

**COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP AS ‘PLUMBING AND POETRY’:
NAVIGATING PARADOXICAL TENSIONS THROUGH COMMUNITY IDENTITY WORK**

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‘Leadership involves a delicate combination of plumbing and poetry.’

James G. March, in Podolny (2011, p. 504)

Unlike other scholarly associations, the *European Group for Organizational Studies* (EGOS) gave up the tradition of publishing presidential addresses in its journals a long time ago. However, at times, it might still make sense to reflect on what EGOS stands for – and where it is heading. The future of EGOS is discussed each year at its Colloquium (the association’s annual conference) as well as in other fora. Yet, these discussions tend to revolve around specific questions and more current, operational, or otherwise practical issues, while broader reflections on our scholarship and EGOS as our ‘home domain’ are rare (as an exception, see, for example, Lammers, 1998). Now that EGOS has entered its sixth decade of existence and recently celebrated its 40th Colloquium (Colloquia used to be biennial events in the early years), we deem it important to pause in order to reflect upon what EGOS stands for in terms of its core identity and purpose. This requires discussion not only of future opportunities and challenges, but also of the development of the association and how we got where we find ourselves, as a community, today.

In this essay, we offer our personal interpretation of the history of EGOS from an identity work perspective. We start from Snow and Anderson’s (1987, p. 1348) original definition of identity work (‘the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept’) but emphasize two dimensions: First, identity work not only shapes one’s self-concept but also others’ conceptions, in cycles of interactions between internal and external identity work; second, we focus on community identity work to highlight that we refer to organizational identity achieved not only by the EGOS Executive Board but together with the broader community it serves. Indeed, based on our selective analysis of EGOS’ recent history, we argue that the identity of EGOS is not defined by its formal leaders’ decisions, choices, or statements as much as by the discussions and debates about issues of concern for the community – i.e., through dialogic identity work (Beech, 2008). In this essay, we more specifically suggest that underlying many of these issues are paradoxes that we confront time and again, albeit

often in somewhat varying forms. By paradoxes we mean persistent, non-resolvable, contradictory demands that create tensions in dealing with such issues (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart., 2016). Navigating these paradoxes in pluralistic contexts, such as the EGOS community, involves a both/and approach (Smith & Lewis, 2011) and collective leadership (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001), as we detail below.

Navigating Paradoxical Tensions

In what follows, we focus on five interrelated paradoxical tensions at EGOS and how these are managed through community identity work: (1) *‘European at heart’* and *‘global in reach’* (i.e., identity work through the management of geographies’ meanings in a (post-)globalized age); (2) *inclusivity* and *exclusivity* (i.e., identity work through reflection on openness/closeness); (3) *continuity* and *change* (i.e., identity work through sustaining and updating traditions amidst new demands); (4) *pluralism* and *normativity* (i.e., identity work through infusing values); and (5) *volunteering* and *professionalism* (i.e., identity work through academic community governance).

‘European at heart’ and ‘global in reach’: Identity work through the management of geographies’ meanings in a (post-)globalized age

One of the key paradoxical tensions is whether EGOS is defined as European or, rather, a research association with a global reach and mandate. EGOS started as an international network in 1973 in Paris and was further formalized in 1998 as an international non-profit association (AISBL) under Belgian law. Researchers felt the need for a home where scholarly research with intellectual roots in European sociology and the humanities was presented across the different lingual and cultural boundaries. Establishing EGOS, with the opening E standing for European, provided a basis for pan-European collaboration in the form of meetings and publications, and paved the way for the creation of the EGOS community as we know it today. While initially EGOS primarily sought to engage researchers from different European traditions in a conversation, ever since its beginning, the relationship to research traditions outside Europe – especially the differences to North American

scholarship – has been an important aspect of EGOS' identity (Meyer & Boxenbaum, 2010), despite intra-European differences often being more substantial than transatlantic ones (e.g., Lammers, 1998).

