, this separation through language is beyond the level of words, but it is through words that it is possible to reflect on it. In the words of Gadamer (2013): “... what comes into language is something different from the spoken word itself. But the word is a word only because of what comes into language in it. Its own physical being exists only in order to disappear into what is said” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 491).

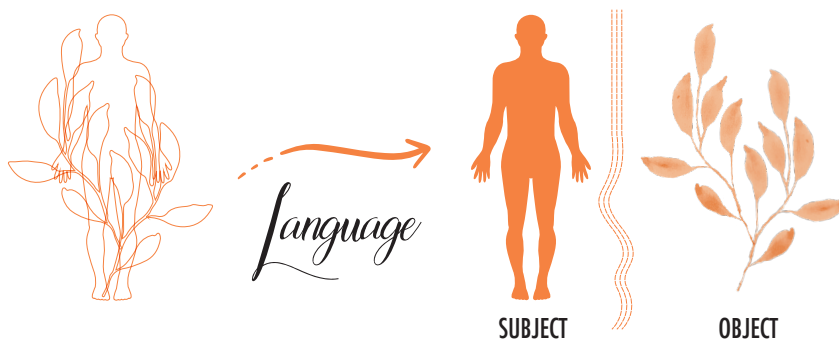
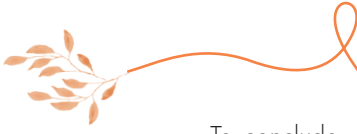


FIGURE 6.1 | Separation of being and the environment through language

It should also be pointed out that separation between the being and the environment is a part of human development: it is related to the subject–object relationship. Therefore, this study has not proposed a return to the original form of fusion with the environment, but a transcendence of it, through gaining awareness of the philosophical underpinnings of our sustainability narratives.



To conclude, this research has presented a reflection on the philosophical underpinnings of sustainability narratives, which I have proposed are the “filters” or “lens” to which individuals are subject during sustainability research and practice. In Figure 6.2, the left-hand side shows representations of these filters. Specifically, the philosophical underpinnings studied in this research were: beliefs about reality and existence, i.e., ontology (Chapter 2); antenarratives (Chapters 4 and 5); fractal narratives (Chapter 4), and social attractors (Chapter 5). Additionally, I reflected on the process by which these “filters” operate; that is, the subject–object relationship (Chapter 3). An awareness of these philosophical underpinnings can contribute to breaking the balance between subject and object, supporting a new “inner dance” for a deeper understanding of sustainability. The right-hand side of Figure 6.2 shows the reconnection of being with the environment through awareness of the “filters.” I suggest that becoming conscious of the philosophical underpinnings of our sustainability narratives can contribute to deeper reflection and, eventually, to reconnection with the environment. Evidently, this study has not aimed toward the initial merging of being in the environment (Figure 6.1, left-hand side), but to a transcendence of it (Figure 6.2, right-hand side). This is because it is through language that humankind has grown immensely, constructed communities, and developed complex societies: all of which are elements of humanity’s development that relate to the subject–object relationship. However, during this development, humankind has constructed dangerous meanings and beliefs through narratives, antenarratives, fractal narratives, and social attractors, with increasing levels of complexity. The original concept of belonging in the environment has been forgotten. To further complicate the issue, in this forgetfulness humankind has developed destructive and powerful technologies, which have the potential to destroy all life on the planet, including human life itself. This research has presented a humble invitation to reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of the narratives of our world.



FIGURE 6.2 | Reconnection of being and the environment by awareness of the philosophical underpinnings of current sustainability narratives

6.3.2 A Proposal

We build the human world through different narratives: behind the current sustainability narratives, there are philosophical underpinnings that humankind has built up over time. These philosophical underpinnings were constructed in past contexts, which differ from the current context of the rapid advancement of potentially highly destructive technologies combined with the exhaustion of natural resources and the disequilibrium of the planet's natural systems. Applying the philosophical underpinnings of the past to construct sustainability narratives in the present context of humankind and the planet can thus have disastrous consequences for both. This research has focused on reflecting on these philosophical underpinnings so that they can be consciously reconsidered, discussed, and altered. To begin this discussion, I proposed basing new sustainability narratives on philosophical underpinnings that are deeper – closer to the being. The deepest concept I am aware of that can be expressed in words (albeit in a limited way) is love. There are different kinds of love (romantic, brotherly, etc), I propose the universal one, which is known as agape. The agape love includes love for all people and love for the planet. Thus, I propose agape love as one of the main philosophical underpinnings of sustainability narratives, for both research and practice. I conclude by suggesting that the world does not want to be saved; it wants to be loved. It is through love that we can save our world.



6.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

*No one has ever succeeded in
conveying Truth through words alone,
for Truth is beyond words, learning,
imagination and language. It is unfathomable.
Words like God, consciousness, emptiness,
the Self, the great void, the Supreme Being
inspire and evoke a contemplation, and perhaps,
herein lies their real purpose and service,
but in truth there are no words for that which alone Is.
When and where words come to an end,
It, the What Is, does not begin.
It is there in the space between two thoughts,
but it is also there during the appearing of thoughts.*

(Moaji, 2018)

This research project has now come to its end. However, this ending does not mean that I have found “the Truth” regarding how to tackle the complex sustainability challenge. On the contrary, in this research I have questioned and reflected on different “truths,” which could perhaps show paths that have potential to address this challenge. I do not know the Truth, and maybe Truth is beyond words. The purpose of this research was to reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of current sustainability narratives as a way to question the basis of the construction of truths in sustainability research and practice. This study is a result of my experience, reflections, and narratives combined with the inspirations and ideas of giants of the field, upon whose shoulders I have gently stood. Even so, I admit that these reflections do not do justice to these sources of inspiration.

At the beginning of this study, I presented an invitation to the reader to open their head and heart to the perspectives reflected in this research. So, if the reflections in this study made sense to you, I further invite you to use and advance them in your sustainability research and practice. If they did not make sense, I simply invite you to reflect on what you have read and then go on your way in peace.

I hope that this research contributes to reflections regarding looking beyond facts and logic in sustainability research and practice, and to awareness about the narratives we use to make sense of sustainability. Additionally, by reflecting on the philosophical underpinnings of our sustainability narratives, I hope that these underpinnings may be consciously rethought, discussed, and changed. I have proposed love (the agape one) as one of the main philosophical underpinnings for future sustainability narratives, and I have concluded by inviting the reader to base their sustainability research and practice on love.

Finally, may the words of Albert Einstein (1960, p. 282) inspire our common journey of being:

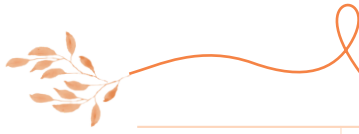
"Still there are moments when one feels free from one's own identification with human limitations and inadequacies. At such moments, one imagines that one stands on some spot of a small planet, gazing in amazement at the cold yet profoundly moving beauty of the eternal, the unfathomable: life and death flow into one, and there is neither evolution nor destiny; only being."



