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# RESCUING PARTICIPATION
## *RESGATAR A PARTICIPAÇÃO*

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# Introductory note
## Nota introdutória

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Why is participation relevant? What is meant when the concept is used? How can we ensure that participation is used in a responsible way, and rendered meaningful in the different spaces of society? These may be the most important questions that motivated us, editors of this volume of *Comunicação e Sociedade*, to propose a discussion on the noteworthiness of participation, and to invite scholars from across the globe to present their perspectives on what a positive and meaningful approach towards participation means to them. The result of this long process is this journal issue, entitled "Rescuing participation".

This volume presents 10 articles, available in both Portuguese and English, produced by researchers from different latitudes that span the globe. Many come from Europe (Belgium, Portugal, United Kingdom, Spain and Sweden), but some come from Brazil and Indonesia. They present their perspectives on what they see as a positive – and pragmatic – approach to participation, in a variety of fields, including public consultations on environmental issues; participation within the scope of cultural policy; participation in elementary schools (as a media literacy project); in fiction/drama; and, ultimately, as a way to engage underprivileged and marginalized communities. Probably the only exception to this pragmatic view can be found in the last article, which brings high theory back to the table, by arguing that participation can be perceived as a (again, positive) talisman within contemporary social dynamics.

The first article in this volume, "Rescuing participation: a critique on the dark participation concept", plays a specific role. Written by the volume editors – Nico Carpentier, Ana Duarte Melo and Fábio Ribeiro –, it reflects about the contribution of the thematic volume to participatory theory. Its starting point is the fluidity of the concept of participation, and its different meanings in a multitude of theoretical frameworks and academic traditions. Moreover, as a key concept, participation is also subjected to the waves of

fashion that characterize academia. In Communication and Media Studies, the concept re-gained popularity with the advent of Web 2.0 – and later with social media – condensing the optimism and hope for further democratizations of our societies. Unavoidably, disappointment about these impossible expectations followed, which now produces the risk of discrediting the notion of participation itself, through its alignment with the dark sides of human behaviour. This article aims to resist this movement, through two lines of argument.

A first line of argument is based on the discussions about the definition of participation, where the dystopian and alarmist approaches towards participation are seen to deploy very broad definitions of participation, which implicitly equate participation to all forms of social interaction. The more restrictive approach towards participation, that we propose and render explicit, allows emphasizing what participation is not. It also enables us to argue that participation is inherently ethical, and needs to be distinguished from its conditions of possibility, from its outcomes, and needs to be embedded in a democratic culture. The second line of argumentation is not so much critiquing the critiques, but is based on a more positive approach, analysing the areas of relevance for participation. Here, the three logics model – developed by Glynos and Howarth (2007) – is used to argue for the social, political and fantasmatic relevance of participation. The combination of these logics produces a wide-ranging list of arguments (namely the protective, agonist, human-rights, educational, integrative, juissance and drive arguments) that together allow to argue that participation still matters, and that it needs to be protected from theoretically-naïve alarmist critiques.

The second article in this volume, by Miren Gutiérrez, is entitled "Participation in a datafied environment: questions about data literacy". The author discusses the consequences of the "datafication of everything" for participation, pointing to a context where the digital environment has become both an important location and an important enabler for participation. Instead of naively celebrating the capacities of the digital to enhance (or even "realize") participation, Gutiérrez looks at its barriers and opportunities, where data anxiety and the working of the data infrastructure industry can be seen to impose serious limits. Gutiérrez mainly focusses on another barrier, namely the absence of data literacy, where data literacy is a significant condition of possibility for participation. Her key argument then becomes that – in this matrix of unequal power relations – participation can (and needs to) be rescued by demolishing these barriers, and by creating new spaces that allow ordinary people to enact their data agency.

In "Beyond the hindrances: experiences of public consultations and the possibility of ethics and relevance in participation", Maria Fernandes-Jesus, Eunice Castro Seixas and Anabela Carvalho analyse the participatory capacities of public consultations, which have often been critiqued for remaining stuck into a tokenistic approach towards participation. To engage with this theoretical discussion, the article introduces an empirical approach and looks into a particular public consultation, that was launched in 2013 and dealt with the construction of extra-high voltage power lines connecting the northwestern parts of Portugal and Spain. In order to better understand the citizens' narrated

experiences, the authors deploy the distinction between access, standing and influence, that was used by Senecah (2004). This distinction refers to three (interdependent) elements: the ability to speak about opportunities and choices, the legitimacy of the process, and the impact that these voices have on the outcome. The interviews and focus group discussions show a discerning set of critiques on the democratic nature of the consultation process, which was considered to be deceitful, dishonest and disrespectful. But, as the authors argued, the analysis of citizen voices also showed the expression of a desire for (genuine) participation, for instance, by formulating proposals to improve the participatory intensities of public consultations. These voices feed into the argumentation that there is a drive for participation and empowerment, that makes participation precious and necessitates its implementation in social practice.

Sofia Lindström Sol's article, entitled "The democratic value of participation in Swedish cultural policy", focusses on the field of culture and the arts, in order to study how (cultural) participation becomes articulated in this field. Even if Swedish cultural policies have a hegemonic starting point – the idea that culture is good – there are still different discursive articulations of this main idea. The author distinguishes two main discourses, namely culture-as-enabler (of good things) and culture-as-preventer (of bad things), a distinction that structurally impacts on how participation is defined, either as inherent or as instrumental, as a means in itself or a means to an end, or, in yet other words, as driven by a corporatist or by a populist model. In reflecting about the possible reconciliations of both models, and their possible complimentary nature, the author points to the struggle over the interpretation of participation, and thus its centrality in contemporary cultural policy discussions – where participation is clearly significant enough to be struggled about – but also to the difficult relationship between the fields of arts and politics, with their logics of cultural creation and governance. This then ultimately raises the question about who gets to decide on the nature, object and intensity of participation in the field of the arts.

Participation at the very young ages is at the centre of the article "Active citizenship and participation through the media: a community project focused on pre-school and primary school children". Here, Vítor Tomé, Paula Lopes, Bruno Reis and Carlos Pedro Dias – all from the Autonomous University of Lisbon (Portugal) – look into how educational environment and families enable children to become active digital citizens. The article is an analysis of participation in the "Digital citizenship education for democratic participation" project that took place in 2015, in a community in the outskirts of Lisbon. Using an action research methodology, the research studied formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts, assessing children's self-perception regarding citizenship and civic participation, but also the teachers' and guardians' perceptions. The analysis tracked the children evolving from non-participation to clear involvement, and from using traditional media to producing digital content. In their evaluation, the authors point to the importance of prior knowledge of the context, in order to allow for the adequate implementation of such projects, ensuring the involvement and commitment of educational authorities, the researcher's support for the teachers and the contribution of media professionals.

"The practice of mediated participation in Indonesian marginalised communities" by Kurniawan Adi Saputro, from the Indonesia Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta, and Bari Paramarta Islam, an independent researcher, deals with participatory film production. The article focuses on two case studies of marginalized communities in Indonesia: a community of believers in a traditional religion (*penghayat*) in Elu Loda and a community of disabled people in Salam Rejo. The two communities were observed during their participation in film workshops from October 2018 to February 2019, resulting in an analysis of the context of participation and how these practices enable and constrain it. Using interviews and questionnaires to study the relation between communicative practices and storytelling, the authors show how personal and collective narratives about the participants' identities and histories emerged from the experience, and how these were structured by the communicative forms and genres, by the cultural context, and by the participants' embeddedness in the community.

A case of non-human, hybrid participation – showing that participation matters because of its ability to bring in a diversity of voices – is described in "Participation and intangible cultural heritage: a case study of '*Tava*, place of reference for the Guarani people'". In this article, Rodrigo Lacerda focuses on the process of recognizing intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as it has been institutionalized by Unesco (2003); it is a process that requires the participation of groups and communities in the identification, safeguarding and maintenance of their heritage. Analyzing the decade-long patrimonialization of the ruins of the São Miguel Jesuit-Guarani Missions, in Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), the author describes how the initial Guarani resistance to the process was gradually overcome by affinity and reciprocity in the relations between indigenous and non-indigenous agents, the valorization of the political potential of the heritage recognition process and the influence of spiritual aspects – namely the participation of non-humans actors – that, resulted in 2014 in the identification and registration of this cultural landmark.

In the article "Online platforms for citizen participation: meta-synthesis and critical analysis of their social and political impacts", written by the Brazilian authors Rose Marie Santini and Hanna Carvalho, we can find a deep concern about the effectiveness of citizens' inclusion in the public and digital sphere. Based on a very systematic literature review, focussing on the world-wide top journals included in Scopus and Web of Science, the authors analysed a large number of scientific articles. Their analysis allowed them to conclude, for instance, that citizens still struggle with their governments to get explanations on political strategies. For Santini and Carvalho, "power – and not technology – is the key obstacle for effective online citizen participation, whose barriers are nurtured by traditional political elite with little interest in building a transparent, inclusive and collaborative democracy" (p. 155). It is exactly this obstacle that prevents citizens from becoming involved, motivated and responsible.

Anna Zaluczkowska, in her article "Meaningful participation via negotiated narratives", analyses the interactive and transmedia "Red Branch Heroes" project, set in Northern Ireland. This project, which involved the author, experimented with the creation of negotiated narratives, that agonistically incorporated a diversity of voices, including

the voices of authors, facilitators and coordinators. Interactive narratives, even if they often open the door for a certain degree of user involvement, can still be organised in a variety of ways, with many different ways of empowering participants, or not empowering them. The "Red Branch Heroes" project shows that – partially through the liminality of this genre and by carefully navigating through the complexities of contemporary surveillance society – opportunities for democratic multivocality and stronger participatory intensities can arise, which in turn can support the construction of more democratic and decentralized societies. But this project also demonstrates that scholars can actively contribute to the enhancement of participatory practices, thus signifying their relevance through the performance of practice-based research.

Finally, Ignacio Bergillos's article, as mentioned before, takes a specific perspective. Less keen on using an empirical/pragmatic approach towards participation, the article "Participation as a talisman: a metaphorical-theoretical reflection about the conceptualization of participation" draws on a peculiar (and still positive) definition of participation, articulating it as an amulet or talisman, "symbolically empowering, phantasmagorical, dark, aesthetic or valuable" (p. 209). Ignacio's effort is concerned with the social, psychological and fantasmatic dimensions of participation, which makes his contribution highly innovative, and even a bit provocative. But eventually, also Ignacio Bergillos concludes: "participation is articulated with power, participation invokes democratic values, participation is *authentic* or a *fetish*, participation is *symbolic* or a *myth*, participation requires a certain *ritual* that *empowers* and it *engages emotionally*" (p. 217).

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# Articles | Artigos temáticos

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# Rescuing participation: a critique on the dark participation concept

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**Abstract**

This article returns to the in-depth theorisations about participation in order to reflect about the nature of participation, and to demonstrate some of the problems inherent to the publications that distinguish between light and dark (forms of) participation. The starting point of the article is a discussion on three limits embedded in the concept of participation. The first limit brings us back to the old discussion on the nature of participation, the focus on power, and what is included and excluded through its definition(s). The second limit of the participation concept thematises a series of distinctions, namely those between participation, its condition of possibility (access and interaction) and its outcomes. The third limit that (potentially) structures participation is the limit imposed by democratic culture. In response to these debates, the article introduces a more positive approach, that focuses on what has been ignored for too long, namely the reasons why participation matters. Here, the article provides a structural reflection on the contributions to the "Rescuing Participation" special issue, and constructs a theoretical model that consists out of three logics, namely a social, political and fantasmagoric logic, allowing us to better understand why participation matters.

**Keywords**
conditions of possibility; defining participation; democratic culture; limits of participation; participatory theory; relevance of participation

# Resgatar a participação: para uma crítica sobre o lado oculto do conceito

**Resumo**

Este artigo regressa a uma teorização aprofundada sobre o conceito de participação, com o objetivo de refletir sobre a natureza da participação e demonstrar alguns dos problemas inerentes às publicações que distinguem entre formas de participação claras e escuras. O ponto de partida do artigo é uma discussão sobre três limites inscritos no conceito de participação. O primeiro limite leva-nos a uma discussão antiga sobre a natureza da participação, o foco no poder e o que é incluído e excluído nestas definições. O segundo limite do conceito de participação tem

como tema uma série de distinções, nomeadamente aquelas entre participação, a sua condição de possibilidade (acesso e interação) e os seus resultados. O terceiro limite que (potencialmente) estrutura a participação é da imposição da cultura democrática. Em resposta a estes debates, o artigo apresenta uma abordagem mais positiva, focada no que foi ignorado por muito tempo, a saber, as razões pelas quais a participação é importante. Aqui, o artigo fornece uma reflexão estrutural sobre as contribuições para este número da revista e constrói um modelo teórico que consiste em associar estas três lógicas, a saber, uma lógica social, política e fantasmagórica, permitindo entender melhor as razões pelas quais a participação é importante.

**Palavras-chave**
condições de possibilidade; definição de participação; cultura democrática; limites de participação; teoria participativa; relevância da participação

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> All of this leads me to a question that has been hovering around the edges of our two month long collective conversation – Is there such a thing as "bad participation"? Nico Carpentier's model offers one answer, as I understand it: he sets a high bar for what counts as participation, which remains an ideal rather than a fully achieved reality. Participation requires an equal distribution of decision-making power amongst all participants. My own work seeks to describe opportunities for participation across different institutions, communities, practices, infrastructures, as we transition towards, struggle for, negotiate around the hopes for a more participatory culture. Participation in Nico's sense is something we imperfectly achieve at best. Mine speaks of varying degrees of participation. (Henry Jenkins quoted in Jenkins & Carpentier, 2019a)

## Introduction

Participation is a theoretical concept that has known fluctuating levels of interest and fascination, which can be, at least partially, explained by different historical conjunctures, and different waves of democratisation (Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali, 2013). In the field of Communication and Media Studies, the 1960s and 1970s were significant decades, as the attention for community media and communication rights reached a peak. While the popularisation of the WWW in the 1990s led to an increased interest in interaction and interactivity, the shift to the second generation of web services (commonly referred to as Web 2.0) in the mid-2000s meant another push for the interest in participation, within the field of communication and media studies.

After more than a decade of a renewed fascination for participation, in its relationship with communication and media, another conjunctural change is in sight. Different groups in society have again started to problematise participation, for a variety of

reasons. For instance, some media professionals feel pressured to hail the public, without having the proper tools and resources to do so, and/or they are being confronted with so-called participatory formats which turn out to be little more than 'marketing', programmed just to fill gaps in broadcasting schedules or to increase audience ratings. Hence, as Rosa Moreno (2006) once highlighted, participation is still regarded as an "*affair*e technique", which implies that media productions tend to include interactive and participatory formats for entertainment purposes, rather than for enabling actual meaningful and public discussions.

Furthermore, the news format is high-jacked for ideological struggles (Silva, 2013), with a disregard of the value of truth-seeking, turning gossip into a political tool. Frustration also occurs when the outcome of participation becomes meaningless, because it is incorporated by powerful elites (active, for instance, in the fields of economics, politics or communication) in order to legitimate their decisions. Media companies struggle with their busy online commenting sections, as they witness their web pages being flooded with hate and prejudice, trolling and flaming, with users that speak more than they listen, frustrating the desire for rational consensus, notwithstanding high rates of public attention in these spaces, as Stroud, Duyn and Peacock (2016) have shown. Moreover, governments are confronted with troll farms and other organised forms of resistance to their representative democratic processes, which results in "the people" to be positioned as a threat to democracy, and not as part of it. And at a larger ideological level, the lack of trust in "the people's" capacity to engage in democratic practices is part of a shift towards an increased belief in stronger elite systems, and a recalibration of the relation between people and "their" elites.

This conjunctural change has given rise to a series of publications that thematise the so-called dark side of participation, and later, dark participation. Even if these publications do not always contain strong theorisations of participation, and locate the "darkness" of participation in a multitude of sites, they are an important symptom of this (upcoming) reconfiguration. For instance, Tzur, Zalmanson and Oestreicher-Singer (2016) article, "The dark side of user participation", discusses how the interactive components of websites increase user trust in these spaces, opening the gates for the instrumentalization of participation; Bouchard's (2016) article, "The dark side of public participation", focusses on an online public consultation on Canada's prostitution laws, and how it was used to legitimate government decisions; Lutz and Hoffmann's (2017) article "The dark side of online participation" constructs a typology of participatory practices, and discusses a variety of what they label as undesirable or negative forms of online participation, including destructive engagement, involuntary imposition, silencing and self-censoring, and exclusion; finally, Quandt's (2018) and Frischlich, Boberg and Quandt (2019) articles use the dark participation concept in – what can be considered an ahistorical – critique on grassroots journalism, linked to "the recent wave of populism in Western democracies" and "characterized by negative, selfish or even deeply sinister contributions" (Quandt, 2018, p. 40).

This article wants to take a different route and aims to return to the in-depth theorisations about participation – that do exist, as the opening citation of this article (from Jenkins and Carpentier, 2019a) illustrates – in order to reflect upon the nature of participation, and demonstrate some of the problems inherent to the publications that distinguish between light and dark (forms of) participation. Moreover, this article wants to introduce a more positive approach, that focuses on what has been ignored for too long, namely the reasons why participation matters. We want to argue that there is also a need for a much better developed legitimation of why participation matters, and what kind of participation matters, so that the notion of participation does not get buried under an avalanche of well-intended critiques. We would like to argue that there is a need for more academic work that protects, defends and rescues participation, and this article aims to contribute to this objective.

## Defining participation

An obvious starting point of this type of argument is the discussion about the definition of participation. As it has been argued rather extensively (Carpentier, 2011, 2016, 2017), participation has received structurally different meanings in different theoretical and research traditions, which has turned the concept's meaning quite fluid. Arguably, two main approaches can be distinguished, which provide structurally different meanings to the concept of participation.

In the sociological approach, participation is defined as taking part, which results in participation being equated to social interaction. Depending on the field where the participation concept is deployed, participation then, for instance, refers to visiting a museum, doing sports, watching television, or going online, just to name a few possibilities.

In contrast, the political studies approach takes a narrower approach, defining participation as sharing power. This approach has its roots in democratic theory, as democracy is always defined through the tension between representation (or the delegation of power) and participation (or the exercise of power) (Held, 1996). But these roots do not imply that participation can only be applied to institutionalised politics. Arnstein's (1969) "A ladder of citizen participation" article, one of the key examples of this approach, deals with the participation of residents in urban planning, which still touches upon on institutionalised politics, but also transcends it. Her article mostly describes how residents are confronted with elite strategies that reduce their capacities to exercise power, but also argues to move away from non-participatory and tokenist participatory practices in defining participation. Other examples of this approach move even more clearly outside the realm of institutionalised politics, studying community media participation (Carpentier, 2017; Howley, 2005), participation as a transformative process in development and social change (Dekker & Uslaner, 2003; Tufte, 2017), participation in the field of NGO action (Oliveira, Duarte Melo & Gonçalves, 2016), patient participation in the medical field (Guadagnoli & Ward, 1998), student participation in the educational field (Taylor &

Robinson, 2009), employee participation in the industry and professional life (Pateman, 1970), participation in the everyday (Bakardjieva, 2003, 2012), in consumption (Hyman & Tohill, 2017), advertising (Duarte Melo & Duque, 2018) and in artistic production (De Bruyne & Gielen, 2011), to mention but a few.

The political studies approach thus immediately produces a distinction between participation and social interaction, where participation becomes seen as the equalisation of power relations in relation to formal and informal decision-making moments, in a variety of societal fields, including the media field (e.g., Wasko & Mosco, 1992). Interaction (and access) remain very necessary to achieve this rebalancing of power relations, but cannot be equated to participation. Access and interaction are thus necessary but not sufficient conditions for participation. Both access and interaction still remain vital for participatory processes, as participation requires to have access and interaction, but participation is, at the same time, more than 'mere' access and interaction, because of its focus on the redistribution of power. This theoretical position does not imply that interaction is socially irrelevant, on the contrary. Social interaction is a vital societal force, for instance, because of its capacity to generate social cohesion and community (Dekker & Uslaner, 2003; Tufte, 2017), but it also has to be acknowledged that social interaction is not always socially benevolent. After all, also war is a form of social interaction.

## Participation and its limits

While the sociological approach constructs participation as almost limitless, the political studies approach imposes clear limits on what is termed participation. Discussing these limits of participation is helpful to better understand the problems with the bad/dark participation arguments. Of course, this type of argumentation only works with the political studies approach to participation, which is very much focussed on establishing differences between what is and what is not participation, for instance, thematising the distinction between the democratic practice of participation, and the non-democratic rhetoric on participation.

The first limit brings us back to the old discussion on the nature of participation, and what is excluded through its definition(s). For instance, Arnstein (1969, p. 216) linked participation explicitly to power, saying "that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power". On the same page, she explains more in detail what she means:

> it is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216)

Arnstein's ladder of participation has three main categories (citizen power, tokenism, non-participation) and eight levels, and only the first category (citizen power) can be considered participation. Arguably, Arnstein's ladder is very much focussed on excluding what cannot be considered participation from the common sense *and* political rhetoric on participation. This becomes very apparent in the discussion on the category of non-participation, which consists of two levels: manipulation and therapy. Here, the objective of these so-called participatory practices is "not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable power holders to 'educate' or 'cure' the participants" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). But the same argument applies to the second main category, tokenism, which has three levels: informing, consultation and placation. To take consultation as example: It is based on the invitation to people to communicate their opinions, but, for Arnstein, this level is "still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account" (1969, p. 219). Even if one could argue that Arnstein's ladder constructs a fairly rigid segregation between participation and non-participation (see Carpentier, 2016, for a critique), her work still provides an argument for the claim that what is sometimes called 'bad' or 'dark' participation should not be considered participation at all.

This type of argument can be further developed by reverting to the core element of the (political studies) definition of participation, namely "the redistribution of power" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216) or the "equalization of power relations" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 354). First of all, these definitions point out that power itself – at least in its Foucaultian meaning – transgresses a categorisation in terms of good and bad, positive and negative, transformative and restrictive. Power, for Foucault, is productive. To use his words:

> we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks", it "conceals". In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. (Foucault, 1991, p. 194)

But this is only part of the argument, as the focus on the productive nature of power does not imply that power's ability to work in transformative and/or restrictive ways is denied.

This then brings us to democratic theory, and the idea that democracy – with its redistribution of power – is based on the particular normative position that the redistribution of power is both wise and ethical. Here, we can be reminded of Dewey's (1888) early essay, *The ethics of democracy*, where he writes:

> democracy, in a word, is a social, that is to say, an ethical conception, and upon its ethical significance is based its significance as governmental. Democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association. (Dewey, 1888, p. 18)

Arguably, the core normative position of democracy is that the radical centralisation of power with particular groups (elites) is unethical, while its decentralisation is (thus) intrinsically ethical. Behind this argument, we can find some of the core discourses of the Enlightenment, with its focus on equality and fraternity (and sisterhood), that delegitimate severely unbalanced power relations. Or, in a more positive formulation, equalised power relations are considered ethical because they allow the people to gain and maintain control – to some degree – over the governance of their everyday lives, respecting their humanity as autonomous beings.

At the same time, we should not forget that the establishment and maintenance of democracy was object of intense political struggle. As Perry (1973, p. 87) wrote: "for many centuries democracy, as a word and as an ideal, was in disrepute because failures had convinced educated men that democracy was a beguiling dream whose pursuit could lead only to disaster". This political struggle was constitutive for the concept of democracy itself, constructing it as an equilibrium between representation and participation, with the exact nature of that balance subjected to continuous (and legitimate) political-democratic struggle. In practice, within the field of democratic ideologies, we can find models that pull towards increasing the weight of the participatory dimension (e.g., participatory democracy), while other models advocate the inverse (e.g., representative democracy). After all, "a well-functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 104) but, at the same time, there is a need for the establishment of a democratic hegemony, or, in other words, for hegemonising *the idea* of democracy as inherently ethical.

This articulation of democracy as ethical also impacts on its participatory component, as this component provides the ground for the normative defence and propagation of democracy. Even if the exact degrees and intensities of participation remain contested, the idea of participation itself is – within a democratic context – an ethical idea. And this renders the concepts of "bad" and "dark" participation inherently contradictory. Instead, the argument can (and should) be made that the differences in participatory intensities – ranging from minimalist to maximalist participation (Carpentier, 2011), or from weak to strong participation (based on Barber's (1984) distinction between weak and strong democracy) – obviously do exist, and are object of legitimate democratic-political struggle, but that the idea of participation, framed within and by a democratic hegemony, in itself is deeply ethical.

The second limit of the participation concept returns to its definition, and two key distinctions. First, there is the distinction between access, interaction and participation, which has already been addressed earlier in this text. If participation is defined as the equalisation of power relations, then a gap opens up between access and interaction on the one hand, and participation on the other. This gap does not discredit access and interaction, but simply defines them as necessary but insufficient conditions for participation. Access, as the concept that theorises presence, is vital for participatory practices, as

the latter require the presence of different actors (participants) in the process, together with the presence of mediating objects and spaces. The same applies to interaction, which refers to the establishment of socio-communicative relationships. Interaction is very much needed to enable participatory processes, as the latter requires people (and objects, and spaces) to interact with each other. But there are many forms of interaction possible, and not all of them are participatory. To jump a bit in the text, violent conflict is very interactive, as it consists out of the deadly interplay of bodies and objects, ranging from the battle axe to the ballistic missile. But it is not participatory.

There is also a second distinction that matters here, which is the distinction between participation and the outcomes of participation. Participation is a (formal or informal) decision-making process, that involves diverse actors in particular power constellations, that rebalance societal power imbalances. To give an example from an earlier research project on youth participation and conflict transformation (Yüksek & Carpentier, 2018): youth participation deals with inclusion of youngsters in a decision-making process that corrects the weak power base that youngsters have in society (often through the logic of ageism, that leads to the privileging of adults). By allowing youngsters to engage in decision-making processes at an equal footing with adults, this power imbalance is adjusted, and youngsters and adults find themselves in more equalised power relations. But the outcomes of participatory processes need to be distinguished from the participatory processes themselves, also at the normative level.

In other words, the outcomes of participatory processes are not necessarily beneficial or benevolent, even if the decentralisation of power relations is ethical in itself. It is not because participation is ethical in itself, that the outcomes of participatory processes are also necessarily ethical. Still, participatory theory and research would argue that in many cases, the outcomes of participatory processes are positive, at both the personal and societal level. The former includes increased self-esteem and self-confidence, skills and knowledge, but also status, while the latter includes increased societal involvement, social happiness and justice, as Huesca's (2008) research illustrates. But the beneficial/benevolent outcomes are not to be taken for granted, as participatory processes can also result, at the personal level, in frustration and personal conflict, in combination with inefficient decision-making, stalemates, and even full-blown chaos at the societal level. Even if the detailed analysis of the different possible outcomes of participatory processes is beyond the scope of this text, these examples illustrate that these outcomes are not necessarily ethical, even if the participatory process in itself is. But this also allows us to argue for the opposite: even if participatory processes can have perverse outcomes, this does not mean that these processes themselves stop being ethical in their own right.

The third limit is the most difficult and contested one, which simultaneously renders this discussion highly relevant, also in the context of the discussion on bad/dark participation. If participation is defined through a democratic lens, then democracy also imposes a limit on participation itself, where participation becomes impossible outside

the democratic realm. Of course, it is necessary to immediately add that also the democratic is not necessarily restricted to institutionalised politics, but can play a role in a variety of societal fields. One way of illustrating this discussion – as was done in the Jenkins and Carpentier (2019b) discussion – is through a hypothetical situation: imagine a perfectly decentralised decision-making process, that is focussed on how to murder an individual. Or, in other, even more provocative terms: Can a pogrom or a lynch mob be (considered) participatory? Instinctively, it is difficult to acknowledge the participatory nature of this process, which then raises questions about the ground of this refusal to accept such a process as participatory.