Notwithstanding the programmatic statement made through the name, EGOS was never purely European when it comes to its member base. North American scholars have been involved in EGOS since its foundation, and the number of members from elsewhere (for instance, South America and Asia-Pacific) has been increasing over the past decades. Today, EGOS is seen as a leading, if not *the* leading global association in organization scholarship. In this sense, it is fair to say that the EGOS community mirrors a field of organization and management research that has always been fragmented, 'globally patchy' (Hickson, 1996, p. 217) and 'splintered' (van Maanen, 1995, p. 133), a 'mosaic of semi-isolated research communities' (Baum, 2007, p. 40). As Jim March (2007, p. 9) put it, it 'is a large, heterogeneous field involving numerous enclaves having distinct styles, orientations, and beliefs. It is integrated neither by a shared theory, nor by a shared perspective'.

Identity work around EGOS reflects this tension and has led to different emphases at different points in time. This has meant especially a reinterpretation of what 'European' means – and to whom. At least from the late 1980s onwards, 'European' seems to be a reference to intellectual roots rather than any geographic area. EGOS seeks to be appreciative of multiple perspectives, to be a platform for building and sustaining bridges between the separate enclaves that form around specific intellectual domains and parochial traditions. In this sense, EGOS is a platform for alternative types of management and organization research, striving – as do its journals *Organization Studies* and *Organization Theory* – to be 'European in origin, global in outlook' (Tsoukas, Garud, & Hardy, 2003, p. 1005). These values are expressed in the editorial statements of *Organization Studies* and *Organization Theory* that aim at 'widening horizons beyond national boundaries' (Hickson et al. 1980, p. 1) and 'becoming a global journal [... because] formal knowledge production today is global' (Tsoukas et al. 2003, pp. 1004-1005; see also Cornelissen & Höllerer, 2020). Identity work is also instantiated in editorials reminding that 'being an EGOSian still means being infused with certain values that other fragments of academia do not necessarily share: those values are close to reinforcing the *diverse diversities* shaping the very academic community, striving to ignore knowledge silos,

keeping strong local-European and ethical roots while reinforcing the global side of the journal' (Courpasson, Arellano-Gault, Brown, & Lounsbury, 2008, p. 1383, emphasis in original).

While maintaining its European identity, EGOS has also engaged in identity work aimed at building a community beyond geographical borders. Longstanding initiatives to reach out to North American scholars have moved beyond welcoming them in convenor teams at the EGOS Colloquia and have been institutionalized in the fruitful collaboration between EGOS and Academy of Management's Organization and Management Theory (OMT) Division. Perhaps reflecting the paradoxical tension best, the Colloquium was organized in North America once – in Montreal in 2013 where a longstanding and strong community of EGOSians acted as local organizers – before awareness of how academic traveling impacts the climate crisis heightened.

EGOS has also interacted with a variety of international initiatives and developments. Interestingly, some identity work there reflected a pendulum swing between the 'European at heart' and the 'global in reach.' On the one hand, EGOS has successfully run recurring paper development workshops via its journals in Eastern Europe, Africa, Australia, and Asia, and jointly organized conferences with APROS in Asia-Pacific and LAEMOS in Latin America. On the other hand, EGOS has chosen to disengage in some instances where its efforts were met with concerns of neo-colonialism in terms of imposing its own, predominantly European values on others.

At the same time, and while the EGOS-OMT collaboration has been very positive and highly appreciated, EGOS has also been criticized for losing a core part of its identity – or even purpose – when promoting a global view of organization and management studies. Has the global engagement helped produce a 'one-way street' that makes the field of organization research ever more dominated by North America (Meyer & Boxenbaum, 2010)? Have we mellowed (Baum, 2007), giving in to North American imperialism (Augier, March, & Sullivan, 2005), the Anglo-American steamroller (Chanlat, 1994), or the North American paradigm police (March, 2003)? Thus, there is a need for an ongoing awareness and sensitivities, which entail valuing local knowledge from diverse parts of the globe, not succumbing to North American hegemony, and, equally, not imposing our own values on other geographic communities.

