

Institutional Theory and the Isomorphic Pressures in the Search for Knowledge: A Study in an APL of Goiás – Brazil

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Received: 23 Oct 2020;

Received in revised form:

09 Jan 2021;

Accepted: 30 Jan 2021;

Available online: 13 Feb 2021

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Keywords— Institutional Theory, Local
Productive Arrangement (APL),
Management and Regionality,
Organizational isomorphism, Search
knowledge

Abstract— The institutional theory provides a greater understanding of organizational phenomena, especially in relation to the reaction of organizations to the pressures of the environment in which they operate. These pressures, which can be mimetic, coercive, and normative, force companies to become increasingly homogeneous, through isomorphic mechanisms, and can even influence the search for exploratory and exploitative knowledge. This study was carried out with the intention of verifying how the pressures exerted by organizational isomorphism affect the search for knowledge. The study was conducted in the underwear companies of APL Taquaral in the state of Goiás Brazil. The results revealed that the organizational isomorphism does exert some pressure on the companies of APL in its three forms. As to whether it influences the search for knowledge, it was demonstrated that the influence of exploitative knowledge is quite noticeable and the exploratory knowledge practically does not occur. The companies demonstrated technical and or financial inability to invest in R&D, which occurs because of the characteristics of the companies of the pole, in addition to the evident lack of public policies.

I. INTRODUCTION

The institutional theory originates from the acceptance and legitimacy of certain practices in organizations, which, therefore, are adopted to face the competitive pressures of the environment (CARDONA et al., 2020).

Organizations tend to imitate behavioral norms of other actors in the organizational field, which according to DiMaggio & Powell (1983), is very important, as it helps in producing similar services or products and have structural equivalence and connectivity. This increases the flow of information and development of mutual knowledge among the participants of the organizations.

By associating relevant stakeholders to institutional theory, DiMaggio and Powell (1983)

proposed the idea of dividing predominant sources of institutional pressure on decision makers into three dimensions: coercive pressure, normative pressure, and mimetic pressure.

Institutional coercive pressure stems from organizations facing cultural and social expectations. After all, the company operates within the society and, therefore, inevitably fits into both formal and informal pressures from other organizations, such as government agencies and regulatory standards (DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983). Government agencies illustrate perfectly how powerful groups can influence the actions of an organization (RIVERA, 2004).

The normative pressure occurs due to professional codes, which assume that professionals will follow specific

guidelines aligned with formal education conventions and the professional community (DIMAGGIO AND POWELL, 1983). Due to social legitimacy, each company is expected to consider or follow standards, norms and expectations of its external *stakeholders* (MCFARLAND et al. , 2008; LAI et al. , 2006). In normal cases, customer demand shapes a central normative pressure (ZHU, SARKIS, 2007; HALL, 2000).

Mimetic pressure arises when an organization copies other successful competitors in the market. As organizations are embedded in social networks (MCFARLAND et al., 2008), companies in these networks tend to imitate the behaviors of other network members (HENISZ and DELIOS 2001). In particular, when the organization does not have clarity in establishing its organizational objective or understanding the technology, there is a greater chance of imitating other companies (DIMAGGIO E POWELL, 1983; LIANG et al., 2007).

Regarding the subject of isomorphism, some researchers assert that it can have a negative impact on organizations, simply because they are involved exclusively with copies of models. Over the years, this will significantly affect their competitiveness, taking away any kind of advantage they may have in the face of competition, which may lead the organization to cease to exist (SCOTT, 1987; KONDRA and HININGS, 1998; OLIVER, 1991).

However, in an uncertain industrial environment, organizations adopt obedient, adaptive attitudes to mediate the stress caused by the environment to achieve the legitimacy of survival. In the gradual process resulting from organizational isomorphism, uncertainty decreases, which can lead to a decrease in the risk of failure of the company's objectives, allowing companies to study and accumulate knowledge and technology quickly, which can increase their own innovation capabilities (MATHEWS, 2002; HAUSMAN, 2005; SHILLER, 2005; HARGRAVE and VAN DE VEN, 2006; SALMERON and BUENO, 2006). Based on studies that demonstrate the presence of isomorphism in its various forms in the development and institutional survival, this phenomenon will be studied in the Local Productive Arrangement (APL) of Taquaral confections in Goiás.

APLs are the subject of different academic studies (CASSIOLATO and LASTRES, 2003; BRAZIL, 2010; MACHADO, 2003; AMATO NETO, 2009), in which issues such as regional economic development are raised due to the creation of these structures, as well as job and income generation analysis. These researches observe issues such as dissemination of knowledge and learning among APL member companies and their business

partners, with the objective of demonstrating how these agglomerations develop and have access to new markets, starting with the supply of services and products.

According to Poletto (2009), recent reports show that local development models should be based on the concept that the basic factor for development and competitiveness of a given territory are directly supported by the capacity to act in an integrated manner, with the effort of the members of the agglomeration themselves, based on the resources available in their territory. The capacity to generate, disseminate, and use new knowledge goes beyond the individual firm, becoming continuously dependent on the interaction between firms and those with different institutions in different fields. Such a scenario makes the APLs, generators of savings in clusters of diverse productive aspects. Within this reasoning, Poletto (2009) stated that the concept of productive arrangements is related to cooperation between local actors, a situation in which they use the tacit knowledge of a given territory, creating and developing innovative techniques that enable the design of new services and products.

