

Spain, Europe. A view from Organizational Cybernetics.

We will begin our reflections on Europe and the relationship between the different states, autonomous communities and other configurations, starting from a question:

Is a conversation possible that allows us to overcome the confrontation between apparently opposing simplifying positions of reality?

From the outset, we are faced with a question of enormous complexity (variety) both within the different states as well as in organizations of a larger (EU) or smaller scope (Autonomous Communities, etc.). Variety that includes emotions, ideas, concepts, political orientations, economic, family, social situations, etc. All this processed through the mental models that each person has and uses to interpret the world. On the other hand, we find political actors in the wide diversity of organizations also characterized by an enormous variety: ideological orientations, political party and individual interests, economic, demographic, social, political constraints, multiple levels of government (municipalities, county councils, autonomous communities, national states, Europe, etc.).

All of this has generated over time different perceptions of reality related to the configuration of both Europe and some of its constituent states, as is the case of Spain. Perceptions that in recent years have evolved, in some cases, towards radically opposing visions.

If we take the Spanish case and consider, for example, the case of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, we find that some consider that Catalonia should be an independent entity (nation, state) of Spain and others that it should remain an integral part of Spain, as an Autonomous Community or other variants. The arguments used by each side are obviously also confrontational: for some "Catalonia contributes disproportionately more than it receives from the rest of Spain" and for others "Catalonia does not show solidarity" and an infinity of variants of a similar nature. Arguments of this type trigger intense emotions on both sides.

In view of the complexity of this type of problems, the question to explore would be: *Is it possible to reflect from a systemic point of view to help overcome the conflicts generated by opposing visions in the sphere of Europe and its components?*

To try to point out an approach to the answer we turn to Organizational Cybernetics (OC) developed by S. Beer in the 70s, 80s and 90s. It is a systemic approach that allows the design or diagnosis of complex organizations taking variety (complexity) as a basic element of study. Let's see what are, according to this approach, the phases of the design of an organization.

The design of an organization (or its diagnosis) can be structured, from the CO point of view, in a simplified way (as described before) in four stages: 1) Definition of the identity, purpose, raison d'être of the organization, etc. 2) Creation of the vertical structure (vertical unfolding of the complexity).

3) Verification in each organization and sub-organizations and, at each level, that all the functions that S. Beer's Viable Systems Model specifies as necessary for its viability exist and function adequately and 4) Verification of the coherence between all the levels of recursion (vertical structure).

In the case at hand (Autonomous Communities, Spain, Europe) the diagnosis goes through these same four stages. We would start by reviewing for the global organization (European Union) its "principles" (identity, purpose, *raison d'être*, or vision, mission, objectives, etc.). These same elements will have to be present "recursively" in each of the organizations contained in the EU (member states, autonomous communities or their equivalents, as well as in more detailed level organizations if we continue the disaggregation downwards). Next, we would review the vertical disaggregation (splitting of the *ple jida d com ple jida d*). In our case we could focus on three levels: The EU as a whole (Level 0), the different member states (Level 1) and the Autonomous Communities (or their equivalents according to the different countries) which would be Level 2.

Level 0 is the EU. In Level 1 we have 27 member states. In Level 2 we have more than 200 components (Autonomous Communities or similar). These figures already give us an indication of the potential complexity inherent in this design. The particularities of the member states and their respective territorial organizations, as well as the variety of competences reserved for each of the levels make this complexity reach impressive levels.

Any deficiency in the execution of the four phases mentioned above will lead to various "pathologies" (See figure 1) in the organization that may eventually destroy it. There are many of them that can occur in the EU today. I will simply mention that among the pathologies identified as very frequent there is one that is particularly damaging: the one known as the emergence of "autopoietic beasts". This refers to the emergence of units (states, autonomous communities, etc.) that put their objectives ahead of any other consideration or impact on the other units at the same level or on the whole to which they belong. An example in biology are cancers, they grow and grow following their own objective to grow; although in the end they end up destroying the organism to which they belong and therefore themselves. The way to avoid their appearance is through a good functioning of the subsystems in charge of integration, synergy and coordination.

The difficulty of achieving harmonious functioning between the units that make up a given level (states, autonomous communities) grows almost exponentially with the number of members. This means that any attempt to increase their number must be assessed with this circumstance in mind.