As former EGOS Chairs, each of us five could tell stories that make it clear that these concerns are still very much alive among the EGOS community despite, and perhaps also because of, academic globalization. Navigating between reaching out, enabling conversations, building bridges, and overcoming ‘pluralistic ignorance,’ as Lammers (1998) called it, on the one hand, and countering hegemony, safeguarding diversity, and appreciating differences on the other hand, was and has remained one of the core responsibilities of the association’s leadership.

Inclusivity and exclusivity: Identity work through reflection on openness/closeness

The second paradoxical tension deals with inclusivity and exclusivity. One of the main challenges for EGOS as a community has been to keep its distinctive identity amidst all the changes within and outside it, such as shifting demands on research, publications, and careers triggered by the large-scale transformations of the publishing and tertiary education sectors. In other words, the paradoxical tension that EGOS continuously faces is being an inclusive, and thereby growing community, while sustaining the quality of scholarly exchange that entails a level of selectivity and exclusivity. Among the forces pushing for growth is foremost the sheer increase in academic production. Not only are researchers more numerous, better trained, and better equipped, but they face stronger pressure to publish. As a result, membership in learned societies, attendance at scholarly conferences, and submissions to academic journals have all increased in the last couple of decades. EGOS is no exception. In the past years, EGOS Colloquia have been attended by some 2,500 participants annually, while EGOS has reached over 3,000 active members from 62 countries all over the world. This is a source of pride *per se*, especially in an academic world saturated by conferences and associations. The interest in the EGOS PhD and Early Career Scholars workshop and other professional development activities has also increased substantially, allowing for a stronger connection with the new generations of researchers. While openness and inclusivity are core values of the community, conversely, EGOSians have voiced concerns with this growth and the challenges it poses regarding our collective carbon footprint, and for maintaining the distinctive ‘EGOS spirit’ and unique experience that they cherish.

This paradoxical tension points to a key element in community identity work: boundary work, which involves defining what the community is and what it is not and separating insiders from outsiders. Besides setting explicit boundaries (e.g., through the formal act of membership), this entails norms and codes of conduct and is instantiated in numerous institutionalized rules and distinct practices. In fact, EGOS' collective efforts to shape the community's boundaries involve all three types of boundary work – competitive, collaborative, and configurational – identified by Langley and colleagues (2019), and the boundaries worked at are social, symbolic, material, and temporal. We give a few examples below.

Over the years, inclusivity has been fostered on many fronts. EGOS has ensured the renewal of people and ideas through formal and informal governance structures, for instance, by setting fixed terms for most positions in association and journal boards. Colloquia are also an occasion for reshuffling, with new teams of local organizers and Sub-Theme proposals every year, and time-limited Standing Working Groups. EGOS encourages PhD students to participate in its events by nurturing a reputation for openness and developmental spirit as well as offering reduced fees. This has resulted in a fairly constant proportion of 25% PhDs among Colloquia attendees. Similarly, EGOS' Inclusivity Policy allows colleagues from low-income countries to join its Colloquia and its journals' paper development workshops at a vastly reduced membership fee (over 90% reduction) with further support through travel grants. Identity work fostering inclusivity also includes responding favorably to requests by other communities to hold workshops. Finally, inclusivity is pushed by codes of conduct to make sure people feel welcome and safe at EGOS events.