The development of APLs requires a series of integrated measures that provide: local autonomy, an environment of inclusion, the constitution and elevation of social capital, environmental protection, integration among the various participating actors, the process of innovation, respect for labor relations, and the reduction of social inequalities (LIMA et al. , 2013).

Lastres and Cassiolato (2003) believe that the main advantages of studies on the APLs is the fact that they represent a somewhat traditional unit of analysis, based on individual organization, sector or production chain, in which it is possible to make a relationship between the territory and its economic activities, so groups of agents and activities associated with production and innovation are focused. Such activities include spaces where learning takes place, and productive and innovative training actions and the development of tacit knowledge are conceived, besides representing levels related to the policies of access to learning and conception of training.

Therefore, this study makes a relevant contribution to the academic area. Its results expand the knowledge about the dynamics of the APLs, by studying the behavior of organizations in the face of isomorphic pressures according to the vision of institutional theory, and how this can influence the search for *exploratory and exploitative* knowledge, which can contribute to the development of this type of cluster.

II. THEORETICAL REFERENCE

In this research topic, the concepts and theoretical bases on institutional theory, organizational isomorphism, and APL will be addressed. Such concepts are essential for the development of the proposed work, since these theoretical bases are related to the objective of the research.

2.1 Institutional theory

Institutional theory originates from the acceptance and legitimacy of certain practices in organizations, which are therefore adopted to face the competitive pressures of the environment. In this sense, it predicts that organizations tend to imitate behavioral norms of other actors in the field. According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983), the concept of organizational field is very important because it is used to denominate organizations that constitute a recognized area of institutional life. That is, they produce similar services or products and have structural and connectivity equivalence. In this sense, they consider that the fields are institutionally defined or structured through a process involving four components:

- a) The increase of interaction between organizations.
- (b) The emergence of rapidly defined inter-institutional structures with coalition standards.
- (c) Increasing the flow of information between organizations.
- (d) The development of mutual knowledge among the participants in the organizations.

In this way, a line of work is generated, incorporating several organizations that seek to find market policies, social groups, practices and organizational forms, which serve as guidance and constitute a globalized organizational behavior, appropriate and legitimate within the field. It is difficult to carry out a process of change from this perspective because the objectives may be changed or new practices may be developed, but in the long run the organizational actors build an environment of homogeneity that limits their ability to change. From this perspective, the organizations would not respond to their own environment, but to the organization's environment responses (CARDONA et al. , 2020).

Institutional theory has proven to be a powerful and popular explanatory tool for analyzing organizational change and behavior. While classic approaches emphasize the idea that organizations are dominated by the role of individuals, rational actors and their personal preferences and interests, the new institutionalism places great emphasis on the formative role of institutions. The central postulate is that organizational actors always pursue their

interests within certain institutional constraints (GREENWOOD et al. 2008). From this point of view, the patterns of organizational actions are shaped more by institutional forces, such as cultural itineraries and norms, than by instrumental calculations (DIMAGGIO and POWELL 1983; MEYER and ROWAN, 1977).

Organizations are considered to be deeply rooted in social environments, suggesting that organizational procedures and structures are often a reflection of environmental expectations. Subsequently, the institutional theory assumes that organizations try to react to the demands of their institutional environment to gain legitimacy (MEYER and ROWAN, 1977).

Based on these studies, institutional theory has institutionalism at its center, which seeks the motivational explanation of organizations, incorporates practices and procedures defined by the concepts that predominate in the organizational environment and are institutionalized in society.

For institutional theory, companies are not only profit-seeking entities, but they also recognize the importance of achieving social legitimacy. Such legitimacy can be understood as the widespread perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (SUCHMAN, 1995).

Institutions can be understood as regulatory, normative, and cultural cognitive elements that, grouped with activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life (SCOTT, 2008; LI; CAI, 2014).

For Scott (2008), institutions can be detailed through a series of conceptions, in which

- (i) institutions are social structures that have achieved a high degree of recomposition;
- (ii) institutions are combinations of cognitive-cultural, normative and regulatory elements, which are related to activities and resources, providing stability and meaning to social life;
- (iii) institutions are conducted by various types of carriers, including symbolic system, relational system, routines, and artifacts;
- (iv) institutions operate at various levels of jurisdiction, from the global system for localized interpersonal relations; and
- (v) institutions by definition relate to stability, but are subject to the process of change, whether incremental or discontinuous.

Institutions regulate economic activities, defining the rules of the game as the basis for production, exchange, and distribution. Thus, it is essential that companies follow

the established rules, norms and belief systems to gain legitimacy and mobilize their political, social, and economic resources to adapt to specific institutional environments. This further helps strengthen the company's performance and its acceptance before *stakeholders*. Thus, a process of institutionalization is necessary for the success of such adaptation (YANG; SU, 2014).

Institutional theory shows that institutionalization places the organization as a culture, in which there is a system of shared meaning among the members. When this entity achieves institutional permanence, acceptable modes of behavior become legitimate and accepted by its participants, and effigies of institutional isomorphism are visualized (QUINELLO, 2007).

Institutional theory seeks to explain the motivators of certain behavioral conducts and processes of behavior change on the part of organizations, which strengthens its applicability in the study of organizations (ALVARENGA and RODRIGUEZ, 2017).

Zhang and Hu (2017) proposed that according to institutional theory, an institutional environment has the power to make organizations within it perceive similar rules, norms, and cognitive and cultural pressures, allowing them to act in a similar manner to gain recognition and approval, and thus, increase their legitimacy. In turn, they can receive the support and resources, and homogeneity is gradually formed.

