

Youth and citizenship: usage of digital media at the NGO Aldeia, in Fortaleza

Juventude e cidadania: uso das mídias digitais na ONG Aldeia, em Fortaleza

Juventud y ciudadanía: uso de los medios digitales en la ONG Aldeia, en Fortaleza

Denise Maria Cogo¹

Daniel Barsi Lopes²

Abstract *The article examines the citizen communication processes tissues by young working in association Aldeia, in Fortaleza, Ceará. The research is theoretical studies of social movements, digital media and citizen communication. Selected as a result of the research, three aspects of the uses of technology by Aldeia young participants: 1) the absence of greater criticality in reading the media; 2) the complementarity between analog and digital media; and 3) the demand for professionalism*

Keywords: *Youth. Citizenship. Digital media. Social movements.*

Resumo *O artigo analisa os processos de comunicação cidadã tecidos por jovens que atuam na associação Aldeia, em Fortaleza, Ceará. O marco teórico da pesquisa abrange os estudos sobre movimentos sociais, mídias digitais e comunicação cidadã. Selecionamos, como resultado da pesquisa, três aspectos dos usos das tecnologias pelos jovens do Aldeia: 1) a ausência de uma maior criticidade na leitura dos meios; 2) a complementaridade entre as mídias analógicas e as digitais; e 3) a demanda por profissionalização.*

Palavras-chave: *Juventude. Cidadania. Mídias digitais. Movimentos sociais.*

¹ Post-doctorate from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona – UAB, Spain, Professor titular at the Postgraduate programme in Communication Sciences Programme of Unisinos – RS [Federal State of Rio Grande do Sul]. Researcher in productivity of the CNPq – Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico [National Council of Scientific and Technological Development].

² PhD in Communication Sciences from Unisinos-RS [Federal State of Rio Grande do Sul] and Professor at FANOR – Faculdade de Nordeste - Ceará and FCRS – Faculdade Católica Rainha do Sertão – Federal State of Ceará.

Resumen *El artículo analiza los procesos de comunicación ciudadana protagonizados por los jóvenes que actúan en la asociación Aldeia, en Fortaleza, Ceará. El marco teórico abarca los estudios sobre movimientos sociales, medios digitales y comunicación ciudadana. Recogemos tres aspectos en los usos de la tecnología por los jóvenes de Aldeia: 1) la falta de una mayor criticidad en la lectura de los medios, 2) la complementariedad entre los medios analógicos y digitales, y 3) la demanda hacia una mayor profesionalización.*

Palabras-clave: *Juventud. Ciudadanía. Medios digitales. Movimientos sociales.*

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Introduction

In spite of the “common place” which implies the approach of the transformations resulting from the presence and the impact of technologies in social life, we understand that, in the introduction of this article, it is necessary to point out some of the changes we have witnessed in society in the last two decades, especially since the beginning of the popularization of residential internet access. The changes in subjective experiences and in sociabilities provoked by the emergence and dissemination of digital media³ have had a significant impact on our ways of being and of being in the world, also reconfiguring the actuation of social movements and the citizenship practices of the collective actors in the present time.

These are the transformations in the forms of the articulation and organisation of society which are attributing other contours to the so-called citizen communication, a notion which has mainly been generated in the context of Latin-American thought and around which reflections on the practices of actors and social movements oriented towards the democratisation of the access, the production and of the administration of the communicational resources in the processes of struggle and of social transformation are being developed. In the last decades, digital media have provoked the reordering in these practices of citizen communication by favouring the intensification of the communicational fluxes and networks and by opening new possibilities of communicational experimentation, thus deepening the displacement of the audience condition of the social actors towards that of producers of mediatic contents and of administrators of communicational policies.

In the mark of the scenario we described before, the interest of this article⁴ is to perceive which processes of citizen communication are ge-

³ When we speak of digital media, we refer to the communication means and supports which use the technology of coding and decoding of digital signs. They are means and tools which enable the production and sharing of texts, sounds and pictures in a unique kind of format, which is digital.