Arguably, this is not so much a matter of the outcome of the process (which would bring us back to the previous discussion, about the second limit). Instead the problem resides in the object of the decision, which is situated outside the democratic realm, in combination with (but not restricted to) the deeply exclusionary practice that characterises it. One helpful discussion in democratic theory deals with the distinction between procedural and substantive democracy, or the distinction between rule-centred evaluations versus value-centred perceptions of democracy (see e.g., Shapiro, 1996, p. 123). In the former case, a process is considered democratic as long as its procedures are. The deportation dilemma shows the limits of this type of argumentation, as democratic procedures can be used by a majority to decide on the deportation of a minority. That is why the substantive democratic principle is needed to complement procedural democracy, arguing that democracy is (and also has to be) characterised by the respect for a set of core values, in particular human rights. This type of argument can also be used at the level of participation, legitimating the need to combine procedural participation with substantive participation. Agonistic conflict (see Mouffe, 2013a) would still perfectly fit within this perspective on participation, but antagonistic/violent conflict then becomes irreconcilable with participation. And this brings us back to the discussion on bad/dark participation, as many of the problematic social practices captured by this bad/dark participation concept might not be considered participatory on the grounds that they are antagonistic forms of (symbolic) violence.

## A positive approach: the importance of participation

Even if "bad/dark participation" is conceptually problematic, there is still a risk that the concept starts leading a life of its own, which, in turn, might produce democratic harm. This is, of course, not an argument against critique, but an argument in favour of critique that is theoretically and conceptually grounded. The previous part has argued that participation is intrinsically ethical, from a democratic perspective, and that the perversions of participation are exactly that: perversions.

Simultaneously, it is interesting to reflect about why the bad/dark participation concept has gained prominence. One possible explanation is that participatory theory has

insufficiently argued for the socio-political importance of participation, and has taken its ethical nature for granted. This issue, in its entirety, supported by this introductory article, aims to contribute to the remediation of this problem, by also offering a more positive approach, that does not only focus on the limits of participation, but also explains explicitly why participation matters.

This argumentation can benefit from a structure that Glynos and Howarth (2007) have developed, distinguishing between three different logics: a political, a social and a fantasmatic logic (see Table 1 for an overview). We should keep the post-structuralist and discourse-theoretical origins of this three-level model in mind, though. One consequence of these origins is that it is necessary to explain the difference between the three levels a bit more. In Glynos and Howarth's perspective, the political is the realm of conflict, contestation and power struggles, which is caused by the radical diversity that characterises our world. The social is the realm of the world where the political temporary comes to rest, sedimented in particular social practices that have become stabilised, but that can always be pulled back into the political. Finally, fantasmatic logics "provide the means to understand why specific practices and regimes 'grip' subjects" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 145). They are the world of fantasies and drives.

| Logic | Argumentations |
|---|---|
| Political | The protective argument |
| | The agonist argument |
| | The human-rights argument |
| Social | The educational or developmental argument |
| | The integrative argument |
| Fantasmatic | The *juissance* argument |
| | The drive argument |

Table 1: The logics and argumentations for the importance of participation

The political logic allows use to think about the relevance of participation from the perspective of the power struggles between elites and peoples. One traditional argument is the so-called protective argument (see Held's (1996, p. 45) discussion on republicanism), where the relevance of participation is argued through the need of protecting the people against excessively powerful elites. As the concentration of power is deemed unethical, undesirable and dangerous because its incapacity to represent the diversity of societal interests and the tendency to serve elite interests, participation becomes a necessity to protect the people. Strauss summarizes this argument as follows:

> political society fulfils its function through political power, and political power is apt to threaten the very security for the sake of which it was established.

> To avoid this danger, the majority must have a share, commensurate with its capacity, in public power. (Strauss, 1978, p. 278)

A number of articles in this issue of the journal *Comunicação e Sociedade* relate to this argument. For instance, Rose Marie Santini and Hanna Carvalho's article points to the accountability generated through participatory practices, where the notion of accountability can be considered one of the key mechanisms for protecting the citizenry. Also Sofia Lindström Sol's article on participation in the governance of culture illustrates this type of argument, in the sense that one of the discourses identified in her analysis emphasise the need for autonomy of the arts field, and the need for the transparency of (financial) government interventions. Interestingly, the second discourse she identifies turns the table around, as this discourse claims that the arts field itself needs to be opened up for democratic intervention.

There are also two contributions in this issue that extend the (traditional) protective argument, not limiting it to the protection of the citizenry against a (potentially) tyrannical state. Maria Fernandes-Jesus, Eunice Castro Seixas and Anabela Carvalho's article offers a first variation of the argument, as they (implicitly) point to the crisis of representative democracy, and argue that participatory practices have a protective capacity towards democracy, protecting citizens against the political forces that wish to weaken, and/or dismantle democracy. More concretely, the authors write that "if practices of access, standing and influence are based on trust, openness, transparency and notions of justice they may contribute to the revitalization of democracy" (p. 75). Miren Gutierrez's article discusses the "datafication of everything", which poses severe societal challenges and threats, that originate from multiple directions and actors, not only the state. "Citizen participation in the data infrastructure" (p. 49), supported by "cognizant agency and data literacy as entry points" (p. 49) offers this protective capacity.

The agonist argument is a variation of the protective argument, where participation is seen to allow for the diversity of voices to be expressed and heard, facilitating their (non-violent) confrontation and providing people with the opportunities for dialogue and debate. One key idea here, that is important to repeat, is that also democratic environments are characterised by conflict. To quote Mouffe (2013b, p. 185): "the specificity of modern democracy is precisely its recognition and legitimation of conflict; in democratic societies, therefore, conflict cannot and should not be eradicated". At the same time, "democratic politics requires" agonism, which implies "that the others be seen not as enemies to be destroyed but as adversaries whose ideas should be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas will never be questioned" (Mouffe, 2013b, p. 185).

Rodrigo Lacerda's article in the issue is an original illustration of the agonist argument, as he focusses on the activism of ethnic groups in relation to a heritage site in São Miguel (Brazil). As the author writes, the article is centred around the "Guarani ontology and cosmology" and reports a case of participation (and agency) of a hybrid form – "in which humans, nonhumans, and things participated in a more dialogic democracy" (p.

160) – that led to the official recognition of the ruins as historical and sacred ground for the Guarani. Also Kurniawan Adi Saputro and Bari Paramarta Islam's article demonstrates the capacity of particular communities to communicate their identities and histories, through the use of participatory films, even though the authors also analyse how the mismatch between form/genre and community culture restricted the participatory intensities.

Anna Zaluczkowska's article comes closest to an explicit version of the agonist-as-diversity argument as she shows how different voices can enter a narrative, labelling it a negotiated narrative, which "recognises the ways in which narratives can be hijacked to promote a particular point of view and suggests that discursive decision making as a central element of participative story making mediates the likelihood of this happening" (p. 203).

Finally, a third argument, within the political logic, is the human rights-based argument, which articulates participation as a human right. Participation in the field of institutionalised politics has been included in several key documents, in particular in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), from 1948, and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in 1966. For instance, article 21 of the UDHR starts with the sentence that "everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives", which is followed by the sentence: "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government". Article 25 of the ICCPR has a similar stipulation (see Fox, 1992; Peter, 2013; Steiner, 1988, for a discussion). The idea behind the articulation of (political) participation as a human right is that participation is one of the "moral rights that people have qua salient features of their humanity" (Peter, 2013, p. 2). Nevertheless, the human rights approach remains part of the political logic, as human rights are not beyond contestation in general, and the participatory intensities, or the degrees of power redistribution, are equally contested. As Peter (2013, p. 11; see also Steiner, 1988, p. 86) writes: "the take part clause is too vague to require any particular political system and would be satisfied by a right to participate in deliberative political processes". Moreover, as the discussions on communication rights (see Carpentier, 2011, p. 88, for an overview) show, there is also a political struggle over the extension of participatory rights into other societal fields.

The social logic produces two different types of arguments that show the importance of participation. First, there is the educational or developmental argument, which has its origins in the work of Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, and later Marx and Engels, but Held (1996, p. 45) also points to the philosophers of the ancient Greek democracy, and to the work of Marsillius of Padua. This argument highlights that citizens become citizens through the performance of participation. This is exemplified by Pateman's (1970, p. 25) discussion of Rousseau's work, where she aptly refers to Plamenatz, who wrote that:

> [Rousseau] turns our minds (...) to considering how the social order affects the structure of human personality, and continues by saying that Rousseau's democratic model aims to develop individual and responsible

> political action through the participatory process, where "the individual learns that the word 'each' must be applied to himself (...) he learns to be a public as well as a private citizen. (Plamenatz, 1963, p. 440)

Participation thus matters as its performance produces citizens that are actively engaged in society and derive happiness out of that social position (Oreg et al., 2011, p. 491).

In addition, participation also matters because, especially when it is located in institutionalised settings, it has the capacity to consolidate and stabilise society. This integrative argument is built on the idea that participatory processes create contact zones (Allport, 1954; Pratt, 1991) that allow, even imperfectly, for the development of mutual understanding between deprivileged and privileged groups in society. Participation enhances trust and attachment (Oreg et al., 2011, p. 491). Moreover, participatory processes also encompass moments of validation of deprivileged groups, whose voices are seen to matter through their inclusion into these processes and through the rebalancing of power relations. In a way, participatory processes can be seen as an antidote to Spivak's (1988) idea that the subaltern cannot speak (and be heard), as participation shifts the subaltern away from a voiceless existence, and from the identity of the subaltern itself.

Vitor Tomé, Paula Lopes, Bruno Reis and Carlos Pedro Dias's article in this issue is an illustration of both the educational and integrative argumentation, when the authors point out that the participation of students through media content production, also increased their involvement with others and strengthened their citizen identities:

> children's social participation has increased in and outside the school, in collaboration with the teachers, the families and the community. (...) In accordance to the teachers' perceptions, interaction among formal, non-formal and informal contexts has contributed to shaping the children's practices as citizens.

The third, fantasmatic logic, emphasises the importance of participation through the enjoyment that it produces. This *juissance* argument is in its core quite simple, as it stipulates that participation and empowerment generate enjoyment, which is, in its own right, highly relevant, at the individual and societal level. Of course, this enjoyment is not unproblematic, as it is bound to become frustrated through the re-establishment of (some levels of) elite domination. It is not only a matter of the "field of the signifier's order, of the big Other", which is "penetrated by a pre-symbolic (real) stream of enjoyment" but then "becomes enmeshed in the signifier's network (...) [and] the body is submitted to castration", as Žižek (1989, p. 136) wrote. It is also a matter to the Other-elite frequently re-imposing its authority in dealing what then becomes participation as part of the carnivalesque, with its idea of exceptionality. Situations of maximalist participation are utopian non-places (or better, "never-to-be places"), which will always be unattainable and empty, but their approximation still generates the enjoyment of empowerment.

The second argument within the fantasmatic logic, the drive argument, does not focus so much on the pleasure that participation generates, but articulates participation as a key drive. This argument can be seen as a positive version of the Nietzschean will to power. Nietzsche (1968, p. 404) indeed argued that the will to power is a key drive in society, but he articulated it as a will to dominate and control: "one must have no choice: either on top-or underneath, like a worm, mocked, annihilated, trodden upon. One must oppose tyrants to become a tyrant, i.e., *free*". Participatory theory shares the idea that the will to power is indeed a key drive, but would (obviously) rearticulate the will to power into its inverse, as a will not to be dominated and controlled, and as a will to share power. If we acknowledge this desire for contextualised autonomy, then participation again becomes important, as it allows the performance of this desire. And inversely, frustrating the will to share power as part of the exercise of contextualised autonomy, risks creating perverse effects, ranging from apathy to revolt.

Ignacio Bergillos's article in this issue, which articulates participation as a talisman, captures this fantasmatic fascination for participation. The article exemplifies this type of argumentation by reverting to the Lacanian concept of the fantasy, but also to the ritualistic and aesthetic attraction (as talisman) that participation can exercise. He concludes his article with the following sentences: "if we understand participation as a talisman, we can protect it, and rescue it, by enhancing the belief in its potential. Bringing back our faith in its power, we will be better equipped for the emotional and sentimental democracy (...) that we are currently living in" (p. 217).

## A brief conclusion

This article expresses a deep commitment to the theorisation of participation. All too often, common sense vocabularies are used to discuss participation, which can be tempting, but does not necessarily assist in a better and deep understanding of participatory practices. Arguably, there is also still a need to flesh out some of the differences between related concepts, such as participation, interaction and engagement, as especially this route has proven to lead to more theoretical sophistication. After all, having all concepts mean everything at the same time does not seem to be that fruitful, especially when these concepts are then used to better understand contemporary conjunctures.

Without disavowing the importance of the sociological approach to participation, this article uses the political studies approach (which is highly indebted to democratic theory), conscious of the need to properly theorise and conceptualise participation. This positioning also has normative consequences, as the interlocking relationship between participation and democracy results in participation being articulated as intrinsically ethical, a position which allowed us to argue that concepts as "bad/dark participation" are more perversions of participation than anything else, and (thus) outside the conceptual realm of participation itself.

These reflections about the intrinsically ethical nature of participation also raise a question which is even more significant than pointing to the conceptual limits of participation. If participation is that important, how can this importance then be argued? How can citizens be motivated to acknowledge the importance of participation? How to render participation substantial? Publications about participation often implicitly assume that participation is beneficial, which has then triggered a number of authors to argue that it is not. Both positions are problematic. The former is problematic, because implicit assumptions work against the idea and practices of participation. The ethical nature of participation needs to be argued for, which can be seen as both good academic and democratic practice. This article (hopefully) contributes to this legitimation and clarification. The latter, arguing that participation is (sometimes) dark, is problematic as well, because it is built on weak conceptualisations of the concept of participation, but also because it produces the risk to become an objective ally of those voices that favour more centralised power relations, and to inadvertently join forces with the century-old attacks on democracy itself, thus contradicting and eventually annihilating the very core of participation.

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# Participation in a datafied environment: questions about data literacy

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**Abstract**

In politics, participation can be understood as citizen involvement in decision making, including mechanisms for people to intervene in political and social choices, among other areas of action. Those mechanisms are crucial since democracy hinges on civic participation in political life. However, in the big data era, participation is not possible without people's access to and control of data; that is, civil rights become digital rights. This article deals with data literacy as a filter for participation in a *datafied* environment and the role of ordinary people in data processes. Because participation in a datafied world depends of people's ability to enter the fray, questions about where lines can be drawn to separate experts from non-experts (i.e. ordinary citizens) and whether intervention in the data infrastructure requires a degree of data literacy for effective participation constitute a relevant discussion for the practice and theory of activism as a form of political or civic engagement. Political engagement is understood here as coordinated action aimed at problem-solving, campaigning and assisting others. Namely, to rescue political participation in a datafied domain, a degree of skill is necessary. Drawing from a taxonomy of data mining involvement (Kennedy, 2016) and empirical cases of crisis mapping (Gutierrez, 2018a; 2018b), this theoretical article offers conceptualisations to think about what participation entails today.

**Keywords**
activism; datafication; data activism; ordinary people; participation; technopolitics

# Participação num ambiente datificado: questões sobre literacia de dados

**Resumo**

No contexto político, entende-se por participação o envolvimento dos cidadãos na tomada de decisões, incluindo mecanismos para que as pessoas intervenham nas escolhas políticas e sociais, entre outras áreas de ação. Esses mecanismos são cruciais, pois a democracia depende da participação cívica na vida política. No entanto, na era do *big data*, a participação não é possível sem o acesso e controle de dados por parte das pessoas; isto é, os direitos civis tornam-se direitos digitais. Este artigo trata da literacia de dados como um filtro para a participação e do papel das pessoas comuns no ambiente e nos processos de datificação. Como a participação num mundo datificado depende da capacidade das pessoas de entrar na contenda, questões sobre onde se estabelecem as linhas de separação entre especialistas e não especialistas (ou seja, cidadãos comuns) e se a intervenção na infraestrutura de dados requer um grau de literacia de dados para participação efetiva constituem uma discussão relevante para a prática e teoria do ativismo como uma forma de envolvimento político ou cívico. O envolvimento político é entendido aqui como uma ação coordenada voltada para a resolução de

problemas, campanhas e assistência aos cidadãos. Ou seja, para resgatar a participação política num domínio de dados, é necessário um certo grau de capacitação. Partindo de uma taxonomia do envolvimento em *data mining* (Kennedy, 2016) e casos empíricos de mapeamento de crises (Gutierrez, 2018a, 2018b), este artigo teórico propõe conceptualizações para pensar sobre as implicações da participação na contemporaneidade.

**Palavras-chave**
ativismo; ativismo de dados; datificação; participação; pessoas comuns; tecnopolítica

## Introduction

In politics, participation can be understood as citizen involvement in decision making, including mechanisms for people to influence political and social choices, among other areas of action (Human Rights Council, 2014). There is a current sense of frustration and disappointment with participation, captured by different authors in diverse situations, including low levels of political engagement among young people in Great Britain (Fox, 2015), participatory frustration with institutional processes in Spain (Fernández-Martínez, García-Espín & Jiménez-Sánchez, 2019), and frustration about poor government performance in Asia (Sanborn, 2017), among others. However, participation is still deemed vital for democracy, as it can affect individual and collective interests and well-fare and can make decisions more well-informed and legitimate. The mechanisms that facilitate participation in public life are crucial as democracy hinges on civic engagement in political decision-making (Council of Europe, 2017). Although there is no consensus about how to define it, democracy is all about equal access, opportunities and voice, as well as participation. For example, *The Economist* – a liberal magazine – famously publishes a Democracy Index every year, which, apart from political and electoral freedoms, takes into account the participation of citizens in political life as one of the fundamental factors to determine the level of democratic development of a given country (Kekic, 2007). Participation matters; however, the transformation of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) and datafication – the process of converting many aspects of our life into data (Cukier & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2013) – have altered participation, presenting new challenges and opportunities for citizen involvement in politics.

ICTs have been both celebrated as enablers and criticised as constraints for political participation in recent years. In fact, cyber-participation (i.e. political participation happening online) has been abundantly explored by numerous authors and perspectives, including Alvarez and Hall (2008), Dahlberg and Siapera (2007), deSoto (2014), Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal (2008), Milan (2013, 2015), Papacharissi (2019), Sampedro (2011), Thomas (2018), and Uldam and Vestergaard (2015), among many others. These authors are part of scholarship dedicated to studying technopolitics, or the various and conflicting employment of ICTs by governments, individuals, civil organisations

and bottom-up movements. Their work involves studies about "the internet-enhanced" politics (i.e. e-government and politics 2.0, which facilitates existing practices) and "the internet-enabled" new politics, which refers to the essential role that ICTs play for the organisation of citizen participation, contentious politics and deliberative processes (Kurban, Peña-Lopez & Haberer, 2016). In a similar vein, referring to cyber-participation in electoral processes, Sampedro distinguishes between cybernauts (i.e. internet users involved typically in online searches) and cyberactivists (i.e. activists involved in petition-signing, lobbying, fora, online deliberative practices and other "technopolitical uses" of the internet) (Sampedro, 2011, p. 22). That is, ICTs can be an obstacle for participation around issues of access, or they may not have an impact on access, but they can also strengthen prevailing ways of participation and support new forms of citizen participation.

The concept of *ordinary* is fundamental in considering the enabling or disabling role of ICTs. Science, technology and society (STS) studies offer different terms and descriptions employed to characterise the types of commonplace technological practices. Dodge and Kitchin refer to software as "everyday objects" increasingly making a difference in people's lives (Dodge & Kitchin, 2008). Referring to the Web 2.0 – known as the *participatory web* or a web environment that eases the creation and exchange of user-generated content –, Beer talks about how software sorts and sinks into aspects of our "everyday lives" (Beer, 2009). Beer distinguishes three levels of research concerning first, the "organisations that establish and activate Web 2.0 applications"; second, the "software infrastructures and their applications on the web"; and third, how the first two levels "play out in the lives of those that use (or do not use) particular web applications" (2009, p. 998). This article builds chiefly on Beer's third level, focusing on the everyday employment of technology for participation.

More specifically in connection with everyday engagement with the data infrastructure – understood as the software, hardware and processes involved in transforming data into value – Couldry and Powell discuss the agency of small "social actors". These agents[1] operate "with social ends over and above the basic aim of generating and analysing data (usually for profit)" (Couldry & Powell, 2014, p. 2). This way, Couldry and Powell establish a fundamental difference between for-profit and non-profit employments of the data infrastructure. Here the interest is the non-profit employments of data. Kennedy uses *ordinary* as a term to typify social media data mining practices (Kennedy, 2016) inspired by cultural studies' resolve to lower the academic lens to capture tangible levels of technological applications (McCarthy, 2008). As scholars zoom in on commonplace data mining practices, "we see actors in ordinary organisations lowering their sights too, in terms of how they imagine that data mining might serve their purposes" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 86). Namely, the observation of data practices at the bottom offers a view of ordinary people's real concerns and how they address them. Ordinary, therefore, is to be

[1] I avoid the word "actor" since it implies male agency; instead, I propose to use "agent".

appreciated here as "the commonplace, the apparently mundane" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 6), contrary to "the extraordinary" (McCarthy, 2008).

To date, the emphasis on structures of and top-down approaches to datafication has implied that attention to the likelihood of ordinary people acting with data agency has been comparatively lacking (Kennedy, 2016). In contrast, this article is focussed on bottom-up, participative data practices. Participation in this context serves as a defence against power imbalances. For instance, the first deployment of the Ushahidi mapping platform to give voice to and visualise the victims of the bloodshed that ensued the elections in 2007 in Kenya managed to bypass the information shutdown imposed by the government and news media (Gutierrez, 2018a). However, in-depth discussions about data power are avoided here since the focus is not empowerment. I talk, instead, of asymmetries and intensities in data agency even though they do create or are a consequence of different distributions of data power. Paraphrasing Castells (2009), data power is to be understood as the ability to impose particular interests on data processes, reaping other people's personal data, and making decisions about and benefiting from them.

The notion of everyday data practices suits the purpose of this article too for two reasons. First, the emphasis here is not the ordinary citizen *per se*, but their ordinary practices of dealing with the data infrastructure. Second, as a previous analysis shows (Gutierrez, 2018a), ordinary citizens seldom engage alone in data-based activity "focused on problem-solving and helping others" (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins & delli Carpini, 2006, p. 7). Datasets are too complex and big, and social causes too complicated to be dealt with unaided, so these social agents typically organise themselves in groups to collaborate for a common cause (Gutierrez, 2018a). Although collaboration in data projects is a relevant matter, the emphasis here is whether data agency can be commonplace.

Another key issue for participation is the idea of equality; the public sphere serves here as a way of thinking about how equal participation looks like. The idealised public sphere was described as a safe space in which participants treat each other as equals to arrive at a mutual understanding; namely, in the Habermasian public sphere, everyone is a *participant* (Habermas, 1991, pp. 33-34). Some authors observe a transition from a normative public sphere to a new networked public sphere (Benkler, 2006; Quintanilha, 2018). But is there equality in these new technology-mediated spheres? Today, challenges in devising participative decision processes within public spheres include enabling diverse participants to exercise similar agency. Bacon defines participation implicitly as a voluntary and open activity, which can be regulated by norms (Bacon, 2009, p. 235). Similarly, these new technological spheres embed rules and filters. Three examples show how this works. In crisis mapping – or the real-time crowdsourcing and charting of citizen data for humanitarianism –, anybody can become a digital humanitarian as long as they register, declare their skills, potential contributions to the map, and then abide by the guidelines to produce actionable, verified information (Gutierrez, 2018c). These spheres are inclusive, but "they establish boundaries for inclusion" (Gutierrez, 2018c). In

the case of the design of Ubuntu – the free and open-source operating system for cloud computing –, Bacon observes that "each prospective member must sign the Ubuntu Code of Conduct" before being permitted to partake (Bacon, 2009, p. 235). And despite the "slow constitution and consolidation of a new networked public sphere" in Portugal, Quintanilha showcases too the appropriation by people of many forms of public participation in the cyberspace (Quintanilha, 2018). Namely, participation in the datafied public spheres is not exactly equal, but it is inclusive as people increasingly cross the threshold to sit at the bargaining table.

The analysis in this article examines, within the above-outlined theoretical framework – which is grounded in the intersection between science, technology and society studies and democracy theory – whether and how political participation is possible in a datafied environment. I first explore how datafication has changed the nature of civic life and the way people engage in datafied participative practices; second, I look at how *ordinary* can be understood in this context; third, drawing on a taxonomy of data mining agents (Kennedy, 2016), I explore collective crisis mapping experiences to offer a classification of data-based roles and their participative intensity; finally, I inspect data literacy challenges and opportunities for participation. Technology has altered the way we think about participation and equality and generated new rules about who can be a participant. Accordingly, datafication introduces specific challenges and opportunities for participation, as explored next.

## People as data agents

Datafication has transformed how people participate in political life. First, *the nature of civic life itself shifts,* as in the big data era, real participation –the kind that Arnstein refers to when she talks about "the real power to affect the outcome of the process" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216) – at least partially depends on people's access to the digital (Sampedro, 2014, 2018). Big data emerge as a "variegated space of action, albeit one very different from the spaces in which pre-digital social actors operated" (Couldry & Powell, 2014, p. 2). The emergence of the big data era has opened the gates for new types of citizen intervention, which could be divided into two categories: the data infrastructure as an area of political deliberation and contention, and as a tool for political action. On the one hand, dataveillance – the big data-based massive government and corporate surveillance (van Dijck, 2014) – and the employment of the data infrastructure to discriminate against minorities and vulnerable groups [e.g. the use of Facebook to stir ethnic cleansing in Myanmar or to manipulate the 2016 US elections (Whittaker et al., 2018)] have been met with opposition by civil rights activists. Big data as a sphere of debate and campaigning has gathered speed recently especially around issues of privacy, fairness, governance and manipulation (Carlson, 2018; Naik, 2017)[2]. The open data movement, for example, has

[2] Information also retrieved from https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/2724/every-police-force-uk-will-soon-use-body-worn-video-cameras-record-us-public

redefined democracy and participation by applying practices from open source culture to the production and use of data, leasing to new rationalities around datafication that "can support the agency of datafied publics" (Baack, 2015, p. 1). Broadly speaking, big data as a debate focusses on data privacy as well as on data rights. On the other hand, individuals and groups are using the data infrastructure politically as a tool to both resist massive data harvesting and manipulation, and to make decisions, generating diagnoses, solutions, counter-narratives and social change (Gutierrez, 2018a). This article focusses on the latter type of citizen intervention in line with Kennedy's preference to observe proactive data practices instead of focussing on the asymmetries, challenges and problems presented by the data infrastructure (Kennedy, 2016).

Second, *participation in the new environment requires more than just interest in contributing to decision-making*; it demands to overcome participation barriers. "Pervasive data and related quantitative rationalities create new pressures on ordinary citizens who wish to participate in civic, social and cultural life as it becomes more data-driven" (Kennedy & Hill, 2017). These pressures include obstacles as well; for instance, a degree of expertise is needed to extract insights from data, since they do not convert into useful information automatically. For example, data mining is the process of discovering patterns in large datasets using machine learning algorithms, statistics and database systems (Association for Computing Machinery, 2006).