Companies operating in the same segment that are in the same area of operation and face similar circumstances, try to change their state of resource occupation for survival. To compete, small companies tend to imitate larger ones, new companies learn from old companies, and cluster companies share technical and professional innovations. Therefore, to gain legitimacy and survive in a cluster, companies gradually become isomorphic through coercive, mimetic, and regulatory institutional mechanisms. In conclusion, it can be said that isomorphism is a process of strategic choice necessary for cluster companies (ZHANG and HU, 2017).

Institutional theory studies the different types of pressure that institutions suffer, be it economic, social or political, and the effects of these pressures on management practices. As per Oliver (1991), the influence of institutional theory on organizational behavior is mainly characterized by the restriction and rationality that organizations show in relation to the pressures they receive from the outside world, as well as the external demands to which the organizations' need to respond. Obviously such a theory unfolds in its specific components—coercive pressure, normative pressure, and mimetic pressure—a conjuncture that can serve as an important driver of firm

supply chain management practices, as any company must face institutional factors in its management practices (ZENG et al., 2016).

To meet the requirements of regulators, consumers, and the public, an increasing number of companies have integrated products and services for consumers (HOEJMOSE et al., 2012; VEZZOLI et al., 2012). Government policies, laws, and regulations can have positive impacts on the productive chains of agglomerate companies (LINTON et al., 2007; ZHU et al., 2005). In addition, policy documents issued by non-governmental organizations such as trade unions, trade associations, club of legal executives, etc., may also encourage companies to adapt institutionally to the pressures they face (AHI and SEARCY, 2013; PHAN and BAIRD, 2015). Studies by Gualandris et al. (2014) and Dubey et al. (2015) also show that institutional pressure is an important factor shaping business management strategy in Italy, India, and other regions.

2.2 Organizational isomorphism

Organizations exist and operate in an environment undergoing institutional changes due to the adoption of new laws, the emergence of new norms or rules, and the development of new practices and designs (MENKES and ALUCHNA, 2018). Institutional change at the macro level requires a series of changes and adaptations at the micro-organizational level (AOKI, 2007). The patterns of the organization's response to institutional change are extensively studied by institutional theory (DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983; MEYER and ROWAN, 1977; MIZRUCHI and FEIN, 1999) explaining how elements of organizations, including structures, practices, and professions, are created and disseminated in society (GREVE, 2003). The theory states that the institutional environment can strongly influence the development of these elements, often more deeply than market pressures (MEYER and ROWAN, 1977).

The reason for this is the fact that organizations are striving for legitimacy with their constituents, which is considered crucial for their continuity by providing access to environmental resources (DEEPHOUSE, 1996; MIZRUCHI and FEIN, 1999). This approach corresponds to the proposal of legitimacy by Aprile and Magnaghi (2012), which emphasize the "social contract" between a company and society.

Faced with this, it is not competition or an objective requirement of efficiency, but the search for legitimacy of organizations, which leads the company to adopt practices and structures in line with socially prescribed dictates on how the organization should act to achieve its objectives (MIZRUCHI and FEIN, 1999).

The response of organizations to institutional pressures and the experience of interactions with their peers lead to isomorphism, which means that companies become similar following the same management practice (DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983).

Organizational isomorphism is a coercive process that forces an organization in a given population to resemble other units facing the same set of environmental conditions (DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983). Many scholars have discussed this phenomenon previously (MESSNER et al., 2008; CAROLAN, 2008; DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983; SCOTT, 1987; FUENTES, 2014; (MENKES and ALUCHNA, 2018).

According to institutional theory, isomorphism among organizations is beneficial, not as a primary means of increasing competitiveness or increasing operational efficiency, but as a legitimate form of survival by consolidating opportunities to survive in a hostile and also, unknown environment (SCOTT, 1987; XINXIAN, 2000).

When investigating cluster isomorphism from a network perspective, Tan et al. (2013) did a study in which they proposed to go beyond the classification given to institutional and competitive isomorphism by some scholars (DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983; FENNELL, 1980; MEYER, 1979). In this path, institutional isomorphism is considered to be that which arises from the movement of institutional forces (DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983; SCOTT, 1995) and competitive isomorphism is imitation under competitive pressures (HANNAN and FREEMAN, 1977; PORTER, 1990). In this context, the study conducted on Xindu furniture cluster, located in Sichuan Province, Southwest China, examined both institutional and competitive isomorphism simultaneously, because the cluster represents an institutional context mixed with characteristics of market competition, a fact that occurs due to the economic reforms that have occurred in China, where the government institutionally influences the companies in the cluster (TAN, 2006).

Krause et al. (2019) disclosed that institutional theorists have long recognized that relationship situations serve as sources of information, which in times of uncertainty can facilitate mimetic isomorphism. In contrast, the capacity of coercive isomorphism comes as a response to direct coercion rather than uncertainty, to propagate through those frames of relationships that remain unknown.

Zang and Hu (2017) asserted that there is no clear consensus on the relationship between organizational isomorphism and innovation performance of companies, opening space for further studies on the subject. A study

that considered Chinese cluster companies as a research object the detailed influence of organizational isomorphism on their innovation performance, as well as the search for knowledge intermediates this influence.

2.2.1 Coercive isomorphism

This refers to the influence exerted by norms, laws, and government agencies on organizations (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; KILBOURNE; BECKMANN, THELEN, 2002; ZHU et al. , 2010). The pressures that are mainly linked to issues of political influence and legitimacy problems arise from the results of formal or informal pressures. (QUINELLO, 2007). Hence these pressures are powerful inducers for the inclusion of management practices in organizations. Government demands are everyday examples that influence the actions of an organization's practices (RIVERA, 2004).