⁴ The reflections made in this article come from the results of Daniel Barsi Lopes' PhD research, carried out in the Postgraduate Programme in Communication Sciences of UNISINOS, under the guidance of Professora Doutora Denise Cogo between 2008 and 2012. See Barsi Lopes (2012).

nerated by young people when these collective actors start developing practices of the uses and appropriations of digital media in the framework of associations and projects directed towards the socio-cultural insertion of young people who are in a situation of social vulnerability. The object of reference of the investigation is the association *Aldeia* [village], located in Fortaleza, in the North-East of Brazil, an organisation which works with young inhabitants of the region of the Morro Santa Terezinha⁵, an area of risk and poverty, according to views that are constructed and disseminated by some of the means of communication⁶ which almost daily cover the phenomenon of criminality that occurs in that place.

From popular communication to citizen communication

To speak of young people's movements and of their potential citizen insertion on the basis of the uses of digital media is to initially accomplish the trajectory of the intertwining of social movements and communication. It is convenient to emphasize already that the initiatives such as those which were developed by *Aldeia* did not appear fortuitously and they are no newness either. Actions of this kind, even with distinct profiles, are the inheritors of a trajectory of popular movements which were developed in Latin-America in the 1960s and 1970s, especially linked to the scenario of the reaction against the military dictatorship.

In the Brazilian panorama, an alternative communication appears, more linked to the left-wing intellectuals who acted in opposition to the military dictatorship, as it was possible to observe in proposals such as that of the newspapers *Opinião*, *O Pasquim* and *Coojornal*, whereas popular communication appears inserted in base movements (such as

⁵ Most of the inhabitants of the *morro* are abandoned by public authorities and frightened by the violence of the place, as a consequence of the fact that Fortaleza is a divided and unequal metropolis, where suburban areas are formed even in the inner part of the city (geographically near the Centre, as it is the case of the Morro Santa Terezinha).

⁶ Especially the sensationalist local TV news, such as *Barra Pesada*, shown by TV Jangadeiro, retransmitted from TV Bandeirantes in Fortaleza and *Cidade 190*, presented by TV Cidade, retransmitted from Rede Record in the capital of Ceará.

the *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* [Ecclesiastical Base Communities]), communitarian associations and popular groups (such as the women's group). Both constitute themselves as modes of resistance to a mass communication which develops itself in line with the hegemonic interests of big economic and political groups of the very mediatic organisations (COGO, 2005)⁷.

Nevertheless, in spite of the different denominations which can be attributed to this kind of more dialogic communication, a number of social, economic, political and cultural phenomena – which have been intensifying themselves more and more in the last years – have collaborated in a process of abolishing the frontiers between the alternative, the communitarian, the popular, etc. Economic and cultural globalisation, which reconfigures the identity marks; trans-nationalism, which brings about the relativization of the national States; the formation of network society; which can favour more horizontal and less hierarchic relationships; the increase of communication technologies – especially the appearance of the internet –, which substantially modifies the notions of space and time –, can be indicated as examples of some of these transformations that are occurring in the contemporary scenario.

Among this set of changes, we must also emphasise the intensification of the international migratory fluxes, which promotes a greater cultural hybridization and at the same time provokes the formation of xenophobic and fundamentalist societies; the pluralization of the proposals and conceptions of citizenship, with its broadening beyond the social, civil and political rights; and the very reordering of social movements, which ally themselves with the new agendas and with the diversified socio-cultural, economic and political demands (COGO, 2010). Besides being present in the class conflicts, social movements insert other questions linked to social and cultural inequalities, such as those which are related to ethnical, sexual, environmental, regional, urban identities into their struggle agendas.

⁷ We cannot omit to quote also the action of various movements that, in the Brazilian context, struggled in favour of the working classes, such as the trade union movements.

In the mark of these mutations which have provoked reordering in the fields of the alternative, the communitarian and the popular and of the appearance of the notion of citizenship, as one of the central spheres of communication produced by social movements, we chose to situate the juvenile practices we analyse in this article in the field of citizen communication⁸. With this we do not intent to disregard the antecedents of the presence of citizenship as a central socio-political perspective of the alternative and popular communication practices of social movements in the Latin-American context, although we can observe that between the 1970s and the 1990s, citizen communication has rarely been used in Latin-America in order to denominate alternative and popular communication – in the framework of social movements as well as in the domain of communicational research⁹. Nevertheless the accumulated studies allow us to affirm that these practices mobilised themselves around citizen ideals of the democratization of the processes and of the means of communication, linked to some doctrines of social transformation.