While Zukin et al. (2006, p. 7) note the requirement of skills in political engagement, participation in a datafied environment demands specific abilities, and the hurdles for involvement with the data infrastructure seem prominent. For instance, Couldry and Powell observe that data mining processes, which can lead to insights into aspects of everyday life, allow no room for "these insights to be folded back into the experience of everyday life" (Couldry & Powell, 2014, p. 4). Another example is the full employment of Twitter's API – the application programming interface that allows data access; Puschmann and Burgess affirm that if a user does not understand how they can leverage it, they are unable to effectively interact with the platform (Puschmann & Burgess, 2013, p. 11).

Because of these hurdles, the contribution of ordinary people in the data infrastructure is typically limited to the role of unaware producers of data in massive data collection and surveillance efforts, which are led by governments and corporations. Everyday behaviour generates data without entailing meaning-building or even basic awareness and consent from the generators of data, which, aggregated, standardised and analysed, produce information and value for the harvesters. This passive role is not considered *participation* in this article since it does not entail agency. Agency is to be understood, not as simple acts (e.g. clicking on a button), but as "the longer processes of action based on reflection, giving an account of what one has done, even more basically, making sense of the world *so as* to act within it" (Couldry, 2013, p. 13). Data participation involves an effort of reflection and overcoming barriers; it is not something that happens spontaneously.

That is, once access (a prerequisite) is allowed by decision-makers or achieved by participants, real participation in a datafied environment entails cognisance and action.

Despite impediments, some people are exercising their data agency transforming data into everyday objects. In fact, the employment of the data infrastructure by people for problem-solving and citizen engagement can be considered a form of technopolitics from the bottom-up. Data-based action can both enhance traditional types of participation in politics, as well as enable new types of participation. One example of data that enhances an ongoing political campaign is creation of a platform that visualises and maps deliberate forest fires in Spain called *España en llamas* (Garcia Rey & Garrido, 2016). Two projects, one in Indonesia (Radjawali & Pye, 2015) and the other in the Amazonian region[3], are examples of the second type of participation. These projects enable radical cartography (i.e. maps with new, unconventional functions), incorporating warning systems, and generating evidence, alerts and counter-narratives around land ownership, resources and politics.

The new sociotechnical practices of engagement with data demonstrate the possibility of agency in the face of massive data collection by governments and corporates and can be observed as expressions of *data activism*, or the happenstance of data and data-based narratives and tactics with collective action and politics. The availability of tools to collect and employ data by individuals and groups has driven the rise of data activism (Milan & Gutierrez, 2015), which initially was aimed at generating tools and protected areas of communication for *techies* and activists against dataveillance. More recently, a proactive ground of engagement with data and technology has emerged, utilising the potential of data and ICTs to support citizens in the exercise of their democratic agency. People are proactively engaging with the data infrastructure to generate data in their own terms, make alternative maps, create counter-narratives and produce solutions to their everyday problems, challenging top-down approaches (Gutierrez, 2018a). In this context, relevant too are discussions about the intensity of participation. In the case of data-mediated participation, the participative intensity is determined not only by openness on the part of the decision-makers and willingness on the part of the participants but also on the level of data adroitness of the latter, as seen later.

In sum, the daily practices of dealing with data and with the results of data analyses breed questions about participation. Why is citizen participation in data practices important? In what way are people participants in this environment? Which participatory intensity is sufficient, or possible, in commonplace data practices? Because political engagement matters as a buffer against power asymmetries, it seems that thresholds dividing experts from non-experts should drop and participative intensity should increase to rescue participation in a datafied environment. What follows is an analysis of political participation in the big data era and the possible participative intensities drawing from Kennedy's taxonomy of data mining involvement (2016) and empirical cases of data

[3] See http://rede.infoamazonia.org/

activism from previous analyses (Gutierrez, 2018a, 2018b), offering conceptualisations that can serve as heuristic tools to think about what participation via data activism entails today.

## Intensities and asymmetries

Examining data mining, Kennedy distinguishes between *worker agency, user agency* and *techno-agency* (Kennedy, 2016). Workers in data mining processes – that is, "software engineers, data scientists and other workers" – are individuals and organisations tasked with the invisible job of producing algorithms (Kennedy, 2016, p. 57). While some authors have *anthropomorphised* algorithms (Kennedy, 2016, p. 57), giving the impression that they act on their own (Lash, 2007; Striphas, 2015), Kennedy talks about the significant workers' role in shaping social life by exercising their algorithmic agency behind the scenes (Kennedy, 2016). But not all workers are located in the same place in the hierarchy. Kennedy quotes Barocas and Selbst to note that data workers can include both decision-makers and simple miners with different responsibilities and control over processes (Kennedy, 2016, p. 57). As seen later, the realm of workers can be even more diverse.

Users, often "conceived as a group whose (unpaid) labour is exploited", are interesting for their "potential for agency", according to Kennedy (2016, p. 57). In the social media platform system – that is, the "commercial, profit-oriented machine that exploits users by commodifying their personal data and usage behaviour" (Fuchs, 2011, p. 304) –, users can be active in self-branding. Self-branders (platform users) engage in the "highly self-conscious process of self-exploitation" for visibility and "material gain or cultural status" (Hearn, 2008, p. 204). Resorting to the tradition of audience research, Kennedy notes that there are other ways to think about users observing what they feel about their employment of social media platforms. Users can censor the content they produce driven by their aspiration to balance their messages or manipulate their profiles to avoid monitoring (Kennedy, 2016, p. 60). Namely, users can do more than just choosing a device, paying to a service provider, clicking on a button or posting a picture.

Indeed, ordinary citizens can act with techno-agency (Kennedy, 2016); I have called them *techno-agents*. People have always strived to "appropriate the technologies" and "adapt them to the meanings that illuminate their lives" (Feenberg, 1999, p. x). Namely, people typically transform technologies into tools that they find useful (Fischer, 1994, p. 25). Kennedy considers techno-agency reflexive and locates the empirical cases she observes in the realm of *ethical agency*, or agency aimed at doing good (Kennedy, 2016, p. 64). She acknowledges the criticism generated by the uses of the data infrastructure for predatory commercial or snooping purposes, as well as the employment proprietary platforms, which embeds asymmetries and gaps, by non-profits (Kennedy, 2016). However, Kennedy prefers to focus on ordinary data mining practices that make "a positive

contribution to social life" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 43). This type of engagement is also the focus here.

Going beyond data mining to include participative mapping (i.e. an employment of the data infrastructure), I have merged into Table 1 the three roles that people adopt around most crisis maps and Kennedy's three data roles. Crisis maps are typically launched in cases of emergency, geolocating volunteered citizen data to support humanitarian operations in near-real time (Gutierrez, 2018b). These maps rely on digital humanitarians, who set up the deployment using different mapping platforms from remote locations (i.e. deployers); humanitarian agencies, who employ the information on the ground, and people affected by the disaster, also on the ground, who report data via different channels (e.g. email, social media platforms, text messages) and use the information (i.e. reporters). Deployers can include salaried workers from humanitarian organisations and volunteering experts collaborating *pro bono* to launch and manage the map, an endeavour that requires skills to adapt the ready-to-use mapping platform and its verification system, categorise alerts and demands for assistance so humanitarian organisations can use them, translate the information into and from local languages, map of uncharted locations, coordinate of the volunteers and deploy a communication strategy, among other tasks (Gutierrez, 2018a). Table 1 compares these roles with Kennedy's workers, users and techno-agents from the points of view of their participative intensity and position in the hierarchy.

| | Salaried | Expert/skilful | Intensity | Location in the hierarchy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Workers** | Yes | Yes | High | Top |
| **Users** | No | No | Low | Bottom |
| **Techno-agents** | No | Yes | High | Top |
| **Map's deployers** | Some of them | Yes | High | Top |
| **Map's data reporters** | No | No (mediated by devises) | Medium | Bottom |
| **Map's users** | No | Some of them | Medium | Bottom |

Table 1: Characteristics of the different roles in data agency
Source: Elaborated by the author based on Kennedy (2016) and Gutierrez (2018a)

The participative intensity in data practices can be low (e.g. Kennedy's users), medium (e.g. the map's reporters willingly contributing their data) or high (e.g. the map deployers working non-stop as the crisis unfolds). One idea that emerges from this comparison is that top roles – whether salaried or volunteered, independent or working within an organisation – are characterised by high participatory intensities and a high level of expertise and time investment. For example, crisis mapping usually engages remunerated professionals tasked by their organisations to assist in the endeavour working side

by side with professionals and experts working *pro bono*. Both are skilled and dedicated to the point that some experience exhaustion in the effort to assist victims (Gutierrez, 2018b).

The people caught up in a disaster go beyond Kennedy's description of a user when they volunteer their data and information to support the humanitarian effort proactively. The data reporters' participation in crisis mapping is willing, voluntary and cognisant, matching Couldry's definition of "agency" (Couldry, 2013, p. 13). Their access to technology mediates their participation. I have categorised their participative intensity as medium, although these data reporters sometimes invest more than their time and data in supporting the humanitarian operation, as their locations and identities can be exposed in dangerous or conflict situations (Gutierrez, 2018b). Reporters take a deliberate step further beyond witnessing, fulfilling what Schudson calls their "monitorial" obligation to know enough to participate in political affairs (1998). In crisis mapping, the employment of citizen data has signified a change of paradigm: not only are so-called non-experts summoned to participate in humanitarian emergencies alongside with experts; new agents have emerged as a result of this endeavour (i.e. the digital humanitarians or the deployers).

Thus, *ordinary* does not have to do with whether citizens are experts or salaried. For example, victims of disasters are not passive or ignorant; quite the reverse, evidence shows that a significant factor for disaster readiness is not technology or logistic means, but people's experience of having been hit by a catastrophe before and their resulting knowledge[4]. Ordinary, then, is to be associated with whether people have incorporated cognisant data practices in everyday lives, as noted earlier.

## Data literacy: barriers and opportunities

Within opportunity structure of participation, there are still a significant number of barriers. As argued before, today's data logics increasingly determine people's lives, while the "means to participate are progressively technology-dependent, increasing the risk to marginalise people in contexts of socio-political, cultural, economic and infrastructural inequality" (Wissenbach, 2019, p. 15). One challenge in data agency, that appear before many others can even materialise, is "number anxiety", which can be so acute that "the mere expectation of doing math" can trigger the brain's pain network (Adelson, 2014). Number or math anxiety is related to data anxiety. Kennedy notes that "addressing data literacy requirements means thinking about how we learn to relate to numbers and statistics" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 235). Some people's negative experience of data and numbers can become an obstacle to attain data agency. Kennedy and Hill talk too about how data visualisations can generate frustration, as well as positive feelings (Kennedy & Hill, 2017, p. 8). Numbers, mathematics, data and statistics anxiety appears

[4] See https://www.odi.org/our-work/disasters

an obstacle for participation in a datafied environment to be addressed when considering rescuing participation.

Other barriers are related to the data infrastructure industry and its lack of (gender) representativeness, which also limits ordinary engagement. Access to these industries is not completely open, which produces inequalities in the industries themselves. For example, the machine learning industry employs an even smaller fraction of women than the rest of the technology sector globally (Simonite, 2018), resulting in data and algorithmic biases (Wachter-Boettcher, 2017). Lack of representatives is another challenge.

But I want to focus here on data literacy, a key condition of possibility for participation, whose absence can impose a formidable barrier. For instance, Turkoglu (2011, p. 141) when discussing "critical media literacy" – and merging the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School with "media literacy" approaches – sees literacy as a precondition to media participation. In the same vein, data literacy could be understood another condition of the possibility for participation in a datafied world. Participative data agency today hinge on three main factors, which are all related to data literacy: a) data skills (understood as competence in the processes that go from determining how data are gathered to using them); b) access to resources, and c) occupying or achieving regimes that allow their ordinary application. Kennedy highlights two of these factors in relation with data mining practices:

> just as data mining can exclude populations from its algorithmic calculations because of its methodological particularities, so it can be exclusive in another way, in terms of who has access to data mining tools and technologies, and the skills needed to participate in data-driven operations. (Kennedy, 2016, p. 64)

The distribution of access to data and the ability to extract value from them is unequal, and this leads to new digital divides, which "highlight the problematically undemocratic character of such inequalities" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 53). How data have been bestowed with certain powers, influence and logics raises political questions. Whoever has the expertise and access to the data infrastructure decides how and who manages the processes and the resulting knowledge, which in turn impacts the social world. Ruppert, Isin and Bigo (2017) place the emergence of practices such as "data science", "data mining" and "data analysis" as a reconfiguration of power and knowledge. Without understanding "the conditions of possibility of data", it is difficult to "intervene in or shape data politics if by that it is meant the transformation of data subjects into data citizens" (Ruppert, Isin & Bigo, 2017, p. 1). Concurring, Hintz, Dencik and Wahl-Jorgensen say that, if citizenship today is based on active data usage and participation, its enactment requires a knowledgeable grasp of the technologies, the structures and agents that make it possible, as well as their interests, and how they might be used in ordinary practices (Hintz, Dencik & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017, p. 735). Consequently, data literacy involving

data proficiency, access to data and data tools, and the chance to explore and exploit data analysis needs to be tackled as well.

When people have access to skills, means and opportunity, data activism happens. Several examples show how these three factors worked together in data activism. The first is the appropriation and use of drones, conceived originally for military purposes, as a method to produce data and counter-maps that opposed governmental "land-grabbing" in Indonesia (Radjawali & Pye, 2015). Radjawali and Pye state that to make these maps, challenges were acquiring and enjoying a) the specialised skills to operate the drones, produce spatial planning and interpret satellite data and images; b) the funds to generate aerial, high-resolution photographs able to capture clear images (which were made available by external donors); and c) the relative freedom that allowed the communities managing the drones to give testimony before court against large mining corporations in 2009 (Radjawali & Pye, 2015, p. 3). This example also shows that data are not the final objective in data activism too; they are a teleological tool to attain campaign or mobilisation aims. The second example is a study about what makes a map mobilise people, showing that, apart from resources and occasion, the employment of rich, complex datasets is crucial too; that is, in map-based data activism the credibility associated with data is essential to incite followers to act (Gutierrez, 2019a). The cases examined in Gutierrez (2019a) illustrate that even the most participatory activist map depends on technological savvy people participating and collaborating. Yet again, cases in another study indicate that data endeavours – whether activist or not – often rely on the participation of citizens at least as data reporters (Gutierrez, 2019b). These notions – the required of skills to exercise data agency and the *de facto* participation of citizens in data projects of all sorts – suggest that ordinary citizens are much more resourceful than anticipated, and confirms the idea that *ordinary* applies to whether data practices become commonplace, instead of whether citizens display or lack expertise. Besides, non-experts can become experts *by doing*; that is, by participating ordinary citizens acquire new awareness and power (Baum, 2015). Generating the third condition for data literacy, opportunity, seems then another factor to rescue participation.

Data literacy could be employed as a perspective to look into how people engage with data as well, refocusing scholarship's attention to the circumstances in which users act within "proprietary digitised environments" (Pybus, Cote & Blanke, 2015, p. 4). Given the disparity between those who typically generate data, people, and those who gain value from the data, corporations and governments, "there is a need to open up new forms of digital literacies, such as privacy literacies, information literacies, code literacies, algorithmic literacies, database literacies and so forth" (Pybus et al., 2015, p. 4). Gray, Bounegru, Milan and Ciuccarelli (2016) talk about "data infrastructure literacy". These new forms of literacies represent areas for activist opportunity as well. Based on Baack (2015), these areas include a new focus on opening and sharing data, which would disrupt the monopoly of governments and corporations over data; transferring the open

source model of participation – which is decentralised, flexible, collaborative, peer-to-peer and free – to political participation, and a new interest in mediators as necessary means to access data (e.g. data journalists and activists who open their datasets to public and free scrutiny). About the last point, Hintz, Dencik and Wahl-Jorgensen note that "the watchdog function we traditionally attribute to journalism is critical" (Hintz et al., 2017, p. 735). Baack suggests that the practices and ideas of the open data movement are relevant because they "help to understand how datafication might support the agency of publics and actors outside big government and big business" (Baack, 2015, p. 1). The implication is that not only people should integrate data literacy into their set of democratic skills, but also that activism and collaboration with data mediators are needed to open spaces for the application of data literacy.

## Discussion

This article ends with the initial questions. How are ordinary people participants in data practices? Which participatory intensity is sufficient, or possible, in ordinary data practices? First, it seems that in this context it is more interesting to use the term *ordinary* in association with whether people incorporate data practices in their everyday lives. That is, whether the exercise of data agency becomes commonplace. Second, citizens are increasingly involved with the data infrastructure, attaining the skills, the resources and the opportunities to exploit it, and progressively transforming it into an ordinary object. However, to occupy the top, decision-making positions in data efforts at all levels (i.e. as workers, deployers, users, reporters and techno-agents), citizens need to boost the intensity of their involvement with the data infrastructure, which also depends on their level of data literacy.

Why is citizen participation in the data infrastructure important today? The datafication of everything presents a new environment for real political participation, which requires cognizant agency and data literacy as entry points, and results in new technopolitical practices. Deterrents to data agency can be purposeful or not. Participation today is endangered by corporate and governmental data-based surveillance (Hintz et al., 2017, p. 732). Datafication provides massively heightened opportunities to understand, predict, address and manipulate citizens as individuals on real-time (Tufekci, 2014). Critical studies have warned about the perils of leaving data decisions up to the free market, corporations or even governments. Whether impediments are intrinsic to the data infrastructure or imposed deliberately, they are part of technology's "ambivalence", which refers on the one hand to how it is employed to perpetuate hierarchies and guarantee the continuation of power, and on the other hand to its potential as a tool for undermining these same hierarchies (Feenberg, 1999, p. 76). Making the data infrastructure *ordinary* – a key issue for democracy because datafication both changes the nature of civic life and increases the requirements for participation – and taking advantage of its ambivalence to

"do good" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 71) requires more than the work of a group of researchers in the critical data studies; it demands active participation of ordinary people and organisations both creating opportunities to use data and putting them to use.

To rescue participation and lower the entry thresholds, issues like data and number anxiety have to be addressed; data literacy – namely, the access to data, means and opportunities – should increase, and new, collaborative spaces for enacting data agency should be created so the data infrastructure becomes an ordinary object in civic involvement. People and organisations are already working on these issues. Examples such as the Medialab-Prado in Madrid, which regularly invites journalists, artists, engineers and data analysis to work together to model data projects and have resulting in ongoing projects, such as *España en llamas*[5]; DataKind, which deploys data scientists to work *pro bono* with social organisations[6]; Data Science for Social Good, which trains data scientists to tackle social problems, transferring data abilities in the process[7], and Good Data, a project and a book that showcases ethical data practices from the bottom-up[8], reveal that it can be done.

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[5] See http://medialab-prado.es/article/que_es

[6] See http://www.datakind.org/about

[7] See http://dssg.io/projects/

[8] See http://networkcultures.org/blog/publication/tod-29-good-data/

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## Biographical note

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# Beyond the hindrances: experiences of public consultations and the possibility of ethics and relevance in participation

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**Abstract**

Public consultations are increasingly used in projects with environmental impact, allegedly as a way to ensure that affected people and communities have their concerns recognised and addressed. There have been multiple criticisms of this form of public participation, with consultations frequently viewed as a tokenistic practice. In this study, we focus on a public consultation on extra-high voltage power lines projected to go from northern Portugal to northwestern Spain. We analyse citizens' discourses regarding hindrances to participation as well as envisaged possibilities to improve it. The study draws on semi-structured interviews with 26 people and five focus groups discussions (N=37) carried out in localities in the north of Portugal that would be affected by the project. Based on citizens' narrated experiences of participation we discuss the relevance and the ethics of participation in access, standing and influence in public consultations processes.

**Keywords**
consultation; discourses; ethics; public participation; relevance

# Para além dos obstáculos: experiências de consultas públicas e a possibilidade de ética e relevância na participação

**Resumo**

O procedimento de consulta pública tem sido, cada vez mais, utilizado em projetos com impacto ambiental, supostamente como uma forma de assegurar que as preocupações e sugestões das pessoas e das comunidades interessadas e afetadas pelos projetos são tidas em conta. No entanto, esta forma de participação pública tem vindo a ser bastante criticada, por ser uma prática meramente simbólica e sem consequências concretas. Neste artigo, apresentamos um estudo focado no processo de consulta pública relativo ao projeto de construção de uma linha de muita alta tensão entre o Norte de Portugal e a Galiza (Espanha). Especificamente, analisamos discursos de cidadãos relativamente às barreiras à sua participação pública, bem como diversas

recomendações para desenvolvimento de processos de consulta pública éticos e relevantes. A análise apresentada é baseada em entrevistas semiestruturadas a 26 pessoas e em cinco grupos focais (N=37) realizados em quatro localidades do Norte de Portugal. A partir dos discursos sobre as diversas experiências de participação, discutimos significados de ética e relevância nas questões de acesso, legitimidade e influência em processos de consulta pública.

**Palavras-chave**
consulta; discursos; ética; participação pública; relevância

## Introduction

Over the last decades, public participation has increasingly become a popular mechanism for policy-makers to involve the broader public in decision-making processes. Public participation has been placed within a participatory space opened up "from above" and "by invitation" (Cornwall, 2002), and defined as the process of involving members of the public, so they can have a say in the formulation, adoption and/or implementation of governmental or corporate agendas (Fishkin, 2009; Rowe & Frewer, 2004). It involves one or more forms of interaction between the government (or other formally responsible actors) and the public (O'Faircheallaigh, 2010), and implies that the public's input will be taken into account in policy-making decisions (Rowe & Frewer, 2000, 2004). Like other forms of participation (e.g., Carpentier, 2012; Ekman & Amnã, 2012), public participation is a complex and contested term (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). A comprehensive approach should recognise that public participation knows different levels and formats, and it can best be seen as a continuum, with the highest levels corresponding to full citizen control of the participation process and outcomes (Arnstein, 1969)[1]. Public consultations are one of the most common forms of public participation (Kaehne & Taylor, 2016; Senecah, 2004), but despite the extensive literature on the topic, there is little evidence that consultations are allowing citizens to influence decision-making processes (Kaehne & Taylor, 2016; van Damme & Brans, 2012). Instead, most consultations have functioned as top-down processes and a pro-forma mode of participation made available to affected communities (e.g., Hendry, 2004; Martin, 2007).

Answering the question "what is good public participation?" is a key quest and a long row of studies has attempted to systematise the ingredients to successful public participation (e.g., Rowe & Frewer, 2000, 2004; Rowe, Horlick-jones, Walls, Poortinga & Pidgeon, 2008; Webler & Tuller, 2006). Most of those studies, however, disregard people's voices and experiences of participation in public consultations processes. We argue that it is crucial to understand what people think, feel, and want from public participation (Webler & Tuler, 2006) so that it may be possible to develop ethical and relevant public

[1] Information also retrieved from https://www.iap2.org/page/about

participation processes (Fox & Murphy, 2012)[2]. This study addresses possibilities of ethics and relevance in public consultations inspired by critical approaches to the ethics of care (e.g., Scourfield & Burch, 2010; Tronto, 2010) and previous recommendations for ethical public participation processes (Fox & Murphy, 2012)[3].

We examine a public consultation launched in 2013 on extra-high voltage power lines (EHVPL) that were projected to go from Vila do Conde, a town in northwestern Portugal, to Fontefria, in Galicia, northwestern Spain. EHPVL were planned to transport 400 kv, the maximum that is normally projected (but rather uncommon nonetheless). They would require exceptionally high towers of up to 75 metres and safety strips nearly 100 metres wide for an extension of several hundred kilometres in Portugal alone. The projected route would cross an area that is quite mixed including forest, small-scale agriculture and various types of settlements. Towns appear to have mainly been spared in the projected route but a number of villages and dispersed residential areas would be directly cut through. According to the Portuguese law (Decree-Law No. 69/2000 and changes introduced by Decree-Law No. 197/2005), projected aerial power lines with voltage equal or above 220kv, over 15 km long and having substations with power lines above 110kv, are required to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Decree-Law No. 69/2000, Annex 1, 19). The public consultation procedure "aims to collect opinions, suggestions and other contributions of the concerned public about each project subject to EIA" (Decree-Law No. 197/2005, article 2, f). The "concerned public" are the "holders of subjective rights or legally protected interests in the context of decisions taken within the administrative procedure of the EIA, as well as the public affected or susceptible of being affected by that decision, including environmental NGO" (Decree-Law No. 197/2005, article 2, r).

The Portuguese State determined that the public consultation on the EHVPL project would be open for a period of 30 to 50 days and the chosen format was the submission of written comments by the public. Part of the EIA could be consulted in the town halls of affected municipalities and parishes. City and parish councils, associations, companies, political parties and individuals submitted 178 contributions (Lusa, 2015). Additionally, local communities contested the project (in some cases with transnational mobilization in Portugal and Spain), through demonstrations, protests, and a boycott to elections for the European Parliament. It is unclear what influence people's participation had on the project's temporary suspension as per decision of State authorities (at the time of writing a final decision had not yet been publicized).

Our analysis focuses on people' discourses regarding access, standing and influence (Senecah, 2004) in the consultation process. What are the hindrances in public consultations? What might constitute an "ethical" and relevant public consultation process? What does this mean for the people? What role may consultations play in bringing

[2] Information also retrieved from https://www.iap2.org/page/about

[3] Information also retrieved from https://www.iap2.org/page/about

about participation? Ultimately, this study aims to go beyond the analysis of what is "wrong" in public consultations processes, and seek to envision possibilities to rescue participation, even in formal and traditional forums. By approaching these issues from the narrated experiences of the people called upon to participate, we reflect on wider issues regarding the relevance and the ethics of public participation.

## Relevance and ethics of public participation

Scholarship on participation is split between those emphasizing a decline on the levels of conventional forms of participation (e.g., Amnå & Ekman, 2014; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2018; Putnam, 2000) and those focusing on the emergence of non-conventional forms of participation in the political arena (e.g., Dalton, 2008, 2015; Norris, 2002, 2011). Central to this debate is the idea that participation is a vital principle in democracy, which can only be realised through active engagement of citizens in political decision-making processes (Fishkin, 2009). Placed at the "the heart of political equality" (Verba, 2003, p. 663), participation should provide the means for citizens to have an equal voice in governmental decisions to the extent necessary to maintain the democratic system and ensure its quality (Verba, 2003; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Despite the fact that public participation has been considered intrinsically a good thing, with many benefits being described elsewhere (e.g., Stewart & Sinclair, 2007), the design and implementation process of specific public participation programs remains highly controversial (e.g., Arnstein, 1969; Hendry, 2004; O'Faircheallaigh, 2010). In particular, many concerns have been raised concerning the "usefulness", "effectiveness" or "productiveness" of public participation processes in improving decision-making and/or improving community relationships (Rowe et al., 2008; Rowe & Frewer, 2000, 2004; Senecah, 2004). A criteria-focused approach suggests that public participation processes must be evaluated through pre-determined standards related to acceptance and process-related criteria (Rowe et al., 2008; Rowe & Frewer, 2000, 2004). Whilst acceptance criteria depend on the level of representativeness, independence, influence and transparency, process-related criteria involve how the task is defined, the accessibility of resources, the structure of decision-making and the cost-effectiveness balance (Rowe et al., 2008; Rowe & Frewer, 2000, 2004).

By proposing that acceptance and process criteria are universal, such approaches to public participation ignore the importance of subjective experiences of participation and the role of contextual variables. In this regard, based on people's views, Webler and Tuler (2006) have argued that the public often holds un-consensual discourses about what should be a meaningful participation process. Some of the points of disagreement relate to what Baker and Chapin (2018) claim to be contextual variables influencing public participation, namely power distribution, leadership, trust, transparency and political openness.