Obviously this brief text does not intend to make a diagnosis or design recommendation for the EU, given the complexity of the problem; but we can at least give an indication of what may happen if elements of level 2 decide and manage to become components of level 1. In this case, in addition to the complexity already mentioned, we would add that contributed by the new units, and let us remember that complexity grows almost exponentially with the number of members. Simply, and to take the reasoning to the absurd, what would happen if the more than 200 units belonging to level 2 (autonomous communities) wished to become part of level 1 (states)? The new number of states would be extremely high and each one of them would have its own specificities. The variety would obviously be enormous.

This is the reason for suggesting a vertical unfolding of complexity. By creating several levels and having each of them address a certain part of the complexity of the environment, its governance becomes possible. In fact, a possible option for the EU could

be to create an intermediate level between the EU and the member states. These would be organizational units made up of several states. It is not a question of going to a two- or multi-speed Europe but of designing policies appropriate to the specificity of "groups of states", i.e. to address the specific variety of such groups.

Referring to the Spanish case, another option to explore could be to consider the creation of a unit superior to the current Spanish and Portuguese state. For example, creating an organizational unit called Iberia. This could contain the Autonomous Communities (or their equivalents) of Spain and Portugal. In this case the interlocutor unit with the rest of the European states could be Iberia. Evidently this option poses enormous challenges that may qualify today as rather utopic; but one of the positive aspects could be the "dissolution" (rather than resolution) of the potential problems of fitting in communities such as Catalonia, Euskadi, Galicia (etc.?). They would all be embedded in a superior unit which would be Iberia. The other benefit we believe would derive from the very important increase in the decision-making power and influence of Spain and Portugal in the EU, through Iberia, by integrating the areas of influence of Spain and Portugal (more than 850 million people speak one of the two languages) in the world.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE CASE OF SPAIN

Relevant aspects

I will first point out some general aspects related to the AACC and the Spanish state, as well as to the application of cybernetics as a meta-discipline capable, according to our opinion, of providing a more comprehensive approach to the issue. Some of them are the following:

1. The harmonious integration of the different autonomous communities (AACC) that make up Spain poses challenges in the treatment of complexity. I will focus the attention on the organizational design of the state from the point of view of its viability.
2. The number and characteristics of the different aspects to be taken into account in each and every one of the Autonomous Regions, as well as their interrelationships and their relationship with the superior entity that is the Spanish state, is enormous. In other words, we are faced with a problem of enormous complexity.
3. Systems Thinking and Organizational Cybernetics (OC) have adequate conceptual elements to address it. For example, Ashby's Law states that "variety (indicator of complexity) can only be absorbed with variety". If we approach the question of the design of the Spanish state and how to integrate the different ACs in order to achieve a harmonious functioning of them and of the whole, of the whole, we will have to conceive an organizational structure that allows us to deal with the complexity (the variety) contained in them. The OC provides us with clues.
4. First of all, we understand that any design of the state and its parts must aim to "maximize the degree of welfare of the parts so that they reach the maximum development that their potential allows".

5. Secondly, in order to achieve the maximum efficiency of the whole/Spanish state "the parts {AACC) shall be endowed with the *maximum autonomy* compatible with *cohesion*".

6. Thirdly, the competences of the AACC will be defined according to the specificities of each of them (geographical location, language, types of natural and human resources, etc.) and, accordingly, grant the powers that maximize the satisfaction and efficiency of the autonomous community and of Spain as a whole.

7. In the case of a community (level 2) such as, for example, Euskadi, Cataluña, Galicia, etc., wished to split off from Spain to move to the previous level of resource (level 1) and place itself at the same level as the other 27 EU states (level 1), would lead to an increase in the complexity already existing at that level. In addition, once accepted the movement of communities (AACC, Lander, regions, etc.) from level 2 to level 1 (states) the number of these would no longer be 27 but potentially much higher. From the point of view of complexity management this organizational structure would be hardly feasible.

8. In conclusion, the proposal from the cybernetic point of view is to reconsider the specificities of the different Autonomous Regions of Spain and identify which attributions each of them should have that contribute to maximize their satisfaction and development potential and that of the whole Spain. This process has many difficulties due to the multiplicity of interest and circumstances, but we think that the use of an approach as described may help to foster conversations that starting from the lower recursion level (the person) may move up by adding elements in a sound and viable way. The aim is to move from a scenario in which what we have is leaders fighting among themselves to win their respective positions producing winners and losers to another different scenario in which the various leaders fight together against common problems trying to get a viable design good for each of them and for the whole.