Thus from a texture in local, national and trans-national networks¹⁰ citizenship already constituted itself into a “communicational question” for sectors of civil society and for organized social movements having in view that their communication practices sought to guide themselves by means of the displacement of instrumental and propagating patterns towards predominantly international perspectives. That is to say that they sought to privilege the interrelations between the poles of communicational production and reception by emphasizing communication as a process, with the purpose to broaden the intervention spaces of social

⁸ We did not disregard here that the profusion of the use of the term “citizenship” by different sectors (academic, entrepreneurial, governmental, etc.) in the last years has an impact on the very explicative capacity of the concept, contributing to the attribution of an exaggerated elasticity to this conceptual notion.

⁹ Very often it was one more term among the various terminologies used to designate the popular sectors’ communication experiences, denominated, among other terms, as alternative, popular, communitarian, local, dialogic and horizontal.

¹⁰ It is convenient to point out that this communication was developed through the combination of local perspectives (of the cities, the districts, etc.), national perspectives (of the Latin-American countries) and, to a certain extent, also trans-national (in the sphere of Latin-America and of the bonds between Latin-American and European countries).

sectors in micro and macro instances of the policies and of the communication practices. In synthesis, citizenship seems to be included as a “communicational question” in the agenda of the struggles of civil society, specifically marked by the concern with the democratisation of the communicational and mediatic processes in the Latin-American context as a primordial condition for the conquest of social equality.

More recently this centrality of the term “citizen” can be evidenced in academic reflections such as those of Martín-Barbero (2008), who defends citizen communication as the most appropriate terminology to denominate the more and more dense and interconnected panorama of communitarian means networks dynamized in contemporary times. Although they can be situated in the place and be produced from there, these communitarian media have sought, in an increasing way, to embrace other spheres and to intervene in different environments, such as the regional and the national ones, anchored in broader projects and agendas, such as political conflicts or socio-environmental questions (MARTIN-BARBERO, 2008).

In the effort to understand this citizen communication, Martín Barbero also postulates the displacement of consumption analysis or of media reading, on the receptors’ part, for the analysis of the “empowerment” processes – or of what we could also call “subject policies” –, generated in experimentations with communication technologies for the so-called Latin-American reception researches. Around this dimension, the author’s position already suggests the modernity of the notion of communicative citizenship, on the basis of the affirmation of the appearance of the concept “citizen media” – instead of communitarian and popular media – such as those which are generated in the “breaches” formed in the broader contradictions of capitalism and in the small daily contradictions (MARTIN-BARBERO, 2008).

If, in Latin-America to speak of “alternative”, according to what the author remembers, meant to assume the authenticity and the beauty which “to be small” represented or the possibility to constitute itself as an alternative to the breadth, to the imperialism and to the “lie” of the

means of communication, to speak of communitarian was associated with the wish to pursue an intern democratisation of the media, as far as the participation of different popular sectors is concerned, such as women, children, young people, etc. (MARTIN-BARBERO, 2008).

But recently the citizen seems to emerge in order to affirm the capacity to use the means of communication and to speak of the life of the town districts and of the nations, evidencing that it is more the communicational and less the technological which becomes the key of political and democratic transformations. Martín-Barbero makes us reflect that “people know that, in communication, they begin to have a power they never had. [...] The tales, songs, narratives, not only the transmission of words, but the political visibility are the elements through which they become present in new forms of citizenship”. (MARTIN-BARBERO, 2008, p. 161)

In the relationships between communication and citizenship practices, it is worth emphasizing that we understand the first as a potential which helps the collective subjects to act in the sense of constructing the second. The right to communication is not something which must be thought only from the perspective of access, but also of everybody's right to produce communication, to propagate contents, to administrate public policies in this framework. The learning processes, which involve education and communication, do not only occur on the basis of the appropriation of messages emitted by mass media, but also from their production and administration. The participation in the design of projects which involve technologies in decision making, in research and in production about relevant thematic topics, which deserve to be publicly debated, in the visibility of other orders of the day, which do not have the priority in the space of the big media conglomerates, in the edition processes which give priority to other communicative grammars, are some of the dimensions of a citizen communication in which the socio-communicational processes can assume more relevance than the final product in itself, especially when a society begins to organise itself through the logic of the networks.