At the same time, to ensure that wide open arms would not result in losing togetherness, some identity work has been geared towards maintaining EGOS' distinctive culture and experience. One key distinctiveness is hosting the EGOS Colloquia on university premises, whereby the organizers invite their community 'home' to their local university or business school facilities that bear their distinct cultural and institutional imprints. This is a very directly noticeable difference from many other scholarly associations' conferences hosted in globally standardized impersonal hotels and convention centers. Debating organizational ideas in classrooms is part of maintaining EGOS' unique feel and

inspiration for true scholarship. Our collaborations and institutionalized exchanges with other associations and academic entities also seek the local-international balance. In addition, it is a way to witness plurality not only in ideas and research traditions, but also in the material and place-related differences among different European and other venues that host EGOS Colloquia and other workshops. That place matters (Dacin, Zilber, Cartel, & Kibler, 2024) can be physically and emotionally experienced by EGOSians every year.

Although this long-time tradition stems from a willingness to sustain a distinctive academic culture, it brings practical considerations for exclusivity. For instance, the extensive number and size of rooms needed to host an EGOS Colloquium often prevent smaller universities from serving as hosts, thereby limiting the number of Sub-Themes and, consequently, the number of attendees. Further, some locations are less accessible as they are more difficult to travel to or have an infrastructure with more (or less) local flavor than some would wish for. In addition, it is sometimes challenging to make attendees realize that they need to enact the role identity of a grateful guest – and not of a customer (despite having paid a fee) towards the local Colloquia hosts.

Most importantly perhaps, maintaining EGOS's unique culture is the ultimate challenge in this respect. Identity work here is primarily a matter of socialization and of passing on the tradition, which gets more challenging with growth and turnaround. In that, tradition starts to move from informal and implicit to more formal and explicit. A mentor program is now available to newcomers, who also benefit from a crash course into EGOS culture by Sub-Theme convenors. One of the key characteristics of EGOS is the mixture of developing specific conversations (e.g., in the Sub-Themes and Standing Working Groups) and bridging different debates (e.g., in Sub-Plenaries and through engaging in events with other scholarly communities such as the OMT Division of the AOM). The Sub-Theme structure's aim is to advance the understanding of a specific topic rather than simply present one's own current research. In the first few decades of EGOS, it was clear to everyone that this implied that people stayed with their respective Sub-Theme for all sessions and contributed to the discussions there. We know of one convenor who, in the first session of their Sub-Theme, half-jokingly made attendees swear the 'EGOS oath' in this respect.

The paradoxical tension between inclusivity and exclusivity holds a number of challenges for the community's leadership and requires a balancing act of community identity work: Building bridges to other communities and being welcoming to newcomers while at the same time making sure the culture remains strong and vibrant and the experience at EGOS distinctive; being open while at the same time keeping growth under control; fostering sub-community building and ensuring change in convenor teams; maintaining the culture without policing the boundaries. This is all linked with the 'EGOS spirit', which brings us to a third paradoxical tension.

Continuity and change: Identity work through sustaining and updating traditions amidst new demands

The third paradoxical tension concerns continuity and change in traditions and values vis-à-vis adaptation to new demands. It arises from changes in the environment that cannot be ignored. The object of analysis of organization scholars, the organization, has been changing significantly since EGOS was created, as documented by Davis (2015). Access to data, along with computing power and new methods, have also pushed for change in how to conduct organizational research. And of course, major changes in our profession are the pressure for publication and the need for international mobility in careers; there is no question that early-career researchers experience much stronger pressures than the five of us ever did. Additionally, two important external shocks called for change. One was COVID-19, during which lockdown policies forced scholarly communities to bring their meetings online. The other is the realization that the climate crisis warrants rethinking scholarly conferences. Conversely, and as alluded to above, forces towards continuity mostly emanate from a willingness to safeguard the EGOS values and spirit to which the community is attached. Continuity is also facilitated by the fact that, at its core, the way we exert our profession has largely remained resilient to the many changes in the environment (Forgues, 2018).

