

## **The Phenomenology of Institutions: Coherence and the Structure of Care**

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### **Abstract**

Models of institutions are patterned after the formal. Whether considered as social constructions or rational-purposive systems, institutions are depicted in terms of models that lay out formal networks, boundaries, roles, and linkages. This research pertains to aspects of institutions that defy characterization in formal terms. For example, depicting programs for resource management in terms of rule-systems, boundaries, and rule-obedience may fail to capture the most essential elements of the program. The authors attempt to understand programs and organizations in new ways by bracketing aside strong, formal models of these and, instead, attempting to uncover the richer meanings that people in these institutions attach to terms such as “organization” and “action” –the idea is, employing a kind of epoché, to treat institutions as phenomena and to return “to the things themselves.” We illustrate this approach by studying two ostensibly similar fishers’ organizations in nearby coastal towns, and proceeding to contrast the different ways that collective action and other phenomena are experienced and interpreted. What emerges is a notion of organization that resembles less the liberal notion of a voluntary association of free individuals and, instead, appears to be a complex, multidimensional topology of relationship. Association is not as much a formal linkage of individuals in a coalition as an embedding in the habitus of a place. We propose to describe organization not in formal terms, but, rather, as structures of care.

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## **The Phenomenology of Institutions: Coherence and the Structures of Care**

### **I. Introduction**

Models of institutions have undergone considerable transformation over time. Having moved beyond the image of institutions being something akin to concrete edifices that lie, immovable, on their pediments, we have now gone over to understanding these as text --constructed and, perhaps, reconstructed, but able to be transported from place to place and simply inscribed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The latter notion leads us to seek an inherent isomorphism in organizations, programs, and organizational fields (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

In this article, we view institutions in a different manner that responds less to the idea of meaning as construct, but of meaning as realized in experience. We begin by understanding that programs, organizations, and practices are formed out of a manifold of movements acting in concert. Rather than seek out a uniform plane of description onto which these complex actions can be translated and integrated, we assume simply that complex phenomena cannot be so explicitly integrated into one analytic. If integration occurs, it is something that is registered in the manifold nature of experience of the actors involved. To some extent, these complex movements are also integrated into the institution itself. In this manner, institutions are not seen to be determined by either concept or action and, instead, the complex field in which these diverse movements work out.

This inquiry is also motivated by reasons more practical than theory-building, and this is as a response to the needs of program evaluation. At the same time as we grow convinced that programs and organizations exhibited isomorphism, our evaluation of the same grows more constrained --to the extent that new insights become harder to generate. However, the need to formulate new ideas about why institutions succeed and fail is more urgent than ever --and existing templates are explaining less and less. Simply put, the evaluator needs to understand, more deeply, how and why programs differ, not how they are the same, and we are short of modes of description or evaluation with which to do this.

The task, then, is to set aside strong notions of models of what institutions are and, instead, to view them as complex phenomena needing thick description. The approach borrows from the phenomenologist's *epoche* --i.e., bracketing overweening ontological propositions about these institutions and, first, opening ourselves up to them as phenomena to be experienced. In doing this, we are still guided by some concepts, but ones that do not overly structure the analysis. The first guiding notion is that institutions somehow reflect the different movements that act upon it --some constructivist, some ecological, and others. In other words, we simply understand these institutions to be coherent, i.e., a phenomenon that reflects these diverse movements. The other notion is that, to understand more deeply, we have to learn to return "to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1901) and see them as they play out in context and are understood and experienced by policy actors, including ourselves.

We begin by laying out the conceptual approach and introducing a small number of propositions. We then carry out this analysis on fishers' organizations in the tropics. This entails following two, ostensibly similar organizations that were hewn out of the same model and attempting to understand what distinguishes the two. This is primarily an interpretive task and, to this end, we employ a hermeneutic approach to strengthen some of our observations. Lastly, we return to the theoretical question of how we might approach the task of modeling (or simply describing) institutions.

In this article, we propose and illustrate a number of concepts that may provide some direction forward. The first is the idea of institutional coherence, which leads to a second, and this is the suggestion that, when examined deeply enough, institutions should exhibit a profound degree of polymorphism. We end by suggesting that limitations in our analysis stem from assuming institutions as a formal construct, in which structures are created out of rule-systems, organizational boundaries, and simple set-operations. One alternative to this is to begin understanding institutions in a more topological sense, in which associations are multiplex, open, embedded, unbounded, and phenomenal. In other words, we propose an analytic that views institutions as not structures of the formal, but, if we are to use the notion of a structure, then they are structures of care.

## II. Conceptual Foundations

We will use the term, coherence, to mean that institutions come about or integrate a number of diverse and overlapping phenomena, all of which work in concert to influence the design and working of the institution. The following diagram depicts this.

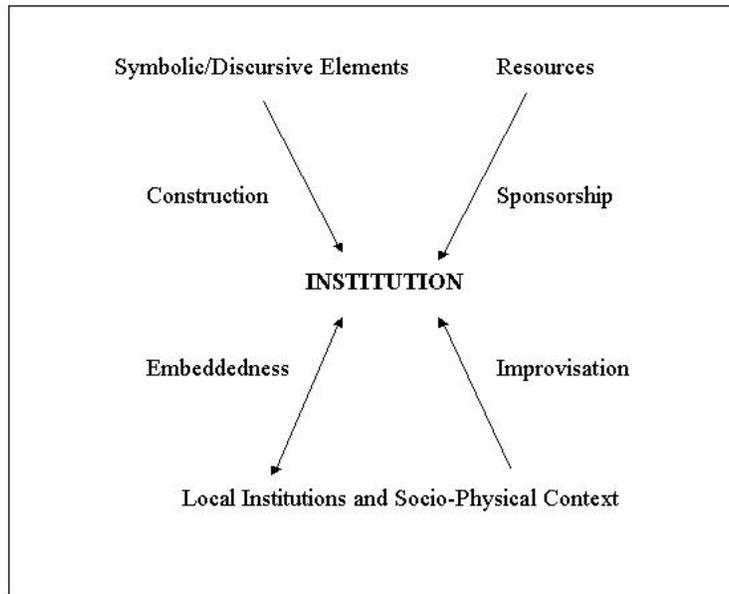


Figure 1 Depiction of Institutional Coherence

That is, not only are institutions embodiments of social constructs, they can also be inherently part of their particular context and an organic outcome of the same (e.g., the notion of ecology as introduced by Hannan and Freeman, 1977). For example, they can take on elements of context when policy actors engage in a measure of improvisation and directly construct the institution from elements of context, which is related to the notion of bricolage (Derrida, 1978). Other processes can be at work, also. All of these influences do come together, and the plane of integration is none other than the institution itself. So then, we study institutions as somehow coherent with all of these processes. Because of the richly diverse nature of these processes across time and place, what we should find are important elements of polymorphism. That is, it may be that the most important characteristics of different programs or organizations lie in the

manner that they are all different. The way the institution integrates these different influences ranges from simple inscription of effects onto the institution (such that these leave traces but do not necessarily change the essential nature of the institution) to deterministic modes of construction (in such manner such that we could actually use these relationships in a predictive manner). If we had to sharpen the definition, coherence might be described as ranges of effects in between these extremes, wherein the range of possible variations of the institution might be narrowed (akin to constraining the feasible set of options to a core of potentially coherent possibilities). However, any such notion of integration does not mean that we can explicitly see its movement. Rather, we suggest that we begin by simply understanding institutions as phenomena. As such, we would like to simply attempt a faithful account of them, as experienced. This calls for an approach that borrows from the phenomenologist's epoché --i.e., by bracketing for the moment questions about what something exactly is, we first would like to approach pure description (Husserl, 1901).

