

The legitimacy of organizational information practices as a basis for accounting sustainability standards. A necessary discussion

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Abstract: In the scenario of the production of organizational information, the use of reference standards is becoming increasingly frequent, both accounting and information on sustainability; This results in the integration of financial and non-financial information in the face of the complexity involved in covering the information needs and multiplicity of stakeholders that compromise information for sustainability. Consequently, this manuscript presents some reflections on the trends that are established as a recurring scenario and of upcoming development for the accounting discipline, of which the journals that are part of Reditores have witnessed and promote their discussion and appropriation. For this, the referencing of the articles is used, indicating their contribution in the discussion, then a reflection is made in the light of the recent issuance of the standard of standards for sustainability and within the framework of legitimation its influence on the claim of transparency on accounting information in this scenario.

Keywords: Organizational reports, sustainability, sustainability standards, stakeholders.

A panoramic review of the trend in national academic journals

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For Rodríguez and Valdés (2018), in accounting it was only in the 1980s that research began to develop an alternative to the functionalist model based on the market economy, and new perspectives and methodologies were generated to develop qualitative studies, establishing lines of research focused on critical and interpretative perspectives of accounting (p.66).). In this sense, it is possible to indicate that the studies related to the environmental accounting aspect arise from processes associated with the economy, but later they split towards ramifications much more related to the emergence of accounting as a knowledge, this being the social one.

On the other hand, in his article Mejía (2019) expresses that since the seventies academic-institutional developments establish new relationships of man in nature, which are framed in the antagonistic alternatives of sustainable development, sustainability and sustainability, visions that, in most cases are not reconcilable and that have founded the rise of methods for the preparation and presentation of both economic and non-economic organizational reports (p.1). These elements support the need to consider that financial information by itself covers interests and needs that do not fully cover those of sustainability and, in this sense, it is important to generate dialogues that integrate financial and non-financial aspects.

Regarding the trends in the production of reports in Colombia, in the article Álvarez, Muñoz, Cardona, Restrepo and Ruiz (2017) in their research conclude that In the last two decades, Sustainability Reports or Corporate Social Responsibility - CSR have been configured as an important tool for business management , the companies in the sample do not fully apply the environmental dimension included in the G4 Guide and similar trends were not observed among them. From this study we derive the need to create a set of standards that allow, from the generation of reports for sustainability, to guarantee homogeneity and thus comparability with respect to the information produced in this framework.

In addition, considering the coverage of the interests of the groups with which the organization is related, Suárez, Gómez & García (2021) express that an increase in the disclosure of social and environmental (sustainability) information generates questions about

its usefulness and materiality, which implies knowing the expectations of stakeholders. Based on two questionnaires answered by 62 managers, preparers, auditors, regulators, students and professors, they identify topics that the most extended frameworks (GRI) do not include and that would increase the materiality of this information in Colombia: actions for peace, fight against corruption and inequality, information for citizens, among others (p.2). This manuscript draws attention to the hegemonic intention in sustainability information that blurs territorial realities, which goes against the intention of full disclosure, to faithfully represent the dimensions contained in organizational reports and therefore, meeting the expectations of different stakeholders becomes a significant challenge at the accounting level.

Regarding the purpose that motivates the production of information for sustainability, Cano & Arias (2023) conducted a study with the objective of analyzing the academic perspectives with which the concepts of sustainability and sustainability have been approached in the field of management and organization studies. The study concludes that these concepts are used indiscriminately in the literature and that three thematic approaches coexist: 1) sustainability as a strategy for economic sustainability, 2) sustainability as conscious economic development and 3) sustainability as a sociocultural and political project of universal transformation (p.2). In this sense, the use of sustainability as a motivator for organizational action goes through the philosophy of the company and its conception as a social agent, as it is inserted in the socio-cultural dynamics that condition managerial trends.

In this same sense, Valenzuela & Suárez (2021) rely on counter-accounting, a branch of socio-environmental accounting, and use a qualitative methodology in two phases. In this work of reflection, some negative impacts are made visible that are not adequately reported by the organization but that have narratives that support them and that are constructed by stakeholders who have been directly affected (p.2). Therefore, the use of information that accounts for alternative aspects to the traditional financial accounting becomes indispensable when it comes to including the multiplicity of agents.

Finally, in the context of professional performance, the preparation of reports on sustainability opens up hitherto unforeseeable fields. In this regard, García (2023) states in his article that reports on sustainable development offer new possibilities for accountants and for students of the field. In a way, it makes accounting more "human", by showing it to be influenced by sustainable development, which is extremely valuable for a discipline that, to an increasingly lesser extent, continues to consider itself distant from issues related to people and the planet (p.8). This reflection is necessary for training scenarios, curricular proposals and graduate and professional profiles, since they constitute the promise of value of university programs in which it is expected that there will be an orientation with respect to this promising scenario for the professional accountant.

A reflection in the light of the recent issuance of the standards for sustainability in the framework of the legitimization of accounting.

The board of international standards for sustainability in the accounting framework is a recent development. Therefore, it is important to keep a watchful eye on the initiatives that the IASB as the IFRS issuing body is developing through the International Accounting Standards Board for Sustainability (IASSB), which in alignment with the SDGs propose the use of complementary financial and non-financial information. The use of the indicators proposed by UNCTAD, as well as the S1 and S2 generated by the aforementioned organization, are already a tangible reality that is being introduced into information practices. In view of this situation, the question arises as to the position of organizations, professionals in training and in practice, regulators and producers of information on sustainability.

In relation to the previously referenced articles, it is evident that, in organizational reports on sustainability, it is possible to indicate an excessive use of rhetoric, with a persuasive and dissuasive intention to the receiver. Although inclusive language is used, the evidence shows a clear exclusion of users with high organizational influence and power. This is notable in aspects such as the language barrier that may represent the presentation of reports in English, the use of technical language and expressions that are difficult for the reader to understand.

The use of the stakeholder theory should be reconsidered with a shift from the view of the recipient rather than the issuer of sustainability reports.

On the other hand, given the widespread use of the GRI standards framework as the most widely accepted as it is aligned with UN policies regarding sustainability through the SDGs, it is important to highlight its homogenizing intention, which excludes the specific conditions of the territories, so regulatory bodies will have to allow its adaptation to the specific conditions of the country, which in the case of Colombia, given its cultural, environmental and social diversity, deserves to be faithfully represented.

Finally, it is clear that both in the identification stage that the latter constructions are made taking the SDGs as a reference, the most accurate way to cover sustainability is the complementation of financial information with non-financial information. Only in this way is it possible for the organization to account for each and every one of the 17 sustainable development goals and thus, in the intention of contributing to the achievement of the sustainability goals, to include stakeholders beyond their contribution to the financial capital for being part of the life of the planet and guaranteeing its survival over time.

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