Considering this, the EGOS Executive Board has focused on balancing between members' scholarly creativity, initiative, and freedom, and the needs to secure maintenance and manageability, ensuring a 'minimum memory' of the strong spirit and legacy, but also of the more mundane

governance and compliance necessities. Such minimum memory also helps institutionalize forgetting (de Holan & Phillips, 2004). It is about guaranteeing a true EGOS experience through enough stability, without becoming rigid so that novel ideas and formats are explored and tried out. It is also about noticing and offering opportunities for minority voices to be heard while at the same time providing enough space for those coming from more established streams of research to communicate and exchange their ideas. A ‘minimum memory’, on the other hand, also needs to institutionalize memorizing, and the right balance between the two is what constitutes the conundrum.

Innovation and institutionalized forgetting are also ensured, to an extent, by having local organizing teams make their imprints on the EGOS annual event by selecting a Colloquium theme and choosing Sub-Themes, as well as curating a locally flavored opening ceremony, Colloquium dinner and party, without a strong and long memory of what has been done before, and by the regular fluctuation among members of the EGOS Executive Board. Openness to new ideas has resulted in recent years in a range of pre-Colloquium initiatives and, occasionally, some post-Colloquium events, as well as in online and hybrid sessions, initially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, and in the 2026 Colloquium as a fully virtual academic program of Sub-Themes and Sub-Plenaries for sustainability and inclusivity. Another recent innovation from the EGOS Executive Board responding to environmental change has been the launching of *Organization Theory* as an online-only open-access journal. The new journal’s ‘business model’ addresses growing calls for open science while being robust to possible evolution (Cornelissen & Höllerer, 2020).

Being open to change while maintaining its distinctive culture through identity work highlights features of EGOS’ organizational model. Balancing acts are supported by EGOS’ unique form of organizing. There have been different attempts to define and label its model. Lammers (1998) referred to it as initially a ‘front-line organization’ run by activists which over time has transformed into a professional bureaucracy. While one can certainly notice the presence of ‘plumbing,’ i.e., certain rules and formats required to guarantee the smooth functioning of a large operation such as EGOS, the activist ‘poetry’ is far from lost. There are numerous EGOS enthusiasts who every year propose and run Sub-Themes, standing working groups, Sub-Plenaries, and pre-Colloquium activities,

or generously support other workshops. The initial purpose of being ‘a breeding ground for initiatives to set up smaller groups focusing on specific topics or themes’ (Lammers, 1998, p. 884) is still alive. For March (2007, p. 10), EGOS originally it resembled ‘a kind of intellectual social movement within organizational scholarship [...] producing, augmenting, proclaiming European resistance’ to North American hegemony. For others, EGOS might represent the imagery of a ‘federation’ of autonomous scholarly communities, also not without its own challenges (Höllerer & Geiger, 2021). Perhaps what it resembles most is a ‘hospitable organization’ (Svejenova, Croidieu, & Meyer, 2013) – that is, one that enables pluralism and openness to new ideas while preserving the authentic spirit and strong identity; operates with a minimum structure for maximum scholarly interaction among ‘regulars’ and newcomers, strangers and friends; provides a unified platform for diverse content, and offers deep and generous engagement with colleagues and their ideas rather than rushed interactions. This is an essential part of what makes EGOS’ identity unique and worthy of maintenance. Such an identity-maintenance project may also explain why newly elected EGOS Chairs, in responding to questions about new directions and strategies for the association, tend to stress that their main objective is to maintain the EGOS community, and why new editorials of *Organization Studies* tend to firmly evoke Hickson’s legacy.

Striking a balance between remembering and forgetting about the ‘poetry’ at EGOS is one thing, and here, the challenge is not to forget history and legacy but also not to carry it around as a burdening rucksack. Institutionalizing forgetting is, therefore, an important achievement. However, when it comes to the mundane work of running a legal entity and all compliance issues – the ‘plumbing’ –, a bias towards remembering is quite useful and, often enough, being at the helm of a scholarly association indeed feels a lot more like being the chief plumber than the stellar poet.