In using this approach, we arrive at new modes of description that may help us unearth new insights about how and why programs work, organizations are established and maintained, and people experience them in certain ways. One basic descriptive is to understand these phenomena as topologies of system, action, and meaning. By this, we do not attempt an ontological account, but simply report that the programs we study, and the patterns we find, seem to us as topological --i.e., unbounded, shifting in scale and extent, open, and multidimensional. For this reason, as we will discuss below, the very notion of what it means to act in a collective manner changes. That is, we begin to see "jointness" as different planes of association and engagement, bringing together multiple, overlapping, and even unbounded sets of actors together, all found in concert. What is left of the idea of "organization", once we allow this expansion of dimensionality, might be understood as the aggregation of these multiple phenomena. We illustrate this further in the case study, below.

If the geometric analogy helps, then we can suggest phenomena as an n-dimensional, complex surface. Models have a planar quality about them, which lead us to understanding institutions through projections onto a unitary plane of description. In this manner, the complex surface might look like a flat figure when projected onto the plane of analysis. For example, models that depict institutions in the language of rule-systems or organizational boundaries act like this. The idea of a topology goes further, however, and it is the possibility of bodies found within the aggregate, in differing dimensionality, each not clearly bounded. To belabor the analogy further, this is maybe why it is not enough to view an institution as a construct, since the latter is, in a sense, a planar concept that projects the phenomenon onto its plane of description. Coherence is a "messier" concept --however, we suggest that perhaps the institution is what occurs within this mess.

In testing this mode of analysis, we also begin to seek alternatives to the description of institutions as structures --whether juridical, organizational, or textual. In this, we discover alternative modes of description, and this is to increasingly understand institutions in relational terms, whether negotiated or found in the habitus of a place, in manner that might better be described as *structures of care*.

### **III. Context and Method**

The need for new approaches to analyzing institutional designs grew out of an engagement by the authors with community-based fishers' organizations in the tropics. It became plain to the researchers that the practice of program evaluation of community-based programs had become too topological. That is, rather than studying what made each program unique, evaluators usually

took to classification, according to broad, general categories (e.g., community-based versus co-managed, top-down versus bottom-up). What the situation called for, it seemed to us, were analyses that went deeper into the nature of these institutions, specifically, into dimensions of organization and practice that revealed rich ways that programs and their actors understood and acted upon their situation.

The research entails a search for new dimensionalities. To do this, we have found ourselves in the position of, for the moment, bracketing or setting aside models of institutional designs and inquiring into how a program's stakeholders understood their specific context. In this manner, the research method resembles the phenomenological method of epoché, wherein we try to gain insight into the characteristic of a phenomenon by attending "to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1913). This means trying to find approaches that will lend insight into the ways that a situation, program, or organization is experienced in people's consciousness. It is the spirit of the phenomenological method that we most adopt and that we follow in searching for new and more effective modes of describing the experience of risk. Less relevant to this research is the phenomenological claim to an essentialism (which was a part of Husserl's theory) that purported to bring out, through the method of epoché, elements of the true reality or nature of a thing. In this research, we do not attempt to make any claims about the true nature or ontological reality of risk or other phenomenon, but merely attempt to describe it in ways that are more faithful to the experience.

In trying to access the unique aspects of a policy actor's experience, we combined the review of numerous research artifacts –ranging from reports, meeting minutes, brochures, interviews, and interview transcripts. The authors made a total of eight visits to these sites in Batangas province, Philippines, and conducted between twenty and thirty interviews with key policy actors, most notably persons who ran the fishers' organizations.

In sifting through the material, the researchers tried not to impose any strong structuration into the examination, but instead, attempted to first read through the material and reflect on what themes most recommended themselves for analysis (as in Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The only guiding thought to this initial phase was the objective of looking for areas of differentiation between the two programs (commonalities were obvious enough). We were then led to focusing more closely on a small number of themes, which we then coded the text for (both written material and interview texts). This was done, not so much to conduct content analysis, but to study the language people used and the ways program actors described their organizations and work.

As will be further developed below, a small number of themes became a focus for our inquiry. First, was the ways that policy actors conceived of "jointness" or the nature of organization and collective action. That is, how did people understand what forming an association meant, and what things did themes like "membership" or "organization" mean to them? From this inquiry, we began to learn that, in some cases, association meant more than the simple aggregation of actors into a coalition, but an embedding into a socio-historical context that spoke as much about the constitution of identity as association. Moreover, we began to see how organizational structure and linkages were manifold and, again, embedded in the deeper context of the place. Another theme that we explored had to do with how these policy actors viewed their practice. Interesting dimensions of differentiation were found between the two organizations. In studying the text, the specific language that people used was important in understanding subtleties of meaning. Both of the researchers understood Tagalog, the language used in these towns in the Philippines.

Most interviews that were conducted with fishers and other policy actors were open-ended. Most were done on site in Batangas province, Philippines, though several were conducted in Manila when organizational representatives visited the capital for meetings and conferences. In studying ways that policy actors understood their programs, we also employed a method called cognitive mapping, which has been used in the past to try to gain insight into mental constructs people use in understanding places and situations (for a review, see Eden, 1988). To do this, the researchers requested one member from each organization to spend twenty minutes and sketch the network of groups that were involved in managing the coastal habitat in their place, including all important groups that their organization worked with. A second member of each organization was also requested to try this exercise to reinforce the information derived from the first sketch.

The case studies involve fishers' organizations in two nearby towns in Batangas province, Philippines. In the 1990's, two nearby localities, Calatagan and Mabini-Tingloy, in Batangas Province, Philippines, each embarked on an ambitious program in community-based coastal resource management (Figure 1). While Calatagan is situated by the open ocean (the South China Sea), Mabini and Tingloy are adjacent towns by the interior Balayan Bay. In each of these areas, largely lower-income fisherfolk were responding to serious problems with declining fish catch and conflicts over coastal zone developments that threatened habitat and nearshore areas.

**Figure 1. Locations of Two Community-Based Coastal Management Programs**



Annual household income data is not available, since these are collected by the National Census and Statistics Office only for key cities, none of which the study sites are. However, the interviews have suggested that there is a prevailing notion that non-land owning residents of Calatagan are more marginalized than at Mabini. We get some corroboration of this insight by examining estimated per capita municipal expenditures for 2001, which are provided below.

Mabini:	Pesos 1,134/capita
Tingloy:	Pesos 987/capita
Calatagan:	Pesos 795/capita

Source: Batangas (2000)

Though both places are dependent on fishing, the mix of livelihoods and land uses differ substantially between the two areas. Calatagan is primarily a fishing town supplemented by income from sugar cane. Tourism is not a strong element of the local commerce, though there still exist several large resorts, one belonging to one of the wealthiest families in the country --in fact, most of the town of Calatagan used to be part of this family's hacienda. There is a greater mix of industries in Mabini-Tingloy, including a healthy dose of local tourism from several resorts in Mabini and dive spots in Tingloy. The housing stock is distinctly more makeshift in Calatagan, mostly being nipa huts with a lesser number of concrete structures, as visually evident in Mabini. Of the two communities in Balayan Bay, Tingloy is markedly the more lower-income. Both programs shared the same concerns and many of the same objectives. While illegal fishing is a serious problem in both places, it seems to be more severe in Calatagan (WWF, 2003).