Design elements

The above considerations refer to the design of the vertical structure of the state. The objective is to have organizations (ACs) adapted to the relevant and specific part of the environment of each of them.

This allows each of the ACs to design and carry out its activity (with the aim of achieving the maximum satisfaction and development of its people) in a way that is very much adapted to its specificity. The Atlantic and the Galician Rías have little to do (from the point of view of the natural environment, resources, climate, etc.) with the Castilian moors or with the Cantabrian mountains or with some of the almost desert-like areas of the Spanish southeast or with the Canary Islands, etc.

These approaches would be (supposedly) beneficial for each CA, but being so, they would also be beneficial for the superior system (Spain). There is no contradiction but just the opposite. Therefore, this is a conception based on collaboration, complementarity and synergy and not on confrontation and zero-sum strategies (what I gain you lose).

This leads us to the other question: what kind of decisions (attributions) is more efficient (for everyone) to place in the ACs instead of keeping them centralized at the level of Spain?

This is a question that must be answered CA by CA. It is not worth "coffee for all". For some, one type of decision will be convenient and for others, different ones may be more convenient (although a good part of them are common). The treatment of language is a good example. (If we take the case of the Galician language, for example, and take into account the number of children under 16 years of age who speak it, a doubt arises as to its continuity, given the danger that before 60 years its use will have fallen dramatically if something different is not done from what has been done. This is despite the fact that it is a language that allows us to communicate with more than 250 million people in the world. Languages are a good example of wealth, of productive variety. Obviously, languages should never be used as a weapon to attack other people.

The other question refers to how the *governance* of this system of organizations (CAAC and Spain) is organizationally articulated. I leave aside for the moment the more detailed level organizations (Provincial Councils and City Councils, etc.). Here is where it is useful to review the functions that the Viable Systems Model (VSM) indicates as necessary for each and every one of the organizations that make up Spain to be viable. These are the five systems (plus the auditing system) that the VSM identifies as necessary for the viability of a system.

To do this, we will have to identify in each of the organizations (Spain as a whole, Autonomous Communities, etc.) how (if at all) each of the systems (functions) is represented. To do so, we will have to answer the three basic questions:

"Is the function represented? That is to say does it exist?

"Does it have the necessary means to fulfill its purpose adequately?

"Does it actually do so? That is, is it used?

If we focus on the current situation in Spain, we see that there are two opposing forces: one oriented towards a more intense centralization (PP, VOX and perhaps part of the PSOE) and the other towards decentralization (part of the PSOE and Podemos, and other more or less nationalist organizations).

The problem is that the question of competences (or independence in its extreme case) is treated as a fight to be won, of some against others, and not about how to design a VIABLE system that benefits all.

This is where it gets complicated. Some parties pose a total confrontation based on alleged (or some perhaps real) grievances, or deficiencies. The strategy is to "hit hard" or "defeat" the enemy. On the other side (as an almost inevitable response, there is defense and, depending on which party is governing, a greater or lesser reactive "attack". "You only give in when you have no choice".

This is pathological behavior as it harms both parties as well as poisoning the relationship and leaving it damaged (perhaps) for a long time. This is not an appropriate strategy. It adds up to zero or, worse, subtracts.

The cybernetic proposal is to jointly design the system that maximizes the benefit of the individual and, I insist, of the whole. There are several sets (organizations) or levels of recursion. But simplifying we have individual, autonomous community, Spain, Europe, Humanity.

In the case of the Autonomous Communities and the organ or organs that will oversee their conception (specification of the normative, strategic and operational aspects, coordination mechanisms, auditing and information systems and communication channels) they will have to be designed guided by the essential principle of maximizing the satisfaction and development of the individual (people). This will help us to configure a Spain made up of Autonomous Communities with the capacity to deal with the specific complexity (variety) of each one of them. To this end, they will have to have the decision-making capacity required for those issues corresponding to that level of recursion (CA), as well as the necessary resources (human, economic, etc.).

A design based on respect and the promotion and use of Spain's enormous wealth (variety) will ensure that we all benefit. The people, the Autonomous Communities and Spain as a whole. It is a matter of generating synergy in a country that is prodigious in terms of history, nationality and cultural and human wealth.

If this is done, we believe that the tensions between the Autonomous Communities and the State, as well as the pressures towards a potential separation of any of them, would be greatly reduced.