Pluralism and normativity: Identity work through infusing values

Yet another paradoxical tension has to do with embracing pluralism while enforcing norms valued by the community. From the start, EGOS was founded in part as an alternative to a model that was experienced as stifling pluralism. Over the years, a better understanding at the societal level of

issues around inclusivity have reinforced this drive. Yet, pluralism can come at the cost of losing togetherness. One key aspect of community building entails negotiating, enacting, and maintaining a shared sense of identity (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000). From a community identity work perspective, pluralism and normativity are two sides of the same coin.

At EGOS, pluralism is a founding value and, as such, part of the norm to be enforced. In terms of identity work, institutionalizing EGOS has been ‘to *infuse [it] with value*’ Selznick (1984, p. 17, emphasis in original). A number of decisions have been made to foster pluralism. For example, Sub-Themes at EGOS Colloquia are convened by teams that must exhibit heterogeneity in terms of geographies, gender, and seniority. Similarly, EGOS journals pay attention to diversity in leadership positions and editorial boards. *Organization Studies*, for instance, has put in place a symbolic but important editorial policy to increase the visibility of women, which consists of showing first names in reference lists. At the association level, as mentioned earlier, EGOS has adopted an inclusivity policy which goal is to ensure pluralism and diversity.

Such moves can be seen as too much of a ‘soft touch.’ It is no wonder that some people have asked why EGOS has not issued an explicit Code of Ethics like several other scholarly associations. The answer lies in our tradition that is less reliant on codes, procedures, rules, or policing, and more driven by shared values and contagious spirit. Furthermore, as we all know from our research, explicit and written-down policies and codes are multi-layered (Zilber, 2024). They signal and make available the values and norms, make clear lines of accountability. But, at the same time, communities and organizations rarely write down what they believe is taken-for-granted by everyone, and having to make values and norms explicit is often a sign of beginning erosion. Hence, the priority of EGOS is to spread its spirit in the socialization of new generations of EGOSians, seeking ways to ‘infuse’ them with enthusiasm for pluralism, so that they benefit from the enrichment that comes with being confronted with different viewpoints, cultures, and perspectives. We have no doubt this should result in fostering enthusiasm for ‘science as a vocation’ (Weber, 1946), which must be made ‘beautiful through rigor, persistence, competence, elegance and grace, so as to avoid the plague of mediocrity’ (March, 2007, p. 18).

One challenge of community identity work regarding pluralism and normativity originates, as we have mentioned above, from the rapid growth in membership and Colloquia attendance that EGOS experiences. This is exacerbated by the important proportion of first-time attendees of Colloquia. While this is a clear token of thriving, infusing so many new community members with values, or socializing them into the EGOS spirit, is not a trivial task, the danger being that EGOS becomes the victim of its own success. We sometimes encounter, albeit infrequently, un-EGOS acts, such as submitting a paper to several Sub-Themes to hedge the risk of rejection, or hopping across Sub-Themes to maximize exposure to and returns on networks and ideas. Given the growth and the current size of the EGOS community, and some developments in the higher education field that tempt to game and gamble, it is becoming necessary to try and spell out what EGOS values and cherishes, and what it means to be a member. In fact, this essay results from our feeling that there needs to be more discussion about the ethics of our academic profession and of EGOS as a scholarly community. But we always wanted to do this ‘the EGOS way’ – through dialogue rather than calling for the imposition of specific rules. Such dialogue may result in a more concrete understanding of our values and practices, as scholars and educators with responsibility to the profession and society, and the ways in which we can deal with important problems and challenges. It is part of the EGOS Executive Board’s mandate and agenda to initiate such a dialogue and to translate these shared understandings into minimal (to keep with EGOS’ essence of relying on minimal structures for maximum interaction), yet meaningful policies and procedures.

Another, rather different arena for taking an ethical stance as EGOS is when it comes to political statements in the face of broader societal and political issues, such as the climate crisis, oppression of intellectuals, or outbreaks of war. While discussions about these and other issues are important for community identity building, reflecting multiple and even contradictory viewpoints, thus far, EGOS as an association has pursued a strategy of not taking a stance (with some exceptions). This may at times be seen as an inadequate response, but it can also serve as a means of protecting pluralism and allowing for a dialogue to continue within the community.