In both cases, fishers organized and decided to create an organization dedicated to advocacy for coastal protection. Both organizations follow the template of community-based resource management, a concept that is, by now, a dominant model in development practice. In both cases, the fishers were aided by an NGO: the WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) in Calatagan, and CERD (Community Extension for Research and Development). In Calatagan, a group called SAMMACA was formed and, in Balayan was formed the group, MATINGCADC. In the case of the first organization, the fishers and the NGO decided to restrict the group to fishers and, instead, reach out to other stakeholders. In the second group, fishers partnered with some local officials and resort owners to form a policy coalition.

The mix of economic activity and land use differentiation is lower in Calatagan than Mabini-Tingloy. Historically, Calatagan was originally a single *hacienda* (i.e., a private farm) owned by one of the wealthiest families in the country, the Zobels. Whatever other activity occurring in Calatagan happened with the hacienda owner parceling out area to tenants --in a sense, differentiation in economic activity happened only when the family let portions of their land slip, in increments, from their possession. Fishing is the only significant type of activity that evolved outside the hacienda.

#### **IV. Analysis**

##### **IV.1 The Constitution of Organization**

In this section, we begin comparing aspects of the two organizations, SAMMACA in Calatagan Bay, and MATINGCADC in Balayan Bay, as well as the actions of their members. The main source from which we draw our insights are the words of the fishers and other members, themselves. The ways that policy actors talk about their programs can give us insight into how they understand their organization and, in fact, what they understand in the very notion of organization, itself. Some distinct differences emerge between the two organizations. As an example, take the following passages, each taken from interviews and meeting documents from the two coastal management programs. (To be faithful to the words of the fishers, we start with the original passage in Tagalog and, then, follow with the English translation.)

##### SAMMACA

*"... ang aming community, hindi lamang ang mangingisda kundi... ang nakikinabang sa dagat, kahit simpleng magbabangka na... dagat pa rin ang ginagamit mo. Kahit na, kahit hindi ka nangingisda, may posibilidad na naron ka sa pangangalaga ng dagat dahil, kung hindi, kahit maapektuhan din siya."*

Translation

"...our community, isn't just the fishers but... those who live by the sea, even just simple boat paddlers... you are still dependent on the sea. Even if you aren't a fisher, it's possible that you will find a place for the care of the sea since, if not, it is your life that will be affected."

MATINGCADC

"...*Makipag-ugnayan sa mga susing sektor tulad ng maliliit na mangingisda at resort owners... tungkol sa membership, kailangan identified ang sectors na inirereprisinta... multipartite composition ng lahat ng sektor kaya ang magdedesisyon ay ang lahat ng nakapaloob sa mga sektor na ito...*"

Translation:

" ... To interact with key sectors like small fishers and resort owners...  
...regarding membership, the need is to identify sectors who will be represented...  
...(it will have) a multipartite composition of all sectors and, so, all the members of these sectors will be represented in decision-making..."

The above passages, and others in the transcripts, provide a contrast between two differing constructions of what membership means. For the fisher from SAMMACA, community is identified as a shared existence with and of the sea. In contrast, in MATINGCADC, we find the classic notion of a coalition, i.e., a voluntary association of individuals who come together in collaborative fashion for the purpose of joint action or decision-making. The framework of decision-making is no accident --in fact, this classic notion of the coalition draws from the rational model of collectivization as strategic action (e.g., Axelrod, 1984; Taylor, 1987). For the fisher from SAMMACA, the question of membership is wrapped up in, and inseparable from, identity, and the fisher is embedded in a complex system of roles, associations, and histories. Likewise, the idea of negotiation, modeled as navigating through a profile of diverging interests, is less characteristic of this group than a concept of relations as involving understanding and, perhaps, transformation --again, the constitution of identity in terms other than the strategic:

SAMMACA

"*Mayaman man o mahirap, kapag alam niya, kapag naintindihan ang pinag-uusapan, tutulong na iyan kung mayroon silang magawang tulong... yun ang idea ng pagpapatawag ng consultation.*"

Translation:

"Whether rich or poor, when they find, when they understand what we are talking about they will act in whatever capacity they have to help --this is the idea of consultation."

We can look further into the language employed in each case. SAMMACA, a play on the phrase "Sama Ka" ("Join us"), evokes the word, *samahan*, or partnership. We will find that almost nowhere in the transcripts and documents of SAMMACA is the word, *organisasyon* (organization), mentioned though it is often mentioned as a verb (organizing). (The word, *organisasyon*, is mentioned in only one document, a grant proposal to Oxfam Great Britain.) Community is a natural association in SAMMACA, borne by history, class, and ecology.

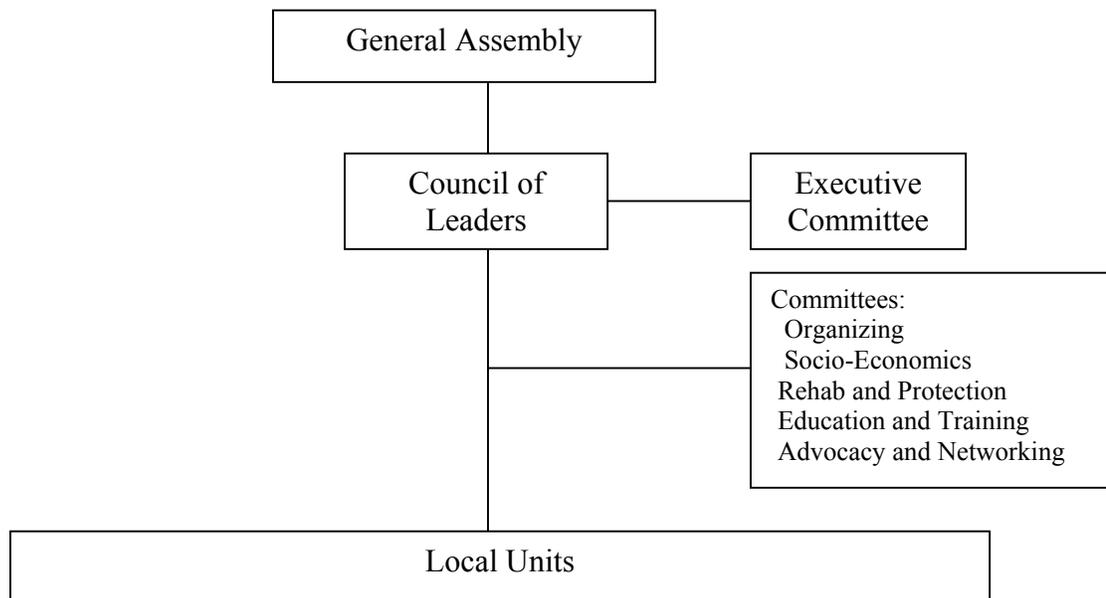
In contrast, transcripts and documents from MATINGCADC (a play on the word, *matingkad*, or clarity) employ the rational model of a coalition, or a loose and voluntary association of individuals. The language of their movement draws much from the western (in fact, American) model of ICZM (integrated coastal zone management). The forums (e.g., multipartite decision-making) they use evoke the ideal of the free-speech situation, a group of stakeholders sitting around a round and level table, negotiating a collective decision (Habermas,1987). It is very

much the modern notion of a democratic or deliberative community. In contrast, the fishers in SAMMACA experience association as a sedimentation of historicity, fate, and identity, a kind of embedding that is perhaps closest in spirit to the notion of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990).