The networks and the participation in society

Contemporary youth forms a plural and heterogeneous group, which experiences multiple and contradictory modes of appropriation and uses of communication technologies in their daily lives. The relationship between young people and society on the web comprises a multiplicity of models which are collaborating to disestablish the hegemonic perception of the existence of a unique model of the young people's link to the digital system, in which youth would appear defined as the youth who is permanently connected to the virtual world and isolated from its social concrete environment.

From the perspective of displacement of this model, which is frequently affirmed by the academic literature or even by common sense, we propose to think about digital media as artefacts which, instead of only promoting the processes of individualism and of social isolation are able to potentialize social appropriations and uses. The processes of interaction with these media can provide, among others, entertainment alternatives, interest in the local environment and in the global events, participation in determined society groups or even in the instauration of citizenship dynamics.

The contours which assume the experiences of the exercise of citizenship in present times transcend the traditional question of social, political and civil rights, in order to refer to elements relative to the communicational production and administration and also to the dialogues, disputes and productive approximations between the different cultures. Other modes of the exercise of citizenship are being formed, in present times in order to stimulate displacement processes from a citizenship doctrine anchored in a political bias *stricto sensu* in order to embrace also cultural questions and questions of identity (re)affirmation and, at the same time, to be dynamized in the framework of the so-called micro-policies of daily life and no more only in the macro groups of institutional life. The notion of "active citizenship" becomes useful, from this perspective in order to displace us from the perception

of a citizenship attributed and distributed by the States and to situate us in a relational perspective, which establishes a relationship between the State and society in the dispute and negotiation of the citizen's resources and rights. As Hopenhayn (2002, p. 9), points it out, the republican idea of citizenship reappears, "not in the horizon of political participation or of the big social projects, but in a great variety of *low profile* practices, be they associative or communicative, which do not necessarily concur in the public of the State". Today many of these policies are oriented towards the uses of mass media for the public construction and visibility of agendas of mobilisation and struggle on the part of social actors and movements.

The very constitution of society on the web and of the central presence of communication technologies in social life have been pointed out as a process which has an impact on the modes of the exercise of citizenship in the public space. Although it is a very old human practice, the formation of networks is re-dimensioning itself, in present times on the basis of three processes which, listed by Castells, are related to the demands of the economic sector for administrative flexibilization and for capital organisation; to the supremacy of social values related to individual freedom and to open communication; and to the extraordinary progresses in computation and in telecommunications made possible by the micro-electronic revolution (CASTELLS, 2003). As Molina also refers it (2004), the very appearance of the debate concerning networks is associated with a sensation of interconnection which accompanies the contemporary relationships and which is not only proper to networks, but it is a widely propagated phenomenon.

According to Castells (1999), the networks configure the logics of the contemporary social organisation, which is characterized by the generation, processing and transmission of information as fundamental sources of productivity and power. In the researcher's view the essential aspects of the constitution of this social organisation in some way condition and affect the so diverse dimensions such as economy, knowledge, power, communication and technology and he suggests that network society

would be the dominant social structure of the planet (CASTELLS *et al.*, 2007). The author thinks that network society on the basis of a transversal breadth, that is to say, through the analysis of economic, cultural, political and social aspects, recognises at the same time that, although the network logic assumes a global dimension, it does not substitute other social structures, more centralized and hierarchical.

Castells emphasises the non homogeneous character of what he proposes to call network society in a research about the internet in the region of Catalonia (Spain), where the author evidences the partiality of internet access and consumption by part of the world population (CASTELLS *et al.*, 2007). Other authors, such as Cardoso (2007) reflect upon the limits of autonomy, choices and decisions in network society. Cardoso links this kind of social organisation directly to the individual subjects' capacity to interact with technologies, but, as the author warns, it will always be conditioned by social, economic, and political limits which define the use of technologies and access to them. The non homogeneity of network society still suggests that we cannot disregard the importance face to face interactions, which are not mediated by technology, keep having for contemporary societies.