Volunteering and professionalism: Identity work through academic community governance

Finally, a tension met by EGOS concerns community governance and the question of how the association is run: as a volunteer organization, self-governed by academics, or as a more professional ‘service provider,’ supported by dedicated staff. Volunteers running a scholarly association do so with strong engagement, at no financial cost for the association and community. Further, being members of the community themselves, they have more connections and a better understanding of the membership's needs and wishes. Volunteering generally comes with a higher turnover, which allows bringing renewed energy and ideas, and works quite effectively against the ‘iron law of oligarchy’ (Michels, 1949) that we see at work also at large scholarly associations that rely much more on permanent and professional staff. Conversely, volunteers run the association in addition to their demanding full-time jobs, meaning they have limited time and availability. Some specific tasks necessary for the smooth functioning of the organization might be outside their skillset or radius of attention. And the drawbacks of a high turnover include a risk that the relationship between remembering and forgetting gets out of balance (see our musings on ‘minimum memory’ above) including having to ‘reinvent the wheel’ regularly, or even of instability, in addition to the time and efforts necessary to train newcomers. Shifting to professionals rather than volunteers presents an almost perfect mirror image of the previous pros and cons.

At the time when EGOS was founded, membership in a scholarly association was mostly a way to access its publications. With the development of wide access to online article databases, this motive lost importance and members grew other service demands in return for their membership fees. At EGOS, most decisions are taken by an elected Executive Board drawn from the community, and the invaluable help of a very small number of extremely dedicated professional staff and service providers that for many scholars are the main interaction points and have become ‘the faces’ of EGOS and its journals.

Relying on volunteers requires, however, community members to step up and volunteer. The EGOS Executive Board is a very small group, composed of seven members who are elected for a 3-year term and a handful of appointed officers, including the journal editors and the members of the

secretariat as ex-office observers. The number of candidates running for election is consistently quite limited, perhaps resulting from awareness of the workload this service entails. Two observations can be drawn from recent board elections. First, candidates tend to highlight how they have already contributed to the community. In doing so, they maintain the community identity. Fortunately, given the many ways members can contribute at the Colloquia and through the journals, the pool of potential members of the leadership team is quite significant. Second, identity work is also done by the community itself: for example, the occasional candidate who would be perceived as lacking engagement with the EGOS community collects a negligible number of votes.

One of the instantiations of how EGOSians participate in the governance of the association is the Annual General Assembly, which is the premier steering body of EGOS, where strategic and central operative decisions are debated and approved. Participation in it is consistently low, though the EGOS Executive Board has tried a variety of formats to lure members. And yet, when members happen to dislike some decision, they seem surprised to hear that they have the opportunity to express their opinion. Perhaps the Board should make a bolder move, such as holding the General Assembly during the Colloquium opening ceremony, which is well attended. In a similar way, we doubt that many EGOS members have ever looked into the Statutes of the association (available on the EGOS website) or know about legal and/or financial aspects of EGOS – often to the frustration of the EGOS Executive Board. The silver lining here is that we perhaps worry too much. Seeing how much the community feels attached to EGOS, how much they love meeting during Colloquia and workshops, and how highly they value EGOS journals, this is hopefully a sign that they are happy with how the association is run.

The paradoxical tensions presented above are not specific to EGOS. Many community-based associations face similar challenges. These tensions also evolve with environmental trends and forces. Further, it is important to note that they sometimes intersect in shaping specific issues. For example, aiming for inclusivity and sustainability simultaneously raises significant challenges that the EGOS Executive Board faced when crafting policies in that respect. In the next section, we draw some

implications for EGOS, and more generally for the collective leadership of community-based organizations.