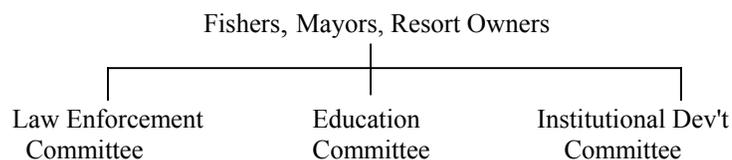
The ideal of democracy influences both of these groups. However, while democracy is sought, in MATINGADC, by having a deliberative community of diverse policy actors meeting within the organization, the fishers of SAMMACA instead go out and reach out to other groups and policy actors. For SAMMACA, in the end, it is the fisher who speaks for the sea.

Organizational form is also a kind of text that we can interpret. If one can speak of democratic ideals in SAMMACA, it is not the horizontally leveling notion of a field. In fact, looking at its organization chart in Figure 1a, we notice a strong vertical structuring --but one that is reversed from the usual. Note that the seat of authority and decision-making is the general assembly, defined as the entire body of women and men of the community. The executive committee, which appears lower in the hierarchy, is that which decides only when the entire body cannot meet and delegates the committee to act on its behalf. As a counterpoint, we show the organization chart for MATINGADC in Figure 1b which emphasizes the horizontal, leveling action of coalition formation.