The social movements' actuation is influenced by the modes of the organisation of network society and by the possibilities that are open to social subjects, dispersed on different territories to articulate themselves and to congregate themselves even if partially and temporarily on the basis of the mediation of digital media in many cases. What some of the authors denominate "activism on the web" (MACHADO, 2007) appears, for example, materialised in a wide range of multi-territorialized local, national and trans-national actions, in which communication technologies, especially the internet, assume preponderance in the planning strategies, articulation and mobilisation of social movements. According to Machado (2007, p. 268), this new form of organisation on the web results in the "increase in the capacity to produce, reproduce, share, express and propagate facts, ideas, values, worldviews and individual and collective experiences around identities, interests and creeds – and in much shorter lapse of time".

The association *Aldeia* and the methodological itinerary of the research

The research which originates this article was articulated through an observation process of the different activities of *Aldeia*, especially on the basis of systematic following of the *Mapa ao Quadrado*¹¹ [literally: Map to the power of four], the NGO's project which was being developed with the young people at the time of the investigation. We were present at the theoretical workshops which were held, at the meetings organised to discuss the conception of the audiovisual product which would be executed, at the recordings in the surroundings of Morro Santa Terezinha, at the production of the interviews with the main figures of the community and at the processes of the edition of the documentary. During the four years of the development of the investigation, we also followed other initiatives of *Aldeia*, such as the meetings of the association, the recordings of audiovisual materials, the cine-club exhibitions, the participation in communiqués and concretization of the *Festival de Jovens Realizadores* [Young Producers' Festival]¹². Some of the young participants of the institution – Roberta, 18 years old; Xaiane, 22 years old; Rosa, 19 years old; Jaqueline, 22 years old and Lucas¹³, 22 years old – gave us thorough interviews¹⁴ at the end of the project *Mapa ao Quadrado*, enabling us to get to know their subjective experiences, their worldview and their trajectories in the context of the collective mobilisations, especially as far as the experience in the framework of *Aldeia* is concerned.

The idea of the creation of *Aldeia*, in 2004, appeared in a collective of four sociologists – Simone Lima, Elson Batista, Ricardo Salmito and

¹¹ Project of audiovisual qualification and performance carried out with a subsidy granted via communiqué of FUNARTE – Fundação Nacional de Artes [National Art Foundation]. The project, partner and almost a “son” of *Aldeia*, used the seat of the association, on the *morro* as a physical space for its workshops and other meetings and it had the help of some young people, who actively participated in *Aldeia*.

¹² Held in June 2011, in the Centro Cultural Banco do Nordeste [Cultural Centre Bank of the North-East], in Fortaleza/CE [Federal State of Ceará].

¹³ Fictitious names, in order to preserve the identity of the subjects under research.

¹⁴ The conducting of the thorough interviews comprised five specific topics: relationships between youth and participation; consumption and use of mass media; relationships between youth and mass media; relationships between *Aldeia* and the *Mapa ao Quadrado*; relationships between citizenship, mass media and local environment.

Leonardo Sá – who are linked to university and who wanted to undertake extra-academic projects in the city of Fortaleza. The four sociologists, whose anterior trajectories were linked to mass media and to the reflection on the means of communication, began the construction of *Aldeia* from this critical perspective about mass media and also with a focus on the STDs¹⁵. One of the association's big projects, in Siqueira's words (2009)¹⁶, is the project Escola de Mídia [Mass Media School], which has already existed for seven years and is normally executed every year. It is a course for the youth's qualification in reading and in mediatic production, grounded on analyses of the contents of television genres and programmes, with the intention to broaden the expression and creation potential, seeking to transform the young people into producers and senders of their own audiovisual messages.