Implications for Community Identity Work and Collective Leadership

In this paper, reflecting on a combined 14 consecutive years of service as EGOS Chairs, we have identified and elaborated on central paradoxical tensions that, in our view, have provided both challenges and opportunities for (re-)shaping the identity of our academic community. Importantly, in all this, we draw on our own personal experiences as well as our – admittedly selective – review of other sources of written and oral history.

This reflection leads us to underscore five points about community identity work and collective leadership in scholarly associations akin to EGOS. First, community identity work seems to involve a dynamic of selective remembering and forgetting. Thus, we tend to confront similar or analogous paradoxical tensions time and again in new manifestations and circumstances. Sometimes remembering earlier discussions, decisions or rules-of-thumb is helpful; at other times it is better not to cling to the past. Second, fostering and facilitating an open dialogue seems the best way to deal with emergent issues and tensions. This is what keeps EGOS vibrant as a scholarly association, including different views, diversity and debate. Third, embracing collective engagement with EGOS appears to be the way to move the association forward. This is important per se as a foundation for collective leadership, and it also creates opportunities for the participation of diverse voices and, through them, for different expressions of beauty, joy, and passion in academic work. Fourth, the role of the EGOS Chair and Executive Board is to create opportunities for discussions but also to listen to different views, make proactive suggestions and serve as custodians of the EGOS culture and spirit. One should not ‘micromanage’ a scholarly association such as EGOS, but it is important to be able to steer the discussion and create opportunities for constructive dialogue. Fifth, working with paradoxical tensions implies that they can never be solved but only navigated. If anything, this reflection shows that the tensions are not merely ‘problems’ to be solved but key parts of the discussion that continually defines what EGOS is for its members.

So, what about the future? Sustaining a thriving academic community, such as EGOS, is about expanding its capacity for collective leadership (Denis et al., 2001). On the one hand, some members like us serve in specific formal roles, which involve defined governance and stewardship responsibilities as well as an open mandate of taking care of the community. This mandate of care is shared among the members of the EGOS Executive Board and the EGOS Secretariat. On the other hand, it is essential that EGOS continues organizing for a wider sharing of leadership roles, e.g., by having co-chairs of EGOS Colloquia, co-convenors of Sub-Themes, co-organizers of Standing Working Groups, PhD, and Early Career workshops, co-hosts of Sub-Plenary sessions, co-Editors-in-Chief of the EGOS journals, etc. In a unique way, every year EGOS offers both the opportunity and the responsibility for shared leadership of different sub-communities to over 200 EGOSians. As these co-organizers represent different generations, career stages, institutions, theoretical and methodological traditions, and localities, it could be argued that this creates both continuity and renewal in the capacity for collective leadership and the shared identity of the EGOS community. Accounting for over 50 years, this collective way of leading seems to enable creating an energizing and committed critical mass of collective leadership for advancing our field, both propelling curiosity for new directions and sustaining community care into the future.

Thus, good leadership, as noted by Jim March (1982/2005, p. 121), is ‘beauty as well as truth’; it is about bridging dualities: ‘an exuberance for life with a commitment to the prosaic duties of leadership,’ ‘poetry and routine as well as action,’ ‘the appreciation of complexity as well as simplicity, the pursuit of contradiction as well as coherence, the achievement of grace as well as control.’ Paraphrasing the late Jim March, we hold that good leadership implies a delicate combination of ‘plumbing and poetry’ (March, in Podolny, 2011, p. 504): the need to sustain a solid infrastructure that nonetheless remains malleable enough to allow beauty, joy, and passion in academic work to unfold.

In conclusion, we are mindful of the fact that our analysis necessarily reflects a specific kind of perspective – different from, for example, those EGOSians who may find themselves more at the periphery of the association, or may even feel marginalized in this community. Thus, we do not claim

to have captured all key challenges, and even less so the possible answers. Yet, we hope this essay will spark other reflections on and studies of EGOS' past, present, and future from multiple perspectives.

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