**Figure 1a Organizational Structure (SAMMACA)**

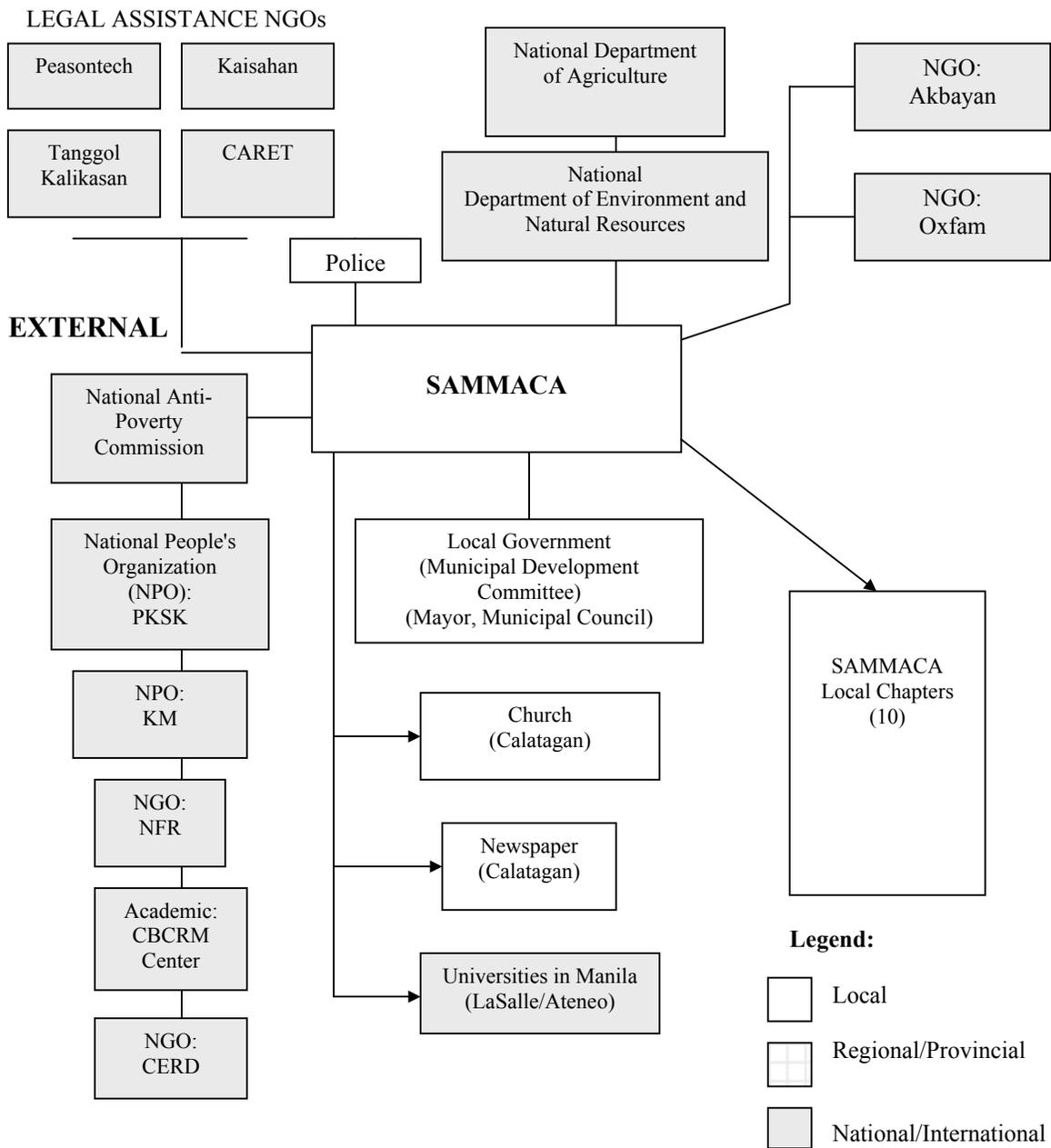


**Figure 1b Organizational Structure (MATINGADC)**

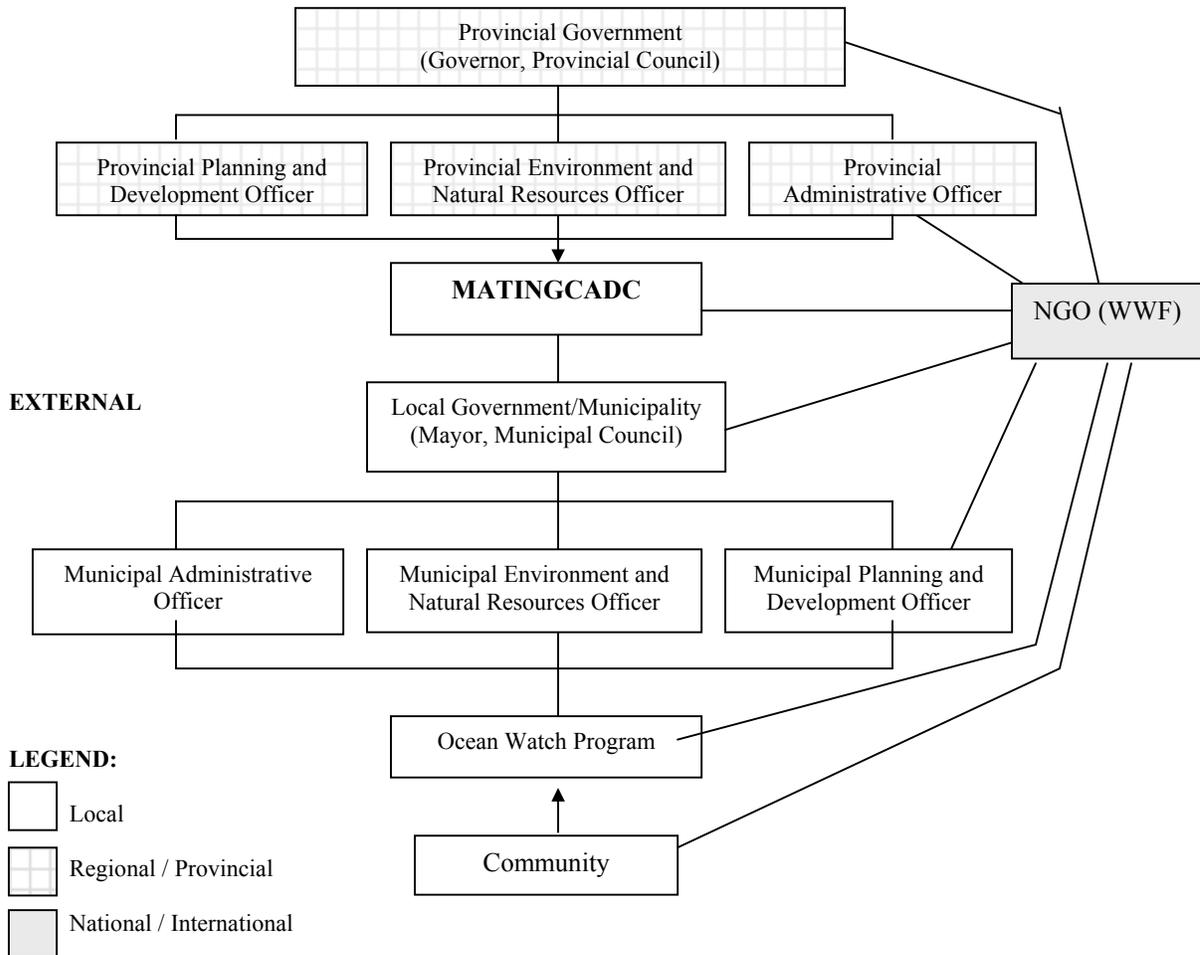


The notion of association is a broader concept, however, and Figures 2a and 2b show cognitive maps of the bay protection network, as drawn by program officers from SAMMACA and MATINGCADC, respectively. The figures were drawn to reproduce, with some fidelity, the proportions and shapes found in the original sketches. Again, we note the complexity in the degree of stucturation in the network map for SAMMACA. Most notable is the degree to which the organization, as experienced and understood by the policy actor, reaches out beyond its geographical boundaries. Though MATINGCADC extends out to a number of regional actors, SAMMACA's reach, particularly to other groups at a national level, is extensive.

**Figure 2a Cognitive Map of SAMMACA Network**



**Figure 2b Cognitive Map of MATINGCADC Network**



The idea of organization (or association, network, etc.) found in SAMMACA is less bounded than in MATINGCADC. It is not a dichotomy between the informal and formal, since as Figures 1a and 1b suggest, if anything, SAMMACA displays the greater emphasis on organizational structure. It is more related to the ease by which the actor makes the cognitive transition between fields of engagement. We see this in comparing meeting minutes between the two programs. Consider, also, the ease by which a fisher from SAMMACA makes this transition, in the following passage:

**SAMMACA**

*" ang kalakasan ng SAMMACA ay sa external na pagkilos, although hindi ka naman makakakilos sa labas kung wala kang base. ... sasabayan mo lang ng local issues, may direct connection yan, eh. iyon ang nagpapalakas ng SAMMACA ...Kahit yung taga Saudi napanood pa raw nila iyong una pang segment namin sa Magandang Gabi Bayan.... at ito, mga resolusyon namin na ginawa, eto, rinerequest i-adopt en toto yung resolution ng DENR. ... kapag hindi mo sinundan ang ganitong pamamaraan na pagsukat, ay delikadong mawala ang Spratley Islands sa amin."*

Translation:

"...the strength of SAMMACA is our external action, though we could not have action without real base. ...we bring in local issues, there is a direct connection, you see. This is what makes SAMMACA strong... Even those (Filipinos) in Saudi, they tell us they saw our (TV) segment on Good Evening, Nation... and here, here is a resolution we requested the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to adopt... (we said) if you don't follow our suggestions for measuring territorial boundaries, we may even lose the Spratley Islands (from China)."

which, later on, leads to his account of his trip to Cancun to participate in protests surrounding the general meeting of the World Trade Organization. We see, then, that organization is not so much a structure, but a variable that shifts continuously from local community to national policy and onto the international sphere. The challenge of depicting this as a network is that ties are established not just between the group and the external, or between individuals and other individuals outside the group, but along different levels of association on different scales. For this reason, although only one member of the group actually links up with the Cancun groups, this association is not an individual one but part of the larger "external movement." It is also, for this reason, that he has no difficulty in finding the local in each of the broader issues the group engages in. We contrast this with the classic notion of association, which envisions free, atomistic actors voluntarily deciding to form a strategic coalition of other individuals which, to draw a geometric analogy, maintains the action of association as a planar concept. A richer model of these associations and relationships would portray them as dynamic and topological -- however, they would not be arbitrary or unimportant. Take the following passages, where the fisher speaks about another fisher's group and its possible connection to a rebel group (the NPA), and again where he speaks about other NGOs with whom they work.

#### SAMMACA

*"Napasukan ng NPA ang Habagat at sinsiraan ng Habagat ang mas malaking SAMMACA...*

*Halimbawa, iyong NGO, yung NGO, tagalabas iyan... kinikilala namin iyong pagtulong nila dahil hindi naman sila... pero parang darating ang panahon na aalis iyan, habang may pondo nandiyan iyan pero pag wala na, aalis na iyan. ...Iyan ang pagkakaiba ng SAMMACA... ang mangingisda, kahit araw-arawin, nandiriyang iyan. ...Ang katangian namin ay hindi NGO, PO lang... Ang inaalang ng marami, ang NGO, nawawala iyan."*

Translation:

"NPA infiltrated Habagat, and Habagat started acting against the larger SAMMACA...  
... For example, take these NGOs, the NGO, they are from outside... we honor their help... but time will come when they will leave, while they have funds they will be here but, once it's gone, so are they. This is the difference with SAMMACA... the fisher, even if you mobilize each and every day, they will be there... Our group is not like an NGO, we are simply a PO... many people know this, that the NGOs, they come and go."

Here, we see a distinction between the NGO and what the fisher calls the PO (or, people's organization), and this is less a distinction in form, but one of coherence with the everyday reality of life in that place. The evocation of the NPA, a Maoist rebel group, also brings to mind the incoherence of the alien. Coherence and association are, most of all, related to presence. The label, "people's organization," takes on a deeper significance, having to do not just with place, but history, marginalization, poverty, and solidarity.

Just as the constitution of self can be an embedded one, so can others be constituted in relational terms. Take, for example, the differing ways that each organization talks about what is

essentially the same situation, which is fighting the encroachment of dredging operations into the coastal zone.