TABLE 6.1 | Summary with the main insights of this research

PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS, AND OTHER INSIGHTS	PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS	PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
Philosophical underpinning: Beliefs on ontologies (realism, relativism, or other) as true representations of “reality” (Chapter 2)	As different ontologies seem to reflect contradictory representations of reality, it is important to be aware that they are just limited representations of so-called reality. To see beyond ontologies, I propose deep reflection through hermeneutics, fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013), and <i>phronesis</i> (Aristotle, 2009).	The importance of questioning before considering analysis through any ontology as “the truth”. Some suggestions to see beyond ontologies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hermeneutical reflection can contribute to not taking for granted the results and narratives of any ontology by reflecting deeply on them; ○ Fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013) can contribute to seeing different perspectives in an open way, then asking different questions, from multiple philosophical assumptions and detaching from absolute certainties of a single version of so-called reality; ○ <i>Phronesis</i> (Aristotle, 2009) can help to understand the right thing to do (Klamer, 2016). So, sustainability academics and practitioners might encourage being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 2010), taking concern and caring for it.
Subject–object relationship (Chapter 3)	In deep personal development there is a change in epistemology. In the words of Kegan (2000): “We do not only form meaning, and we do not only change our meanings; we change the very form by which we are making our meanings. We change our epistemologies” (pp. 52–53). This means that individuals move what was subject to object, moving the philosophical underpinnings from “being then” to “having then” (Kegan, 2000). Thus, to develop individuals to know sustainability in a deep way, it is important to support a growth in their inner dance of subject and object: developing more than just technical skills, but individuals’ inner sustainability.	To understand and tackle the sustainability challenge in a deeper way, it is not enough to teach individuals just technical knowledge about sustainability; it is also important to develop the inner, human dimensions of sustainability. Thus, I invite universities and organizations to support the development of individuals’ inner sustainability. I suggest that this can be done through reflecting on the philosophical underpinnings of sustainability narratives of which one is subject, thus facilitating a growth in the subject–object relationship, moving the philosophical underpinnings from inside (“being then”) to outside (“having then”). Then, individuals can tackle the complex sustainability challenge from a deeper, inner space, i.e., closer to the being. The combination of this whole process I call “InsideOut Sustainability.”

<p>Philosophical underpinning: Antennarratives (Chapters 4 and 5)</p>	<p>Antennarratives are fragmentary constitutive ideas that come before the narratives, the building blocks of narratives and the means by which people make retrospective sense of the world or anticipate the future (Boje, 2001; Perey, 2014). In accordance with previous research (e.g. Adams, 2002; Adams, Potter, Singh, & York, 2016), I found that the antennarratives on sustainability of the analyzed organizations converged in two main groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is the right thing to do – consistent with substantive reasoning and <i>phronesis</i> (practical wisdom); ○ It is good for business (the business case for sustainability) – consistent with instrumental reasoning (means to ends). 	<p>As a practical way to base the organizational decisions more on what is the right thing to do, I suggest substantive reasoning and <i>phronesis</i> (practical wisdom). Substantive reasoning can contribute by focusing “on what is important, on values and also on what is worth striving for” (Klamer, 2016, p. X). To find what is important, then values, qualities, purpose, and praxis all need to be considered. This may not be a rational process, but <i>phronesis</i> can help along the way. According to Klamer (2016), “<i>Phronesis</i> involves the weighing of values, conditions, interests and findings in order to do the right thing. It is often a chaotic process with a lot of talk, a going back and forth, the making of mistakes, and more talk and deliberation” (p. 372).</p>
<p>Philosophical underpinning: Fractal narratives (Chapter 4)</p>	<p>Fractals are patterns encountered on several levels (Mandelbrot, 1977). I suggest that the antennarrative on the business case for sustainability is related to the fractal narrative around fear of scarcity and competition for survival. On the organizational level, it is related to having the maximum resources to survive, to self-sustain, but without other deeper purposes, like solving problems for society and the planet. The fear of scarcity and competition for survival are old beliefs constructed in society, which are based on misinterpretations of studies in different fields, from economy to biology (e.g. Darwin, 1859, 1871; Smith, 1759, 1776). Finally, I argue that organizations need a new narrative; a narrative that is more fit for human beings and in closer harmony with the planet.</p>	<p>On an even deeper level than the antennarratives, I found that the business case for sustainability is, arguably, related to the fractal narrative around the fear of scarcity and competition for survival. This insight can make a contribution for academics and practitioners, who perhaps are trapped in past paradigms and philosophical assumptions. It indicates that a more fruitful approach would be making time for reflection and introspection. This may contribute to sustainability research and practice beyond the business case for sustainability. Additionally, “when a perturbation is visited on a fractal, it affects all scales simultaneously” (Perey, 2014, p. 216). I also suggest that, by deeply reflecting on new methods of sustainability research and practice, and making them real, the fractal narrative of the fear of scarcity and the competition for survival can be modified. This fractal narrative can be modified for one that contributes to the flourishing of both humankind and the planet.</p>



Philosophical underpinning: Social attractor (Chapter 5)	<p>This study is related to the inclusive and innovative narratives on sustainability in society.</p> <p>I found 13 patterns emerging in these narratives. Inspired by complexity and chaos theories, I proposed a comprehensive pattern, which I called “social attractor.” Like the fractals, I suggest that the social attractor is dispersed in the antenarratives (Boje, 2001; Perey, 2014). Additionally, according to the butterfly effect, in chaotic systems, small events can have huge consequences due to the non-linearity of these systems. Thus, the innovative and inclusive narratives on sustainability, besides not being the mainstream narratives, have the potential to help the entire societal chaotic system to evolve. Also, according to the concepts of feedback and amplification, positive feedback (that moves the system even further from equilibrium) can amplify the changes. When the volume of positive feedback becomes a disturbance of the magnitude that the societal system can no longer ignore it, the system self-organizes in a new form or it disintegrates. Thereby, the current chaos in the societal system with its apparent conflicting narratives can help society, through positive feedback, to self-organize into a new form. I suggest that the patterns in the social attractor (Figure 5.3) might be a preview of the next upcoming narratives in society.</p>	<p>I argued that in the middle of the social attractor is the “Openness to Review Beliefs and to Evolve,” which I suggested “attracts” the other patterns. On the left-hand side of Figure 5.3 are the patterns that are more related to inner dimensions in society: authenticity and vulnerability; balance, care and respect; ethics and values; compassion and wisdom, and a mindset of abundance and prosperity. On the right-hand side of Figure 5.3 are the patterns more related to the outer dimensions in society: collaboration and multiple value creation; freedom of reflection and dialogue; networks and interdependence; blurring of borders; diversity and culture; circular and exponential, and purposeful and positive impact. These 13 patterns can contribute as inspirations for academics and practitioners to tackle sustainability challenges in innovative and inclusive ways.</p>
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<p>Other insights (Chapters 3 and 6)</p>	<p>Sustainability insights from the interviewees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sustainability from different dimensions (from inner individual's dimensions to outer ones, such as organizations, society, and planet); ○ Sustainability as a direction, not a clear path (because its complexity, sustainability challenges are constantly changing); ○ Natural principles (e.g. interdependence, diversity) as helpful pointers along the path; ○ To take care of the external environment, it is important to take care of the internal environment, i.e., the importance of taking care of the human dimensions of sustainability. <p>I argued that, to understand and tackle sustainability in a deeper way, it would be important to pay attention to the inner, human dimensions of sustainability. Then, for inspiration, I proposed a model composed of: balance; care; love; respect, and wisdom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The importance of considering different dimensions when tackling the sustainability challenge; from the inner, human dimensions to outer dimensions like organizations, society and the planet. Also, understanding the relationships of the different dimensions in the sustainability challenge, i.e., how one dimension can influence the other dimensions. ○ Because of its complexity, sustainability does not have a clear path as it is constantly changing. Fixed models constructed with past realities might therefore not work with the reality of the present moment. I suggested that, for research on sustainability, it would be important to be open to the unknown, to the uncertainty in the development of relate models and tools, and not to take for granted fixed models or tools for tackling the sustainability challenge. For organizations, it would also be important to open up a space for vulnerability, uncertainty, and discovering the sustainable path in each decision. Also, in the development of programs for sustainability, it would be important to consider doubt, uncertainty, and vulnerability. ○ Although sustainability is complex, without a clear path to tackle its challenge, the principles of nature can be used as signposts along the path. A deeper understanding of natural principles could be important in sustainability research and practice. ○ To enhance the effectiveness of our tackling of the sustainability challenge, I suggest inner, human development and developing training programs for sustainability that also considers the human inner dimensions. ○ The model with the dimensions of sustainability (Figure 3.1), including balance, care, love, respect, and wisdom, might inspire academics and practitioners to understand more about the inner dimensions of sustainability and explore it in their sustainability research and practice.
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Other insights (Conclusion)	<p>The philosophical underpinnings studied in this research were: beliefs about reality and existence, i.e., ontology (Chapter 2); antenarratives (Chapters 4 and 5); fractal narratives (Chapter 4), and social attractor (Chapter 5). Additionally, I also reflected on the process that these “filters” operate; that is, the subject–object relationship (Chapter 3).</p> <p>The awareness about these philosophical underpinnings can contribute to breaking the balance between subject and object, supporting a new “inner dance” for a deeper understanding of sustainability.</p>	<p>We build the human world through different narratives, so behind the sustainability narratives there are philosophical underpinnings built up over time by humankind. I propose to base the new sustainability narratives on philosophical underpinnings that are deeper, closer to the being. The deepest form I am aware of that can be expressed in words (albeit in a limited way) is love. Thus, I propose love as one of the main philosophical underpinnings of sustainability narratives, for both research and practice. I conclude by suggesting that the world does not want to be saved, it wants to be loved. It is through love that we can save our world.</p>
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Chapter 7