The young people's actuation in the framework of *Aldeia* comprises two modalities: that of voluntary participants and that of scholarship holders, who carry out activities in the association. For the payment of the scholarships as well as for the association's financial support, *Aldeia* maintains a close relationship with public policies. "We have got various fronts. [...] we issue a public communiqué, [...] we look for partnerships in the funds for culture of the Federal State, of the government and of the municipality, [...] we seek people who can support us to undertake some project" (LIMA, 2009). *Aldeia* organises great part of its work according to the communiqués, "which are issued and involve education, art, culture, citizenship, civil law, everything that brings improvement to the people" (SIQUEIRA, 2009)¹⁷.

Among the various experiences the young people had in their participations in *Aldeia* we emphasise three analysis axes– which will be treated more thoroughly in the next topic – which concern the absence

¹⁵ Sexual transmitted diseases.

¹⁶ The quotations in this topic of the article come from the interviews which were conducted with Simone Lima and Valdo Siqueira, directors of *Aldeia*.

¹⁷ In the period we selected to carry out the systematic following (with beginning, middle and end) of a project linked to *Aldeia* and to the Mapa ao Quadrado presented itself as the only option, since the change in the Federal Government caused the considerable diminution of the publication of public communiqués in the first semester of 2011.

of a more critical perspective of mass media reading and of the analysis of the structures and social relationships which generate inequalities; which concern the complementarity of analogue and digital media in the young people's daily uses, – within and outside the association's space –; and which concern the demand for professionalization for the labour market involving communication.

Young people and digital media: complementarity, critical reading and professionalization

The protagonists of the research compose a profile which is not very different from that which can be observed in different popular communities of other Brazilian metropolises¹⁸. All of them studied in public schools [in Brazil: a public school is supported by public funds] and, at the moment, only one of the informers has a professional link. The totality of the young people mentions economic difficulties, but almost all have access to digital media (MP3 player, cameras, etc.), inclusively from their homes¹⁹, even with the financial limitations. Modern mobile phones with internet connection – some of them smartphones – and with different other functions configure the aesthetics constructed and exhibited by these social subjects.

The mediatic diet of the young participants of *Aldeia* assumes a complementarity dimension in the uses of the media (MORLEY, 2008), configuring a scenario in which the accesses occur in multiple and complementary ways, combining the appropriations of “new” and “traditional” media. The photos and the videos are recorded on cameras or mobile phones, they watch the content of TV on the internet and on television;

¹⁸ Fortaleza has about 2.5 million inhabitants (without counting the metropolitan region) and is, according to the data of IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatísticas [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] of 2010, the fifth more populous city of Brazil, behind São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Brasília.

¹⁹ Some of the young people have a computer and broadband at home. Others, even with a PC at home, must go to Lan Houses in order to access the internet, because the residential connection is done via fixed telephone dialling, which causes discomfort to part of the young people, due to the delay and to the limitation of the times of use.

internet access is done through the computer and the mobile phone; the consumption of films and songs is done through the purchase of pirated DVDs and downloads through the sites on the network; they see the news in printed newspapers, on the TV news and on the internet portals. “I wake up and I switch on the radio, because I love listening to music” (Xaiane, 22). “Television is what I most watch; it is on at home all day long, because there is always somebody watching it” (Rosa, 19). “Since I like doing the household chores, first I switch on the radio and then I do my chores. Then I run to the internet in order to look at my e-mails and at the social networks” (Jaqueline, 22). “As far as I am concerned, it is basically internet and television, and the radio, which I listen to while I am on my way to work” (Lucas, 22).

The consumption of mass media is constructed through the routines among which the internet and television mainly appear as the most media young people access, in spite of a broad and pulverized participation of other media in their processes of mediatic production, circulation and appropriation. Maybe due to the actuation in projects which constitute themselves around mass media and to a certain centrality which the means of communication assume in the young people’s lives, it is possible to emphasise the technical competences they acquired in their way of dealing with mass media, the absorption of their new productive processes, of their, languages and grammars, pointing out the role of the video-technological mediations in the processes of the uses and appropriations of the means of communication. “I like very much watching the news and once in a while I watch the *novela* [soap opera]. [...] I like to watch the news on the internet. About that which I listen to on the radio, I go and get more information on the internet portals, in order to check whether what they say is really true” (Lucas, 22). “Lately I have been more devoted to national and regional news, although I know that the media very often do not show reality, they only show what they want to” (Jaqueline, 22 years old).