2.2.2 Mimetic isomorphism

They occur when an organization imitates the actions of successful competitors in the market by creating a benchmark for organizational practices (AERTS; CORMIER; MAGNAN, 2006; DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; ZHU et al. , 2010). Thus, mimetic pressures are mainly linked to the patterns of certain social groups as a response to environmental uncertainties and often represent a powerful force in the imitation process (QUINELLO, 2007).

2.2.3 Normative isomorphism

They are usually exercised by the parties interested in the organization, whether internal or external, aiming at full efficiency and professionalization (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; ZHU et al., 2010). Basically originating from professionalization owing to normative pressures, normative isomorphism arises from a collective effort of members of a given occupation to define methods and conditions for their work, in which they establish and create controls on cognitive bases and legitimate for their occupational autonomies (QUINELLO, 2007).

2.3 Organizational isomorphism and institutional pressures

Organizational isomorphism is the phenomenon of effective conduction of organizations to the process of institutionalization. Such a phenomenon is directed to a homogeneous character of the use of practices, processes, and management by organizations (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; POLLACH; 2015). According to these researchers, there are three mechanisms that exert pressure on organizations and promote this isomorphic conduction: normative, coercive, and mimetic.

In this context, it is reinforced that normative pressures are usually exercised by internal and external stakeholders who have an interest in the organization, in

which full efficiency and professionalism are sought (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; ZHU et al., 2010).

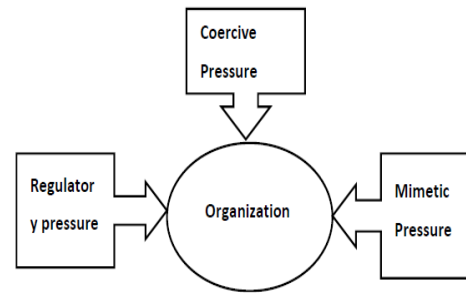
For Ball and Craig (2010), normative pressure is an important inductor for industries to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors, and there is also the fact that institutional research is necessary for the understanding of new social rules, such as ethical values and ecological thinking.

The aspects such as formal and legitimate education and the elaboration of professional networks that dictate new management models as in the areas of logistics, information technology, quality, and environment are included in normative pressure (QUINELLO, 2007). It is worth noting that normative pressures also arise from values and standards of conduct promoted by industrial associations and academic institutions (RIVERA, 2004; TATE; ELLRAM; DOOLEY, 2011).

Under these conditions, a company may develop practices if it wants to be recognized as legitimate and professional in dealing with its responsibilities (BERRONE et al., 2010; KETCHEN & GIUNIPERO, 2004). This, in turn, implies that the organization will engage, for example, in environmental practices, such as Green Supply Chain Management, where it is driven by industry associations, competitive pressures, and the need for legitimacy (KETCHEN & GIUNIPERO, 2004).

In coercive pressures occur the influence exerted by norms, laws, and government agencies (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; KILBOURNE; BECKMANN; THELEN, 2002; ZHU et al., 2010). Such pressures are a powerful driver for the inclusion of management practices in organizations. Government demands are everyday examples that can influence an organization's actions on its practices (RIVERA, 2004).

Mimetic pressures occur when an organization imitates the actions of successful competitors in the market by creating a benchmark of organizational practices (AERTS; CORMIER; MAGNAN, 2002; DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; ZHU et al., 2010). When companies are confronted with a new technology, and even in the absence of previous experience in this area, such organizations tend to act in a similar way to others in order to be successful in this aspect (HENISZ; DELIOS, 2001). Thus, Figure 01 presents the model of the isomorphic pressures suffered by organizations.



Source: Adapted from DiMaggio and Powell (1983).

2.4 Local Productive Arrangement - APL

According to Cassiolato and Lastres (2003), productive arrangements are agglomerations in which interdependence, articulation, and consistent bonds result in interaction, cooperation, and learning, with the potential to generate increased endogenous innovative capacity, competitiveness and local development. Cunha (2008) pointed out that foreign literature does not conceptualize APL. This terminology was thus named by the researchers of the Research Network on Local Productive and Innovative Systems and Arrangements (REDESIST), and there is no specific translation or conceptualization in other countries.

Cassiolato and Lastres (2003, p. 27), define APL as follows:

Territorial agglomerations of economic, political, and social agents—focusing on a specific set of economic activities—that have even incipient links. They usually involve the participation and interaction of companies and their various forms of representation and association. They also include public and private institutions focused on the formation and training of human resources; research, development and engineering; politics, promotion and financing.

From this perspective, Brasil (2010) states that when studying APL, it is necessary to consider actors, activities, and regions that are generally excluded from the policy agenda. This can help overcome specific and unisectoral policies, following the understanding that productive and innovative development depends on the articulation between actors of a given productive chain and other economic, political, and social actors that are part of different systems and arrangements, including those responsible for knowledge production, financing and support.

Cassiolato and Lastres (2003) opined that in APL's approach, the focus of the analysis is on the relationship between companies, and between companies and the institutions, and not on the individual actions of

the company. In other words, it is suggested that the focus should be on all agents and not one alone.

Amato Neto (2009) highlighted the fact that externalities can benefit the companies that make up APL, taking into account their geographic location, infrastructure, road network, labor, easily accessible raw material and good location to consumer markets, factors that decrease costs, increase profitability, and provide greater competitiveness.