Amar

Que pode uma criatura senão,
entre criaturas, amar?
amar e esquecer,
amar e malamar,
amar, desamar, amar?
sempre, e até de olhos vidrados, amar?

Que pode, pergunto, o ser amoroso,
sozinho, em rotação universal, senão
rodar também, e amar?
amar o que o mar traz à praia,
e o que ele sepulta, e o que, na brisa marinha,
é sal, ou precisão de amor, ou simples ânsia?

Amar solenemente as palmas do deserto,
o que é entrega ou adoração expectante,
e amar o inóspito, o áspero,
um vaso sem flor, um chão de ferro,
e o peito inerte, e a rua vista em sonho, e uma
ave de rapina.

Este o nosso destino: amor sem conta,
distribuído pelas coisas pérfidas ou nulas,
doação ilimitada a uma completa ingratidão,
e na concha vazia do amor a procura medrosa,
paciente, de mais e mais amor.

Amar a nossa falta mesma de amor, e na secura
nossa
amar a água implícita, e o beijo tácito, e a sede
infinita.

To love

What can a creature but,
among creatures, to love?
to love and to forget,
to love and to love wrongly,
to love, to stop loving, to love?
always, and even with glazed eyes, to love?

What can, I ask, the loving being,
alone, in universal rotation, but to
rotate too, and love?
love what the sea brings to the beach,
and what it buries, and what, in the sea
breeze,
is salt, or precision of love, or simple craving?

To love solemnly the desert palms,
what is surrender or expectant worship,
and to love the inhospitable, the rough,
a vase without flower, an iron floor,
and the inert chest, and the street seen in a
dream, and a bird of prey.

This is our destiny: lots of love,
distributed by perfidious or null things,
unlimited donation to a complete ingratitude,
and in the empty shell of love the fearful pursuit,
patient, of more and more love.

To love our own lack of love, and in our dryness
love the implicit water, and the tacit kiss, and
the infinite thirst.

(Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Brazilian Poet, 1902-1987 - author's own translation)







Epilogue

ON SUSTAINABILITY AND LOVE



***Guidance:** this chapter is an epilogue with reflections on practical implications for academics and practitioners.*

7.1 MESSAGE TO ACADEMICS

"Bringing forth a world is the burning issue of knowledge" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 27). What kind of world are we bringing forth with the research we develop? What kind of world are we bringing forth with the goals we stipulate for producing and publishing our research? What kind of world are we bringing forth with the teaching approaches we take, and the contents of what we teach our students?

Ultimately, if we develop sustainability research using philosophical underpinnings based on unsustainability, are we really bringing forth a more sustainable world? For example, if we use the business-as-usual philosophical basis of only maximizing profits to develop organizational-related sustainability research, are we actually developing research to help organizations bring forth a more sustainable world? Or are we just using different narratives (e.g., the business case for sustainability) to maintain a past vision that is no longer sustainable in the current context?

Consider if we were to set goals for developing and publishing our sustainability research using philosophical underpinnings based on instrumentalism. As an example, when we put in place instrumental goals for researchers to develop publishable sustainability research in "first-class" journals, without actually asking ourselves what kind of world we are bringing forth through these goals, are we really bringing forth a more sustainable world through our academic efforts? Or are we just using an outdated philosophical basis from past contexts of command and control, to further control and consequently limit creativity and academic contribution?

If we teach our students sustainability content based only on the ontology of realism, about a predictable and controllable world—for example, when we teach that there is one single objective reality, and to predict and control this reality we only need to learn some fundamental technical concepts—are we actually teaching students to help bring forth a more sustainable world? Or are we merely passing on partial philosophical concepts and limiting the abilities and creativity of our students to develop new solutions to the sustainability challenge?

I understand that, as academics, we are in the midst of institutions and systems that seem powerful and that can exert great control over our lives and careers. It is not easy to challenge this system and take the risk of losing career opportunities. Thus, we often think first of attaining a certain position and of our academic achievements. After this, we intend to develop research that we believe in





and also to teach differently. However, is it really worth waiting for a lifetime to only be able to follow our deeper inspirations and be authentic at the later stages? What guarantee do we have that this will really happen one day? What if we cannot return to what we believe in, and when we realize this, it is just too late? Then we will have lost precious years of our lives developing research that we do not believe in, and that does not actually contribute to bringing forth a more sustainable world. Additionally, we will also have contributed to destroying the dreams and aspirations of succeeding generations, by maintaining past patterns and teaching people to bring forth an unsustainable world.

I know that I have asked more questions than I have answered. But it is through questions that we academics can reflect upon the world that we are bringing forth, whether consciously or unconsciously. Thus, after posing all these questions, I present an invitation to consider different possibilities in sustainability research and education.

7.1.1 An Invitation Regarding Sustainability Research

First, I invite you to undertake an exercise of reflection. Forget for a moment about yourself and your career. I know it is not easy, but paradoxical as it may seem, it may be important to help your self-discovery as an academic. Then, reflect on the impact of your current research on the world. Feel this impact in people's lives and on the planet. What do you feel? Does this research make sense in the context of today's world? Does it contribute to making the world better? Next, reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of your current research. Are these underpinnings really sustainable, both for humanity and for the planet? Are they based more on love than fear?

After you have reflected on your current research, I invite you to explore further and expand your research possibilities. Imagine that it would be possible for you to conduct any type of research. Forget for a moment any kind of restriction (financial, career, resources, etc.): just imagine that anything could be possible. If you could develop any kind of research you wanted, what would it be? What area would it focus on? What would the subject matter be? What problem would you solve? Which issues would you research if you were truly committed to making the world better? Now, imagine developing this dream research project. Feel the joy, the satisfaction of developing this research. Feel your contribution to humanity and to the planet through this research.

Once you have reflected on the research you would like to develop, now consider the small steps you could start taking now toward your goal. Remember that your mind will try to block your ideas and dreams. There are many philosophical underpinnings in the way of making sense of your research, career, and success. So try not to focus on your limitations, but on the possibilities. Reflect on the small steps you can take from now on. For example: reading articles in your area of real research interest; finding academics who already work in this area; talking to people you know will support you, etc. In this way, start walking in the direction of this research. The steps can be small, it does not matter. The most important thing is to walk in the direction that your inner being is whispering to you, one step at a time. In the words of the Chinese philosopher Lao Tse (6th – 5th century BC): “Every journey begins with a single step.”