Nonetheless that which draws the attention is the fact that, even participating in projects the proposal of which is to think about mass media

from another perspective, a contra-hegemonic one, these young people follow scenarios in their incursions through the media which comply with some dominant logics, in terms of genres and contents: series, TV news, *novelas* [soap operas] and humour programmes of hegemonic broadcasting companies, in the case of the consumptions of television and news portals, social networks and chats, as far as the internet uses are concerned. “I love Record News, which transmits news of the whole world” (Roberta, 18). “I like to watch a little bit of everything, you know, I watch the artists’ gossip, I very much access G1 site and UOL, in order to see what is going on in Brazil and in the world” (Xaiane, 22). “I love *Pânico* and *Legendários*” (Jaqueline, 22). That is to say that alternative programmes and sites or blogs which are not linked to big media conglomerates do not compose – at least not regularly – the repertoires and the routines of mediatic consumption of the young participants of the research.

It is in this sense that it was possible to perceive the absence of a work perspective, in the heart of *Aldeia*, which manifests itself in a more vehement and thorough way through the critical reading of the media and the analysis of the social and governmental structures²⁰. In the framework of the association, we noticed that even after many months of participation in a project which theoretically has the discussion on the means of communication as one of its guiding axes, the young informers were not motivated to discuss about fundamental questions, which are constructed by the media and have a direct repercussion on their daily lives and an incidence on the social equality policy, in which they are inserted. This is the case, for example, of urban violence – and the ways in which the media appropriate this phenomenon and reconfigure it –, about which there seems to be no effective debate in the space of the project. Some of the subjects of our research, for example, end up linking violence to individual aspects and to a manichaeistic perspective of good and evil, exempting the State from its responsibilities. “What I would change here

²⁰ It is convenient to emphasise that we do not want to say that there is no portion of criticality in the young informers’ attitudes at all. What we ponder is that this more reflexive character about the role played by the means of communication could also be developed in a more effective way in the work carried out by the association.

at the *Morro* would be violence. [...] Violence is something individual which you have inside yourself. With time passing the character is being formed, so, what should happen is that this person would get a spiritual guidance” (Jaqueline, 22). The culture of violence appears in one or another speech of the young people almost exclusively associated with criminality, generally separated from the State and government institutions and from its structural causes (TAVARES DOS SANTOS, 1999).

What seems to be evident in some experiences of *Aldeia*, is the emergence of a citizen practice through digital media, which is very often based upon experimentation for experimentation’s sake, recording for recording’s sake, without any effective concern about the meanings which mobilise the filming, about the deeper transformations that are sought with the re-signified visibilities and with the potential of social criticism which clothes the audiovisual product which was originated in those experiences. Even because the theoretical workshops, that is to say those which involve debates and discussions – and are distant from the practice which consists in passing through the community filming and interviewing the inhabitants – are considered boring and monotonous by a great part of the participants of the *Aldeia* projects. “He [the project coordinator] spoke much about cinema, about TV and he was a little boring because he kept talking” (Roberta, 18). “At the beginning I did not like it, because it was very boring, it was only rubbish, a person just talking there and we just standing there. I actually wanted to give up, but I decided to stay, when I started filming at the *Morro* to make the documentary” (Rosa, 19). The young people’s declarations reflect the reality we observed while we were following the activities of the *Mapa ao Quadrado*. While the theoretical workshops were being carried out, we could observe a certain lack of interest on the team’s part. Constantly walking out of the room playing with the mobile phones, looking lost and bored, all this marked the participation of some of the young people.

The longing for practice – to the detriment of a more thorough debate about the topics in question – can be explained by these young people’s recurrent and immediate wish to professionalize technically in

order to get a job which provides them a certain financial stability. Many of the *Aldeia*'s participants criticize the lack of the transfer to the labour market; something which, in their views, is not articulated through the association. "The question is that you need money, you have to work. As I told you, [the actuation in the NGO] is not a constant thing, which gives you stability. You must be an adult, pay your bills, sustain your family" (Lucas, 22). "They could, in a way, pay more attention, during the project to see who is outstanding and select these fellows to be engaged for a period of probation in a communication vehicle, at *TV Verdes Mares*, for example" (Jaqueline, 22).