In such agglomerations, interaction between competition and cooperation can also be observed, and this coexistence is possible because it occurs between different actors and in different dimensions, allied to the fact that competition between the companies that make up an industrial agglomeration is fundamental for the development of APL. Moreover, this competition can lead to the search for external markets, increased productivity and the search for innovations (PORTER, 1998).

III. METHODS

Aligned with the theoretical bases of the research, the methodological path chosen in this work characterizes the steps taken to achieve the proposed objectives, brings more information about the research environment, and the process of delimiting the *corpus* for the analysis of observed data.

3.1 Characterization and type of survey

This research can be characterized as exploratory and descriptive, since it seeks to provide familiarity with the problem, enhancing the knowledge of the researcher in relation to it, serving as a starting point for future studies (COLLIS; HUSSEY, 2005), establishes relationships between the variables (GIL, 2010), and enables the researcher to maximize his knowledge about a given phenomenon or problem (TRIVINÖS, 1990).

The research strategy used in this study was the mixed design, in which the researcher collects and analyzes the data, integrates the findings and extracts inferences using quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or research problem (CRESWELL; TASHAKKORI, 2007).

Among the advantages of using mixed methods is the ability to provide more evidence about the study of a research problem, helping to answer questions that cannot be answered by one approach alone (quantitative or qualitative); thus, providing a link between quantitative and qualitative approaches enabling the adoption of multiple world views.

3.2 Population and Sample

This study is based on the population of clothing companies belonging to APL Taquaral in Goiás. The sample was selected for the following reasons: the apparel companies present characteristics of organizational isomorphism, the apparel companies of this APL belong to endogenous industrial clusters, where the scale of most companies is the same with a small degree of product differentiation, and the degree of homogeneity quite evident (ZACARELLI ET AL, 2008).

As it was a relatively small geographical region with companies grouped together, the survey was expected to include the entire population or as large a number as possible. However, it was not possible to survey the entire population i.e., 144 companies, instead, 109 companies were surveyed, representing the sample.

The survey was conducted in two stages: the first classified as a *survey*, using the scale created by Zhang & Hu (2017). With this procedure, direct questioning was sought with the companies that make up APL. The second stage consisted of a qualitative survey, in which APL managers and entrepreneurs were interviewed.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results were achieved with the treatment of the data obtained through the application of the questionnaire; the semi-structured interviews were analyzed and discussed, as detailed in the methodological path followed in this research and explained previously in this work.

4.1 Results and Discussion of the Basic Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistical tests were carried out to check preliminary information on the results.

The average age of the companies was 7.8 years, with companies between the ages of 1 and 5 making up 41.3% of the total; between 6 and 10 years, 30.3%; and more than 11 years, 28.4%. The oldest company was 36 years old, which coincides with the end of the 1980s, the time mark of the first clothing companies in the city. The average value of the capital stock of the companies was R\$ 22.900,00, a low value due to the large number of Individual Micro Entrepreneurs (MEI) that exists in the city. These companies employ 564 people, distributed as follows: 1 to 5 employees correspond to 26.6% of the total; 6 to 20, 41.3%; and more than 11, 32.1%. The company that employs the most has 28 employees, which by local standards is a major employer.

4.1.1 Results Questionnaire

In Table 1, questions 01 to 03 represent coercive isomorphism; questions 04 to 06, normative isomorphism;

questions 07 to 09, mimetic isomorphism; questions 10 to 13, *exploratory* knowledge and 14 to 17, *exploratory knowledge*; 18 to 21, innovative performance; and 22 to 24 business environment. The descriptive statistics are also presented.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Questions	Average	Median	Fashion	Standard deviation
Question 01	3,92	4,00	6	1,939
Question 02	3,37	3,00	1	1,869
Question 03	4,28	4,00	4	1,738
Coercive Isomorphism	3,86	4,00	4	1,520
Question 04	4,56	5,00	6	1,675
Question 05	5,72	6,00	7	1,508
Question 06	5,55	6,00	7	1,613
Normative Isomorphism	5,28	5,33	5	1,263
Question 07	4,98	5,00	6	1,622
Question 08	4,21	5,00	5	1,896
Question 09	4,95	5,00	6	1,601
Mimetic Isomorphism	4,72	5,00	6	1,374
Question 10	4,69	5,00	5	1,736
Question 11	4,48	4,00	3	1,730
Question 12	4,67	5,00	5	1,673
Question 13	5,15	6,00	7	1,779
Exploratory Knowledge	4,75	4,75	5	1,396
Question 14	4,56	5,00	5	1,713
Question 15	4,63	5,00	4	1,665
Question 16	5,05	5,00	6	1,524
Question 17	4,90	5,00	6	1,699
Exploitative Knowledge	4,78	5,00	6	1,405
Question 18	4,28	5,00	5	1,621
Question 19	4,40	5,00	5	1,522
Question 20	4,48	5,00	5	1,501
Question 21	4,42	4,00	4	1,499
Innovative Performance	4,39	4,50	4	1,312
Question 22	4,92	5	6	1,727
Question 23	5,16	6,00	6	1,617
Question 24	5,62	6,00	7	1,353
Question 25	4,83	5,00	5	1,533
Business Environment	5,13	5,25	6	1,242

Source: Elaborated by the author

4.2 Analysis of Results and Discussion of Interviews

Seven entrepreneurs from the city of Taquaral were interviewed, with the intention of checking the consistency of the data presented in the questionnaire with the answers of the interviews. To detect how the coercive isomorphism, normative isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism, exert pressure in the search for *exploratory* knowledge and *exploitative knowledge* in APL, the interviewees were presented a brief explanation of the constructs evaluated, so that they could understand the terminologies used. It was informed that the answers are in italics and the parts considered most important are in bold.