In addition to starting out on your next steps, you can also help inspire others around you to rethink their own research. In a more comprehensive way, you can help your peers and your university management to reconsider research goals and objectives. You could invite them to reflect on whether these indicators help to promote research that could bring forth a more sustainable world. Invite them to reflect on different issues. Do these indicators help bring out the best or the worst in the academic community? What are the philosophical underpinnings of these indicators? Are they based on love or fear? Propose open discussions to review these indicators. It may be that many academics are thinking the same things, but that no one has yet had the courage to manifest their ideas. In these conversations, try to forget for a moment your own interests, your career, hierarchies, and relational difficulties with other academics. Try to talk to them authentically and be present. Try not to condemn or judge anyone; rather, be open to the experience and give every chance for the best in people to emerge. Maybe you will be surprised by the results, maybe not – it does not matter. Just give a chance to the ideas that want to emerge from your deep being, to simply do so.

7.1.2 An Invitation Regarding Sustainability Education

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all,” Aristotle warned. However, we currently educate people only from the intellectual point of view. So, I invite you to further reflection. Does the content you teach in your classes help your students to bring forth a more sustainable world? Do your teaching methods





help your students become more connected with their hearts, their inner selves? Do your classes combine challenges and support for students' growth at the same time? What are the philosophical underpinnings of your classes: fear, competition, and scarcity; or love, cooperation, and abundance? Consider the impact of your classes on your students, and consequently on their actions and society. What could you do from now on to engage all the humanity of your students during your classes? What could you do from now on so that your classes contribute to the development of your students' minds and hearts, so that they can bring forth a more sustainable world?

Finally, to go beyond reflection, I present a poem to help us all deepen our connections with being and inspire our journeys as sustainability academics:

*Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
mere skill and little gain;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
thrown by an eternal partner
with accurate and measured swing
towards you, to your center, in an arch
from the great bridge building of God:
why catching then becomes a power –
not yours, a world's.*

(Rainer Maria Rilke, German Poet, 1875–1926)

7.2 MESSAGE TO PRACTITIONERS

"The current sustainability agenda is a band-aid in an exposed fracture," is a statement that I heard from an important sustainability executive in Brazil. He had heard this from someone who had a great impact on him. As difficult as it may be, I also believe that there is a lot of truth in this statement. Does this therefore mean that our work as sustainability professionals, business leaders, and policy makers is not worth anything? That all the sustainability actions that we apply to the practice of organizations and societies does not have any effect? I would argue not, as I have seen many inspiring examples of sustainability practices across Brazil and

around the world. However, I have also seen that many of these practices are isolated and small, and that most organizations and societies in the world are still far from establishing practices that actually contribute to bringing forth a more sustainable world. To make matters worse, according to the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2018), humankind has only a decade to avoid climate catastrophe. This will require a profound transformation of sustainability practices and management worldwide. Therefore, the work of sustainability practitioners is vital if humankind is to undergo a transformation of such unprecedented scale.

So, I invite you to an exercise of reflection. You, who as sustainability practitioner, are tired, overwhelmed, and disconnected from the dream that one day you have to contribute to a more sustainable world. I have met hundreds of practitioners like you, during my work of more than 20 years in the field of sustainability. The vast majority of those who I have met chose to work in the area of sustainability in pursuit of a gift, a genuine willingness to contribute to bringing forth a more sustainable world. However, after much study and dedication to this dream, many of them end up in organizations that hire them just to comply with some sort of legislation, or worse, to do some kind of "greenwashing." I know that the pain of working in such an organization is not insignificant, and that combining the conflicting demands of career, work, and livelihood with the dream of a more sustainable world is very difficult. I hope that this reflection may help you move forward in finding your path again.

7.2.1 An Invitation Regarding Sustainability Practices

To begin, forget yourself and your career for a moment. I know it is not easy, but this exercise may help you to reconnect with yourself, your own inner voice. Then, reflect on the sustainability practices of your organization. Focus on the practices that are under your responsibility, both directly and indirectly. Do these sustainability practices contribute to a more sustainable world? Are these practices sufficient to fully mitigate the negative impacts of your organization? In addition to mitigating impacts, do these sustainability practices go beyond minimizing harm, to actively creating good? Reflect on the impacts that the sustainability practices that are under your responsibility have on the world. Feel these impacts in the lives of people, and





on the planet. What do you feel? Does these practices make sense in the context of today's world? Then, reflect on the basis (philosophical underpinnings) of these practices. Are these more related to love than fear?

After you have reflected on the current sustainability practices under your control in your organization, I invite you to go deeper and expand the possibilities of your work. Imagine that any type of sustainability practice could be possible for your organization. Forget for a moment any kind of restriction (financial, career, resources, etc.). If anything were possible, if you could develop any kind of practice you wanted, what would it be? What sustainability practices would you implement if your organization were truly committed to making the world better? What problems would you solve for people and the planet? Now, imagine implementing these ideal goals. Feel the joy, the satisfaction of developing this work. Feel your contribution, through your work, to humanity and to the planet.

Once you have reflected on the sustainability practices you would like to implement, now reflect on small steps that you could start taking from now on toward establishing these practices. Remember that your mind will try to block your ideas and dreams. There are many philosophical underpinnings in your way to make sense of work, career, and success. So try not to focus on the limitations, but on the possibilities. Small steps that you could start taking include, for example: studying innovative sustainability practices of other organizations; finding professionals who already work with these practices; talking to peers you know will support you, etc. Start walking in the direction of the work you want to do. The steps can be small, it does not matter, as long as you are walking in the direction that your inner being is directing you toward, one step at a time.

7.2.2 An Invitation Regarding Sustainability Management

With great power comes great responsibility. Is your organization using its power in a responsible way? Unfortunately, it seems that there is an irresponsible gap between the sustainability management of organizations and the information that science provides (e.g. IPCC, 2018). Using climate change as an example, if organizations proceed with the same performances in terms of greenhouse-gas emissions as they are showing now, the temperature of the planet will probably increase above the limit of 2°C proposed by the IPCC. This is because most organizations have

conservative indicators to reduce their emissions. Therefore, maintaining business as usual could arguably lead to climate catastrophes worldwide.

Thus, I invite you to an exercise of reflection. How effective is the sustainability management in your organization? What sustainability indicators does your organization have? Do these sustainability indicators, and their management, go beyond minimizing harm to actively creating good? What kind of sustainability management would you implement if your organization were truly committed to making the world better? Is your organization using its power in a responsible way? Are the sustainability management and indicators of your organization based on love or fear? What are the impacts that they have on society, and on the planet? Feel these impacts and consider what you could do from now on to help your organization to advance in its sustainability management. For example, you could help inspire others around you to rethink their own management approaches. In a more comprehensive way, you can help your peers and your management to rethink sustainability goals and objectives. You could invite them to reflect on whether these indicators and management approaches help promote a more sustainable world. You can propose open discussions to review these indicators. It may be that many of your peers are thinking the same things, but that no one has yet had the courage to manifest these ideas. In these conversations, try to forget for a moment about yourself, your career, hierarchies, and relational difficulties with other professionals. Try to talk to them authentically and be present. Try not to condemn or judge anyone. Be open to the experience and give every chance for the best on people to emerge. Maybe you will be surprised by the results, maybe not – it does not matter. Just give the chance to the ideas that want to emerge through your inner being, to simply do so.