Although there has been a considerable shift towards a more comprehensive approach to public participation, most studies still privilege instrumental impacts. Indeed, very few studies have examined public participation processes per se, especially from the perspective of lay people. Senecah's (2004) "practical theory" of Trinity of Voice (TOV) looked at those processes by focusing on access, standing and influence. In this theory, access, standing and influence must be guided by "an on-going relationship of trust building to enhance community cohesiveness and capacity" (Senecah, 2004, p. 23). This calls for the analysis of how people speak about their opportunities to express choices and opinions (access); the civic legitimacy of the process, including the respect, esteem and consideration that people's voices receive (standing); and the impact that those voices have on the decision-making process (influence). In our view, TOV represents an interesting move towards the "process" rather the "product" of participation (Davies, 2001), and provides a relevant structure to analyse the ethics of participation in public consultations.

Aiming to ensure purpose and influence in public consultations processes (Baker & Chapin, 2018; Davies, 2001; Fox & Murphy, 2012; Senecah, 2004), codes of ethics have been advanced towards improving practices of public participation. The International Association of Public Participation[4], for example, proposed a code of ethics to guarantee the purpose, trust and credibility of the process, transparency and openness to the public, access to the process, and respect for communities. Existing ethical standards, however, are essentially a list of aspirational principles that must "be owned by those who generally have greater power" (Fox & Murphy, 2012, p. 212), and guide their experts' interventions (Conrad, Cassar, Christie & Fazey, 2011)[5].

Ethics in public consultations is also about challenging power relations (Cornwall, 2002), as a way to ensure that people have their concerns recognised and addressed through democratic decision-making processes (e.g., O'Faircheallaigh, 2010). Thus, the entity leading the consultation should be responsible for ensuring no ethics violation such as "lying, breaking promises, and manipulation; inviting an exchange with the public but then failing to follow through with the agency portion of the exchange; and fostering participation that is not equipped to lead to wiser decisions" (Fox & Murphy, 2012, p. 212). This necessarily involves considering the needs, contributions, and views of all different actors involved in the process. In Senecah's terms (2004), it would mean providing opportunities of access, standing and influence. Furthermore, it also involves looking at public consultations as spaces of (de)politicization through which political subjectivities may (or not) emerge, gain a voice and get recognition (Krause & Schramm, 2011). In a context of politicized public participation, citizens would have opportunities for political agency (Carvalho, Wessel, & Maeseele, 2016), and for debating different choices and alternatives (Pepermans & Maeseele, 2016).

[4] Information retrieved from https://www.iap2.org/page/about

[5] Information also retrieved from https://www.iap2.org/page/about

Inspired by the mentioned proposals (e.g., Fox & Murphy, 2012; Krause & Schramm, 2011; Senecah, 2004; Tronto, 2010)[6], we consider that ethics in public participation is ensured when: processes of access, standing and influence are perceived as transparent and trustworthy by all involved actors; the concerned public have participation opportunities and accessible resources and tools; the views and opinions of the public are considered in the decision-making process; power is equally shared, and the community has real power to influence all phases of the process; and finally, all concerned people have fair and equal access to the public participation process.

A discursive approach to public consultation will allow us to examine these aspects. Looking at the ethics of public consultation in practices of access, standing and influence (Senecah, 2004) from the perspective of lay people constitutes a novel approach to public participation. Although several studies suggested the need to establish ethical standards for public participation (Fox & Murphy, 2012; Rowe & Frewer, 2004)[7], very few have analysed public consultation from an ethical and discursive perspective, or from the perspective of the concerned citizens.

## Methodological design and implementation

Based on a qualitative multi-method study, this article analyses data from 15 individual interviews and five group interviews with local inhabitants; and five focus discussion groups with 37 people. Data was collected between March and May 2014. The option of using both focus groups and interviews opens the space for the analysis of discourses on experiences of public participation as well as on possibilities of political action in public consultations processes (Häkli & Kallio, 2014).

### Interviews

Interviews were carried out in four localities that would be affected by the extra-high voltage power line project: Barcelinhos (county of Barcelos), Gemieira (Ponte de Lima), Ribeira (Ponte de Lima), and Monção (Monção). The first three are villages located not very far from the small towns that name the counties; the last one is the town itself.

We interviewed 15 people individually and five groups of two to three people (amounting to a total of 26 people), with an average duration of 16 minutes (one person was both interviewed individually and as part of a group). Interviews of this convenience sample (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016) were conducted predominantly in public spaces such as cafés, gardens and squares (a few took place in other types of public space – a shop, a hotel and a parish town hall). Inhabitants were approached face to face by the researchers and invited to participate in the study in those "natural" spaces. Participants

[6] Information also retrieved from https://www.iap2.org/page/about

[7] Information also retrieved fromhttps://www.iap2.org/page/about

were recruited because they were available at a given time and revealed willingness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). Given the continuing importance of physical meeting spaces as "public spheres" in small villages and towns, we addressed those that inhabit the localities affected by the extra-high voltage power line project in order to capture sociabilities and dynamics of those localities in some (although necessarily limited) ways. As we encountered both individuals and small groups, we decided to carry out interviews in both formats (individually and in small group). Although posing different challenges to interviewers and analysts, individuals and natural groups allowed us to collect discourses produced in various formats of interaction.

Our sample is predominantly male (18 males, seven females) and predominantly elderly (estimated average age – 54). Gender distribution may reflect the population that spends time in village public spaces, such as cafés and squares, and so does the age distribution. Although somewhat biased by the fact that most interviews took place during working hours, the average age reflects the demographics of many Portuguese villages and small towns, which have for long suffered from a significant exodus towards cities, where most work opportunities are found.

The first few questions that we posed were aimed at "breaking the ice" and, simultaneously, understanding the connection of interviewees to the community ("Are you originally from Barcelinhos?"; "How long have you lived here for?"; "Do you like it here?"). Next, we asked participants about their experiences of civic/political participation, for example about issues concerning the local community, their perceptions and motives for participating. The next questions focused on the sense of political influence (e.g. "Do you think that citizens can have political influence on the issues affecting their communities? In what way?"). After those questions we asked participants about their knowledge of the extra-high voltage power lines and about the public consultation procedure as well as their participation in it (e.g. "Have you heard about this power line project?"; "Have you heard about the public consultation procedure?"; "Did you participate?"). Subsequently we asked participants if they could recall situations in which citizens' interventions led to policy changes or had no effect. The final questions concerned attribution of responsibility for deciding about environmental issues such as power lines ("Who in your opinion is in charge of deciding matters such as this one?"; "Who do you think should have that responsibility?").

### Focus group discussions

We also conducted several focus group discussions in order to approach people's experiences in a manner complementary to interviews. We were interested in capturing processes of social interaction and influence, which our spontaneous small group interviews confirmed as important and productive for research. By "recreating" some of the dynamics of social groups, focus group discussions offer hints into those processes.

Focus group discussions took place in some of same parishes as the interviews and in others with similar characteristics, namely Barcelinhos (county of Barcelos - two focus groups); Tangil (Monção); Ribeira (Ponte de Lima); and Refóios (Ponte de Lima) (one focus group in each locale). Focus groups had six to eight participants each, amounting to a total of 37 people, and discussion sessions occurred in June and July 2014 (average duration of one hour and 27 minutes). Participants were recruited through civic organizations or local associations (e.g., environmental non-governmental organization, sports group, scouts), thus using naturally existing groups. The participating individuals shared specific characteristics in common, as proposed by Krueger and Casey (2015), and were recruited because they lived or work in the affected localities. We mapped those groups via internet searches and then contacted them via email and phone with the invitation to collaborate. Each civic organization recruited the participants for the focus group session further to our request to include diverse profiles in terms of gender, age and profile of involvement with the organizations.

The sample was again predominantly male (27 males, 10 females) but younger than in the interviews (18-25 years old: seven participants; 26-35: nine participants; 36-50: 16 participants; 51-65: four participants; over 65: one participant). Twenty nine participants inhabited in the parishes where the sessions took place and eight worked or had some other meaningful connection to the place. Focus group discussions aimed at understanding: a) whether participants were aware of and had participated in the public consultation process; b) participants' views about the impacts of the extra-high voltage power lines; c) who should conduct the public consultation process; d) who should be in charge of disseminating information and what should be the chosen media; e) the appropriate duration of the public consultation process; f) means for citizen participation; g) how citizens' views should be taken into account; h) how a decision should be made further to the consultation. Two moderators guided the focus groups. One moderator focused on the topics relevant to the discussion and the other on the group dynamics (e.g., body language, unequal participation). During the sessions, both moderators encouraged all participants to share their opinions and experience. For example, when a specific participant was quiet, the moderator directly asked for his/her views about the topic being discussed. Moderators also encouraged participants to share dissenting or conflicting voices.

### Analysis of citizens' discourses

In this section, we present an analysis of the interviews and the focus groups discussions. The structure is based on a thematic analysis of the data guided by the notions of access, standing and influence proposed by Senecah (2004), which we conducted with the help of NVivo. Inspired by various strands of Critical Discourse Studies (Fairclough & Wodak, 2006) and Positive Discourse Analysis (Hughes, 2018) we analysed citizens' discourses on the factors that may constrain their participation, as well as on the conditions

for public participation processes that may be relevant and ethical. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) "combines critique of discourse and explanation of how it figures within and contributes to the existing social reality, as a basis for action to change that existing reality in particular respects" (Fairclough, 2014). In other words, CDA encompasses the study of texts as well as how they relate to social practices, processes and structures, and has emancipatory goals. Whereas most scholarship has focused only on discourses that produce discrimination, power abuse and/or oppression, Positive Discourse Analysis (e.g., Hughes, 2018) explicitly looks at language practices that counter social problems and that suggest possibilities for improvement. In this article, we complemented the analysis of citizen's feelings of disempowerment and exclusion with an examination of the strategies proposed to address perceived deterrents to public participation.

## Narratives of exclusion: Lack of access, information and knowledge

Nearly all participants spoke about lack of information on the impacts of the EH-VPL as well as on the consultation process. Indeed, the most frequently – and arguably most crucial – factor mentioned to explain non-participation in the consultation was lack of information about the fact that it took place. Most citizens suggested that it is not their fault that they did not know about it. In Monção, Manuel, José and Armando offered the following account:

> Manuel – No one heard about it around here...
> Interviewer – And you, Sir, did you not hear about the public consultation either?
> José – Nothing, nothing. What consultation? Nothing, nothing.
> Armando – There was no public consultation. Even though they say there was. (Group interview, Monção)

Manuel generalizes his lack of information and speaks for the whole of the population in the region. The very implementation of the public consultation is questioned by José and explicitly refuted by Armando who casts doubts onto the honesty of the organizers of the process. Besides, the use of vague expressions such as "they", implicitly, creates a confrontational "we" the people, in a typical us/them categorization. The "they" category represents the people in power, and the "we" the people, who were excluded from the process. This interviewee thus delegitimizes the public consultation process because it did not reach citizens. Furthermore, most participants expected that political institutions would share information on the consultation process as well as on the impacts of the power lines, so they could "develop a critical and grounded opinion" (Elisa, focus group, Barcelinhos 1). Accordingly, lack of support and response from local authorities is likely to be one of the most significant deterrents to public participation (Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker, 2001).

As in the interviews, participants in the focus groups repeatedly suggested that the consultation was marred since the very beginning by intentional concealment of the process itself. Information was absent or too late and/or inaccurate. "We got to know about it when everything had already been decided (...) in this parish they only started requesting signatures three days before [the process closed]" (Helena, focus group, Ribeira). These and others moral criticisms are explicitly related to the fundamental right to access the consultation process as participants did not have the sufficient information on the opportunities to express their voices (Senecah, 2004).

As conditions for citizens' early involvement were not created, people perceived the consultation process as biased (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). For most participants, information (mis)management was strategic and aimed at suppressing public contestation. There is therefore a problem of trust underpinning interpretations of public participation opportunities created by the State and which is likely to hold people back from engaging with such processes. A participant in a focus group in Refóios argued that people learned about the power lines project by accident: "and do notice that people learnt about the project by mere chance. There was a flaw somewhere. Someone from outside the system saw this process and rebelled" (Leonor). Regarding the consultation process, an interviewee from Gemieira maintained that "this was hidden from us all" (Fernando) and a participant in a focus group in Barcelinhos argued that "if they really were interested in hearing our opinion, they would have organized a clearer process" (Sofia, Barcelinhos 1).

Additionally, those few participants who had access to the consultation process emphasised that the nature of the language used in the official documents that describe the project was a hindrance to participation. "I have read a little bit, but there are parts that... It is a very technical language. It is not quite for us" (Rafaela, focus group, Tangil). Participants would like to have more information on the impacts of the EHVPL, with lack of information on health risks being particularly distressing for most of them:

> Interviewer – So you think that it was not well conducted?
> Sérgio – No. What worries us the most no-one says anything about.
> Lurdes – What worries people the most is the health issue
> and, in that respect, they say nil. (Focus group, Tangil)

Citizens felt that information was managed in a manner intended to limit knowledge of both the proposed project and of the possibility of voice, or, in other words, of having a say about what was being proposed. The minimum elements of access were not met (Senecah, 2004), which suggests a view of the institutions as not interested in citizens' views, opinions and concerns, even if they may claim the opposite (e.g., Arnstein, 1969; Rowe & Frewer, 2000). From an ethical perspective, there was no genuine opportunity to access the process nor disclosure of the information relevant to public

understanding of consultations and evaluation of decisions[8]. The participants' views on the lack of access, information and knowledge suggest a perceived violation of several ethical principles, namely those related with the openness, accessibility and transparency of the process[9] as well as with the adequacy of the resources and tools provided to citizens' engagement.

## Experiences of (simulative) consultation: format, interactions and citizens' standing

The format of this consultation has obvious problems in terms of access since it excludes people who cannot read or write, does not include any debate or deliberation, and depends heavily on a good information strategy (and respective media coverage) by the central/local government. During a public consultation, the Portuguese State (often through the Portuguese Environment Agency) is supposed to organize public sessions intended to help citizens understand projects and their impacts. To our knowledge there was only one that took place in Monção on 8 February 2014. The few participants in our samples that attended the public session expressed a strong frustration with the way it was organized, with the posture of speakers, the language used and time management:

> Rui – I didn't hang on until the end because it seemed endless, (...) each speaker came with their theory and it went on and on and when the actual debate started, when people started talking, I left, it was almost 8 in the evening and I had to leave.
> (...)
> Rui – It started at 3PM. It was about 7 and it had only been crap talk up until then.
> Simão – Yes, it was a lot of crap.
> Rui – There was this lady, this lady with the electrical company. [Simão – REN.] Yes, she just wouldn't finish.
> Simão – Sure, that's just to piss people off.
> Rui – Because a lot of people were villagers.
> Interviewer – Was the language quite technical?
> Rui – Sure, it was rather technical. There were a lot of villagers there, people that will be affected in their localities. They wanted to have a say and their turn just wouldn't arrive. Most people just left. [Interviewer – They left.] Travelling 15, 18 km, being there all afternoon and hardly getting [[understanding]] anything.
> (...)

[8] Information retrieved from https://www.iap2.org/page/about

[9] See, for example, https://www.iap2.org/page/about

Simão – Right. They come to speak to no one.
Interviewer – Because it was difficult to understand what they were saying, wasn't it?
Simão – Yes, of course. Talking to one one ((Everyone speaks at the same time agreeing with this idea)). They don't come with concrete data.
Rui – She spoke for almost an hour and a half.
Simão – For what? To put people off. To get them to leave.
Rui – This lady spoke, spoke and never (.) technical terms and that.
Simão – Obviously, it's all set up for that.
Rui – This man came after her and refuted nearly all that she said.
Simão – Of course.
Interviewer – Was he also an expert?
Simão – That was another hour and a half. (Group interview, Monção)

This account of the interaction between the speakers and the public clearly shows how the possibility of voice is constrained by institutional discourses that excessively empower expertise and close off to citizen participation through a technologization of issues and associated depoliticization (e.g., Carvalho et al., 2016). Whereas this project has severe potential impacts for the local population and can thus be viewed as a social and political matter, it was presented to that population as a highly technical matter that, together with excessive use of time, "gets them to leave" the room, fundamentally limiting their opportunities of participation. The extract presented above also illustrates the ways in which citizens deconstruct the strategic goals of powerful actors. It contains numerous hints of how citizens interpret the intentions of the state, of corporations and of the experts that speak in their name. Interestingly, these interviewees actively read the purposes of given ways of interacting with citizens: "putting them off".

The experienced modes of addressal of citizens are portrayed as disrespectful of the profile of the local population and of their circumstances. In Butler's terms (1997), there are references in this interview to a desire to be addressed by authorities but also of voice and recognition, and to how it is castrated. As Blüdhorn (2013) puts it, this exchange can be seen as a critique of the public session as a form of "simulative democracy", where some practices are used to create the illusion of political freedom and equality, and that "government is inspired by, and responsive to, the values and needs articulated by the demos" (Blüdhorn, 2013, p. 28).

Rather than contributing for public understanding of scientific, technological and environmental aspects associated to the projected power lines, this public session seemingly intensified mistrust and suspicion towards the State and large corporations. The pragmatic effect of this kind of session (where experts "speak to no one") is the development of forms of resistance to authorities through criticism and scepticism. In the conversation reproduced here, the interaction between the two interviewees reinforces

each other's views through lexical choice ("sure", "right", "obviously") and short turn allocation thus developing a shared culture of antagonism towards the state and other powerful actors. This rich excerpt offers interesting hints on the relational construction of identities, namely between citizens and experts. It also supports the argument that ethics should be guaranteed by those leading the consultation process (Fox & Murphy, 2012). The "experts" should then respect ethical principles in the design and implementation of the public consultation, not allowing any form of manipulation and placation of the public (Arnstein, 1969).

### Power relations and citizen's desire of influence

The majority of participants were sceptical regarding the possibility of influencing political decisions. They viewed the political system – at times referred to as allied to the economic system – as unresponsive to citizen pressure. Many eschewed public participation as they considered it useless or meaningless vis-à-vis "the system". Whereas for some people this disbelief appeared to be based on previous experiences of public participation, for most it was not. Interestingly, expressed disbelief in the possibility of civic influence was several times contradicted by the cases recalled by interviewees when prompted to do so. Nevertheless, a few participants expressed positive views of the impact of civic action. Some had no recollection of cases of impactful or impactless public participation. These inconsistencies can be related to the post-democratic paradox described by Blühdorn (2013, p. 20) as the "peculiar simultaneity of incompatible commitments", which can be observed in late modernity consumer democracies where social pressures for more democratization (e.g., engagement of minority and under-privileged groups) coexist with a weakening of democracy in the context of a "liquid", individualistic and consumer society.

The views mentioned above appeared in association with allusions to power inequities. Several participants argued that certain actors in the political and economic realms – referred to as the "big ones" ("os grandes") or the "mighty ones" ("os maiorais") – hold (most of) the decision-making power whereas "people" are a weak element. The decision to build the power lines (or not) is essentially viewed as an unequal power relation where citizens are impotent. Perceived lack of influence via the public consultation is widespread and clearly expressed in Fernando's words: "fundamentally, I think it has all been decided already" (Gemieira). Discourses that explicitly suggest a lack of power from the part of the population to influence policies or institutions were quite consensual and uncontested:

> Helena – we're fighting against things that...
> Nuno – That are already decided.
> Helena – What little influence we will have.
> Nuno – We are so few.

> Helena – Exactly. There have been some demonstrations and some effort has been made, for example, at the level of state budgets, going back to the political issue, which is, perhaps, the most visible aspect. We try hard and harder, and what comes out of it are the unions clapping and making deals. That is, the voice of the people no longer counts.
> Daniel – When it comes to the people, it's already been decided, there is no point ... (Focus group, Ribeira)

The positions reported above dismiss the public consultation process as decisions are interpreted as dependent on power distribution only. Thus, citizens' actions and positions are defined mainly as constrained by the actions and positions of others. Again, this illustrates the relational nature of the (discursive) construction of identities, which emerged very clearly from the data. The possibilities of participation offered by the State are seen as very negative for many subjects, who feel humiliated and ridiculed. The expressions used by participants suggest a relationship of domination in which the State is presented as the "lion" and the centre of power in relation to which citizens are construed as less knowledgeable or credible, and thus also concern matters of standing:

> Interviewer (addressing Rui) – Would that [expressed wish of seeing improvements in the pension system] lead you to participate in some form of protest?
> Simão – If justified, why not?
> Rui – Yes, of course, if justified, if we could see that
> Simão – That there was a way out.
> Rui – That there was a way out for these things, yes.
> Simão – But not like this, no.
> Rui – We would be getting into the lion's mouth.
> Simão – Messing up with the top establishment (...) the centre of power, we cannot
> Rui – The system.
> Simão – If you could see, if you believed that it would have some impact, is that what you're saying?
> Rui – Precisely. Not like this, like this it's like flogging a dead horse.
> Simão – That's it. It's just to be humiliated, to be ridiculed. To be told: what's the point of a person at this age to get into that, huh?

The two speakers (from Monção) reinforce each other's positions by repeating what the previous speaker has said, completing each other's sentences, reinforcing the other's statement. In a focus group in Barcelinhos, a participant evoked a beast of prey to refer to the power that some people have. "Because then they reach a certain point and economically they cannot fight against these great sharks" (André). The images of "lions" and

"sharks" are used to refer to those who have the power to decide. On the contrary, those who participate, and resist are defined as "clowns". The extract below may, at first, suggest a delegitimization of the "protestors" "for being half a dozen" and "saying nothing". A more in-depth analysis of the interview suggests that this discourse might be based on a strong disbelief regarding the power of the people to influence public policies:

> Gil – I think that individuals (...) Are too small to do... it's not worth fighting for something that is taken for granted (...) In principle there is (...) there must be acceptance of the municipalities, there must be acceptance of the parishes, right?
> Interviewer – There you go.
> Gil – The parishes have to make noise.
> Interviewer – The parishes are all the people (h).
> Gil –The parishes are, they are all the people, they are all (.) It's all of us. But they should have (...) we are at a very advanced stage of the project, they should, we are in a phase where the line has been drawn, the line is defined, isn't it? Before that, there should have been some consultation with the parishes, the municipalities. Has anyone said anything about it? Now come the clowns, the population, half a dozen people who do not even say anything. No! This should be passed on to the parish well in advance, not now at this stage.

In summary, in citizens' speech, their actions and positions are defined mainly as constrained by the actions and positions of others. Consequently, the type of power relations involved in the public consultation might have an impact on the way citizens engage with the public institutions and with the democratic system itself. Ultimately, these discourses suggested the need to rethink approaches to participation. As previously argued, efforts to promote participation need to be accompanied with proper support, otherwise "it may do serious harm" (Fox & Murphy, 2012, p. 212). These successive experiences of lack of access, standing and influence, leads to citizens feeling disempowered and disrespected, and may result in them actively avoiding engagement in further processes of public participation.

## Envisioning ethics in public participation

In line with Senecah (2004), our analysis points to interdependence between practices of access and standing, as well as influence. Besides, expressed visions regarding an ideal and relevant public consultation process were strongly aligned with participants' narrated experiences of access, standing and influence. To address problems related to lack of access and standing, participants suggested a variety of strategies including: organizing informational and dialogue meetings, as well as public assemblies and joint

meetings with all the promoters of the project; directly reaching the population door-to-door; providing information through the power bill or by post; disseminating information via social networks; creating an information office at the parish hall and/or at the local church; distributing posters and flyers in local markets; using local media (newspapers, radio) to share information; and involving local organizations in the public consultation process. All participants seemed to agree that a combination of tools and channels of communication is the best way to ensure that all citizens – or at least most of them – are included in the consultation process:

> Rita – I think that we have to update ourselves a little bit. The times are for new technologies and disseminating via Facebook and other social media is crucial nowadays. And one shouldn't send different messages. Send a single message and adapt it to different types of audiences. New technologies are useful to reach a younger audience, but we must not forget that here in this type of parishes that are still so rural there is a part of the population that has no instruction, that is not so aware of these issues and needs to be informed by other means.
> Alexandre – There have to be several devices.
> Ana – For me it could be an email, but for the elder...
> Sofia – Or even more effectively, doing like the city council and leave a newsletter in people's mailboxes. (Focus group, Barcelinhos 1)

As highlighted by many participants, it is crucial that the conveyed message is clear and coherent across multiple channels. The church emerged as a key place for sharing information in the rural areas where the study was conducted, with many participants arguing for public announcements by the priest "if the priest announced it during mass (...) that's the first means to reach people" (Luísa, focus group, Refóios). The proposal of disseminating information on the EHVPL and the consultation through priests and churches reminds us of the need to consider the role of contextual factors in public participation. By placing public consultations in a local, social and political context, with specific characteristics that need to be addressed, the relevance and the ethics of the consultation will be more easily preserved.

Participants proposed the creation of several forums of participation, such as phone or web opinion polls, petitions and popular referenda. Many parallels with the current democratic voting system were made, with several participants expressing incomprehension regarding the lack of use of ballots in such an "important" matter, such as the EHVPL. People were very emotional about the lack of perceived right to express their voices in the matter, and asked for more debates, demonstrations, public sessions and forums of decision-making:

> Luísa – I'm thinking about debates... Information dissemination by people who are competent, who have knowledge.
> Helena – Demonstrations.
> Daniel – Meetings.
> Rogério – A meeting held on a Sunday. Since they make you go vote on Sundays a meeting could also be scheduled on a Sunday.
> Interviewer – And people would go there and say what they think?
> Rogério – Yes.
> Helena – Through debates, demonstrations, if necessary, and through voting.
> Interviewer – All those things?
> Luísa – Considering that voting is by secret ballot ...
> Nuno – Maybe it will be easier for people to vote than to talk face to face.
> Helena – And the ballot being secret it is less likely to be influenced. (Focus group, Ribeira)

Although there was a lack of consensus regarding the ideal length of time for consultation processes (e.g., three or six months, one or two years), participants seemed to agree that the consultation process should take enough time to reach all the population, or at least most people, ensuring that all members in the community had the opportunity to participate in the process and clarify their doubts: "the time needed for people to be well informed" (Pedro, focus group, Tangil). Whilst participants' discourses highlighted minimum elements of access (e.g., opportunities to access information and education, and early involvement), they also asked for more opportunities for dialogue and debate, and for deliberation forums, which are connected to practices of standing (Senecah, 2004). The mentioned proposals also recognized the role of contextual variables and socio-demographics variables (such as level of religiosity of the community, social networks and instruction levels) in constraining public participation (Baker & Chapin, 2018).

It was clear that participants want to be heard, but more importantly they seem to desire that their proposals are binding, or at least taken into consideration: "How should the decision be made? People should have some binding power over the final decision, if not what's the point of debating if in the end ..." (Rodrigo, focus group, Barcelinhos 2). For most participants public participation is often misleading, creating false expectations of participants' power to influence the decision-making process. Nevertheless, several participants linked influence to expert knowledge. Expressions such as "feasible", "informed", "prudent", "knowledge-based" and "information-based" were used to illustrate the type of voice that should have legitimacy to influence the decision-making: "All opinions should be considered, discussed, and reach a realistic conclusion, and then the decision would be there if it was realistic" (Otávio, focus group, Tangil). These and other discourses suggested ambivalent positions regarding practices of influence. Ultimately,

they reveal how "citizens" perceive their "own" legitimacy to decide and influence relevant issues.