The interviews aimed to seek sources that may indicate the presence or origin of organizational isomorphism and the search for knowledge in APL Taquaral, as seen in table 2, considering the main terms of the questionnaires of organizational isomorphism and search for knowledge. To facilitate understanding within each table, there are question numbers that represent the

variable, applied in the questionnaire. The results indicated that the Government, Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE), customers, suppliers, and local companies in a certain way pressure and influence the search for knowledge, affecting the innovative performance of companies. But what is more relevant is the way in which the Internet, through social networks (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and YouTube), plays a prominent role in the access to news in the clothing industry, which is apparently due to the ease the companies have in accessing such information through these media that do not have filters. This context is also combined with the fact that practically all of them have some kind of access to these networks.

The mimetic isomorphism was perceived in the interviews as the most relevant, given the high degree of imitation perceived among companies, ranging from models, trends, materials, etc. It seems that this generalized imitation occurs mainly in the production process of pieces, because it is easier and simpler to copy, not depending so much on access to new technologies and/or greater financial disbursement, which may indicate innovation in the case of new companies (NIOSI, 2012; MACEDO and BATAGLIA, 2012; CAULKINS et al., 2007; LEÃES, 2008).

The normative isomorphism is presented by the interest of entrepreneurs in professionalizing themselves, demonstrating interest in partnerships with universities and research institutes for the educational and professional formation of entrepreneurs; thus, seeking professional efficiency (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; ZHU et al., 2010). It was expected that there would be signs of cooperation among firms (ZACARELLI et al, 2008), but no organized cooperation among firms was seen.

The coercive isomorphism shows that government and clients exert pressure on companies as confirmed by the literature (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; KILBOURNE; BECKMANN, THELEN, 2002; ZHU et al., 2010). In some cases, the interviewees claimed that they do not have governmental benefits, we consider that this thought occurs because the pole is considered an APL, but the governmental demands are examples of what can influence the actions of an organization and its practices (RIVERA, 2004).

For *exploratory* knowledge, the interviews demonstrated very little capacity of the companies to generate innovative solutions or ideas owing to the fact that APL is composed mainly of micro companies. About 90% of the companies fall into this type, and the fact that on an average the initial capital stock is R\$ 20,000.00, these companies will hardly be able to invest in R&D that

would be the source of *exploratory* knowledge. The low level of investments in R&D and marketing, which is the characteristic of Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs), causes inability to radically develop a product, realize complex innovations and customized products (KACHBA AND KAZUO, 2013).

With regard to *exploitative* knowledge, it has been demonstrated that companies obtain this knowledge through social networks to ensure future operation (MCDONALD and WESTPHAL, 2003). However, this knowledge acquisition does not occur because of the degree of relationship of the companies, between themselves and or with customers and/or suppliers, but because of their similarities (BROWN and EISENHARDT, 1997).

Table 2: Results indicated in the interviews pointing out the sources that provide evidence for the existence of the constructs

Company	Coercive Isomorphism	Normative Isomorphism	Mimetic Isomorphism	Exploratory Knowledge	Exploitative Knowledge
Company 1, 4 employees, 11 years of operation (ME)	1. Government (tax benefits, events. It does not see norms. 2. Local companies (those that want to impose themselves) and 3. Customers require models	4. Little training of entrepreneurs. SEBRAE training courses, 5. companies universities 6. internship students UFG Universities (COTEC, UEG, UFG)	7. Before local companies, but now Instagram, customers. INTERNET (social networks) 8. through social networks mainly 9. specifically models and trends	10. 11, 12. Little technology, but those that come by these means: COTEC, SEBRAE. INTERNET (social networks), customers and suppliers	13. Doesn't understand new technologies only models and fabrics 14, 15. Main channels are INTERNET (social networks), customers (for bringing the models and materials they want).
Company 2, 05 employees, 03 years of operation (ME)	1. Government (few benefits and regulation), 2. (no) local businesses and customers 3. (models)	4. No, 5, 6. partnerships with SEBRAE, Universities (COTEC, UEG, UFG)	7, 8, 9. Imitations by local companies, through employees, customers. INTERNET (social networks)	10. Yes, but cannot deploy, 11, 12. Suppliers, INTERNET (social networks)	13. yes, through observation of local companies (models and trends), 14, 15. INTERNET (social networks), suppliers
Company 3, 08 employees, 11 years of operation (EPP)	1. Government (credit lines, regulation), 2. local companies (price interference, wages) 3. customers (take suggestions)	4. No (little experience, different training) 5, 6. yes (has interest)	7, 8, 9. Yes, through local companies, customer employees, INTERNET (social networks)	10. No, 11, 12 vendors and social networks.	13. Yes, 14, 15. suppliers, customers, SEBRAE local companies (shop windows and social networks),
Company 4, 07 employees, 15 to operating (ME)	1. Government (does not offer anything only charges) 2. restrictions (prices, materials) 3. customers (suggestions)	4. No (little experience/knowledge) 5, 6. No (no longer interested)	7, 8, 9. Local companies, employees, customers. INTERNET (social networks), mainly modeling	10 not (precise, but does not recognize) 11, 12. Imitating colleagues, social networks (Instagram) suppliers	13. Yes, through local companies, 14, 15. INTERNET (social networks), suppliers, customers, closest colleagues.
Company 5, 09 employees, 12 years of operation (EPP)	1. Government (public policies, credit lines, tax incentives and regulation) 2. Yes, by local companies (prices, materials), 3. customers (larger, require materials, models)	4. No (persons with various training) 5, 6. Yes (Universities . UEG, UFG)	7, 8, 9. Yes (material, model, color, trends) Local companies INTERNET (social networks)	10. Yes (but cannot use) 11, 12. Suppliers, local companies, customers	13. Yes (cannot replicate production process) 14, 15. INTERNET (social networks. WhatsApp), SEBRAE
Company 6, 12 employees, 07 years of operation (ME)	1. Government (regulation) 2. No, 3. Supplier (condition to acquire materials) customer	4. Little similarity (more or less equal) 5, 6. No (already has a way of working)	7, 8, 9. Yes, local companies, customers (models)	10, 11, 12. No (intends to achieve, has no contacts or representatives for this).	13. Yes, partially (modeling yes, machines and equipment. no) 14, 15. Clients, INTERNET (social networks . Instagram, WhatsApp)
Company 7, 12 employees, 33 years of operation (EPP)	1. Government (regulation), 2. local companies (price) 3. customers, suppliers (requirements)	4. Yes (they have the same education, professional no) 5, 6. Yes (for the need of more technology) universities.	7, 8, 9. Local companies (model imitation)	10. Yes (identifies, but cannot implement) 11, 12. INTERNET (social networks. Instagram)	13. Yes (through imitation, of the companies that are ahead), 14, 15. Local companies, INTERNET (social networks. Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp groups), vendors