Here we perceived two interesting elements as far as labour question is concerned. Firstly we evidenced a kind of paradox in these young people's reports, when, at the same time in which they point out failures of the means of communication (the repetition of the *novelas*, the rubbish of the audience-participation programmes, the exaggerations and distortions of the TV news, to quote some examples of the informers' speeches), maintain the wish that the projects of *Aldeia* train them and transfer them to jobs in big media corporations, such as the *Sistema Verdes Mares*, in Fortaleza, affiliated to *Rede Globo*. We can establish relations between this kind of wish to act in the hegemonic media and the centrality of a time marked by mediatic visibility and by an emphasis on individualism, partly cultivated by the very media. The other peculiar element concerns the question of precariousness of the employment and the absence of stable and durable labour links as elements which mark our informers' context – in a certain way, limiting their entrance into the adult "world" –, which is suggested by a questioning about the fact that these social projects, which are involved in the juvenile universe, do not transfer their participants in a practical way to the professional world. In these young people's views, it is important that the changes in their lives do not cease when the project comes to an end or when the association has financial problems and suspends its activities.

It is convenient to problematize the question of professionalization as an extremely important question in the young people's discourse,

although it is quite relevant. In the course of the performance of the field work, it was obvious that the expectations around the projects, on the young participants' part materialize themselves more through the interest in a technical and professional training and less based upon the demand for a critical training for life and for a common action in the means of communication. This seems to deviate from the doctrine of the alternative and communitarian projects which we know and which have guided the configuration of a popular and citizen communication, especially in the Latin-American trajectory. We do not mean that the wish to get professionalized is not legitimate, but the risk of its "essentialization" seems to be little transforming, mainly if we consider the already strong presence, in the present time, of educational conceptions oriented towards professionalization and towards pragmatism, to the detriment of an ideal critical development of the social subjects or of an educational project which, at least, allies the two dimensions – professionalization and critical formation. It is convenient to emphasise as well that the young people's sense of citizenship is linked in a very strong way to the view of labour and professionalization, a relation which can be explained by the very situation of exclusion or of the precariousness of the insertion into the labour market they experience. In this sense we could perceive a strong demand, on the young people's part to be professionally inserted into the hegemonic mediatic universe, a process that is separated from a perspective which considers the socio-cultural associations and the projects as spaces of reflection about mass media – critical reading – and about the social and communicational relationships.

Final considerations

The results of the research, which were briefly systematized in this article, motivate us to reflect on the kind of citizen communication which is being established in this contact with digital media – and with network society – with the juvenile collective mobilisations. It is obvious that all

these experimentation processes with digital media, even if they are not accompanied by a more thorough critical reflection, are legitimate, since they provide the young people with forms of expression and practical exercises, on the basis of the creation of spaces – the associations – and of dynamics – the activities – which, in a certain way, are stimulators of concrete experiences. Be it through the filming of their local environment; through the selection of that which they want to render visible; through the speeches and the elements which they prioritise in the edition, in the scripts they produced; or through the ideas which come to the surface in the conversations rounds, it is important to point out that it is not possible to disregard the fact that the young people establish relationships with technologies and so they develop creative capacities, exercise the written and oral expression and finally add knowledge to their repertoire.

Nonetheless it is convenient to emphasise that to question the media and to view the social construction of reality with hegemonic mediatic patterns and organisations from another perspective is something which is being recognised as preponderant elements for social transformations. In this sense, this expectation can be situated in the field of reflection on citizen communication, the expectation that the socio-cultural projects, which are focused on digital media can motivate the young people to transcend the question of the use of the supports, from the perspective not to empower them only technically, but to enable them to feel mobilised and able to reflect and even to re-qualify the mediatic systems. In this sense, to participate and to exercise citizenship would be more than to use mass media, but to perceive the possibilities and actions for their transformation.

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