## Concluding reflections

Focusing on citizens' narrated experiences regarding practices of access, standing and influence, our analysis suggests that several ethical aspects need to be addressed to ensure a relevant consultation process. They relate to access to information and knowledge; consultation format, interactions with experts and citizens' standing; power relations and citizen influence. Elements of access, standing and influence appeared as interdependent (Senecah, 2004) and were linked through ethical aspects such as trust, respect, transparency, openness, and equitable power relations.

One of the first conclusions is that, in public consultations, one size does not fit all. Citizens made several suggestions to adjust formats, forums and times to the context and the project undergoing consultation. This aspect points to the need for attending to contextual factors and providing contextually-relevant forms in public participation processes. Contrariwise to a trend to determine universal criteria to public participation processes (e.g., Rowe & Frewer, 2000, 2004; Rowe et al., 2008), our analysis shows the importance of looking at contextual variables as well as to specific project-related dimensions that may deter people from participating (Baker & Chapin, 2018; Webler & Tuller, 2006). One of the ways to do so might be to provide plural and adequate means and forms of participation. This necessarily implies recognizing multiple possible ways of engaging the public, recognizing legitimacy to those forms of participation, and considering that the public may have different preferences about how public participation should be conducted. From an "ethics of care" perspective, it would imply to recognize particularity and plurality in the consultation process (Tronto, 2010).

It is particularly worrying that practices of access, standing and influence in the public consultation process were perceived as deceitful, dishonest and disrespectful to citizens. Participants suggested that more openness and transparency regarding the EH-VPL project, as well as opportunities for public participation and influence, could help to address that and other problems. As others have suggested, purpose and trust (Baker & Chapin, 2018; Senecah, 2004)[10] are then key aspects when the goal is to improve public participation processes. In Arendt's terms, if there is no genuine opportunity to influence the outcome, as well as the process, public participation does not contain the possibility of political action, as "political action in an expression of human individuality and freedom, a beginning where something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before" (Arendt, 1958, p. 178).

[10] Information also retrieved from https://www.iap2.org/page/about

Nevertheless, our analysis suggests that non-participation does not equal lack of interest and political disaffection (Cammaerts et al., 2014). Interestingly, people expressed a desire for more participation and presented several proposals on what an "ideal" process of public participation would be like. Given that the consultation that we studied was not considered a genuine opportunity to participate in decision-making, participants proposed strategies, means and forums for improving access, standing and influence. The suggestions made indicate that participants were quite hopeful about the promises of deliberative democracy (Fishkin, 2009). Discourses on practices of influence appeared intrinsically related to visions of a more democratic polis. Ultimately, by expressing the desire to participate and demanding ethical and relevant processes of participation, citizens were attributing legitimacy to participation.

The participants' proposals to rescue public consultations held several expectations in relation to democracy (Conrad et al., 2011) and suggested the need to politicize public participation processes, because the removal of the political character of decision-making may reduce the perceived capacity for collective agency (Hay, 2007; Wood, 2015), which in turn may have implications on how people see politics itself (van Wessel, 2010). The deterrents that were mentioned indicate that thinking about ethics and relevance in public participation should involve looking at public participation based on the democratic right to include everyone and under conditions that make them feel motivated (Fishkin, 2009). By claiming the right to express their concerns and to be involved in the public participation process, participants in this study claimed the power to achieve political "agency" and "gaining recognition" so that their voices are treated as legitimate. Our analysis suggests that if practices of access, standing and influence are based on trust, openness, transparency and notions of justice they may contribute to the revitalization of democracy. At the very least, they may help defuse some of the perceived power inequities that seem to constrain political agency and participation itself.

This research draws upon the views of a wide range of citizens living in various localities in the north of Portugal. Despite the qualitative rigour of our study and the combination of different data sources, this analysis focuses on discourses concerning a particular public consultation that occurred in a specific context. Furthermore, the combination of interviews and focus groups discussion also brought some challenges into the analysis. Although the analysis presented here attempts to give voice to both dominant and dissenting opinions, it is possible that dominant voices were over-represented and group dynamics under-analysed (Smithson, 2000). Future research should continue to explore the meanings associated with public participation, giving centrality to citizens' voices and perspectives of political processes (van Wessel, 2010). As suggested by this study, views on the ethics of public participation deserve special attention.

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# The democratic value of participation in Swedish cultural policy

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**Abstract**

Through an exploration of Swedish cultural policy, this article analyses how policy legitimates its support for the arts and culture, and how "participation" is made meaningful in this process, to discuss how different understandings of culture and participation relate to changing notions of democratic governance in culture. The article discusses how an overarching discourse of culture as good, and therefore an interest in and responsibility for policy, can be understood as two discourses: 1) culture is good as it enables good things and 2) culture is good as it prevents bad things. These two discourses rest on different logics and "fixate" the concept of participation in different ways but are constructed as if they were compatible. The meaning of democratic governance in culture is also differently interpreted in the two discourses – as either protection of autonomy, equality in access to culture, and participation as taking part, labelled a corporatist democracy, or as guaranteeing sustainable societies at risk, and participation as an equal possibility to influence, labelled populist democracy. This break in discourse is interpreted as a sign of diminishing legitimacy of a corporatist discourse of democracy where experts have had the power to decide the content of cultural policy. The article partakes in a discussion on the role of participation and democracy in cultural policy.

**Keywords**
corporatism; discourse analysis; policy analysis, populism

# O valor democrático da participação na política cultural sueca

**Resumo**

Através da exploração da política cultural sueca, este artigo analisa o modo como a política legítima o apoio às artes e à cultura e a "participação" é importante para este processo, discutindo a forma como diferentes entendimentos da cultura e a participação se relacionam com as noções variáveis da governação democrática na cultura. O artigo discute de que modo um discurso abrangente de cultura considerado positivo e, por conseguinte, de interesse e responsabilidade para a política, pode ser entendido como dois discursos: 1) a cultura é positiva, pois promove coisas boas e 2) a cultura é positiva, pois evita coisas más. Estes dois discursos estão assentes em lógicas diferentes e determinam o conceito de participação de diferentes formas, contudo são construídos como se fossem compatíveis. O significado de governação democrática na cultura é também interpretado de forma diferente nos dois discursos – a proteção da autonomia, igualdade no acesso à cultura e participação como parte integrante são classificadas como democracia corporativista, ao passo que a garantia de sociedades sustentáveis em risco e a participação como igual possibilidade de influência são classificadas como democracia populista. Esta quebra no discurso é interpretada como sinal de redução da legitimidade de

um discurso corporativista da democracia, no qual especialistas tiveram o poder de decidir o conteúdo da política cultural. Este artigo integra a discussão sobre o papel da participação e da democracia na política cultural.

**Palavras-chave**
análise de discurso; análise política; corporativismo; populismo

## Introduction

Participation is a widely used concept in cultural policy (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Ekholm & Lindström Sol, 2019; Jancovich, 2017; Sørensen, 2016; Taylor, 2016). It serves ambitions regarding a variety of cultural policy goals, such as attracting wider audiences and increasing user involvement (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Stevenson, Balling & Kann-Rasmussen, 2017). The concept prompts implications regarding questions of who culture is for, how public funding for culture should be legitimised, and what should be interpreted as the value and content of culture (Carpentier, 2009; Vestheim, 2012). However, participation remains an under-theorised "buzzword" that eludes exact definition, although it carries a positive connotation (Carpentier, 2016).

As a political concept, participation is discussed as a key element of democracy, both in terms of the people being the source of power through voting, as well as people being active agents in the exercise of power through dialogue and influence (Blomgren, 2012; Chhotray & Stoker, 2012; Pateman, 1970). The present-day popularity of participation is explained by the democratic potential it is seen to have, at a time where we are seeing a general "democratic deficit"; low trust in democratic institutions, growing authoritarianism, and declining membership of political parties and organisations (Chhotray & Stoker, 2012; Fischer, 2003; Vestheim, 2012). This crisis in democracy is often linked to major social transformation processes such as globalisation, individualisation and the transition from welfare state to workfare state (McGuigan, 2005; Fischer, 2003). In an attempt to define the concept of participation, Pateman (1970) distinguished between partial participation and full participation in response to scholars promoting a limited model of democracy – participation, she claimed, is essential for democracy. Similarly, Arnstein (1969) constructed the model of a "ladder of participation" to understand why certain governmental attempts at including citizens in participatory practices resulted in non-participation, or worse; manipulation. Carpentier (2016) discusses a model that explicates the differences among access, interaction and participation, where the latter refers to the involvement of the citizenry within institutionalised and non-institutionalised politics. Where access relates to the mere presence of participants (and technologies), interaction requires socio-communicative relationships, and participation requires co-deciding. All these theories link participation to power and influence over decision-making, which is why it has strong connotations to the exercise of democracy.

The aim of this article is to discuss the meaning of participation in relation to the governance of culture. Through a discourse analysis of Swedish cultural policy documents, the study argues that we are seeing a discursive change in cultural policy. Depending on the construction of participation, the concept may support or challenge normative notions of democratic procedures in culture. Thus, the article partakes in a discussion on the role of participation and democracy in cultural policy, requested by researchers such as Blomgren (2012), Sørensen (2016) and Vestheim (2009). The research questions are: what discourses regarding the role of culture in society, and by extension, about the "right" way to govern culture, appear in the cultural policy documents analysed? Is participation part of a discursive change? How do the discourses relate to issues of democratic ideals?

## The governance of culture

Norwegian cultural policy researcher Geir Vestheim defined cultural policy as when "agents of the political system intervene with the production, distribution and consumption of cultural products, services and experiences" (Vestheim, 2012, p. 497). Although defining the choices governments make in relation to culture fails to acknowledge implicit policies (Ahearne, 2009; Gray, 2012), the above definition stresses the relation between the political system and the cultural field. In their contested but often cited text from 1989, Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey argued for a typology of four ideal types regarding the state governance of culture, namely the state as facilitator, patron, architect and engineer. The facilitator state regards culture as a private interest and governs mainly through tax deductions on private sponsorship. The patron state governs through support via arms-length art councils with the focus on artistic quality. The arm's length principle, often exemplified by the British Arts Council, protects the arts field from undue political governance through a certain distance; politicians may not decide upon the content of cultural institutions, or who receives financial support. Instead, this responsibility is allocated to independent art councils who use art experts, and as in the Swedish case, arts organisations and unions to protect the values of the art world. This has shaped Swedish cultural policy in a corporatist manner (Mangset, 2009). The architect state governs directly via a cultural department and tends to link cultural value to social value. Finally, the engineer model state controls the means of production of culture and instrumentalizes cultural value according to political ideals.

Sweden is an interesting case for exploring participation in culture as a political concept, because of its cultural policy history. Swedish cultural policy is conceived of as a mix between the patron and architect state. The government established a cultural department in 1991 and the country has a long tradition of arms-length organisations that decide on the allocation of funds to culture (Blomgren, 2012; Duelund, 2008; Vestheim, 2007). The state is concerned with culture, popular education (*folkbildning*) and media,

where culture is defined narrowly as "endeavors in literature, the performing arts, visual arts, music and cultural heritage" (Proposition 2009/10:3, p. 12). The state governs through legislation in three areas; cultural heritage, public media services, and library policy. Traditionally, culture has been viewed as part of the Swedish public good and has thus been part of the expansion of the welfare state after WW2, with a responsibility for the distribution of support between state, region and municipalities. The economic crisis of the 1990s marked a halt to this expansion, and policy has increasingly focussed on effectivity (Johannisson, 2006). The main task of the national cultural policy since the adoption of the first national cultural policy goals in 1974 has been to promote the production, distribution and consumption of professional, high-quality artistic work (Duelund, 2008; Johannisson, 2006). Generally, in Sweden, the policies oriented towards fostering artistic works and expression has been labelled arts policy, while policies towards the dissemination of culture to the people, regardless of where they live or their social background, has been labelled cultural policy (Blomgren, 2012).

In Sweden, municipalities are free to formulate their cultural policies independently. Even so, they show remarkable consistency in formulating goals that mirror the national cultural policy goals (Johannisson, 2018). Still, in an analysis comparing local and national cultural policy, Johannisson and Trépagny (2004) found that regional and municipal policy documents more explicitly linked the value of culture to sustainable development in a social, economic, and environmental meaning. The regional and municipal cultural policy also stresses the need to transcend boundaries between public, private and civil sectors. As such, Johannisson & Trépagny (2004) argue that regional and municipal cultural policy in Sweden is closer to the architect model than is to the case for the state, which is closer to the patron model as formulated by Hillman-Chartrand & McCaughey (1989).

## Participation in cultural policy

Bonet and Négrier (2018) argue that the participatory discourse emerged in cultural policy in the 1970s through the paradigm of cultural democracy, which emphasised amateur culture, empowerment of citizens and minority rights in culture. This paradigm emerged as a critique of previous paradigms in cultural policy for focussing too narrowly on the fine arts and for assuming a universal understanding of taste and quality (Evrard, 1997; Vestheim, 2007; Virolainen, 2016). The previous paradigm, cultural democratisation, was grounded on the goals of spreading high-quality culture to all, where audiences were largely understood as passive consumers of culture (Evrard, 1997). New technological innovation and changes in media and culture consumption are said to have pressured cultural institutions into finding new ways to engage audiences and let them influence the cultural content (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Virolainen, 2016). Participation does not produce a new paradigm in cultural policy but is rather to be understood as "a strategy that creates tensions within paradigms" (Bonet & Négrier, 2018, p. 70).

Lately, participation in culture has signified a means for cultural institutions to become more accessible through engagement/interaction with audiences, especially in respect to groups that are traditionally under-represented in visitor profiles (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Virolainen, 2016). Research on participation in culture often mirrors national cultural policy concerns regarding inequity in attendance to publicly funded culture (Stevenson et al., 2017; Taylor, 2016; Tomka, 2013). Numbers are showing that what is called participation rates, when they refer to attending the subsidised arts, are both falling and are consistently shown to be correlated with socio-economic background (Stevenson et. al., 2017; Taylor, 2016; Vestheim, 2007). This kind of non-participation is primarily a problem for the institutions that risk diminishing legitimacy and funding cuts, not necessarily for citizens. To frame non-participation as not attending publicly funded cultural institutions is a deficit model of participation, as is claimed by authors such as Sullivan and Miles (2012) and Blomgren (2012).

## Legitimate democratic procedures in cultural policy

Gray (2012) discusses four possible approaches to democratic procedures in cultural policy; direct democracy, representative democracy, deliberate democracy and democratic elitism or corporatism (Chhotray & Stoker, 2012; Fischer, 2003). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, corporatism is "the organisation of a society into industrial and professional corporations serving as organs of political representation and exercising control over persons and activities within their jurisdiction"[1]. Gray (2012) claims all versions of democracy have anti-democratic tendencies. The democratic accountability and control over any of these systems are only as good as the policy frameworks for them provided by elected politicians.

As stated above, the corporatist democratic model of Swedish cultural policy is characterised by the arm's length principle to protect the arts from undue political influence, as well as building on the influence of artistic unions and other cultural organisations. The system of allocating the decisions regarding support through arm's length organisations and experts is a way to allow for legitimacy in democratic, political and bureaucratic structures (Vestheim, 2007). The principle defended is not only the classic liberal democracy notion of autonomy and freedom of speech, but above all the notion of artistic quality, operationalised in different criteria, as the basis of decision-making (Blomgren 2012). The influence from politics in this democratic model may stem less from overt control but from a "community of taste" between the members of the arm's length body and the political elite (Mangset, 2009, p. 276).

The risk of bias and corruption in the corporatist structure of decision-making has provoked critiques on this system, which claim that it is inherently non-democratic, as

[1] Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/corporatism

the public is excluded because of their lack of cultural capital and habitus that characterises the well-off and well-educated classes (Blomgren, 2012; Vestheim, 2007, p. 231). As stated by Mangset (2009), the influence of artist unions on arm's length organisations has diminished since the 1990s and the corporatist structure of Swedish cultural policy is therefore weakened.

What approach ought to replace the corporatist model in cultural policy is seldom discussed in Sweden, although it can be argued the recent participatory turn stems from a discontent with the lack of citizen influence (Blomgren, 2012; Vestheim, 2007, 2012). The argument is that autonomy, as a concept, also applies to individuals, and not only to institutions, which in turn implies that cultural policy should reflect the will of the people and seek its legitimisation from the people rather than the cultural elite (Blomgren, 2012; Jancovich, 2017). In this article, this desired "rule by people", going against the elitist structure of the corporatist model (Blomgren, 2012; Chhotray & Stoker, 2012), is labelled populist democracy. Populism is often denounced for its associations with extremist political movements, but both populist and corporatist democracy are "the mechanisms through which individuals can contribute to the making of decisions on behalf of all members of the political system" (Gray, 2012, p. 505). Erneso Laclau (2005) understands populist notions of the people not as a threat to democracy, but as essential to its procedures. Populism is a "political logic" (Laclau, 2005, p. 117) or a way of constructing the political through demands towards the system, demands that in themselves presuppose deviance from the status quo, and therefore make possible the emergence of a "people". Both democratic approaches tend to be understood in terms of their extremes; corporatism as elitism, and populism as "tyranny of the masses" (Evrard, 1997).

In this article, the notion of populist democracy does not necessarily signify "an expression of class antagonism in relation to a dominant power bloc" (Torfing, 1999, p. 304). After all, strategies to diminish the corporativist structure of Swedish cultural policy have been initiated by the "powerful" themselves, such as the artistic unions, due to their wish not to exert undue influence (Mangset, 2009). Populism rather refers to the significance of participation in cultural policy, resulting in a shift in attention from the values and interests of cultural producers to the interests of cultural consumers, i.e. citizens/taxpayers (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Sørensen, 2016). Arts policy has, since the 1990s, shifted from focussing on the supply end to the demand end (Jancovich, 2017). We have seen this shift in the discourse on participatory decision-making in general, and it is now seen as integral to legitimate political action in public policy (Fischer, 2003).

Another change in the current cultural policy is the focus on arts as a tool for social inclusion, an approach rooted in an instrumental notion of cultural polices in the '80s (Stevenson et. al., 2017). According to McGuigan (2005), the translation of social policy issues into cultural policy is a distinctive feature of neo-liberal developments in the public sector, together with commercialisation, and is especially noticeable in national

broadcasting. The extent to which the neo-liberalisation has reached cultural policy in various national contexts is contested, with evidence for strong remaining commitment to principles of *bildung* ideals and resistance to attempts at instrumentalisation (Ekholm & Lindström Sol, 2019; Virolainen, 2016).

## Theoretical and methodological framework of the study

To discuss the significance of participation in cultural policy, this article uses the theoretical framework of discourse theory, mainly as discussed by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), Torfing, (1999), Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2002). In discourse theory, meaning is attributed to phenomena such as culture or participation through language (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The understanding of discourse employed in this paper is a meaning-making system of practice that shapes world-views and understandings of what subjects and objects are and can be. Discourse fixates meaning by constituting a framework for what can be said and done (Torfing, 1999). Discourse theory helps us see different understandings of the meaning and value of phenomena such as governance of culture as negotiations between actors struggling to gain acceptance of a certain understanding of the social order (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Torfing, 1999; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The main argument of this article is that there is an ongoing negotiation regarding the governance of culture, i.e. the interest of the state, regions and municipality in supporting and taking responsibility for culture and the arts, which has resulted in change. The surge of interest in participation plays a role in this change. The discourse that presupposes policy interest in culture is that culture is good for societies, a moral-philosophical trend that can be traced back to Aristoteles' *Poetics* (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). Culture is made meaningful as good in different ways; for social inclusion, citizen health, entertainment, leisure and contemplation, and for its potential for learning and *bildung* (Ekholm & Lindström Sol, 2019). According to Belfiore and Bennett (2007), this discourse is dominant but overlaps with two other discourses that have legitimised the interference of policy in culture; the articulation of culture as bad (need for censorship, tax on certain cultural expressions deemed negative) and the articulation of culture as autonomous and in need of protection, which relates to the arms-length system in cultural policy, that was discussed earlier. The discourse of the autonomy of the arts presupposed the hegemonic position (as in the dominant discursive formation) of democracy as corporatist (Torfing, 1999). This article will discuss how the overarching discourse of culture as good has two components; 1) culture is good as it enables good things and 2) culture is good as it prevents bad things. These two discourses rest on slightly different logics and fixate the concept of participation in different ways.

Discourse theory does not – nor should it – offer a clear and simple way to apply it in empirical studies (Torfing, 1999). The theory provides us with key ideas about

discursive formations and then positions the researcher as a "bricoleur" in the analytical endeavour (Lindsköld, 2013). Below, I will briefly outline the main theoretical concepts used to analyse the meaning-making of the democratic governance of culture and the role of participation in the material, namely myth, social imaginary, subject position, nodal point, and floating signifier.

A myth does not pinpoint something as untrue but helps unpack assumptions that legitimate meaning-making in discourse (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Myths are often embodied in sets of norms, values and presuppositions and are sometimes transformed into social imaginaries – the condition of possibility of any object (Torfing, 1999). Laclau (1990) exemplifies the social imaginary as progress in the enlightenment, and the classless society in communism. The role of both myth and social imaginary is hegemonic; to form objectivity regarding how something is possible to understand and what (political) actions are desired and possible. Myths and social imaginaries deny contingency, i.e. they deny the idea that things could be different.

Discourses offer forms of identity that subjects may identify with. This process often forms the subjects' space for political acts and political subjectivity. Subjects are subject positions in a discursive structure (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Torfing, 1999). A discourse can have multiple subject positions. As an example, Terning (2016) identifies three subject positions — or three articulations of the student subject position — regarding the student in Swedish educational policy; the free and successful student, the individualised and solidary student, and the loyal and adjustable student.

Nodal points are privileged signifiers in discourse that serve to partially fixate meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). As an example of the nodal point, in Lindsköld's (2013) study on the meaning of quality in policy regarding state funding of literature, quality is a nodal point tied to other signifiers such as original, modern and provoking. Nodal points are especially capable of fixating the meaning of floating signifiers, signifiers that overflow with meaning and are articulated differently within different discourses (Torfing, 1999). Participation is analysed as such a floating signifier which in itself becomes a nodal point in national, regional and local discourse of cultural policy.

## Data and analysis

This analysis is focussed on how the policy documents construct (1) the role of culture and by extension, legitimate and meaningful governing of culture, (2) the definitions of participation in relation to the meaning-making of governance of culture (Vestheim, 2007). It considers four cultural policy documents outlining cultural policy goals and ambitions in Sweden (see Table 1). The focus on discursive work in official cultural policy documents adds valuable knowledge to how certain policy is legitimised, and why (Wedel, Shore, Feldman & Lathrop, 2005). Taken-for-granted assumptions, norms and normative notions of what kind of society and behaviour is deemed to be "good" and

"wrong" are articulated in such documents (Lindsköld, 2013; Vestheim, 2007; Wedel et al., 2005). According to Vestheim (2007), official policy documents tap into discourses that express intentions about the effects of cultural policy. This study thus considers what Jeremy Ahearne labelled "explicit cultural policy" that is acknowledged by policy organs such as the Swedish *riksdag* (the national parliament) or the city executive board (Ahearne, 2009, p. 142).

| Level | Cultural policy document |
|---|---|
| National | Proposition 2009/10:3: Tid för kultur [Time for culture] |
| Regional | Västra Götalandsregionen (2012): En mötesplats i världen [A meeting place in the world] |
| Municipal | Göteborgs Stad (2013): Culture Programme for the City of Gothenburg |
| Municipal | Kulturnämden Göteborg (2018): Budget for the Cultural Affairs Council Gothenburg |

Table 1: Empirical material

Local cultural policy tends to be overlooked in cultural policy analysis, especially in a Swedish context (Johannisson, 2006, 2018). In this study, the analysis considers the cultural policy of the city of Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest municipality with approximately 500k inhabitants. The city is interesting for analysis as it is known for having an ambitious cultural policy and was one of the first municipalities to implement cultural planning, where the arts and culture were implemented as aspects of a more general social policy of the city (Johannisson, 2006). The cultural goals of the city of Gothenburg are divided into three sub-areas; arts policy, cultural policy and cultural planning. The budget of the cultural affairs council of Gothenburg is analysed as it is formulated with a vision of how culture as a policy area should best be governed.

## Results

The analysis outlined the articulation of two components of the culture-is-good discourse in the analysed documents; 1) culture is good as it enables good things; 2) culture is good as it prevents bad things (see Table 2). All policy documents contain variations of both, but in general, the first is more prominently found in the national and local cultural policy goals, whereas the second is more prominently found in the regional cultural policy goals and the local budget. For convenience sake, the two components will be labelled "discourse" in their own right. Both discourses rest on different myths, social imaginaries and nodal points, as well as the accompanying subject positions of politicians and inhabitants in the nation, region, or city.

The first discourse stresses the role of autonomy; culture can act as an enabler, but then art needs to be free. The regional cultural strategy has five dimensions; democratic

openness, artistic quality, social relevance, economic potential, and regional profiling. In discussing the second dimension, the importance of the intrinsic value of the arts in policy is made clear: "the second dimension, artistic quality, corresponds to what is often called arts policy, that together with democratic openness above all safeguards and creates prerequisites for the intrinsic value of art and the freedom of the artist" (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2012, p. 6).

The meaning of culture and art as free is above all manifested in the continuous respect for the arms-length principle and in stating the value of culture as a policy area in its own right: "culture and the content of culture should not and cannot be governed by political decision-making, but society can, through a well-executed cultural policy, create prerequisites for a strong cultural sphere that can develop and bloom on its own conditions" (Proposition 2009/10:3, p. 9).

The second discourse stresses the role of the arts and culture in creating a better society. This is expressed in terms of social justice, economic importance and societal sustainability:

> in the era of global competition, it is a survival condition for a small export-dependent country like Sweden - not to mention an outward-looking region like Västra Götaland - to pursue an aggressive cultural policy and to work for increased participation in cultural life. (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2012, p. 11)

If we imagine society as a car, the "culture as counteractor" discourse understands culture as the airbag and the economy as the engine. The road is full of obstacles or threats why there is a need for safe driving. These threats are globalisation, inequality, segregation, stagnation, and insignificance (McGuigan, 2005). In the "culture as enabler" discourse, culture is rather to be understood as the steering wheel. This image tells us of the position of the driver: either as someone who gives the car the possibility to move forward or someone more cautious and powerless against the dangers of the road. Participation can be understood at a minimum as an invitation to ride along or to be involved in deciding which way to drive. The understanding of those who do not join the ride (non-participants) is that they are hindered to do so and would if they could; alternatively, they have possibly not understood just how important the ride is. These discourses on the importance of culture and thereby the importance of policy to take responsibility for culture follow classical lines of an intrinsic or instrumental value of culture and the arts: culture as a value in its own right or as a means to something beyond itself (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Blomgren, 2012; Vestheim, 2012).

| Discourse | Myth | Social imaginary | Nodal points | Subject positions | Floating signifier: participation | Floating signifier: democratic value in cultural policy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Culture as an enabler of good things. | Culture can only be a good force if the arts are free. All would participate in culture if they could. | Furthering democratic society through guaranteeing artistic freedom. | Freedom (respecting). Equality. Openness (to the force of culture). Taking part. | Those enabled to take part, those unable to take part.<br><br>Those who seize the possibility to exert influence and those who cannot.<br><br>Cultural policy and institutions that provides culture and possibilities to participate.<br><br>Special groups in need of support to be creative (youth and children, overlapping). | Participation *is* – (intrinsic definition) Access, to be an audience and to experience (culture), to learn, expand the mind, develop skills. *(Take part)*<br><br>Engage in dialogue, cooperate, influence and create (overlapping). *(Participate,* Carpentier, 2016*)* | To protect the autonomy of the arts.<br><br>To guarantee equality in access to high-quality arts and culture.<br><br>(Cultural democratization) (Corporatist) |
| Culture as counteractor of bad things. | Societies are in a process of rapid change. Without culture, we are exposed to risk. | Furthering democratic society through the use of culture and the arts. | Change (openness to). Adaptation. Risk. Possibilities. Influence. | Those with possibilities and those without.<br><br>Those left behind and those in the forefront. | Participation *leads to* – (instrumental definition) Increased accessibility (for certain groups), sustainability, social cohesion, innovation, lower thresholds, open societies, less discrimination, and attractivity in a changed society fraught with risks and challenges. | To guarantee sustainable societies and equality in possibilities to exert influence among the people.<br><br>(Cultural democracy) (Populist) |

Table 2: The two discourses of cultural policy

## The myths grounding the two discourses

Earlier, myth was pinpointed as the assumptions that make the meaning-making of the discourse possible. The myths of the "culture as an enabler" discourse are that the arts can be beneficial if they are free, and that all would participate in cultural life if they could – if the arts and culture were more accessible. This also allows us to see the meaning-making of cultural policy and the subject position of politicians and civil servants in the arts sector; if they did not provide culture with infrastructure and support, fewer would participate in culture: "in the efforts to increase accessibility to culture, the cultural affairs administration is also prioritising to find diverse ways to prevent obstacles for people to take part in culture on more equal terms" (Kulturnämnden Göteborg, 2018, p. 15).