#### SAMMACA

"...Subalit sa kabila ng ...kautusan... ang mga pablabag dito na kadalasang ginagawa ng mga mayayaman at maimpluwensang indibidwal tulad ni G. Reymond Moreno, isang nagmay-ari ng lupain ...at kilalang kaibigan ng yumaong Favian Ver... Subalit nagsimulang mawasak ang pangisdaang ito ng hukayin ng mga backhoe ang mga bahura... sa pag-uutos ni Ginoong Moreno"

Translation:

"...Despite the... marine reserve ordinance ...we see the continuous violation of this by wealthy and influential individuals like G. Reymond Moreno, a landowner... and known friend of the late (General) Favian Ver... The destruction of the fisheries began when they began to backhoe the reefs... on orders of Mr. Moreno."

#### MATINGCADC

"...tinalakay ay ang pagrerekomenda sa Punong Bayan ng mga bagay na may kinalaman sa cement plant issue..."

Translation:

"...the matter of forwarding to the Council matters concerning the cement plant issue was taken up..."

While MATINGCADC talks about the situation in terms of incompatible land use (which leads to a subsequent discussion of zoning), in SAMMACA, the concept seems to be understood in terms of relationships with the cement plant owner. Personalizing the owner, Moreno, and referring to it as the Moreno case, is indicative of this. The problem is not, formally, an incompatible land use, but an incoherent relationship that this owner, Moreno, has taken up vis-a-vis the rest of the community. It is a transgression of the strictures of relation and social pattern in that town. The rest of the story flows from this basic distortion in relations.

Lastly, take the account that the fisher from Calatagan gives about the learning process by which fishers learned to give up mangrove harvesting:

#### SAMMACA

"...Ako man ay dating pumuputol ng bakawan... para panggawang bahay at panggatong... pero ng namalayan ko ang epekto nito sa kabuhayan ng dagat, ay nagpalit na ako ng ugali, at tuluyang naging tagapangasiwa ng bahura..."

Translation:

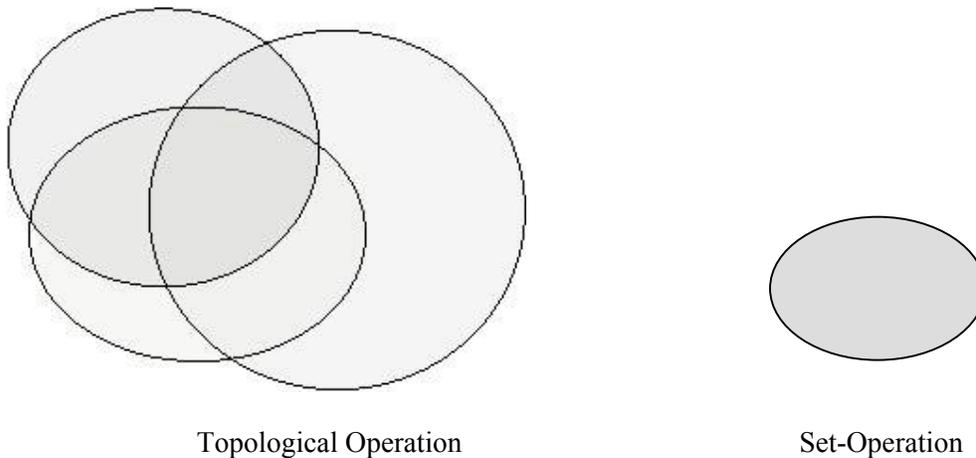
"...I, myself, used to cut down the mangroves... for material to build a house and fuel... but once I understood the effect this had on the life of the sea, I changed my ways and, furthermore, became a protector of the mangroves..."

In this case, education is not merely the transmission of a signal (knowledge) to a passive recipient, but the transformation of the person himself.

In this section, we have seen a contrast in how the meaning of organization and membership is constructed. On the one hand, we find the classic, liberal notion of a group of  $n$  individuals coming together, freely, to form an  $n$ -person group. Here, the organization is simply the aggregate of the member individuals --it is a simple set operation (again, drawing from a geometric analogy). In contrast, a differing notion of organization is also found, one that is more akin to a topology. By topology, we mean concurrent, overlapping, loosely bounded sets of

actors. In a topology, an individual can be a member of differing sets at the same time, and a set can be a member of a higher-order set, etc. Moreover, in a topology, boundaries are open (or fuzzy), and linkages between individuals and groups are difficult to characterize formally and, so, are better described as multiple systems of relation. Organization, in this more complex model, is the sum total (or, in another manner of speaking, the density surface) of all of these interlocking, overlapping, and manifold associations all overlain onto each other. What emerges is not a sharply bounded group, but a density mapping that suggests where and how association is most intense, and where it is most loose and unimportant. Figure 3 depicts this difference between a simple set-operation and a topology.

**Figure 3 Depiction of Organization as Set-Operations and Topologies**



#### **IV.2 The Constitution of Practice**

One cannot help but see the same distinctions reflected in the everyday practices of these organizations. Probably the most formal way that practice has been characterized is as the formation of rule-systems and subsequent rule compliance. Practice begins with a code that is subsequently brought into a place and enacted. This derives from a rationalization of practice as a two-stage process in which a solution is first worked out in concept or as a policy, and that concept subsequently implemented (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1979). But it is possible that practices are not so easy to characterize in terms of agency but, rather, in terms of *relationship*. For this reason, when the fisher from SAMMACA talks about monitoring for illegal fishing, he describes it in terms of connectedness:

##### SAMMACA

"...pero nararandaman ng mangingisda ang yanig ng dagat. ...alam na ng tao ang kung sinong nagdidinamita, at paglaot pa lamang ng bangka na walang (equipment na) panghuli, sinusumbong na iyan sa bantay dagat.

Translation:

"...but people can feel the pulse of the ocean. ...people naturally know who uses dynamite, and the minute the boat so much as leaves without fishing gear, people already let the coastal watch know."

The classical system of monitoring, on the other hand, utilizes rationalist schema for classification and technologies of observation, as in the following text:

#### MATINGCADC

"...Ang katubigan... ay ginagawan ng guhit o plano at binahagi upang magkaroon ng ibat-ibang gamit o kapakinabangan na naaayon sa anyo ng tubig... nagtatag ng isang proyekto na maglagay at magtatag ng mga boya... Kaakibat na rin dito ang pag-iwas sa... pag-aangkla sa mga bahura...."

Translation:

"...The nearshore area... was divided into different zones corresponding to uses that are appropriate for these waters... established the placement and marking of buoys... This is part of the effort to reduce anchoring at the reefs..."