Finally, may the following words inspire our common journey as sustainability practitioners:

"The day will come when, after harnessing the space, the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, French philosopher and theologian, 1881-1955)



7.3 BACK TO THE FUTURE?

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I will meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about
language, ideas, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense*

(Rumi, 1996, p. 36)

Consider the analogy of human development and a person's relationship with the mother at different stages of life. A baby, before birth, is integrated in the body of the mother. Then, after birth, the child is still connected with the mother in some way until adulthood. The mother feeds the child, the child gets all that he/she wants, often not caring about the sacrifices of the mother; in fact, not really understanding them.

We can see the same patterns in the development of the relationship between being and the environment. Initially, the being was integrated in the environment (as represented in the left-hand side of Figure 6.1). Then, through language, there was a rupture: a separation of the being and the environment. The environment feeds the being, while the being gets all that it wants, not caring about the sacrifices of the environment; in fact, not really understanding them. The being positioned itself as subject and began to relate to the environment as an object. In this separation through language, different filters were used (which are referred to in this research as philosophical underpinnings).

Finally, I suggest that it is time for humankind to grow from childhood to adulthood in its relationship with the planet: to grow from using it indefinitely and without awareness, to embracing, taking care of, and loving it. As in the parable of the prodigal son, who left home to experience the world, it is time to return home, to loving and caring deeply for (Mother) Earth. In the words of one of the greatest Latin American poets, the Nobel Laureate in Literature, Pablo Neruda (1990, p. 500):



*Es la hora, amor mío, de apartar esta rosa
sombria, cerrar las estrellas, enterrar la ceniza
en la tierra; y, en la insurrección de la luz,
despertar con los que despertaron o seguir en
el sueño alcanzando la otra orilla del mar que
no tiene otra orilla.*



*It is time, love, to break off that sombre rose,
shut up the stars and bury the ash in the earth;
and, in the rising of the light, wake with those
who awoke or go on in the dream, reaching the
other shore of the sea which has no other shore.*





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Samenvatting

“Alles van waarde is weerloos”, merkte de Nederlandse dichter Lucebert op. De planeet is kwetsbaar, de balans van ecosystemen is kwetsbaar, leven is kwetsbaar, het menselijk leven is kwetsbaar. Hoewel veel waardevolle dingen kwetsbaar zijn heeft de mensheid narratieven die deze kwetsbaarheid lijken te vergeten. Toch heeft de mensheid narratieven nodig om de wereld te begrijpen en mensen in staat te stellen zich te verbinden. Narratieven maken het mogelijk om betekenis te creëren in de intersubjectieve werkelijkheden die tussen mensen zijn gebouwd (Boje, 2001; Harari, 2016; Maturana, 1998). Het is niet sterk gerelateerd aan feiten en logica (objectieve realiteit), maar het zal waarschijnlijk een intersubjectieve realiteit zijn die de toekomst zal bepalen van alles dat waarde heeft op de planeet; daarom is het kwetsbaar. Dit wordt veroorzaakt door het hoge tempo van de technologische ontwikkeling. Die heeft de destructieve kracht versterkt van narratieven die in verschillende contexten in het verleden werden opgebouwd. De mensheid heeft nog nooit zo’n exponentiële groei in technologische ontwikkeling doorgemaakt als die zich de afgelopen decennia heeft afgespeeld: van kunstmatige intelligentie en genetische manipulatie tot oorlogswapens die met één druk op de knop miljoenen levens kunnen redden of vernietigen. Technologie wordt in een sneller tempo ontwikkeld dan de narratieven van de menselijke realiteit. Vanwege deze snelle technologische ontwikkeling wordt een singulariteit verwacht in de komende jaren: d.w.z. een moment voorbij de mogelijkheid van voorspelling (Gawdat & Daher, 2018). Een moment waarop technologie ontwikkeld op basis van narratieven uit eerdere contexten, alles kan vernietigen dat waarde heeft. Een moment waarop kritische veranderingen op zo’n schaal zouden kunnen plaatsvinden dat het niet langer mogelijk is ze om te keren.





Ondertussen lijkt de mensheid verloren te zijn in een wirwar van narratieven die niet langer relevant zijn voor de huidige context van een wereld met een dergelijke exponentiële technologische ontwikkeling. De narratieven die de kwetsbaarheid van wat waardevol is vergeten, beschouwen de planeet, ecosystemen en het leven zelf op een instrumentele manier: als middel om de doelen van de mensheid te bereiken. Deze narratieven werden gebouwd voor een realiteit van menselijke en technologische ontwikkeling die verschilt van de huidige. Ze hebben in de context van het verleden veel zin gehad, maar volstaan niet meer in de huidige context. Zulke narratieven hebben de mensheid geholpen om tot hier te komen, maar ze zullen waarschijnlijk niet helpen verder te komen. Het is waarschijnlijker dat, als deze narratieven worden gehandhaafd, de mensheid het risico loopt achteruit te bewegen of zelfs zichzelf te vernietigen. Zodoende moet de mens nadenken over de wereld die hij bouwt, nu en voor de toekomst, door zich af te vragen of fundamentele fouten verborgen zijn in de narratieven die zijn wereld construeren.

Het probleem is dat de mensheid lijkt door te gaan met het maken van nieuwe narratieven gebaseerd op eerdere contexten. Een voorbeeld is het narratief dat de uitdaging van duurzaamheid wil aanpakken. Dit is een complexe uitdaging, die bestaat uit verschillende onderling afhankelijke kwesties zoals verlies van biodiversiteit, degradatie van ecosystemen, economische crises, armoede en de veelbesproken klimaatverandering. Vanwege de waarschijnlijke invloed van de mensheid op de ecosystemen van de planeet, zien we een uniek moment in onze geschiedenis. Zo uniek dat dit tijdperk het Anthropocene is genoemd (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). Er is echter geen absolute zekerheid over de omvang van de menselijke invloed op de planeet. Vanwege de complexiteit van deze systemen, die niet kunnen worden geanalyseerd in termen van directe oorzaak en gevolg, is het geen kwestie van feiten en logica, maar verderstekkend dan dat. Dit wil niet zeggen dat feiten en logica irrelevant zijn, ze kunnen alleen niet alles definiëren. Dus, terwijl duurzaamheidsonderzoek zich doorgaans richt op feiten en logica, heeft dit onderzoek een nieuwe benadering van deze discussie voorgesteld. Deze studie richtte zich op de basis van de vorming van de verschillende duurzaamheidsnarratieven, in hun dieper mogelijke connectie met het zijn. De belangrijkste onderzoeksvraag was: Wat zijn de filosofische onderbouwingen van de hedendaagse duurzaamheidsnarratieven?

De scope van dit onderzoek was de duurzaamheidsnarratieven in hun verschillende dimensies: persoonlijk, individueel, organisatorisch en maatschappelijk. Elk van deze dimensies is in een ander hoofdstuk van dit onderzoek onderzocht. Het doel van het bestuderen van deze dimensies was het begrijpen van de verschillende niveaus waarop onze duurzaamheidsnarratieven worden gevormd, van micro tot macro. In wat volgt, presenteer ik reflecties over elk van deze dimensies.