Arguably, the myth grounding this discourse relates to the cultural democratisation paradigm in cultural policy outlined by Bonet and Négrier (2018); culture needs to

be spread to the people to ensure equality in access. As the arts can only function if they are free, the social imaginary of the discourse is a society where politicians further democratic values through the autonomy of the arts.

Conversely, the myth of the "culture as counteractor" discourse is about culture as a provider of factors that prevent risk and threat, especially threats of sustainability, either in the nation, the region or the city:

- "investments in culture can, inter alia, contribute to social cohesion through meetings, increased understanding and strengthened dialogue among people".(Göteborgs Stad 2013, p. 11 [Culture programme])
- "how to develop the cultural sphere of Västra Götaland region as a space with an open border, a meeting space for all? How can we deal with the strains of segregation, class division, unemployment, exclusion? How to take advantage of the possibilities of creation, experience, provision, intercultural dialogue and democratic participation that form part of the expanded societal role of culture?". (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2012, p. 7)

The myth tells us that without culture, we would lose opportunities to develop openness, understanding and respect for each other, and without the efforts of politicians and civil servants to provide culture to the inhabitants, the nation, region and city would risk stagnation, loss of innovation, and increased segregation. Thus, the social imaginary of the discourse is a society where prosperity and democracy are enhanced by using culture. The imaginary would arguably relate to the cultural democracy paradigm in cultural policy with its focus on empowerment of citizens (Bonet & Négrier, 2018).

## Subject positions in the discourses

The discourses are organised according to similar, sometimes overlapping, but still different signifiers (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Terning, 2016). Youth and children are an important subject position in all policy documents and both discourses, representing a group needing special interventions, together with those deemed to live in vulnerable areas of the city (Ekholm & Lindström Sol, 2019): "the administration will also work to find strategical methods and new ways of working to reach new target groups and thus increase accessibility for certain groups or geographical parts of the city"(Kulturnämnden Göteborg, 2018, p. 17).

Some citizens are thus seen to be enabled by cultural policy to take part in culture, but some are still left out, and these groups need attention in the policies.

In the "culture as enabler" discourse, the public funding of culture is fixated as unquestionable, as it is a "societal responsibility" [Göteborgs Stad, 2013, p. 4 (Culture programme)]. Alternative funding from private and EU funding is possible, but "all such initiatives must be conditioned by the guarantee of the integrity, autonomy and intrinsic value of the arts" [Göteborgs Stad, 2013, p. 4 (Culture programme)].

In the "culture as counteractor" discourse, the subject positions of the people being given and policymakers and civil servants as giving opportunities to participate in culture are there, with a slightly different understanding of those left behind. In the first discourse, those left behind have not been given enough attention by politicians, while in the second discourse, subjects such as citizens and regions risk being left behind for more intangible reasons: "the intensified globalisation means competition on a world market that is merciless to the losers. Nothing suggests that the part of the world that used to be the richest can expect to continue to be so" (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2012, p. 7).

The subject positions found in both discourses are above all those who enable/are enabled by the participation in culture and those who do not enable/are not (hindered from being) enabled. The "blame" for non-participation or non-involvement is usually not put on the subjects themselves but explained by external, often vague forces that are beyond their control (Stevenson et. al., 2017), which, in turn, legitimises political intervention.

### Nodal points and floating signifiers in both discourses

The "overflowing meaning" of the concept of participation in cultural policy is no surprise. Because of the historical tendency towards soft steering and respect for the arm's length principle in Swedish cultural policy (Blomgren, 2012; Mangset, 2009), keeping concepts multi-layered is a way to avoid undue political interference (Carpentier, 2009).

The nodal points were earlier discussed as important signs that partially fixate the meaning of the floating signifiers. Important nodal points in the first discourse are freedom, equality and taking part. These signifiers affect the floating signifiers of participation as access and democratic value as protection of autonomy and equality. Openness is another nodal point that refers to the ability to be open to the (positive) force of culture. Openness is also a nodal point in the second discourse, but more in relation to being open to change. The society in a state of change is the important link between this nodal point and the social imaginary of this discourse. Other important nodal points are adaptation (to change) and the duality of risk and possibility that accompanies the change. This nodal point partially fixates the floating signifiers of participation as a means to societal ends, and democratic value as sustainable societies and equality in possibilities to influence.

In both discourses, the signifier "cultural participation" ranges from a more passive (taking part) to a more active meaning (participate as relating to power, Carpentier, 2016), from accessing, being an audience and to experiencing (culture), to learning, expanding minds, conversing, cooperating, influencing and creating. The "culture as counteractor" discourse generally employs the meaning of the results of participation, ranging from increased accessibility (for certain groups), to sustainability, lower thresholds,

better workplaces, less discrimination, and attractivity in a changed society fraught with risks and challenges: "Gothenburg is today one of the most segregated cities in the country. The city's work to implement its cultural and arts policy, as well as its cultural planning, is crucial for the goal of developing a sustainable city" (Kulturnämnden Göteborg, 2018, p. 9).

One articulation that both discourses have in common is that participation is something the inhabitants are primarily invited to, or hindered from, rather than something they engage in themselves.

The discourses fixate the floating signifier of participation differently. In the discourse on culture as an enabler of good things, participation is made meaningful as a democratic right. For example, the principle of the right to participate in culture is supported by the UN's declaration of the rights of children and young people in all documents. When this discourse attempts to stabilise the meaning of participation as a means to an end, it is often in terms of "contributing to reflection and critical thinking" (Proposition 2009/10:3, p. 19). In the discourse of culture as a preventer of bad things, participation is made meaningful as instrumental; as a means to democratic ends (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). The enemy of the first discourse is undue political influence over culture, whereas the enemy in the second discourse is global insignificance and the societal throes of social exclusion. Both discourses claim their relevance through resting on democratic ideals, as these examples show:

- "another way (to guarantee artistic quality) is to assert the principle of arm's length distance between politics and art. Democracy demands that the integrity and critical ability of art be defended". (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2012, p. 14)
- "democratic openness – that is, contributing to creating equal opportunities for all (...) – to participate in culture as creator, audience, and discussant. More arenas are needed to enable all citizens to participate in the discussion on the future of cultural policy". (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2012, p. 14)

The arms-length principle is therefore made meaningful as a relationship concerning the necessary distance between policy and arts, not between the arts and audiences/citizens. Another floating signifier is the democratic procedures in cultural policy, which different discourses give meaning to, and struggle over. The first discourse struggles to fixate the meaning of democratic value in cultural policy by defending the autonomy of the arts from policy, whereas the second discourse struggles to fixate the meaning of democratic value in cultural policy by giving citizens the possibility to influence. Just as the overarching discourse of culture as good for societies and, therefore, a task for policy has reached a hegemonic position, so has the discourse on the necessity of policy actions to rest on democratic ideals.

## Discussion – the desirability of participation in cultural policy

The argument of this article is that there is a break in discourse regarding the governance of culture. The limit to the analysis is the local, national perspective, but this change is discussed in various ways by other researchers (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Bonet & Négrier, 2018, Duelund, 2008, Jancovich, 2017; Mangset, 2009; Sørensen, 2016; Virolainen, 2016). This study adds an empirical, local example to this change with a discussion on the two discourses that fixate the meaning of participation in either more intrinsic or more instrumental ways.

A result of this break is that the discourse on culture is good as it prevents bad things, is gaining greater legitimacy in policy, because it has the capacity to give "discursive expression to underlying structural contradictions and strategic dilemmas in the economic and political system" (Torfing, 1999, p. 240 and following). These dilemmas above all relate to issues of social exclusion (Ekholm & Lindström Sol, 2019). This break in discourse can also be interpreted as indicating a diminishing legitimacy for a corporatist discourse of democracy where experts have the power to decide the content of cultural policy (Mangset, 2009) in favour of the more populist democratic discourse where the citizens or the audience are involved in co-deciding about cultural policy.

Discourses justify political responses and the two discourses found in the analysed documents give legitimacy to different ways of governing culture. The first discourse legitimises the continuation of state, regional or municipal support for the arts through the principle of arms-length governance, i.e. the *status quo* (Jancovich, 2017). The second discourse also legitimises the continuation of state, regional or municipal support for the arts and culture, but in a different way, namely through attempts for participatory governance, i.e. change. In a world with declining trust in democratic institutions and skewed/declining participation rates in publicly funded culture, the actualisation of participation (in cultural policy and in general) carries the hope for the deepening of democratic procedures. The value of participation lies in the way it legitimises the governance of culture in ways that correspond to the dominant understandings of correct political responses to societal challenges. What changes are legitimised? It might be too early to say, and the answer is not unequivocally demonstrated in the analysed material, but some changes we might see in the governance of culture concern redefinitions of the concepts of culture, quality, representation, audiences, and cultural spaces.

What is interesting is that the two discourses are not constructed as solutions to the flaws of the other; i.e. as in an antagonistic struggle for hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), but as if they were complementary. There is especially a tendency for the second discourse to recognise the importance of the first and to position itself as a complement, not as a perspective that should replace the first. What appears is a rather paradoxical cultural policy discourse regarding the understanding of democracy as governance (Vestheim, 2009). The potential hegemonic struggle is resolved through the traditional separation between cultural policy and arts policy in the analysed material (Blomgren, 2012).

In this separation, arts policy – with its focus on the autonomy of the arts and the state's role in guaranteeing arts producers the ability to make high-quality arts – is safeguarded from cultural policy in a political landscape where publicly funded culture is put under pressure to alleviate social problems of inequality in the city/region/nation.

The question that arises is whether discursive change can occur without instating hegemony through antagonism. A reading of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) suggests a negative answer to this question, as they define hegemonic articulatory practices as produced through the confrontation with other articulatory practices, which gives it an antagonistic character. Perhaps the two discourses outlined in this article are compatible, which is why an acceptable and unacceptable instrumentalisation of culture can be argued to be defined relationally, situated on a continuum from thin to thick governance of culture (Torfing, 1999). The argument of this article is not that one discourse should cancel out the other; neither does the article argue for a more specific definition of participation in cultural policy. The issue of participation – and democracy – is more complex than that, and the purpose of the analysis is to point out how the struggle for interpretation reveals struggles in interpreting the social order and appropriate political responses.

## In sum

Through a policy analysis of empirical data from a Swedish cultural policy context, this article aimed to discuss the meaning of participation for understanding the legitimate governance of culture, and its relation to notions of democracy. The analysis outlined two discourses regarding the societal meaning of culture; either it enables positive phenomena, or it counteracts negative phenomena in the nation/region/municipality. The two discourses fixate the meaning of cultural participation roughly according to an instrumental or intrinsic logic – as a means to an end or as an end in itself. This mirrors a rather classic instrumental/intrinsic logic in cultural policy (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Blomgren, 2012; Vestheim, 2009).

The two discourses also fixate the meaning of governance in culture differently – as either protection of autonomy, equality and participation as access and taking part (a corporatist democracy), or as guaranteeing sustainable societies at risk, and participation as equality in the possibility to influence (a populist democracy) (Blomgren, 2012; Mangset, 2009). These two understandings of democracy (interpreted as the role of the state regarding culture and the arts) proposed in the analysis are not treated as is they were antagonistic in the empirical material, but as compatible. This compatibility is possible through the meaning-making of "arms-length" a matter between the arts and policy, not the arts and audiences/the people. The policy documents also tend to separate arts policy and cultural policy and thus employ different discourses regarding legitimate governance of culture (Blomgren, 2012).

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# Active citizenship and participation through the media: a community project focused on pre-school and primary school children

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**Abstract**

The project "Educação para a cidadania digital e participação democrática" [Digital citizenship education for democratic participation], which began in 2015, currently involves around 200 kindergarten and primary school children, their families, teachers and other members of the Caneças educational community, a neighbourhood in Odivelas, Lisbon. The project's methodology is action research, its objective is to understand how a coordinated action by a school, families and the community, contributes to enabling three to nine-year-old children to become active digital citizens. This paper focuses on social participation activities of children through traditional and digital media and involves activities that include formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. Results show that social participation of children through the media increased and gradually evolved from producing traditional media content (school newspaper) to producing digital content (video). They also evidence that action research methodology, adjusted to context and deriving from prior understanding of the context, is an adequate methodology for developing this type of project. However, its adequate implementation implies the support of the school board, researchers' support to the teachers and the involvement of journalists and/or other media professionals.

**Keywords**
action research; digital citizenship; school newspaper; social participation; three to nine-year-old children

# Exercício de cidadania ativa e participação através dos média: um projeto comunitário focado em crianças do Pré-escolar e 1º Ciclo

**Resumo**

O projeto "Educação para a cidadania digital e participação democrática" envolveu cerca de 200 crianças de Pré-escolar e 1º Ciclo, suas famílias, professoras e outros membros das

comunidades escolar e educativa de Caneças, concelho de Odivelas, distrito de Lisboa. Assumindo como metodologia a investigação-ação, teve como objetivo central compreender em que medida uma ação concertada da escola, das famílias e da comunidade contribui para a preparação de crianças, dos três aos nove anos, para o exercício de uma cidadania digital ativa. Este artigo centra-se nas atividades de participação social das crianças, através dos média, tradicionais e digitais, envolvendo atividades marcadas pela transversalidade entre os contextos de aprendizagem formais, não-formais e informais. Os resultados mostram que a participação social das crianças através dos média aumentou, tendo evoluído paulatinamente, da produção de conteúdos de média tradicionais (jornal escolar) para a produção de conteúdos digitais (vídeo). Revelam ainda que um modelo de investigação-ação, efetivamente adaptado ao contexto e em função da prévia caracterização deste, é uma metodologia adequada ao desenvolvimento deste tipo de projetos. Mas o adequado desenvolvimento implica ainda apoio da direção da escola, apoio sustentado dos investigadores aos docentes e o desejável envolvimento de jornalistas e/ou outros profissionais de média.

**Palavras-chave**
cidadania digital; crianças três-nove anos; investigação-ação; jornal escolar; participação social

## Preparing participating citizens in a post-truth world

The increased production and dissemination of fake content in online social networks – in particular, so-called "fake news", a concept that refers to a new type of disinformation in the contemporary world (Bakir & McStay, 2018; European Commission, 2018; Gelfert, 2018; Guess, Nyhan & Reifler, 2018; Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2018; Unesco, 2018) – together with the normalization of hate speech (Soral, Bilewicz & Winievski, 2018) and citizen distrust of information by the media (Reuters Institute, 2018) have called democratic culture and intercultural dialogue into question (Council of Europe, 2018).

These phenomena are enabled by large-scale usages of digital technology, often by users without the skills to engage in responsible and positive civic participation. The percentage of citizens with Internet access has been expanding, mostly through mobile devices (especially among young people, who access the Internet earlier and earlier), and the frequency of use continues to increase (OberCom, 2015; INE, 2016; OECD, 2017a) – though there is still evidence of digital gaps (in terms of access, geographical gaps, etc.). However, empirical evidence has also shown the emergence of "epistemic bubbles" and "echo chambers" (Nguyen, 2018), and their connection to disinformation. This emergence is based on the "algorithization" of user preferences and enhances the circulation of fake information - due to users' lack of skills to assess it as such, reinforcing problematic expectations, preconceptions or pre-existing beliefs, the active rejection of diversity and plurality of opinions.

At a time marked by a deep crisis in social and institutional trust, this is fruitful (though swampy) ground for the dissemination of false content. Social networks and social messaging support new types of disinformation, which includes "poor", corrupted information, dependent on the "agendas" or "agencies" and/or purposely fake, as well as politically, ideologically, economically or otherwise motivated information, in order to

manipulate public opinion. This especially affects those who lack digital skills and who cannot afford quality information (Unesco, 2018). More users tend to rely on the opinions of influential groups and prioritize content that confirms their world views (Baldacci, Buono & Gras, 2017), as it is reported that fake content tends to be more shared on social networks than the most popular news stories (Silverman, 2016). Moreover, those who read fake content confirm that they believe what they read (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016). Noteworthy is the fact that, "when journalism becomes a vector for disinformation, this further reduces public trust and promotes the cynical view that there is no distinction between different narratives within journalism on the one hand, and narratives of disinformation on the other" (Unesco, 2018, p.18).

All this takes place in a world in which digital mediation has generated unprecedented levels of collaboration (Hirsjärvi & Tayie, 2011). Participatory activities are important, since they are the creative tools for citizens to become involved in the online (Middaugh, Clark & Ballard, 2017). However, research shows that these activities should not be developed on their own, but that citizens should be prepared, from an early age and throughout their lives, for "global citizenship" (Unesco, 2015), to attain "global competence" (OECD, 2016), "digital competence" (Vuorikari, Punie, Carretero & Van den Brande, 2016), in order to perform global citizenship, as defined by Frau-Meigs, O'Neill, Soriani & Tomé, as a:

> competent and positive engagement with digital technologies (creating, working, sharing, socialising, researching, playing, communicating and learning), participating actively and responsibly (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge) in communities (local, national, global) at all levels (political, economic, social, cultural and intercultural), being involved in a double process of lifelong learning (in formal, informal, non-formal settings); and continuously defending human dignity. (2017, p. 15)

Considering that children access digital devices even before they start speaking (Hooft Graafland, 2018; Jorge, Tomé & Pacheco, 2018), use them more and more frequently and develop increasingly complex practices as they grow up (Chaudron, 2016; Marsh, 2014; Palaiologou, 2016; Ponte, Simões, Baptista & Jorge, 2017; Sefton-Green, Marsh, Erstad & Flewitt, 2016; Slot, 2018), it is crucial to prepare them for civic participation in their early years, when they start to understand values and develop competences in terms of attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding, decisive for their creativity and entrepreneurship in its widest forms (in relation to, for instance, social, personal, and business spheres), having positive effects throughout their lives (Ozanus, 2017; Patrinos, 2018).

The school is not the only element responsible for preparing children, though. Family and community are also responsible, i.e., children should learn in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. This makes it crucial to develop community projects that contribute to the enhancement of teacher training, to involve parents in their children's education, as well as to innovate at course level (OECD, 2017b). These projects should include

children attending kindergarten and primary school, thus ensuring continuity between the cycles and eliminating inconsistencies in the curriculum and in the pedagogical contents in the two school levels (OECD, 2017c).

For projects focusing on active citizenship and on participation through media, one approach to be considered is the multidimensional approach to disinformation suggested by the European Commission (2018). This approach is based on five pillars: i) transparency, ii) media and digital literacy, iii) citizen and journalist empowerment, iv) safeguarding diversity and sustainability of the European media ecosystem, v) promoting research. Also for consideration are the challenges and the types of resistance that D'Ancona (2017) mentions: a critical and dialogue-type of attitude towards information, developing and promoting skills/abilities; planning and implementing policies, actions and solutions able to help citizens/consumers in validating content nature and reliability; this process includes different communication types including emotional appeals. These are the key requirements for effective social participation.

Academic debate on children and youth participation is being consolidated in the Social Sciences. The main explanation for this fact is that only after the 1990s, children were viewed as citizens with full rights and with specificities, different from adults (Landsdown, 2005). Up to that moment, the concept of childhood was closely linked to the ideas, created by Sociology and Education Sciences, that saw children as adults in the making. One explanation is that, until the 1980s, Childhood Sociology was predominantly based on Durkheim's education theory. His concept was that of an educational model centred on state regulation, which would define pedagogical guidelines that should consider the predominant values in a specific society. The school, as an agent of socialization, would create a bond to those collective rules and contribute to social cohesion. The process of child socialization was thus dependent on an "adult-centred" perspective. This viewed children as passive in the way they assimilated adult socialization rules, while more focus was given to a sociological interpretation of the role played by education institutions and by families (Van Haecht, 1994).

This rationale was reinforced[1] with the dominant role of Piaget's cognitive theory after WWII, according to which child development occurs in different stages as a result of their world experience. More critical perspectives emphasize that Piaget's theory is based on an obsessive typification of development stages, simplifying and belittling the understanding of cultural and school contexts of the students (Graue & Walsh, 2003), since it considers that "cognitive and psychological development is due to an internal process, and does not consider the wide range of historical and social relations in individual development" (Sartório, 2010, p. 225).

An interpretative model that considers the socialization process as dynamic/contextual decisively contributes to a different approach to children's learning process, as a series of interactions that required new methodological strategies for their understanding (Boudon & Bourricaud, 1982). Focus has been placed on children's reflexive practice

[1] Sartório (2010) points out similarities in the concept of learning processes by Durkheim and Piaget, in which assimilation is viewed as a coercive exercise in which the individual accommodates to existing patterns.

which, besides rule and procedure assimilation, has led to a specific understanding of this process, confirming an intersubjective interpretation of the process (Bergman & Luckman, 2010). This perspective paved the way for childhood studies in which children do not simply internalize society and culture but actively contribute to cultural production and change (Corsaro, 2011, p. 32).

This reflexive practice concept has been actively consolidated in Unicef working papers, in several projects developed with children (Unicef, 2003; Tomás, 2007), in which the concept of participation, though wide and unclear (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010), has become a starting point for the respect for children's rights and their effective civic implication (Gaventa, 2004). Hart's text, in a report solicited by Unicef, decisively contributed to understanding how child participation is created, by defining it as

> the sharing of decisions that affect someone's life and the life of the community you live in. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship. (1992, p. 5)

Based on his analysis of children's participatory processes, Hart proposes an eight-stage model, in which he established different levels of children's involvement in relation to the activities suggested by adults. To discuss which criteria allowed for the actual participation of children in the projects, he adapted Arnstein's "ladder of participation" (1969), and concluded that full involvement means that the process was initiated by the children and in which decision-making is shared with adults.

The proposal[2] led to a wide debate on the role of the school for the construction of democracy (Bae, 2009) and, therefore, questioned the role of the media in youth cultures, heavily influenced by social networks in their daily lives (Amaral, Carriço Reis, Lopes & Quintas, 2017). Since the 1970s, this understanding of the core role of the media in youth practices has become more and more important in sociological terms, when the mass media gained a significant role in young people's learning and started being seen as primary agents of socialization (Lee, Shah & Mcleod, 2012). Children and youth development are now seen as more complex and its discussion focuses on learning processes, more ambiguous and less formal, as a result of the decreased relevance of classical agents of socialization (family, school and religion gradually lost relevance and were replaced by peer groups mediated by digital tools). Such a conception introduces a logic of "mutual accommodation" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) - a sense of dynamic interdependence between the individual and the environment. This human development ecology acknowledges the importance of context, crucial for the understanding of the actions and interactions of social actors. Young people use technology and networks as tools to express themselves and to participate in social organization and mobilization (Bird & Rahfaldt, 2011), enhancing the perception that the media are powerful agents for the socialization of children and youth, crucial to the way we see the world (Giddens,

[2] To understand Roger Hart's core ideas, the development of his proposal and the criticism to his ideas, see the text by Tomás (2007, pp. 56-62).

1994; Kellner, 1995; Thompson, 1995) and act as citizens (Carriço Reis, 2009; Torney-Purta, 2002). However, a significant number of children and youths make a limited use of digital resources, being exposed to disinformation and to a high number of risks (Livingstone, 2008)[3]. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the concept of digital native,

> which is based on a pattern of digital socialization since birth, technological mediation enabling youths to take the most of digital resources, including being aware of the risks of their use. Empirical studies deny these perceptions and reinforce the need for public policies that may contribute to reducing the risks and widen the use of digital tools for civic participation, for example. (Rivera Magos & Carriço Reis, 2019, p. 158)

Based on these assumptions, we set up the action research project "Educação para a cidadania digital e participação democrática" (Digital citizenship education for democratic participation, 2016 -2018) in Caneças, Odivelas, in the north of Lisbon, aimed at mobilizing a school, families and the community in preparing three to nine-year-old children to be active and participating citizens.

## Methodological approach

This article reports on an action research project, on school and community intervention aiming to develop civic participation skills in children living in low-middle-class environments. It aimed to understand these children's self-perception regarding citizenship and civic participation, which would help us to evaluate the contributions of school and family to the participatory process:

> action research is, in fact, a social intervention that implies not only describing and theorizing on a social issue in people's daily lives but solving that issue; it is practice-theory that changes reality and contributes to overcoming a situation-issue. (Melo, Filho & Chaves, 2016, p. 159)

Understanding this issue allowed us to understand the potential for, and restraints of, action and to open a dialogue that allows for designing activities for these specific children. The synergetic process, mediated by the researchers, aimed to contribute to a harmonious collaboration among all those involved in the civic education of the pupils, as "children need to build their knowledge in a social and pedagogical context that supports, fosters, facilitates and celebrates participation, i.e., a context that participates in the construction of participation" (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2011, p. 27).

The action research project allowed for the implementation of a set of civic involvement practices by children. At the end of the project, the referred practices were assessed in terms of the attained results (Lewin, 1965). This assessment required the need to understand how the developed activities fed the children's interactions with their families

[3] See also this *EU Kids Online Report* available on http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/eu-kids-online

and the school: "the idea that children simultaneously contribute to both cultures (theirs and that of the adults) is especially important" (Corsaro, 2011, p. 95).

In short, the project's core objective was to foster children's civic participation, by using tools associated with media literacy strategies (Alon-Tirosh & Lemish, 2014; Bird & Rahfaldt, 2014). We acted as mediators in a cooperative dynamic (Cunningham, 1993), working in the school/family contexts. Through the reflexive process we realized how children developed a collective awareness of the participatory process, which led to a link with the community via a school newspaper, designed to challenge their surroundings towards active civic participation.

The following analysis will describe in the project and the research strategy in detail.

## Action research in a context

The project had the following core research question: "does an integrated approach that involves the school, the family and the community prepare three to nine-year-old children for being active and effective digital citizens?" The project followed the model by Sefton-Green et al. (2016), shown in Figure 1, according to which, in order to be active citizens, children must mobilize three cross-sectional and interconnected areas: the operational (to read, write and interpret media messages), the critical (to critically interact with digital texts and products) and the cultural (to interpret and act in specific social and cultural contexts).