And, so, rational systems establish rule-systems and employ modes of classification, such as zoning, buoys, and markers. These rational systems function as ordering schema, whereas systems of relation (or, as we will refer to it, care) present strategies of vigilance. The difference is not just in the technocratic versus the human, since SAMMACA does employ some new technologies when possible (e.g., their realization that response times could be shortened through the use of a cell phone). Rather, it seems to lie in the distance between system and presence. The idea of rational systems characterizes much of modern-day coastal zone management, with its emphasis on the formal-juridical and rationalist. In contrast, what we find more markedly in SAMMACA's practice is a framework that is relational. This is why their talk often focuses on the personal, since the program is essentially a socio-cultural field, which is related to the idea of embedding. For this reason, the idea of modeling their situation as the classic commons problem does not work well, since property rights relies on the primacy of the juridical (in fact, in concept, allowing actors to eschew the need for personal relations). Also, the notion of understanding it as a repeated game, with its emphasis on establishing membership, boundaries, and monitoring rules, does not seem to fit well. In SAMMACA, there is no repetition, and everything in the movement is cumulative, embedded in the history of the place and people. Behavior does not result from drawing, as on a blank slate, patterns of action and response that correspond to patterns of incentives and disincentives. Behavioralism does not well explain the idea of action as being part of the constitution of a person who is embedded in a certain time and place. Otherwise, the organization would pay greater attention to formal evaluation --rather, the questions brought up in their monthly meetings revolve mainly around the strength of the movement, relationships with other members, and linkages. The Moreno case is not just a conflict of incompatible interests, but something that draws from the history of the place, the landowners, and the experience of marginalization of the fishers. Each case is unique, since each case draws from a different relational history.

These distinctions in practice are also reflected in the policy instruments found in each place. For the longest time, the most dominant item in MATINGCADC's agenda was the establishment of a user's fee system that would allow local authorities to charge visitors to the dive resorts a fee that would then go to the organization for their activities. This, along with the focus on classification systems, reflects the group's reliance on formal-juridical instruments (i.e, rule-systems). SAMMACA, on the other hand, puts the most emphasis on presence and vigilance, relying on relationships with fishers who guard their places and work with the organization on establishing circles of relationships. For example, maintaining some balance in the amount that each fisher can harvest is done partly through some rules on fish gear, but largely informally, as fishers work with each other in sharing places. MATINGCADC, on the other hand, relies on a coding system, where boats are "color-coded" in some places, such that only those with a certain color code can

fish at certain times of the day. While the objective is the same, the constitution of action (whether as juridical or relational) is different.

The creation of a system of action can be formalized as the drawing up of boundaries, rules, and tasks. However, the real institution seems to occur in the "mess" that happens within the boundaries of the formal. The program is essentially the innumerable ways (and so being, difficult to formalize) that modes of action and cognition are integrated into the everyday institutions of a place (which evokes work by Garfinkel, 1967).

The differing emphasis placed on rational goal-achievement, in MATINCADC, and on establishing and righting relational systems, in SAMMACA, can be seen in the salience of issues which take up each group's agendas. For example, using content analysis to describe the frequency of appearance in monthly meetings, can be suggestive of issue salience. In this exercise, the following ordering of salience seems to be suggested.

#### MATINCADC

1. Monitoring and Enforcement
2. External Organization
3. Internal Organization
4. Planning
5. Fundraising
6. Legal: Cement Plant

#### SAMMACA

1. External Organization
2. Internal Organization
3. Legal: Moreno and Asturias Cases
4. Planning
5. Monitoring and Enforcement
6. Fundraising

This does not mean that monitoring for illegal fishing is less important to SAMMACA --in fact, they exhibit a greater rate of apprehension and conviction of illegal fishers than the other group. Rather, it shows that, contrary to (or perhaps partly because of) the reality that the fishers in SAMMACA are constrained in terms of funding and mobility, the group values external linkages and wider circles of action or, as we will develop below, systems of care. This is why an issue like globalization is important to the fishers in SAMMACA, necessitating that they use resources to send one of their own to the WTO protest in Cancun. It is the threat of an alien presence disrupting these circles of care and introducing incoherence into an intricate topology of relationship. Perhaps for the same reason, the group is quick to reject both the WTO and the rebel group, since both represent a dissolution of these systems of care, whether through the sublimation of community into a featureless global marketplace, or the sublimation of the person into the collectivization of violence.

### **IV.3 Hermeneutics**

When we introduce elements of context in the picture, we reinforce or reinterpret some of the above insights. The relation of context to the form and function of these organizations is not meant to imply some sort of determinism --rather, we use the notion of coherence, which simply means that the organization and movement of these groups reflect elements of context. The danger is always that these connections are made too simplistically. At any rate, let us examine some relevant elements of context in each case and see how these help us understand (but not completely explain) some differences between the two programs.

The mix of livelihoods, land uses, and social strata in Balayan (where MATINCADC is found) is greater than in Calatagan (where SAMMACA is). The ecology of each place is somewhat different, also. While Calatagan Bay opens out to the China Sea, which extends all the way to the larger Asian continent and, most immediately, parts of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Taiwan, Balayan Bay lies in the more sheltered interior of the Philippine archipelago. While fishing is the main

livelihood for the coastal communities in Calatagan, Balayan has, in addition to fishing, a healthy tourism industry owing to the presence of several important dive spots (which Calatagan does not have).

With regard to the fishers, their degree of marginalization seems to be greater in Calatagan, as borne out by some census figures but, more meaningfully, observations from the people we interviewed. The type of housing reflects this, too, as Calatagan is characterized, visually, by shanties in informal settlements, as opposed to concrete structures in government surveyed parcels.

We might understand more deeply how this degree of marginalization, coupled with the sparser mix of social groups and livelihoods, can help foster a greater emphasis on collectivization and organization in Calatagan. Marginalization can create a deep sense of solidarity, and the legitimation of the group through organization becomes more important in this case. Perhaps the simpler social structure in Calatagan also allows a greater emphasis on the constitution of identity and its reflection in the organization. For this example, organizational structure of both internal and external movement is most important to SAMMACA. Of course, this is most immediately reflected in the composition of the organization itself, as MATINGCADC is a coalition of fishers, government officials, and resort owners, though the fishers naturally outnumber all the rest.

Marginalization in Calatagan is more deeply understood when one considers the history of this place. Unlike Balayan, Calatagan started out as the private property of a single family, the Zobels, a *mestizo* family, who do not just represent one of the two or three richest families in the country, but also symbolize the irrevocable legacy of the Spanish colonialist era. Calatagan was essentially a large *hacienda* or farm, and the poor were largely farmhands and sharecroppers. People who set up shanties on the more peripheral properties were encroachers. The Zobels have since then given up much of Calatagan to the municipality and sold parts to other parties, but still retain a large farm and resort, Punta Baluarte (Bastion Point). Still, tourism is not an important part of the local economy, and whatever small numbers of tourists come to Punta Baluarte each year confine their activities and spending inside the estate. Marginalization is also found in the everyday existence off the fisher, as their more informal status and the greater threat from external poaching (e.g., from large fish trawlers from Manila, Taiwan, etc.) has led to a more degraded coastal environment and fish stock in Calatagan. Perhaps related to this marginalization, SAMMACA imparts a greater sense of value to both the threat of the external and promise of constructive engagement with the larger context. The danger and promise of the larger pale of society is more keenly felt in Calatagan.

Context also encompasses the type of NGOs that helped establish each group. In the case of MATINGCADC, the group was founded and still largely sponsored by an international NGO, WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature, whose headquarters is found in Washington, D.C.). Inevitably, WWF casts its blueprint onto the organization, of which it is not formally a part. This is reflected partly in the rational-purposive language we find in this organization, with its focus on rule systems and coalition formation. The notion of consensus building, which is a large part of the model of MATINGCADC, owes much of its meaning to this western influence. In contrast, the NGO in Calatagan, CERD (Community Extension for Research and Development), phased out years ago, and it was left to the fishers to maintain and build up the organization. CERD's model of organizing is still present in SAMMACA in form, but the everyday reality of the movement and the blend of activities that characterizes it is now completely determined by the fishers.