Source: Prepared by the author.

Based on the results of the interviews, Table 3 was prepared, which visualizes the intensity of the isomorphic pressure and the search for knowledge at APL Taquaral. This indicates the low capacity of companies to recognize and utilize *exploratory* and *exploitative*

knowledge, apparently due to the technical inability to obtain new knowledge and implement it in addition to the financial restrictions. As already mentioned, they are micro and small companies that do not have the capacity to invest in R&D or even in the modernization of production processes, while the organizational isomorphism stands out, leading to believe that imitation in creation and manufacturing is the main tool that companies need to employ to maintain themselves.

Table 3: Results indicated in the interviews regarding the intensity with which the organizational isomorphism of the search for knowledge occurs

Company	Coercive Isomorphism	Normative Isomorphism	Mimetic Isomorphism	Exploratory Knowledge	Exploitative Knowledge
Company 1, 4 employees, 11 years of operation (ME)					
Company 2, 05 employees, 03 years of operation (ME)					
Company 3, 08 employees, 11 years of operation (EPP)					
Company 4, 07 employees, 15 to operating (ME)					
Company 5, 09 employees, 12 years of operation (EPP)					
Company 6, 12 employees, 07 years of operation (ME)					
Company 7, 12 employees, 33 years of operation (EPP)					

Legend:


Source: Prepared by the author.

4.3 Results and discussion of the joint analysis of survey and interviews

After the interviews it was verified that the analyzed constructs appear, in a certain way with an incipient indication, which suggests that the companies practice organizational isomorphism (coercitive, normative, and mimetic), *exploratory* knowledge search and *exploitative* knowledge search in a very timid way. The existence of mimetic pressure emerged in a very definite way in the interviews, which confirms research data (HENISZ; DELIOS, 2001) as companies end up following the most successful ones. As for normative pressure, it appears as the most significant form with an accumulated average of 5.29—the highest among the evaluated constructions, which may represent a search for efficiency and professionalization on the part of companies in their ambition to obtain the results of those that are successful. Moreover, the fact that entrepreneurs do not have similar professional and school qualifications corroborates this result, since they seek business and management efficiency that come through qualification (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; ZHU et al., 2010).

Thus, the interviews confirmed what was apparent in the questionnaire responses: the existence of organizational isomorphism in its three models due to the rapidity of changes in this market, this in a certain way

decreases uncertainties and may reduce the risk of failure (ZHANG and HU, 2017).

It was quite explicit how much the companies imitate themselves in the production of their models, a situation facilitated by technology (the Internet). When comparing the results presented in the questionnaire and the interviews, the information obtained is similar, especially in the poor capacity to seek knowledge and apply it even with the isomorphic pressure, due to technical-operational disability or financial limitations. This may lead to the failure of many companies in the future (LEONARD BARTON, 1992; LEVINTHAL and MARCH, 1993).

This happens because of the visible inability of companies to work in a cooperative or associated manner. The unstructured nature of relationships between APL actors (companies, educational and research institutions, and government agencies) creates a culture that does not present support for effective and efficient processes of code design and product development (CARBONARA, 2005), a situation that was perceived while comparing data from the interviews with the results of the questionnaire.

4.3.1 Outcome and General Objective Discussion

Considering the general objective of identifying and verifying the occurrence of organizational isomorphism and the search for innovative knowledge in APL Taquaral Goiás, and identifying its influence on the innovative performance of the arrangement, the findings are as below.

Taking into account the results from the questionnaire and the interviews, it was observed that organizational isomorphism occurs in APL Taquaral. From the questionnaire responses, the existence of the three types of isomorphism was evident, with 66.72% of responses leading to this understanding, which confirms the findings of other studies (MESSNER, et al, 2008; CAROLAN, 2008; DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983; SCOTT, 1987; FUENTES, 2014; MENKES and ALUCHNA, 2018). The emphasis was on the normative isomorphism, with 75.5% of responses indicating this practice, aiming at efficiency and professionalization (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; ZHU et al., 2010). The interviews also confirmed this, but with emphasis on mimetic isomorphism, in view of the indication of the high degree of imitation among companies, corroborating studies by other authors (HENISZ; DELIOS, 2001; QUINELLO, 2007).