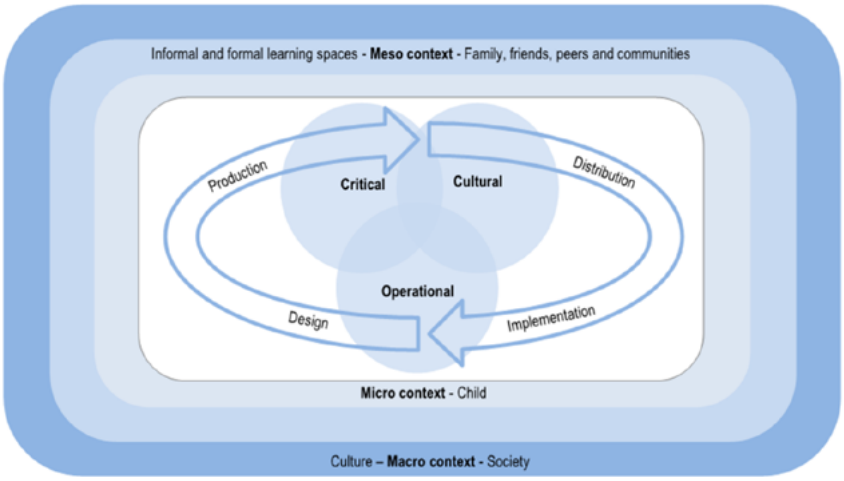


Figure 1: Areas, decision levels and framework of children's digital literacy practices
Source: Adapted from Sefton-Green et al. (2016, p. 18)

When interacting with and through the media, children operate in these three areas and make decisions at four levels: design (if the message is multimodal or not); production (how they create the text); distribution (which channels to choose) and implementation (imagine how recipients will interpret the message considering their background).

All these processes are located within frameworks that influence children's digital literacy practices, usually the micro framework (the child), the meso framework (formal and informal learning contexts, family, friends and the local community) and the macro framework (society as a whole, the nation-state).

The project aimed to understand children's media uses and practices, the effects of such practices in their learning, in their literacy, in the way they understand the world, in their social relations and in their social participation, as well as the effects of the use of digital equipment on their overall education (Sefton-Green et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this paper focuses on the social participation activities developed in the scope of the project, involving the children in their family, school and community contexts.

## Procedure

Between March and December 2015, we organized a teacher training course on Digital Citizenship and Democratic Participation, which was accredited by the Scientific and Pedagogical Council for Continuous Training. The team produced data collection tools and presented the project to schools in Odivelas, in cooperation with the municipality. Between January and February 2016, we conducted a training course for the teachers on organizing and implementing social participation activities using the media, involving pupils, families and the community. In the end, eight teachers in a school in Caneças, attended by about 200 kindergarten and primary school pupils, accepted to be part of a community intervention project. Our first step was to characterize the context in order to define our intervention strategy. The context was described based on: i) a questionnaire completed by 24 of the 25 teachers that attended the training (10 kindergarten and 15 primary school teachers), focused on digital media uses and practices, the perception of the pupils' media use, perceptions on learning potential, risks and opportunities; ii) a questionnaire completed by 38 guardians[4], focused on digital media uses and practices, perception of children's media use, perceptions on risks and opportunities, on learning, as well as on parent mediation; iii) interviews (with scripts adapted from Chaudron, 2015) with 38 children (22 were four to six years old and 16 were seven to 10 years old). The interviews had three parts: an ice-breaking dialogue; a part on personal data; and the main part on media and practices, with usage observations whenever possible, evidenced skills, parent mediation and family rules; iv) field notes resulting from visits to the school and different contacts with the community (operational assistants, school psychologists, school nurse, among others). The data collected were processed using the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (quantitative data) and the software Atlas.ti (qualitative data).

[4] Some of the questions were adapted from Mathen, Fastrez & De Smedt (2015).

## Results

Results show that guardians and teachers were more focused on the risks than on the opportunities that digital media offer to children. This was a generalized concern, regardless of the social and economic level and the family structure, which was very different among the pupils. In terms of net monthly income, four families had an income below 600 Euro, eight had an income up to a 1.000 Euro, 10 between 1.000 and 1.500 Euro and seven between 1.501 and 2.000 Euro. Only six families had a net monthly income of 2001 Euro or more. Three opted not to reply to this question. In terms of family structure, six children lived with their mothers, eight were only children living with both parents and the remaining lived with both parents and had at least one sibling. This difference allows for understanding the results in describing the context, which we summarize here:

### The teachers

- all used the internet, television and radio (frequency of use was similar among them) and only two did not have a profile on social networks. Newspapers and magazines were mentioned but they were used only occasionally;
- only eight out of 24 stated they accessed the internet on their smartphones, mostly accessed it through their laptops;
- all of them thought that digital media had pedagogical potential but their use in the classroom was rare or merely functional (the mobile phone was mostly used for taking photos). And if 11 of 14 primary school teachers said that they used a computer in the classroom, though not frequently and never by the pupils, only one kindergarten teacher said the same. Among the reasons for this rare use of the computer, the teachers mentioned the lack of means and of technical support.

### The guardians

- all used the internet, television and radio (the frequency of use was also similar among them), only eight used social networks. Newspapers and magazines were rarely mentioned and used only occasionally;
- three out of four stated they accessed the internet on their smartphones, but they mostly accessed it through their laptops;
- according to them, children had learned to use digital media with their mother (26) and/or father (20), with other family members (12) or friends (two). Only one guardian stated that his son had learned how to use the computer at school and nine stated that the child had learned on his/her own, which is consistent with the idea that learning takes place by imitating adult practices, through trial and error, or learning through games' interactive tutorials (Edwards et al., 2016);
- all stated they watched television with their children and 34 said they went with them to the cinema (30 at the weekend). Only 16 read books with their children and only 15 read newspapers or magazines with them;
- parent mediation was lower in the use of mobile digital media. While 31 stated they researched online with the children (26 only during the weekend), only 14 played video games with them (13 only did it in the weekend). According to the parents' perception, their mediation practices included restrictive (implying usage restraints), active (implying debate with children) and joint use mediation (implying the use of both parents and children). We must, nevertheless, exclude the lack of mediation or distance mediation in some cases (use of media as baby-sitter). However, we found no clear evidence of mediation through participatory learning, in which parents and children debate media

use, learn about it together and define media use strategies (Zaman, Nouwen, Vanattenhoven, de Ferrerre & Van Looy, 2016).

### The children

- all watched television (36 did it every day) and used YouTube, but the frequency of use was varied. Next came digital games (only three of them did not play), and the internet in general (five did not have Internet access at home). Printed media, online social networks and blogs were not used daily;
- 18 out of 38 accessed the Internet on their smartphones. Computer tablets were the most popular (33 in 38); 17 preferred the console:
- the time children spent using digital equipment increased during the weekend. If, from Monday to Friday, three children did not use it and 19 only used it up to an hour per day, they all used it during the weekend and only 12 used it up to one hour, 10 (in contrast to four during the week) used it for two to four hours and seven (in contrast to 1 during the week) for more than four hours.

Teachers and parents rarely talked about the children's media usages and practices. When so, digital media were always negatively referred to (used for too long, video game addiction, the dangers of the internet). And if 33 of the 38 guardians said they talked with their children about digital media, the most common topics of these conversations were use restrictions and risks. Thus, though digital media use was high and frequent among adults and children, there was an excessive concern with the risks while the potentials of those media were neglected, namely in terms of social participation.

## Intervention plan

Considering the context of the project, in which there were digital gaps (five families did not have internet access at home) and there was no dialogue and reflection among parents, teachers and children on media uses and practices, we organized an intervention plan whose main objectives were to boost the critical analysis and reflexive production of media messages, children's civic participation and social intervention.

In September 2016, at a meeting between lecturers and researchers, it was decided to create a printed school newspaper with four main goals in mind: i) reinforce the link between the school, the families and the community; ii) ensure that children have the opportunity to express their opinion through the media; iii) reinforce their critical sense in relation to the media and to social issues; iv) foster democracy at school and in the community.

Aware of the contradiction of having a project on Education for Media Citizenship based on traditional, printed media, the project team nevertheless decided to implement the project, as this was the only way to overcome the limitations of its context. The first step was to select the name and logo for the newspaper by means of a contest, open to all the pupils. The name most voted was *O Cusco* (The Busybody). The graphic design was offered by a company. Printing (250 copies) would be sponsored by the Odivelas municipality.

For the first issue of the newspaper – which included news on school activities – pupils and teachers prepared several interviews on the theme of "being a digital citizen". Kindergarten pupils interviewed parents and grandparents about what toys they had when they were little and what games they played. First and second-year pupils asked parents and grandparents what the media were like when they were children. Third and fourth-year pupils organized debates on media development. One of these debates was marked by the question: "teacher, what was the internet like in the past?". This generational activity contributed to the pupils' better understanding of how the media, toys and games had developed. It allowed for dialogue and reflection at the school, in the families and in the community. Children participated and intervened, especially after the first issue of the newspaper was published.

Each edition was always prepared by all the teachers. The school coordinator would collect all information and would coordinate the layout of the newspaper. The draft layout of the newspaper would then be analysed by the team, which would then suggest alterations. Afterwards, the newspaper would be printed. The newspaper was first distributed at the school and among the families, and, from the second issue onwards, in the educational community as well, at the end of each term.

The project officially ended in February 2018, but the teachers continued to produce content for the school newspaper and new issues were published in March and June. This paper presents a set of social participation activities which were published in the school newspaper.

## Social participation activities

Considering that there were acts of indiscipline and violence at the school, the teachers decided to focus on this matter in the second issue of *O Cusco*. Fourth-year pupils filled in a questionnaire, in which participants were asked to choose one of four positions regarding nine acts of violence among children (Flowers, 2007, pp. 85-88). The team adapted the questionnaire, which the parents were then asked to fill in. The data were processed and discussed with the pupils, who produced a text for the newspaper, to which a text written by the researchers was added, as well as a one by the school psychologist. The pupils expressed their opinions on bullying and other types of violence and exchanged ideas with adults on these matters. This process evidenced effective participation, social intervention at school, family and community levels, as the newspaper was starting to be distributed by the teachers among the several other schools in the school group, in public service facilities and in some of the busiest areas in the neighbourhood of Caneças.

In March 2017, the children attending the kindergarten discussed human rights and the rights of the child. One of the kindergarten teachers took a rabbit to school, inside a wooden box, and told the children to think about the animal's needs, imagining that it was alone in the world. The children named the rabbit "Pantufa" (Slipper), the most voted name, and listed all its needs, including home, family, and food. Next, they were asked to think about a child, instead of a rabbit. Using drawing, the activity allowed

to stress that the interests of children come before those of adults (Article 3), that their right to life is inalienable (Article 6) as is the right to express their opinions and, furthermore, that their opinions should be considered regarding any matter that concerns them (Article 12). These ideas were reinforced in the school newspaper for the adults to read.

"Castles in Portugal" was another topic. It led fourth-year pupils to build models of Portuguese castles using recycled material. The pupils decided to show them to the community and organized an exhibition at the library, wrote summaries on the history of each castle and created paper and online invitations, as well as a poster to advertise the exhibition. The visitors could choose to leave a message in the exhibition book and to vote for their favourite castle. On the last day of the exhibition, the ballots were counted. The pupils organized the event, which involved the community, learned to organize a simple voting event and to understand the importance of each vote.

In June 2017, in compliance with new legislation which stipulated that recreation time in the school yard was pedagogical time, pupils submitted proposals for changing their school yard (consisting of a football field and areas surrounding the primary school, where there was no equipment at all). The kindergarten children drew a yard with wooden treehouses, swings and slides, whereas the primary school children claimed a swimming pool, a disco and even a circus. Second-year pupils wrote to the local authorities - the mayor of Odivelas and to the president of the União de Freguesias de Ramada e Caneças – and concluded their letter saying: "we would just like to be heard and that our requests are taken into consideration when you consider and are able to renovate the school, which belongs to everyone but is mostly from the children". Both the drawings and the letters were published in the school newspaper. In 2018, the children would again rethink the school yards and the school by building a model with the help of one of the children's mothers (an architect) and the husband of one of the kindergarten teachers. The photo of the model would be the headline of the June issue of *O Cusco*.

In 2018, the pupils' interests for current affairs together with the critical analysis of the news led to a news program, hosted by the children, to be produced and video recorded. On a Friday, all the primary school children were asked to choose a piece of news that interested them, a task they could carry out with the help of their family, friends or other people. On Monday, the topics of the news were listed on the blackboards of the classrooms and the pupils voted on the news they considered most relevant. The 16 most voted pieces of news were selected, which the pupils presented to the teacher by answering four questions: "Which piece of news did you choose and what was told there?"; "Do you usually read, listen or watch the news?"; "Where did you watch/hear/read this piece of news?"; "Why did you choose this piece of news?". The host of this first news broadcast, which the pupils called *Telecusco,* the first show in Cusco TV, was a female pupil. The images were recorded with a mobile phone and edited using Movie Maker. The pupils debated current affairs and involved their families and members of their community. They stated that they were interested in the news (only three said they were not), regardless of the place the news referred to, they consumed the news on multiple platforms (the TV is predominant but the radio, the Internet, the newspaper

and even family members were mentioned) and they were mostly interested in negative news (e.g. a plane crash in Iran, two fires and an accident in Portugal, the murder of a child in Brazil, American parents who kept their children locked in their home for years, a lady in Caneças who disappeared, violence in sports and in court, a bomb explosion in the Ukraine, the collapse of a waste dump in Mozambique that caused 17 casualties, the floods in Paris). The video was watched by the children, as well as by the parents, to whom the need was reiterated to talk about current affairs with their children, since many of them found it difficult to understand what was being said, as the news have adults as their target audience.

## Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

The project "Educação para a cidadania digital e participação democrática" [Digital citizenship education for democratic participation] had two main outcomes. On the one hand, it increased children's participation and social intervention, thus contributing to the development of their citizenship skills. On the other, it became a sustainable project, taken on by the school, which has continued to develop digital citizenship skills, by continuing to publish the school newspaper, nowadays considered the newspaper of the school and educational community, where it is distributed for free.

Children's social participation has increased in and outside the school, in collaboration with the teachers, the families and the community. Therefore, the project allowed children to move from non-participation (first three levels) to clear involvement, meeting the upper levels of Hart's "participation ladder" (1992). The developed activities placed pupils at either level six (activities started by adults in which children have decision-making power) or seven (activities started and led by children).

In accordance to the teachers' perceptions, interaction in formal, non-formal and informal contexts has contributed to shaping the children's practices as citizens. However, they participate mostly through traditional printed media, which gradually changed to digital media, with the production of a video news broadcast. This situation can be explained due to the lack of equipment and to teachers' limited skills in digital media production.

Therefore, although adults and children are active and frequent users of digital media, this does not mean that they are ready to produce (more complex forms of) media content. And even in regards to producing for traditional media, the fact that the intervention methodology was action research, with the involvement and support given to the teachers by the researchers, was crucial for the newspaper to become a reality. This evidences that these kinds of projects must include frequent and significant support provided to the schools or institutions they are being developed in.

The projects must also have the support of the board of the school group (Agrupamento de Escolas), which was essential in this case, at least one teacher must coordinate the project in the school (in this case, it was the school coordinator) and, if possible, include at least one media professional, who can assist teachers and pupils in producing

media content, as was the case in this project. Moreover, this project is not complete, as a second stage is necessary that will involve more researchers and media professionals who can train children to deconstruct and analyse media content, as well as produce content considering adequate techniques and ethical and deontological aspects.

We should also add that the project and its results were limited by a set of factors, including that of having been developed in a specific context, which means that its results cannot be extrapolated to other contexts. Participants of this study were those who voluntarily accepted and/or those authorized to participate, which means that the results may have been different, if other individuals, even if they came from the same context, had been involved The results are based on teachers' and guardians' perceptions and on data collected by the researchers through tools adapted or designed by them and not validated for the Portuguese population. Finally, in regards to participation, the activities were designed to impact on the 200 pupils attending the school and not on each child individually. On the one hand, the context was characterized by the participation of only 38 of the 200 children, some of whom (those attending the 4th grade when the project started) were not present during the second year of the project. On the other hand, the focus was on creating the conditions for pupils to actively participate through the media rather than measure that participation individually.

Why is it then so relevant to rescue that participation? Because we need to preserve democracy, which is more than a form of political organization. Democracy is participation and strive to action, which are crucial in today's global context, where institutions are disintegrating and democratic practices are lost due to the breaking of civil bonds in local communities and to individuals forgetting the existence of a common ground between opposing political perspectives. Jenkins affirms this, adding that "right now, around the world, democracy needs our help" (2019, p. 7). This help is required from everyone, even of those still in their cribs, who should be prepared to become participating citizens throughout their lives, and prepare their children as well. This is only made possible with community projects that involve the school, the families and the community (Heckman & Karapakula, 2019).

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# The practice of mediated participation in Indonesian marginalised communities

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**Abstract**

The question of participation has often been asked as an issue of degree, namely how much members of a society are allowed to have a voice in their collective life. Rather than evaluating the degree of equality reached between actors, this article attempts to identify existing practices that contextualise participation, and thus enable and constrain it. Two case studies, involving marginalised communities in participatory film production, were analysed: a community of believers in a traditional religion (penghayat) in Elu Loda and a community of people with disabilities in Salam Rejo. These communities were observed during their participation in film workshops, from October 2018 to February 2019. Fourteen participants, two facilitators, and one programme officer of the sponsor were interviewed. In addition, participants and a selection of community members who interacted with the process were invited to fill in a questionnaire designed to elicit their communicative practices in relation to storytelling, making pictures, and community meetings (Elu Loda n=49, Salam Rejo n=31). We studied how personal stories were circulated in these groups and how some individuals used the film as a channel to distribute their version of the stories, while still their collective way of storytelling was disconnected from the workshop. Second, we learned that culture shaped how certain people become more visible than the others and how these people developed skills to be more visible, which opened the door to their participation. Third, the participants' embeddedness in their culture and community affected what aspects they were inclined to participate in and for what reason: in the workshop's technical know-how and/or in the content.

**Keywords**
marginalised communities; media-related practices; participatory media

# A prática da participação mediada em comunidades marginalizadas na Indonésia

**Resumo**

O tema da participação tem sido frequentemente questionado em termos de abrangência, nomeadamente quanto ao número de membros de uma determinada sociedade que têm voz enquanto coletivo. Este artigo, ao invés de avaliar o nível de igualdade entre atores, tenta identificar práticas correntes que contextualizem o processo de participação, tornando-a, desse modo, possível e limitada. Foram analisados dois casos de estudo que envolvem comunidades marginalizadas, durante um projeto de cinema participativo: uma comunidade de fiéis de uma religião tradicional (*penghayat*), em Elu Loda, e uma comunidade de pessoas com necessidades

especiais, em Salam Rejo. Estas comunidades foram observadas durante a sua participação em oficinas de cinema, entre outubro de 2018 e fevereiro de 2019. Foram entrevistados 14 participantes, dois facilitadores e um representante do patrocinador do programa. Além disso, os participantes e alguns membros da comunidade que estiveram envolvidos no processo foram convidados a responder a um inquérito criado com o objetivo de pôr a descoberto as suas práticas comunicativas relacionadas com a narração de histórias (*storytelling*), registos fotográficos e reuniões comunitárias (Elu Loda n=49, Salam Rejo n=31). Estudámos o modo como as histórias pessoais circulavam entre esses grupos e como alguns indivíduos usavam o cinema como veículo de apresentação da sua versão das histórias, enquanto a sua forma coletiva de contar histórias permanecia desligada do workshop (oficina). Percebemos ainda que a cultura formata o modo como algumas pessoas se tornam mais visíveis do que outras e como estas desenvolvem competências para se evidenciarem, o que abriu a porta à sua participação. Por fim, descobrimos que a imersão dos participantes na sua cultura e comunidade afeta os aspetos que despertam mais o seu interesse e por que razão: o saber técnico da oficina e/ou o conteúdo.

**Palavras-chave**
comunidades marginalizadas; média participativos; práticas mediáticas

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If I were blind, touch your eyes
If I were deaf, touch your ears
If I were lame, wash your feet
Ephphatha!
Because I am you
You are me
Because we are of one dignity
Because we are of one plan

This poem was recited by a half-deaf girl who was practising for her performance on "World Disability Day". The words were inspired by stories from the *Bible*, which people in her community knew well, from their weekly Sunday church service. The poem also borrowed several words from the promotional material of the programme that sponsored the participatory film in which she was involved. The poem is a collage, a patchwork of existing words, both sacred and promotional. Each word is taken from its previous context, but in a clear case of intertextuality, its meaning is transferred into the new text, producing new meanings. It is an apt metaphor for participatory processes, in which participants carry over their experiences and stocks of cultural knowledge and put them together, under the guidance of facilitators. But at the same time, it is only pertinent to ask: Were these participants not already someone before their involvement in a participatory film project? Had they not done something before this? This study is an attempt to answer these questions.

## Mediated participation and the decline of democracy

The question of participation has often been asked in terms of degree, namely as the question to what degree members of a community or group are allowed to have a voice in their collective life. From a normative perspective, Arnstein (1969) asks what participation is and then elaborates a model that has become, e.g., in development studies and but also in development projects, a classic model of citizen participation. Arnstein's model situates citizens in an antagonistic relationship, which consists out of the powerful and the have-nots; the ladder is arranged vertically to signify the degree of control that citizens have in the decision-making processes. In her view, only the highest three rungs of the ladder count as true participation, whereas the other (lower) six rungs are labelled tokenism or nonparticipation. The model is useful for evaluative and reflective purposes, but, it also has its limits. In Arnstein's own words, the model explicitly does not consider "political socioeconomic infrastructure and knowledge base, plus difficulties of organizing a representative and accountable citizen's group" (1969, p. 217).

Carpentier (2011a, 2011b) proposes a different model of participation, where access and interaction are defined as participation's necessary preconditions, but are still considered to be distinct from participation. For him, access and interaction cannot be equated with participation since those two preconditions lack the critical element of power-sharing. Hence, in the AIP model (Access, Interaction, Participation) Carpentier echoes, in a different way, Arnstein's approach, as he too reserves the space of participation for "real" power struggles, an inevitable consequence of grounding participation in democratic theory. He warns, though, that participation can never be considered a fantastic place where all power struggles have been resolved by a fully equalitarian relationship between all actors. In a contemporary context, the focus is placed on changing elites "to allow for power-sharing" (Carpentier, 2011b, p. 26). His proposal is to focus on the analysis of specific cases, because these participatory processes are "characterised by specific power balances and struggles at different levels, moments, and locations" (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013, p. 267). The aim is to capture participation's "complexity - and the contradictions that trigger it" (2013, p. 267). Complexity seems to be crucial for understanding participation, because of its multidimensional, multilevel, and dynamic nature.

Carpentier (2016) further develops his analytical framework by viewing participation as a process with several subprocesses, sometimes without clear-cut overlaps between these components. In addition to attending to its contingent, multi-layered, and complex characteristics, the model takes the "material and discursive struggles" (2016, p. 77), that are intrinsic to a power struggle, into account. The result is a multicomponent (Carpentier calls them levels) model that consists of the analysis of 1) context (the process and the fields in which the process is situated); 2) actors; 3) decisions; and 4) power relations. He suggests breaking the (analysis of the) participatory event down into

twelve subcomponents. The model is more complex than Arnstein's ladder of participation, or than Carpentier's own AIP model. It is fine-tuned to address the intrinsic issues of participatory analysis and the first attempt to apply it seems to capture what it aims to portray (Yüksek & Carpentier, 2018). The model's strength, in our view, might become its weakness since the model is highly descriptive, complex, and hence will probably be most useful in analyses where the researcher has a deep knowledge of the local context. We see the merit of using such dynamic and complex framework; however, as a reminder, because participation is located in the intersection of theory and practice, it is arguably better to create a meaningful conversation between the two by using less expansive vocabularies, with a strong orientation toward real-world concerns and expectations.

This is a point that also Dagron (2007) makes, when he asserts that participatory projects are inextricably connected to the participants' lives. In his view, reflecting on his decades-long community media activism, participation was used to "refer to a wide diversity of experiences" that can confuse those who "have had little experience at the grassroots level" (Dagron, 2007, p. 197). Further, he warns against the "academic exercise of including some and excluding the rest" and being "not really representative of what is actually happening on the ground" because participation deals with "processes of communication, that is, live social organisms" (Dagron, 2007, p. 198). Rather than using an idealised model, he advocates for models that describe "the struggle of community media as a tool of social change, education, entertainment, socialization of knowledge, economic development, and so on" (Dagron, 2007, p. 202).

According to some of the work done in democratic theory, the best way for citizens to learn about participation is by participating in civic activities (della Porta, 2013). In fact, it was the recognition that "democracy is in crisis" that led some authors to study participation in the first place (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2007; della Porta, 2013). For example, della Porta writes that "saving democracy would mean going beyond its liberal model, broadening reflection on participation and deliberation inside and outside institutions" (2013, p. 2). She pinpoints participation as one of the two – deliberation being the other – defining characteristics of democracy. Couldry, Livingstone and Markham also "look for social preconditions of declining engagement" (2007, p. 14). These studies reflect the authors' deep and long concern about the decline of citizens' political engagement as indicated by low rates of electoral participation.

In our study, we largely follow Dahlgren's (2003) direction, to study civic culture, which is concerned with "how people develop into citizens" (2003, p. 153). This focuses on the daily life of citizens, rather than on the formal procedures of institutionalized politics. This approach is aligned with what Postill (2010) defines as "the embodied sets of activities humans perform with varying degree of regularity, competence and flair" (Postill, 2010, p. 1). We borrow Postill's notion of "media-related practice", and use it – quite loosely – by expanding his definition of media. This expansion means that we view

theatre (with its focus on storytelling), and written documents (in particular in relation to community meetings) as relevant media. These media-related practices were brought together in two participatory film workshops (see below), which became the object of our study. Through the analysis of these workshops, we aim to capture the complexity of participation in an Indonesian context.

## Participation in Indonesia

In the past 20 years, Indonesia has undergone a radical transformation from dictatorship to democracy. Meanwhile, political participation, as measured by party membership, has shown a sharp decline, similar to that in many western democracies. Muhtadi (2018) shows that party membership fell from about 10% in 2004 to 1,5% in 2014. However, electoral turnout had remained steady at 72% when compared to the previous elections (Nurhasim, 2014) and rose to 81% in the 2019 presidential elections. These numbers indicate that Indonesia has experienced some decline in democratic participation, but also that its citizens still believe in the procedures and idea of democracy. There are, however, quite a few differences when comparing Indonesia's political development with that in western democracies. Indonesia's current trajectory of democratisation did not start with the rise of a strong, politically independent and progressive middle class, or any "structural change ahead of democracy" (Törnquist, 2013, p. 6) as some theorists have argued. Rather, it has emerged from a struggle amongst elites, and between them and a host of "dissenting actors, social movements, civil society organisations" (2013, p. 11).