Why would fishers in Balayan form a coalition with government representatives and resort owners? Put another way, why would they not also form an organization completely on their own? The liberal notion of rationality would suggest that they do so if the fishers benefit from the association. However, this would conceivably apply to the fishers in Calatagan, as well. Conceivably, the history of alienation of subsistence fishers in Calatagan, along with the greater ecological stress on their marine environment, has evidently helped foster a culture of solidarity, completely apart from utilitarian considerations. As the fisher from Calatagan put it, in the end, all others will leave, leaving the fishers to fend for themselves. The sentiment echoes the life of the subsistence fisher, paddling alone in his boat into the ocean, irresolutely alone. The fisher depends on nothing else, and the phrase they use to describe the fisher's sojourn out to the sea each day is "paglaot sa dagat" which evokes an engulfing by or a complete giving over to the sea, in a relationship of utter dependence. In this position, the fisher's household has learned not to depend on others, save for the ocean.

#### **IV.4 Conclusion: Structures of Care**

In trying to describe the phenomenon of organization found in fishers' groups, we needed to go beyond the formal-judicial description of these institutions --not that these modes of description are not necessary, since we believe they are. However, much of the essence of these programs lie outside these frameworks. We have already introduced some of the elements of an alternative framework: presence, relation, vigilance, and care. We will begin to describe these institutions in terms of *structures of care*.

In part, this alternative framework draws from a considerable tradition of feminist thought. Various authors have sought to describe persons through a different set of attributes that are sometimes summarized as care (Gilligan, 1982), which is a person's capacity for empathy, as well as the primacy of interpersonal relationships. This, in turn, draws some of its concept from the work of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenologists (primarily Husserl, 1901, Heidegger, 1927) who sought to portray human experience in as authentic and faithful a manner as possible. In doing so, these phenomenologists essentially described human consciousness in terms of intentionality (Brentano, 1874), which leads to an understanding of the human condition in terms of establishing relationships with the world or other subjects in it (which we will refer to as *care*).

In employing a closely related notion of care, we attempt to use it as a primary descriptive for institutional structures, i.e., habituated patterns of behavior and relations between individuals and groups. In doing so, we really are using the term, care, in a way it has not been hitherto used. How do we describe, as a structuring, a phenomenon (i.e., the essence of organization) which defies formal description? As an initial attempt, we might posit structures of care as mappings from individual to individual, individual to group, and group to group. In this sense, social network theory would provide some directions in describing some of these structures. However, the structures we observe are less aptly depicted as formal links between individuals or groups, but perhaps more properly described as virtues and movements.

The notion of a virtue, as contrasted with a moral principle, is a good analogy for distinguishing the relational from the formal-judicial. In describing moral conduct (e.g., academic honesty), we can stipulate rules such as those that prohibit plagiarism, fictitious references, and physical theft (of classmate's paper), and those that promote documentation, accurate citation, etc. However, the practices that really define the essence of academic honesty are best described by virtues not rules, since these include an innumerable universe of things, some of which cannot be defined beforehand (otherwise, they could be stated as rules). A good description of the virtues of academic honesty motivates the academics and provides some compass for action. You could not

specify most of the actions themselves, since these are often derived pragmatically or originate from a relational point of view. For example, one can guide one's self accordingly by reflecting on what it might mean, in that situation, to act in accordance with an attitude of respect for one's classmate or teacher. Somewhat related to this is the ethical distance between rule-obedience and an attitude of ethical concern (Blum, 1980).

For example, in the case of the fisher, when describing some arrangement (e.g., between their group and the mayor), this is described as *may pagkakaintindihan kami* (that is, that we have a mutual understanding). Note that these things are not described as arrangements or patterns of behavior, that you could describe in juridical terms. Sometimes, it is stated as *mayroon kaming usapan* (that is, we have a discussion). The latter is not well described as communicative practice (Habermas, 1987), however, since this would attempt to capture, using a model of communication that is joint, rationalist, liberal, and agonistic, a phenomenon that is topological, pragmatic, embedded, and empathic.

We note, too, that these relations of care do not imply "caring" which may be too strong a concept. Suffice it to say that care as a relational concept is more generally defined to include caring relationships as well as the employment of police to ride along with the fishers and fire rounds into the air as illegal poachers flee in their motorboats. (Note: more often than not, the larger poachers have faster boats and are not caught). It includes participation by the fishers in a mayor's clean-up day in town, as well as their participation in an anti-WTO rally in Mexico --one which ended in the violent self-immolation of one protester (as recounted by the SAMMACA representative to one of the authors).

Could we attempt to depict structures of care through formal representations, as with social network analysis? We can use it to evoke some of the structure, and the exercise in cognitive mapping, which we employed in this research, is one example of this kind of representation. Merging these depictions with narratives, using whenever possible, the very words of the speaker can bring us closer to the phenomenon. In addition, introducing the reflections of the researcher is also important. In doing the latter, we acknowledge the departure from any allegiance to pure objectivity. However, as Gadamer pointed out, interpretation would not be possible were the researcher not to approach the phenomenon from her or his universe of experience, so long as such "prejudices" do not blind one from discovery (Gadamer, 1960).

If organizational boundaries and rule-systems form the formal structure of a program, then the systems of care are what constitute the things that occur within this formal structure. However, this "mess" that goes on in between the bounds of the formal may constitute the essence of the program. For example, policing a bay from illegal fishing may entail a formal monitoring schedule and rules for engaging poachers. More substantively, however, this is enabled through the relations, understandings, and affiliations that the fishers' group establishes and maintains (even from day to day) with different groups and individuals. This works by virtue of the care by which a relationship with the mayor is established and nurtured by the group that causes her/him to begin foregoing relations with the poachers. When two people say that they "understand each other," this embodies a host of mutually coherent patterns of actions, communication, and cognition. These structures of care, though informal, are real and can be as sharp-edged as legal principles. To encode these actions as rules or standards, however, can be a disruptive and hegemonic practice. To some extent, we can have formal systems, such as found in MATINGCADC, imposed by an alien presence (e.g., a policy entrepreneur, the state). Alternatively, the structures of care may persist unimpeded, working their effect within the boundaries of the formal. It is not so much that these relations are better not encoded into rules or formal propositions, it is rather that they cannot be encoded.

How do we describe systems of care? Being true to the phenomenological bent of this inquiry, ultimately, we should say that these can only be experienced. However, we can begin to put together modes of description that can help us better characterize these. It begins with uncovering how people or groups understand relationships within and outside the group. The relationship between SAMMACA and other NGOs is an example, wherein presence is a foremost element in the characterization. Understanding membership in a group to be embedded in identity, history, and existential aspects of life in a community is another example. Though we use geometric analogies to help define the concept, structures of care are, for the most part, unmappable. Narratives can help convey how these structures work, but perhaps we can best aspire to thick description by creating a composite picture through different modes of description, including narratives and maps. At any rate, structures of care require description of relationships that are maintained, negotiated, and renegotiated (sometimes on a daily basis). These structures can evolve over time, or their maintenance can take on ritual elements. Their description requires we pay explicit attention to aspects of an institution that go beyond the formal. Most of all, it requires that we be open to understanding an institution as a phenomenon that is experienced.

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