The search for knowledge was characterized as existing in the questionnaire responses (68.14%), indicating the presence of the search for exploratory and exploitative knowledge. Even though the companies could identify innovative knowledge, they do not have the capacity to

implement it, due to a certain technical and operational incapacity, in addition to the financial restrictions.

When analyzed separately, it can be seen that there is practically no exploratory knowledge search, as SMEs do not have the capacity to invest in innovation specifically R&D which would generate exploratory knowledge (KACHBA AND KAZUO, 2013).

What became quite visible was that APL's companies, in terms of innovation, are very attached to product imitation (modeling, colors, fabrics etc.), which confirms other studies that imitation is what leads to innovation in clothing industries (NIOSI, 2012; MACEDO and BATAGLIA, 2012; CAULKINS et al., 2007; LEÃES, 2008). It is noted that to meet the demands of consumers, it is necessary to constantly search for production quality and novelties, also to meet a market that is characterized by high adaptability and flexibility (MDIC & IEL, 2005; PINHEIRO & ARAÚJO, 2006; RÜTHSCHILLING, 2009).

These results confirm that organizational isomorphism, through the pressures it exerts, has a mediating effect on the search for knowledge (SINGH, 2005; KEE-HUNG et al., 2006). The processes of isomorphic pressure verified complement the search for knowledge at APL, which reflect on the innovative performance of companies, even if it happens incipiently.

V. CONCLUSION

Through this study carried out at APL Taquaral de Goiás, the goal of our research was achieved, which verified how organizational isomorphism occurred (coercive, normative, and mimetic) and search for knowledge (exploratory and exploitative), in light of the institutional theory.

Regarding the pressures exerted by organizational isomorphism, it can be seen that it manifests in its three forms (DIMAGGIO and POWELL, 1983.)

The presence of effective public policies that are essential in building localized competitive advantages was not perceived, even with the perception of government coercive pressure by entrepreneurs. The types of public policies aimed at promoting APLs are generally fiscal incentives—investments in urban infrastructure, and construction of public equipment (roads, airports, land concessions, paving, extension of power lines, and telephone networks, etc.), which come into foray when companies talk about government (AMATO NETO, 2009; PEREIRA; CARVALHO, 2008).

Entrepreneurs have different professional and educational backgrounds, they see the partnerships with research institutes and universities with optimism, which may show their interest in professionalization ((DIMAGGIO and

POWELL, 2005) according to the interviews. This was further confirmed through the evaluation of the questionnaire. However, these partnerships occur in a manner that some companies do not perceive, which may indicate the incipient management by APL's managers, who should plan and execute innovative strategies to help companies develop competitive products in the market where they operate or wish to operate.

When the search for knowledge was analyzed (*exploratory and exploitative*), the exploratory knowledge was evaluated with 67.71% on the ability to seek new technologies. The interviews indicate that there is no defined way to obtain new external knowledge; it occurs in an almost imperceptible way, linked to an inability to operate it. This is possibly because it is a micro and small business environment, with little or no resources to invest in R&D (KACHBA AND KAZUO, 2013). Without the capacity to obtain funding through development agencies (a situation that may also indicate the absence of public policies), the APL companies unable to seek new technologies due to the lack of technical-operational skills and means to finance innovation. This confirms the observation that was made regarding the massive imitation that occurs in the pole studied.

About 68.29% of the answers indicate the capacity of APL companies to seek and implement technologies when it comes to exploitative knowledge. As for exploratory knowledge this capacity is not perceived due to the characteristics of the companies that make up the cluster (KACHBA AND KAZUO, 2013). From the interviews, it is perceived that this information comes from the Internet and it plays a leading role, with the suppliers and close colleagues, and some buyers bringing different models. According to Zhang and Hu (2017), the use of new equipment and acquisition of new knowledge in modeling and new materials, is an acceptable practice that seeks to give legitimacy to companies owing to the fact that the cluster is relatively new. However, this practice, over time, could negatively influence APL's companies, which could lead to the inactivity of some.

It was possible to verify the existence of institutional practices and strategic actions among the organizations of the cluster that have coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphic characteristics (ZHANG and HU, 2017). These characteristics occur individually most of the time and almost never in an integrated way. This is because it was perceived that the APL companies do not actually act with the appearance of a network, perhaps because the pole is relatively new and there is no professionalism among most companies (AMATO, 2009; ZACARELLI ET AL, 2008). However, this did not prevent the origin of a strong

environmental isomorphism, especially mimetic (DIMAGGIO E POWEL, 2005), among the companies that make up APL.

Thus, it is verified that according to institutional theory, the isomorphic pressures (especially, mimetic pressure, due to the high rate of imitation) occur in a marked way in the APL studied, but this pressure does not result in appropriation of knowledge by companies. There are other factors that must be observed for this—public policies aimed at development, financial capacity, interaction with research institutes, among others.

It is recommended that new research be conducted in other APLs, clusters or poles, to verify whether what was observed in Taquaral de Goiás applies similarly or not in other poles of clothing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Federal Institute of Education Science and Technology Goiano - IF Goiano, for encouraging the qualification it offers to its servers.

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