Reflecties over Persoonlijke Duurzaamheidsnarratieven

De reflecties van dit onderzoek naar duurzaamheidsnarratieven begonnen met het oude aforisme 'ken jezelf'. Hoofdstuk 2 presenteerde een reflectie op mijn eigen inbedding in de omgeving door het begrijpen van de filosofische onderbouwing van mijn duurzaamheidsnarratieven. Hiervoor 'narrateerde' ik mijn werk van bijna 20 jaar rond duurzaamheidskwesties in organisaties. Ik ontdekte dat de basis van mijn duurzaamheidsnarratieven varieerde van de ontologie van het realisme tot de ontologie van het relativisme. Realisme kon een realiteit verklaren, zoals een milieudeskundige die technologieën ontwikkelt voor de beheersing van verontreiniging, maar kon een geval van verschillende werkelijkheden niet verklaren, zoals een manager duurzaamheid die zich bezighoudt met stakeholders met verschillende realiteiten. Aan de andere kant kon relativisme wel mijn realiteit verklaren als manager duurzaamheid die te maken heeft met schijnbaar tegenstrijdige eisen van verschillende stakeholders, maar niet de realiteit van de onveranderlijke wetten en mechanismen waarmee ik als ingenieur werkte. Ik heb daarom voorgesteld dat realisme en relativisme misschien twee toestanden van dezelfde kwestie zijn, zoals licht dat zowel deeltje als golf kan zijn. Bovendien, aangezien realisme en relativisme tegenstrijdige representaties van de realiteit lijken te presenteren, is het belangrijk om ons ervan bewust te zijn dat beide slechts beperkte representaties zijn van deze zogenaamde realiteit. Een realiteit die we, mogelijk, niet helemaal kunnen begrijpen. De metafoor van geografische kaarten gebruikend, zouden realisme en relativisme verschillende kaarten zijn, maar ze vertegenwoordigen niet volledig de gebieden zelf: d.w.z. dat ze geen volledige beschrijving van de werkelijkheid zijn, maar slechts abstracties ervan. Kaarten kunnen de eigenaardigheden en complexiteiten van een gebied niet weergeven;



evenmin kan realisme noch relativisme het complete beeld van de zogenaamde werkelijkheid weergeven. Dus, om verder dan realisme of relativisme te kijken, stel ik diepgaande reflectie voor door middel van hermeneutiek, fusie van horizonnen (Gadamer, 2013) en *phronesis* (Aristotle, 2009). Daarnaast wil ik ruimte creëren voor onzekerheid en twijfel.

Reflecties over de Duurzaamheidsnarratieven van Individuen

Na over de oorsprong van mijn eigen duurzaamheidsnarratieven te hebben nagedacht, reflecteerde ik op basis van de duurzaamheidsnarratieven van andere individuen. Hoofdstuk 3 presenteerde een beschouwing over de inbedding van individuen in de omgeving. Ik bestudeerde het proces hoe individuen duurzaamheid begrijpen, d.w.z. epistemologie. Hiervoor interviewde ik ondernemers, leidinggevend en professoren. Tijdens de interview analyse observeerde ik een patroon van duurzaamheid meer als een gevoel van zijn; d.w.z., een innerlijke dimensie in het begrip over duurzaamheid van de geïnterviewde. Hoewel alle geïnterviewden professionele ervaring hadden met betrekking tot duurzaamheid, hebben ze verschillende manieren om het te begrijpen; met andere woorden, ze hebben hun eigen epistemologie. Dit heeft minder te maken met 'wat' ze wisten over duurzaamheid, dan met 'de manier' waarop ze het wisten. Recent onderzoek naar menselijke ontwikkeling laat zien dat de basis van alle weg[en] van weten kan worden beschreven ten opzichte van waarnaar het kan kijken (object) en dat waarmee het kijkt (het 'filter' of 'lens' waaraan het subject is) (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p.51). Dit betekent dat het kennen van duurzaamheid wordt geconstrueerd door de filters (filosofische onderbouwing) waaraan men is onderworpen. Zelfs in gevallen waarin geïnterviewden dezelfde technische achtergrond hadden in termen van duurzaamheid, begrepen ze duurzaamheid anders omdat ze verschillende filosofische onderbouwingen hadden. Bovendien, wanneer er een verandering is in de manier van weten, is er een beweging van wat subject was in de oude epistemologie naar object in de nieuwe epistemologie (Kegan, 2000, p.60). Deze verandering in epistemologie houdt verband met een subject-object beweging, een 'innerlijke dans' tussen subject en object. Zo verplaatsen individuen wat subject was naar object, de filosofische onderbouwing veranderend van 'zijn' naar 'hebben' (Kegan, 2000).

Daarnaast vond ik bij het grondiger analyseren van de interviews de volgende inzichten over duurzaamheid (momenten van helderheid) die de geïnterviewden presenteerden:

- duurzaamheid van verschillende dimensies (van de innerlijke dimensies van individuen tot uiterlijke, zoals organisaties, samenlevingen en de planeet);
- duurzaamheid als een richting, niet als een duidelijk pad (vanwege de complexiteit van het probleem veranderen duurzaamheidsuitdagingen voortdurend);
- natuurlijke principes (bij voorbeeld onderlinge afhankelijkheid, diversiteit) als richtingwijzers op het pad;
- het belang van zorgen voor de interne omgeving (innerlijke duurzaamheid) als voorwaarde om voor de externe omgeving te kunnen zorgen. Mijn eigen momenten van helderheid volgend van bijna 20 jaar werken met duurzaamheid, heb ik beargumenteerd dat, om duurzaamheid op een diepere manier te begrijpen en aan te pakken, het belangrijk is naast de uiterlijke dimensies aandacht te besteden aan de innerlijke menselijke dimensies van duurzaamheid.

Vervolgens heb ik, om de innerlijke dimensies van duurzaamheid dieper te begrijpen, de interviews verder geanalyseerd en een model voor inspiratie voorgesteld, bestaande uit: balans, zorg, liefde, respect en wijsheid. Ik beargumenteerde dat, om individuen aan te moedigen hun kennis van duurzaamheid diepgaand te ontwikkelen, het belangrijk is om groei in hun innerlijke dans tussen subject en object te ondersteunen; meer te ontwikkelen dan alleen technische vaardigheden, maar ook de innerlijke duurzaamheid van het individu. Ten slotte heb ik nagedacht over mogelijke manieren om de innerlijke duurzaamheid van het individu te ontwikkelen.



Reflecties over de Duurzaamheidsnarratieven van de Organisatie

Na een reflectie op basis van duurzaamheidsnarratieven van individuen, ging ik verder met nadenken over de oorsprong van narratieven over de duurzaamheid van organisaties. Hoofdstuk 4 was een reflectie op de inbedding van organisaties in de omgeving. Ik reflecteerde over de filosofische onderbouwing van narratieven over duurzaamheid van organisaties, aan de hand van hun duurzaamheidsverslagen. Hiervoor analyseerde ik de betekenis van wat niet is geschreven; dat wil zeggen, de stiltes in deze rapporten. De reden hiervoor was om de onderliggende duurzaamheidsnarratieven van organisaties te begrijpen. De organisaties van deze studie maakten deel uit van de Braziliaanse Corporate Sustainability Index (ISE) van 2016, wat betekent dat ze in theorie de benchmarking organisaties voor duurzaamheid in Brazilië waren. Als referentie voor de analyse van de duurzaamheidsverslagen van deze organisaties heb ik de Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) -standaarden gebruikt, waar alle geanalyseerde organisaties hun rapporten op baseerden. Tijdens de analyse vond ik enkele ongemakkelijke 'stiltes', die niet in overeenstemming lijken te zijn met de duurzaamheidsuitdagingen waarmee Brazilië en de wereld worden geconfronteerd. Voorbeelden zijn:

- enkele van de geanalyseerde energieleveranciers (voornamelijk waterkrachtcentrales) beschouwen het beheer van water en/of biodiversiteit niet als materieel (niet belangrijk genoeg om over te rapporteren);
- sommige financiële organisaties beschouwen ethiek, transparantie en / of lokale ontwikkeling niet als materieel;
- sommige organisaties die veel mensen in dienst hebben, maar de ontwikkeling van deze mensen niet als materieel beschouwen.

Deze bevindingen lijken een ont koppeling te zijn van de duurzaamheidcontext waarin deze organisaties opereren. In plaats van dat deze organisaties bijdragen aan het oplossen van duurzaamheidsuitdagingen, lijkt het erop dat sommige organisaties juist bijdragen aan verdere verslechtering. Aan de andere kant hebben enkele van de andere geanalyseerde organisaties alle aspecten van het analyse materiaal in overweging genomen.

Ik ging toen verder en analyseerde de filosofische onderbouwing van de diverse duurzaamheidsnarratieven door de diepere niveaus van de duurzaamheidsnarratieven te beschouwen; namelijk antenarrative en fractal. Antenarratives zijn fragmentarische constitutieve ideeën die vóór de narratieven komen; de bouwstenen van narratieven en de manier waarop mensen retrospectief de wereld zien of anticiperen op de toekomst (Boje, 2001; Perey, 2014). In overeenstemming met eerder onderzoek (bijv. Adams, 2002; Adams, Potter, Singh, & York, 2016), ontdekte ik dat de antenarratives in twee hoofdgroepen samenkwamen: organisaties met het antenarrative: wat is het juiste om te doen, en organisaties met het antenarrative: wat is goed voor de business. De organisaties die alle belangrijke aspecten als materieel beschouwden, baseren hun beslissing mogelijk op wat het juiste is om te doen, wat consistent is met substantief redeneren en *phronesis* (praktische wijsheid). De organisaties die belangrijke aspecten niet als materieel beschouwden, baseren hun beslissingen mogelijk eerder op de businesscase voor duurzaamheid, wat consistent is met instrumenteel redeneren (middelen en doelen). Natuurlijk, het is geen eenvoudige taak om te beslissen wat wel en niet te melden in een duurzaamheidsverslag en deze studie claimt niet de 'waarheid' te presenteren. Het doel van deze analyse was om licht te werpen op de 'stiltes' in de geanalyseerde rapporten, om beoefenaars en academici bewust te maken dat zelfs de benchmarking organisaties voor duurzaamheid problemen hebben. Vertrouwen op substantief redeneren en *phronesis* kan organisaties helpen bepalen wat het juiste is om te doen. Bovendien, omdat de businesscase voor duurzaamheid in de geanalyseerde rapporten als een dringend antenarrative naar voren kwam, ging ik dieper om ook het fractalnarratief te begrijpen. Fractals zijn patronen die op verschillende niveaus terugkeren (Mandelbrot, 1977). Het lijkt alsof het narratief over de businesscase voor duurzaamheid verband houdt met het fractalnarratief van angst voor schaarste en concurrentie om te overleven. Op organisatieniveau heeft dit te maken met de maximale middelen willen hebben om te overleven, zichzelf te kunnen onderhouden. Dit zijn oude overtuigingen die in de samenleving zijn geconstrueerd, gebaseerd op verkeerde interpretaties van studies op verschillende gebieden, van economie tot biologie. Kort samengevat, ik beargumenteer dat organisaties een nieuw narratief nodig hebben, een narratief dat meer geschikt is voor de mens en meer in harmonie is met de planeet.





Reflecties op Narratieven over Maatschappelijke Duurzaamheid

Na te hebben nagedacht over de oorsprong van narratieven over de duurzaamheid van organisaties, ging ik verder met reflecteren over de filosofische onderbouwing van duurzaamheidsnarratieven in de samenleving. Hoofdstuk 5 was een reflectie op de maatschappelijke inbedding in de omgeving. Volgens Scharmer (2017) kunnen de huidige narratieven op sociaal gebied worden ingedeeld als: doormodderen (de 'business as usual' narratieven); achteruit bewegen (de 'making-X-great-again' narratieven), en vooruit bewegen (de 'doorbraak' narratieven). Om een beter inzicht te krijgen in de inclusieve en innovatieve narratieven over duurzaamheid, heb ik deze studie geconcentreerd op de vooruit bewegen benaderingen. Dit komt omdat de doormodderen en achteruit bewegen narratieven minder inclusief zijn, wat betekent dat ze noch voor de meerderheid van de mensen, noch voor de planeet werken (Elkington & Braun, 2013). Bovendien, omdat de vooruit bewegen narratieven niet de gangbare stroming zijn, was deze studie gebaseerd op een microstory-benadering, die vaak gaat over het trotseren van een groots narratief (Boje, 2001, p.60), d.w.z. over het trotseren van de mainstream narratieven. Het is noemenswaardig dat mijn doel in deze studie was om licht te werpen op de inclusieve en innovatieve narratieven over duurzaamheid, en op hun metaforische dans met de andere soorten narratieven, niet om te controleren, of om welk type narratief dan ook op te leggen. Ik ben het met Boje (2001, p.19) eens dat hoe meer een narratief werkt om een centrum te beheersen, zelfs met een kern van waarheid, des te meer het narratief onbeheersbaar wordt. Hoewel ik dus geen specifiek narratief wilde beheersen of opleggen, heb ik wel hoop dat de samenleving zich verder ontwikkelt mede op basis van het narratief 'vooruit bewegen'. Dit komt omdat de verscheidenheid aan narratieven het chaotische maatschappelijke systeem kan helpen om binnen zichzelf te experimenteren en de informatie kan verschaffen voor het systeem om te evolueren, of niet. Dit kan worden verklaard door complexiteit en chaostheorieën, die de basis vormden van dit hoofdstuk. Deze studie baseerde zich op de volgende concepten van deze theorieën: het vlindereffect (Lorenz, 1963), feedback en versterking, en zelf-organiserende systemen. Volgens het vlindereffect kunnen kleine gebeurtenissen in chaotische systemen enorme gevolgen hebben vanwege de non-lineariteit van deze systemen. Dus, innovatieve en inclusieve narratieven hebben, naast dat ze niet mainstream zijn, ook het potentieel om het hele sociale chaotische systeem te helpen evolueren, hopelijk op een vooruitstrevende manier. Bovendien kunnen positieve feedback, (die het systeem verder uit evenwicht

brengt) volgens de concepten feedback en versterking, deze veranderingen versterken. Dus, wanneer positieve feedback een verstoring wordt van een omvang die het maatschappelijke systeem niet langer kan negeren, organiseert het systeem zichzelf in een nieuwe vorm of valt het uiteen. Daardoor kan de huidige chaos in het maatschappelijk systeem, met zijn schijnbaar tegenstrijdige narratieven, de samenleving helpen door middel van positieve feedback zichzelf te organiseren in een nieuwe vorm.

Op basis hiervan analyseerde ik de patronen van de innovatieve en inclusieve narratieven over duurzaamheid. Hiervoor heb ik duurzaamheidsdeskundigen en changemakers geïnterviewd en inzichten verzameld op internationale conferenties over duurzaamheid en management waaraan ik de afgelopen jaren heb deelgenomen. Met behulp van de hermeneutiek vond ik dertien patronen die opduiken in de innovatieve en inclusieve narratieven over duurzaamheid. Geïnspireerd door de 'strange attractor', het patroon in complexe systemen, stel ik een uitgebreid patroon voor, dat ik de sociale attractor noem (figuur 5.3). Net als de patronen in complexe systemen, stel ik voor dat, in de sociale attractor, een punt (in dit geval de openheid om overtuigingen te herzien en verder te ontwikkelen) de andere patronen 'aantrekt'. Gebaseerd op het sociaal-attractor raamwerk, stel ik enkele reflecties voor onderzoeksrichtingen voor. Ik heb ook betoogd dat zowel het sociale attractor raamwerk als de ideeën voor een onderzoeksagenda geen vaste modellen wilden zijn; veeleer zijn ze bedoeld voor inspiratie, reflectie en om perspectieven te verbreden.

Conclusies

Dit onderzoek was een reflectie op de filosofische onderbouwing van de duurzaamheidsnarratieven, die ik heb voorgesteld als de 'filters' of 'lens' waaraan individuen worden onderworpen tijdens duurzaamheidsonderzoek en -praktijken. De filosofische onderbouwingen die in dit onderzoek werden bestudeerd, waren:

- overtuigingen over de werkelijkheid en het bestaan, d.w.z. ontologie (hoofdstuk 2);
- antenarratives (hoofdstuk 4 en 5);



- fractalnarratieven (hoofdstuk 4);
- sociale attractor (hoofdstuk 5);
- daarnaast heb ik nagedacht over het proces waarmee deze 'filters' werken;
- de subject-objectrelatie (hoofdstuk 3).

Bewustzijn van deze filosofische onderbouwingen kan bijdragen aan het doorbreken van de balans tussen subject en object, en een nieuwe 'innerlijke dans' ondersteunen voor een dieper begrip van duurzaamheid. Ik stel voor dat het zich bewust worden van de filosofische onderbouwing in de duurzaamheidsnarratieven kan bijdragen aan diepere reflecties en mogelijk aan herverbinding met de omgeving. Natuurlijk was deze studie niet gericht op een terugkeer naar het oorspronkelijke samenvallen van het zijn met de omgeving, maar op een transcendentie ervan. Dit komt omdat het door taal is dat de mensheid een enorme ontwikkeling heeft kunnen doormaken, gemeenschappen geconstrueerd heeft, en complexe samenlevingen heeft ontwikkeld: alle elementen van de ontwikkeling van de mensheid die betrekking hebben op de subject-object relatie. Tijdens deze ontwikkeling heeft de mens echter gevaarlijke betekenissen en overtuigingen geconstrueerd door middel van narratieven, antenarratives, fractalnarratieven en sociale attractors, met toenemende niveaus van complexiteit. Het oorspronkelijke concept van thuishoren in de omgeving is vergeten. Om het probleem nog ingewikkelder te maken heeft de mensheid, dit thuishoren vergetende, destructieve en krachtige technologieën ontwikkeld die het potentieel hebben om al het leven op de planeet te vernietigen, inclusief het menselijk leven zelf. Dit onderzoek was een uitnodiging om na te denken over de filosofische onderbouwing van de narratieven van onze wereld.

Voorstel

We bouwen de menselijke wereld op basis van verschillende narratieven: achter de huidige duurzaamheidsnarratieven zijn door de mensheid in de loop van de tijd filosofische fundamenteën opgebouwd. Deze filosofische onderbouwingen zijn geconstrueerd in contexten uit het verleden die verschillen van de huidige context van snelle vooruitgang van technologieën. Technologieën die zeer destructief

kunnen zijn in combinatie met de uitputting van de natuurlijke hulpbronnen en onevenwichtigheid van natuurlijke systemen van de planeet. Het gebruik van de filosofische onderbouwing uit het verleden om duurzaamheidsnarratieven te construeren in de huidige context van de mensheid en de planeet, kan desastreuze gevolgen hebben voor beide. Dit onderzoek heeft zich gericht op het reflecteren op deze filosofische onderbouwingen, zodat ze bewust kunnen worden heroverwogen, besproken en veranderd. Om deze discussie te beginnen, stel ik voor de nieuwe duurzaamheidsnarratieven te baseren op filosofische onderbouwingen die dieper zijn, dichter bij het zijn staan. De diepste vorm waarvan ik me bewust ben, die in woorden kan worden uitgedrukt (zij het in beperkte mate) is liefde. Daarom stel ik liefde voor als een van de belangrijkste filosofische onderbouwingen van duurzaamheidsnarratieven, zowel voor onderzoek als voor de praktijk. Ik concludeer door te suggereren dat de wereld niet gered wil worden, dat ze geliefd wil worden. Het is door liefde dat we onze wereld kunnen redden.

About the author



Ofertas de Aninha (aos moços)

Eu sou aquela mulher
a quem o tempo
muito ensinou.
Ensinou a amar a vida.
Não desistir da luta.
Recomeçar na derrota.
Renunciar a palavras e pensamentos
negativos.
Acreditar nos valores humanos.
Ser otimista.
Creio numa força imanente
que vai ligando a família humana
numa corrente luminosa
de fraternidade universal.
Creio na solidariedade humana.
Creio na superação dos erros
e angústias do presente.
Acredito nos moços.
Exalto sua confiança,
generosidade e idealismo.
Creio nos milagres da ciência
e na descoberta de uma profilaxia
futura dos erros e violências
do presente.
Aprendi que mais vale lutar
do que recolher dinheiro fácil.
Antes acreditar do que duvidar.

Offers by Aninha (for young people**)*

I'm that woman.
to whom time
taught a lot.
Taught to love life.
To not give up the struggle.
To start over in defeat.
To renounce negative words and thoughts.
To believe in human values.
To be optimistic.
I believe in an immanent force
that binds the human family
in a luminous chain
of universal fraternity.
I believe in human solidarity.
I believe in overcoming mistakes
and the anguish of the present.
I believe in young people.
I exalt your confidence,
generosity and idealism.
I believe in the miracles of science
and the discovery of a future prophylaxis
against the errors and violence
of the present.
I have learned that it is better to struggle
than to collect easy money.
Rather to believe than to doubt.



(Cora Coralina, Brazilian Poetess, 1889-1995 - author's own translation)

*Aninha is a nickname for Ana. It is what my family and close friends kindly call me in Brazil.

** I consider "young people" to include every person (independently of one's age) who is deepening their connection with being, then, through love, is bringing forth a more sustainable world for all.




Ana Cristina Campos Marques



Ana has worked in the private, non-profit, and government sectors in Brazil for nearly 20 years. Currently living in the Netherlands, she is the founder of Lumina Perspectives – an online startup focusing on sustainability education. Ana believes in new sustainability narratives, where individuals, organizations, society, and the planet can thrive together. To that end, Ana designs development programs, delivers keynotes, mentors academics and practitioners, and supports new ways of thinking. She blends perspectives from several fields of knowledge with a driving quest to discover deeper paths toward sustainability. She has a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the Federal University of Paraná (Brazil), an MBA from Fundação Getúlio Vargas (Brazil), a master's degree in design for the environment from the Technological Federal University of Paraná (Brazil), and now a PhD from Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands). Ana loves that her life is a dynamic balance of rethinking sustainability, deepening her connection with being, writing, trekking in nature with her partner, enjoying time with family and friends, dancing, and having conversations that could make a difference for people all around the world.

Online platforms:

- International:
luminaperspectives.com,
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To tackle the sustainability challenge, humankind have placed a great deal of faith in the development of new technologies, with a belief that they will miraculously solve this complex issue. The problem is that technology is a double-edged sword: it can help to address the sustainability challenge, but it could also lead to the situation deteriorating further. This all depends on the narrative basis on which the technology is developed and is subsequently used. Thus, while sustainability research typically focuses on facts and logic, the current research proposes another perspective on this discussion. This dissertation focuses on the very narratives that construct the human world, specifically on those regarding sustainability. To deeper understand the sustainability narratives, it reflects on their philosophical underpinnings on different dimensions: personal, individual, organizational and societal. This study reveals that the use of the same philosophical underpinnings of the past to construct sustainability narratives in the present context of humankind and the planet can have disastrous consequences for both. So, it proposes ways to consciously rethink, discuss and change the outdated philosophical underpinnings. It also suggests future directions for sustainability research and practice.

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