Amongst several criticisms that Törnquist has launched against democratic assessments based on the liberal model, one is particularly relevant here, namely the critique on the "superiority of the liberal democratic model (and the related constitution of the demos and public affairs)" (2013, p. 12). He writes that the model ignores other institutions, "rules and regulations related to participatory democracy, deliberation in Muslim communities or communities run according to customary law" (Törnquist, 2013, p. 13). What Törnquist argues is similar to the position developed by Menchik (2016) in his study of tolerance within the largest three Indonesian Islamic organisations. More specifically, Menchik argues in his book that Indonesian democracy could develop without liberalism. The Indonesian state is, according to Menchik (2016, p. 12) "a religious-secular hybrid that makes the promotion of values like belief in God and communal affiliation a major goal for civil society and the state". Our intention here is not to echo Menchik's argument of the centrality of religion in Indonesia, but to disentangle the concept of participation from its roots in liberal political theory, in which individual rights and identities are of utmost importance and serve as the basis of one's interest in taking part in decision-making processes. We follow and expand Menchik's argument that the strict

separation between individual and communal issues is not a universal phenomenon, and, in many places, communal concerns take precedence over the individual ones. In addition, it is the individuals' involvement and the deployment of their skills in communal and cultural activities that prepare them for their participation, in the maximalist sense of the concept (Carpentier, 2011a). What we want to argue here is largely similar to Dahlgren's (2003, 2006) view of culture and everyday life as the "training ground" (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 272) for participation. The difference lies in our emphasis on specific practices that are communally accepted and reinforced, and that provide participants with the motivations, identities, and skills to enter into and be able to fully engage in participation processes.

In our study, we want to focus on participatory video, which has been used in Indonesia since the 1980s, by activists and media professionals, as a method for people's empowerment. The Kunci Cultural Studies Center and Engage Media (2009) surveyed the landscape of participatory video and found that it was quite sparse, consisting only of three organisations that specialised in participatory video production. However, many more production workshops have been held by civil society organisations that were run on an ad hoc basis, although documentation about these workshops is often lacking. The participatory video project that we studied was part of a larger program where the Indonesian coordinating ministry of social welfare had been working in partnership with the Asia Foundation, with the Australian government's financial support, to widen access for those who were structurally marginalised, in a variety of ways.

Its programme officer said that, for this project, they were actually experimenting with the medium of participatory video since they had never before substantially used the genre of the feature film in their work (interview on 13/10/2018). The experiment was motivated by the unexpected success of a book-writing workshop about the history of the village of Salam Rejo where *penghayat kepercayaan*, believers in a traditional and "unofficial" religion[1], lived. This book-writing workshop, held in 2017, ran for more than six months and involved 15 teenagers who were trained to interview key informants about the history of certain landmarks, cultural practices, and founding members of their village. It resulted in a local history publication, in the form of a pocket book, that was then distributed for free to the people of the village. Although fraught with delays and disagreements over the accuracy of the book's narrative and the choice of informants, its final version was accepted with the acknowledgement of the village administration and the village's key figures. The interview process that allowed teenagers to interact with people outside their own groups, and the village meetings with different groups that were organised to discuss the results, created a sense of togetherness. The local religious leader in the Salam Rejo village took part in directing the project, provided information regarding the history of their village, and was profiled in the book as one of

[1] Indonesia has six official religions (*agama*), including Islam and Protestanism, but also a large number of non-official religions (*kepercayaan*). The latter sometimes face marginalisation in Indonesia (see Crouch, 2016, Mutaqin, 2014).

the elders of the village. When the book was finally finished, it was highly appreciated by other villages in the same regency[2] and their village head was frequently invited to give talks about the project, and to make suggestions on similar projects. The believers were given a seat in development consultations at the level of the regency, and have worked with other groups (mostly adherents of Islam, the major official religion of Indonesia) to create economic initiatives, related to village tourism and food catering.

The book project inspired the programme officer to consider other media forms, to document and portray how frictions and exclusions work in the everyday life of marginalised groups. It is difficult to capture this adequately in programme reports, which focuses on the indicators, whether or not a programme has met its objectives. Without recognising and acknowledging that some groups were barred from participation, or from public services, due to their identity, and without rendering the conflicts and the tolerance visible, their voices would not be heard. Telling their story in the form of book, and then a film, was seen as a form of struggle because in certain cases the fight was not only structural, but also symbolic.

## The case study

The Asia Foundation partnered with the NGO Tumbuh Sinema Rakyat [Tumbuh the People's Cinema] to recruit communities of *penghayat* in Salam Rejo, which is part of the Kulon Progo regency on the island of Java, and communities of people with disabilities in the village of Elu Loda, situated in the Sumba Barat [West Sumba] regency on the island of Sumba. The workshops lasted from mid-October 2018 until February 2019. The feature film format was chosen because its long duration afforded the inclusion of different people and a representation of the variety of circumstances in which different challenges manifested themselves. However, the film format also presented specific challenges, at the narrative and technical level. Consequently, the participants only took part in the pre-production and production phases, whereas the post-production phase was under the full control of Tumbuh Sinema Rakyat. The reasons for this decision was that the sponsorship brought about time limitations for the project, and that the technical masteries that were required for the post-production phase were considered to be beyond the participants' capabilities.

One workshop was conducted with fourteen disabled and non-disabled members of the Elu Loda community in the West Sumba regency. It is relatively underdeveloped and underserviced when compared to the western part of the country, where economic development is concentrated. The village of Elu Loda lies on karst hills and its lack of fresh water meant that its people, including children, have to walk or use their motorcycles to fetch one or two cans of water. The houses are built using low-cost manufactured

[2] Regencies are second-level administrative units in Indonesia, directly situated underneath a province.

materials, such as concrete brick for the walls and zinc for the roof, rather than the wood and palm leaves that were used in the past. The village is quite new; only seven years ago it became a separate administrative entity, being separated from a larger village. The people mostly live off the land, growing corn, upland rice, soy, and caladium roots, which mainly serve their own subsistence. In addition, they habitually, rather than industrially, raise pigs, which could be found at every house and are also used in rituals. Since their daily lives revolve around their land, which does not need intensive care, they generally live unhurriedly and have ample time for socialising.

The second workshop was conducted in Salam Rejo and involved thirteen people, consisting of *penghayat* and non-*penghayat*. Salam Rejo has the characteristic look of a community in transition, shifting from a rural and traditional way of life to an urban and modern lifestyle. In general, the houses are largely constructed from manufactured components, such as cement, glass, concrete bricks, steel, and ceramics. The majority of village residents no longer relies on their land for their livelihood. They work as manual labourers, craft producers, contract workers for the local government, or selling different types of services. Since many of the participants are still young, they went to school in their regency and to university in Yogyakarta, the province capital, riding motorcycles on the smooth asphalt road that connected their village to other parts of the province. Their daily life cycle followed the rhythm of urban work hours, from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon, making it rather hard to allocate a convenient time for the workshop.

## The workshops

The workshops started with teaching the basic concepts of audio-visual storytelling, where participants created a simple plot. Then participants learnt how to tell a story by writing their own story or by "interviewing" another participant and writing up his or her story, and then vice versa. The personal stories were related to the theme of the workshop, namely inclusiveness in society. Next, the facilitator-cum-director considered all these stories, and the authors of those stories (called story owners) that were considered to have potential were then invited to a small workshop to provide more details. He then brought all these different stories into a coherent narrative, which included more than one storyline. He used the participants' core story lines, core characters, but put them in a new story world. Rather than being a full movie script, the end result of this process was a story treatment, comprising scenes that specified the characters, their actions, location, and time, without dialogue. This was a method intended to reduce the production time and budget, and the participants' workload. Furthermore, the approach involved using real characters (story owners), real locations (with minimal modification), local language, and their own dress and make-up.

The story owners were (partially) anonymised in the film by adopting new, fictional names. However, other participants and the community knew that the film was about his or her real life. After all, the film was intended for a larger audience, the workshop would eventually result in the participants' private lives being revealed to the public. Moreover, as this article will point out later, the films were an opportunity that the marginalised communities could (and would) use to their advantage. Locations were sought in the participants' local areas and selected based on how convincing these houses and other locations were in relation to the story and characters, in combination with artistic considerations pertaining to the film. For example, many shots were taken in outdoor locations in Sumba, which is known for its vast savannah, blue sky, and dry environment, so that it was convincing that the film scenes were set on this island, with these shots also having an aesthetic dimension. In addition, the local language was used in both films, although in Sumba not all film facilitators spoke that local language, which meant that they had to consult with a local interpreter to gauge the dialogue, and in the end relied more on the authenticity of the actors' expressions. Their authentic dress and make-up also created a more local look and greater credibility of their characters for the films' audiences, although sometimes the actors needed guidance when they became slightly over-enthusiastic and dressed themselves up more than was required.

## Data collection and analysis

This research asks what and how existing community practices are connected with the participatory film workshops. To obtain a fuller understanding of the communities and appropriately locate the workshop within the participants' daily life, participant observations were conducted during almost four months of the process. The first author (of this article) observed the workshop in Salam Rejo, from preparation to production (himself only minimally participating), whereas the second author observed both the Elu Loda and Salam Rejo workshops, with moderate participation as a temporary crewmember and also as a cast member with a small role. During the observations, the authors took notes on the processes and conducted mostly individual, semi-structured interviews with participants (n=14), asking them about their previous media-related practices (story-telling, making images, and community meetings) and how the new skills were already, or were going to be, incorporated into their lives. The interviewees were selected based on their intensity of participation in the workshops and their time availability. Due to the authors' language limitation, Elu Loda informants were interviewed in Indonesian, which for some of them presented considerable difficulties, whereas Salam Rejo informants were interviewed in Indonesian or Javanese, whichever was easier for them. In addition, we interviewed, and had discussions with, often in informal settings, the director, a facilitator of the participatory film project, and the senior programme officer from the

donor organisation. Many follow-up interviews were conducted, by private messaging, to verify and obtain fuller details in relation to our observations.

Interview and observation are common data collection methods in the studies of participation *in* and *through* media (see for example Carpentier, 2011a; Evans et al. 2009; Gutberlet, 2008; Mistry, Bignante & Berardi, 2014; Singh, High, Lane & Oreszczyn, 2017). Furthermore, some authors also used diary writing to gain insight into the subjects' experience in temporal dimension (Couldry et al., 2007; Shaw, 2016). Survey methods are less often employed in these researches, possibly due to their aim of revealing insights into the subject's experience rather than portraying their general characteristics (in contrast with, for example, Couldry et al., 2007). In this study, a survey is used to better grasp the practices of the larger communities wherein the two participatory video projects were situated.

Participants and some community members who interacted with/in the process were invited to fill in a questionnaire designed to elicit their habits of storytelling, making pictures, and community meetings (Elu Loda n=49, Salam Rejo n=31). Using a convenience sample, the community members who lived close to the shooting locations and attended community meetings were selected. This created similar characteristics for the participants, in terms of sex, age, and educational background, although there were difference between the two villages. For example, in Elu Loda the selected participants were older (M=38), than those in Salam Rejo (M=26). This difference also applied to the workshop participants. This convenience sample was not designed, and cannot claim, to be representative of the whole population, but the survey was necessary to ground our interpretation. The questionnaire statements (n=26) were grouped into inquiries about their speaking habits, their writing habits, their involvement with the community, and their multimedia-specific skills, namely making photographs and video recordings.

Numeric data were analysed to describe the community's media-related practices. Furthermore, the interview transcripts and field notes were systematically coded to understand the two communities' practices before the workshop took place and how they incorporated the new skills they had acquired from the workshop. As our analysis is embedded in the workshop project, our findings are mostly applicable to the workshop participants, rather than to the larger community.

## Community participation and media-related practices

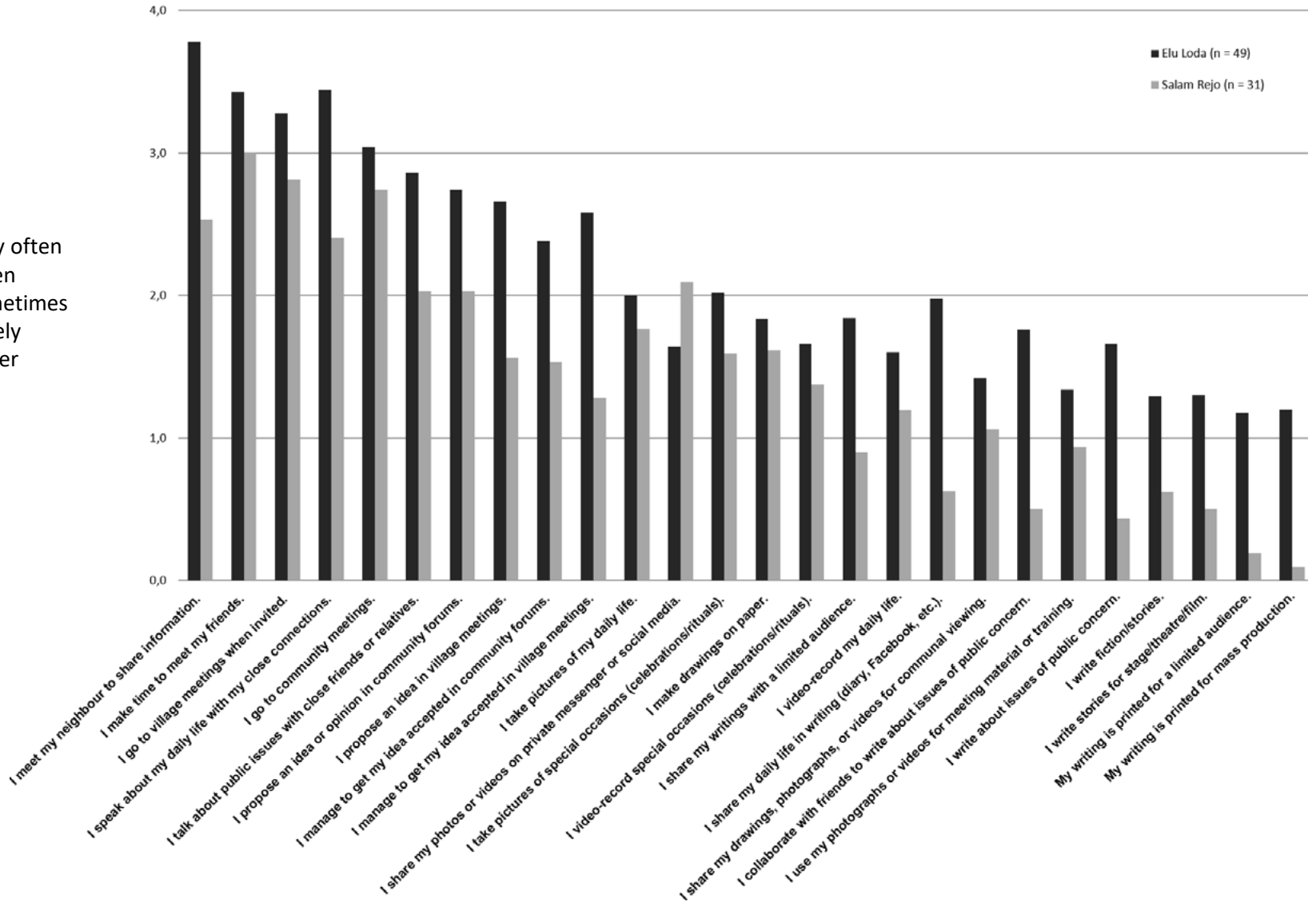
Based on our survey in both communities, we obtained a rough picture of both communities, their similarities and differences, in terms of how the community members participate on issues of common concern.

Our initial observations made it quickly clear that community members in Elu Loda and Salam Rejo naturally focused on issues affecting their own communities and situated

within their immediate social surroundings. The questionnaire responses show clearly that the meetings with their closest family and neighbours were the activities that had the high frequencies (see Graph 1). Slightly less frequent, although still categorised as "often", was joining in community and village meetings, which means that, for Elu Loda and Salam Rejo members, their community was important as well. When comparing both cases, Elu Loda community members are seen to have scored higher on communal activities. They actively contributed suggestions and followed the decision-making processes in community meetings, whereas Salam Rejo community members still chose to be present, but were less active in these meetings. This might be due to the fact that the Salam Rejo's respondents were younger (M=26) and therefore might not consider themselves as full members of their community, whereas the Elu Loda respondents, being older (M=38), were more likely to be fully embedded in the life of their community.

Face-to-face meetings and immediate forms of interaction were still the respondents' cardinal means of participation in public life, whereas other media-related practices were less frequently used. Elu Loda respondents "sometimes" wrote about public issues and "sometimes" it reached a limited audience. It was beyond the bounds of their daily lives to think of reaching wider and more general audiences, discussing public issues. Based on our observations and the survey data, we know that they used smart phones to browse and chat on Facebook and private messaging services, enabled by recently installed telecommunication services, in addition to communally watching soap operas at night, due to the limited number of television sets in the village. The authors' observations and interviews revealed that they seemed to be more interested in soap operas than evening news. Respondents in Salam Rejo were slightly less interested in mediated participation with public issues (Couldry et al., 2007) than those in Elu Loda. Respondents in Salam Rejo sometimes used their smartphones to take pictures and videos of their immediate surroundings or special events, but only rarely in relation to public issues. We will explore their reasons later, but it is clear from the survey that access to and interaction with (Carpentier, 2011a, 2011b) a wide variety of media were no longer a problem to Salam Rejo respondents, yet participation in public issues was still beyond the horizon of their attention and interest.

4 = Very often
3 = Often
2 = Sometimes
1 = Rarely
0 = Never




Graph 1: Media-related practices of Elu Loda and Salam Rejo community

It is safe to infer, based on the survey data, that the media practices in which the respondents engaged were shaped by their communal life, especially in the case of the Elu Loda respondents. Geographically, Elu Loda was also more "isolated" from the city; although it was already connected to the regency capital, economic activities were more oriented toward their communal life, and those with the city were sparse. On the other hand, Salam Rejo was economically and geographically connected to Yogyakarta and other regencies within the province with better and wide-reaching infrastructure. For this reason, and also because Salam Rejo respondents were mainly young, they were less defined by their communal life. Although they scored differently on the degrees of intensity, in both cases media-related practices were not merely based on personal preferences exercised by unconnected individuals, as they often are in more urban and western societies. Rather, these media-related practices were informed by the community as to what was considered relevant or not, and what was perceived as normal or not. For example, it was highly implausible for Elu Loda community members to become youtubers or vloggers on other platforms, although the technical instruments and infrastructure allowed them to do this, at least to an extent. What was missing was the motivation – no one would encourage or appreciate it, at least at the moment – to try these new forms of expression and to make contact with (potential) audiences (which might come mainly from the outside). This was different from the attitude among the Salam Rejo youth who did not see anything extraordinary in being youtubers, with at least one participant trying to become one. Yet, their more communal practice of film-making was meant to be watched by their friends in the village, even though uploaded to YouTube. Another indicator of their sense of communality, and the limits of their field of practice, was that all of their amateur videos were shot within the area of their village and were about their own community.

The differences between the two communities in which media they preferred, but the similarities in the limits to their attention, underscore the question of "participation in what". The kinds of practices that communities accept as normal, or even desirable, serve as reference points for individuals who are socialised to consider, accept, modify, ignore, or reject. This is not an argument for cultural determinism, where culture is *the* underlying force that determines identities, agendas and behaviours. But it is also unreasonable to think of individuals as disconnected from their social contexts and individually creating their own predispositions, tastes, subjectivities, and values. Instead, we argue for taking the middle road, by positing that through the lens of media-related practices we can see participation as part of larger processes, not a single event, with processes that are layered and that unfold themselves in a longer temporal dimension. The concept of practice focuses our attention on what is a quite structured, embodied, and stable engagement with the world (Postill, 2010). Rather than analysing the struggle between asymmetric power holders, we look at the asymmetry in relation to the skills that individuals hold through regular practices long before the participatory processes under analysis took place.

These practices are grouped into three types, each focusing on particular aspects of the media-related practices that are relevant to participatory film-making. First, film-making is concerned with the story, as it is essentially what strings together shots (with their images and sounds) into a film. In the case of these particular workshops, due to their method of collecting bits of story from participants' experiences and weaving them into more extended narratives, it is important to analyse the communities' practice of telling personal stories. Second, embodiment and how individuals present themselves, to be seen by others, are important to understand how these amateur actors successfully act in these films. Finally, their practice of participating in community meetings is analysed to understand the choices they made regarding how they want to be represented in the film. The data for these different analyses came from the field notes and semi-structured interviews with participants and workshop crew members.

## Personal stories and collective storytelling

Living in a communal society means sharing more of what we normally consider to be private, with others, including property, food, time, and personal stories. The act of sharing personal stories does not have to be deliberate since the web of connections between the community members is usually dense enough to allow bits and pieces of information to circulate to the peripheries. This point was supported by some participants; they claimed not to like or easily share their personal stories but the workshop facilitators were able to obtain details of their stories from almost anyone else in the group (male facilitator, interview on 21/12/2018). The major problem for the owners of such stories was not their distribution, since it was preventable nor stoppable. The problem was that they felt that they did not have control over their stories. The film's narrative, which was woven with their personal stories, provided an opportunity, though. It was exemplified by one participant: The film allowed her to tell "the real story of my [life]" and what she had been yearning to tell was "finally heard" (female participant, interview, 10/1/2019). Another participant also entrusted the story she had tried to keep to herself, although further observation confirmed that others already knew about it, at least partly (female participant, interview on 22/11/2018). In the workshop, the facilitators tended to gravitate more toward those who revealed more about themselves, since this would provide enough material for them to work with, in order to produce a more complete narrative plot. The participants who contributed their personal stories were aware that in the future this film would be viewed by strangers and anonymous audiences. This caused them anxiety, which in one case prompted the story owner, a divorcee, to negotiate with the film director, outside of the forum, what parts should be included and how she would be depicted. Actually, they had composed their own version of the story during the story workshop, but the director often added narrative elements to make the characters believable and relatable to audiences. These additions were not necessarily based on reality because the end result would be presented and promoted as fiction. This tension between

participants and workshop facilitators was a lingering issue, which was resolved in this particular case (with the agreement of both parties), but demonstrated the need for more developed deliberative-participatory framework to resolve these kind of discrepancies and tensions in a more structural way.

At the collective level, interesting similarities and contrasts emerged between the Elu Loda and the Salam Rejo communities, including both the marginalised and the non-marginalised members. These two communities had developed some practices that they could use in order to speak about their community. The Elu Loda community was relatively homogenous in its religious practice, with the Protestant church as its central institution. As part of its religious rituals, for example, during their Easter and Christmas services, they produced short dramas based on relevant pericopes from the *Bible*. The workshop participants expressed their enjoyment in playing roles in these dramas but also their struggles to memorise the dialogue. The same cultural narrative was also developed by Salam Rejo community, in the form of the local history book that was mentioned earlier, and which was about their origins, their places of collective memory, and the founding members of their community. The book became a foundation for their successive cultural celebrations and efforts to promote inclusivity, such as the National Festival of Local Wisdom and annual village day. However, in both films this potential remained untapped. The workshop film did not use the elements related to Elu Loda's religious drama, either its artistic forms or the story. The participants' previous acting experiences (in their local drama) were not explored or used further. The same happened with Salam Rejo's local history. While the book-writing workshop was successful in enabling the participants to move forward with a more inclusive agenda, their rich stories and characters were not incorporated in the film.

This is a missed opportunity since the Elu Loda community still produces these dramas. If they would have been used and adapted in the film, the community could then have used their film workshop experience to further develop their religious drama. This would be a more realistic alternative, instead of making more films of their own, which would be very difficult for them, considering their lack of technical and economic resources. In contrast, Salam Rejo's practice of writing their cultural history has stopped. Some of the young amateur "historians" have left their village to pursue higher education and better employment opportunities. Interviews with those who participated in both the local history workshop and the film workshop revealed that they were no longer practising their writing skills (male and female participants, interview on 9/1/2019). Their new institutional environment required nor supported their former practice.

We can see from the examples that the cultural practice of storytelling, both at the personal and the collective level, has trained the community members to participate in film production. It has enabled them and, at the same time, structured their choices into what is culturally acceptable and how to do it. In a communal society, telling one's personal story is both a personal and social, if uncoordinated, decision. Oftentimes, this puts individuals into the defensive position of trying to mitigate the damage that social

storytelling has done to their reputation. However, existing practices of collective storytelling can also be incorporated into participatory media processes, to the community's benefit, once they have mastered the skills and the narrative.

### Visibility and social casting

The initial design of this research attempted to explore how people adopted different technologies to create visual images, that these people then used to participate in public discourse about their common concerns. However, the survey and observations revealed that these technologies were only minimally used to address public issues. In addition to the lack of attention as an explanation for this, one participant offered another – quite revealing – reason. The former leader of the youth organisation in Salam Rejo said that he dared not raise attention to social issues for fear of inciting negative comments from other people. He only used it for posting news of cultural events as part of his job role in the village administration (male participant, interview, 9/1/2019). Because of this finding, the authors then shifted their attention to the related question of how participants made themselves visible to the public, inside and outside of the film workshop. This question is relevant for two reasons. One is that publicness requires visibility of the agents (Sorlin quoted in Dayan, 2001, p. 746) and the other reason is that the medium of film itself is visual. Thus, visibility to the naked eye and to the camera's eye is constitutive for participation in public issues through film.

The disabled community members of Elu Loda were previously situated in an unfavourable position since they had remained hidden by their families until after a campaign initiated by NGO activists only seven years before (female participant, interview on 13/11/2018; female participant, interview on 30/11/18). Not everyone was discouraged by their family's feelings of shame and one member, at least, managed to gain a basic education, earn a living and to build a family himself (male participant, interview on 27/11/2018). However, generally, the disabled community members had previously been relatively invisible, except for two siblings who were albinos. They were easily noticed in public and felt no inhibition about participating in public activities, only hindered by their hypersensitivity of direct sunlight, which was aplenty in Sumba. The community perceived them as "almost normal" because, although their hair and skin looked abnormal to them, white skin was esteemed locally. Furthermore, somehow these siblings had developed a different and more fashionable style of dress as compared to the community standards. Not only the young female's willingness to provide a very complete description of her life story, but also hers and her brother's albino skin and fashionable clothing made them stars of the Elu Loda film. We would argue that it was not their physical appearance per se that made them noticeable, but their difference from the others, which was largely a cultural construction. Theoretically speaking, the same condition, in a different context, would have yielded different outcomes. Because this particular film told stories of disabled people, the siblings were, more than others, asymmetrically

positioned to participate. Based on the combination of their skin condition and skilled practice of dressing they were almost impossible not to include.

There were also other examples of how the evaluation of physical appearance is cultural, but also how it generated particular predispositions in relation to this film workshop. The casting of the Salam Rejo film happened at the same time as the director was weaving together the story threads. As the director elaborated the story details, developing more characters and scenes, the cast grew. The casting principle was either to mould the film characters to fit the person, or to look for a person with similar characteristics to the character. Usually the film crew went down the first route, since all of the actors and actresses were amateurs. However, for the Salam Rejo film, the crew wished to include a fictional character, someone who looked good on camera and would provide the film with a modern and fresh appearance so that the issue of traditional religion would not be negatively associated with backwardness and primitivism. They initially selected one young woman to play the character, but the way she presented herself was considered not modern and fresh (enough). They then invited workshop participants to nominate their friends and acquaintances. In response, the participants browsed their picture folders and social media accounts on their smartphones and put forward what they thought to be suitable candidates. This process of browsing through the photographs, finding the ones that were considered to match the criteria (good-looking and outgoing), and then proposing and discussing the candidates again, show how visibility and values of good-lookingness work together in order to open the door for participation. In the casting, the selected candidate proved to be adept at presenting herself before the camera, as indicated by her various items of clothing that could be mixed and matched, to create differences in her appearance. Again, the point here is not about her intrinsic qualities, but about her relative difference from the others, and how this was perceived and appreciated, that made her impossible to overlook.

## Being and participating in community

As was stated earlier, one characteristic shared by both cases was the participants' engagement in communal life, although this varied in intensity. Workshop participants did not relinquish their social standing upon entering the workshop; on the contrary, once inside, they reproduced and continued to draw on their social standing. The Elu Loda community had, to some degree, solved their problem with the social inclusion of disabled people, at least to the point where they had appointed a person with a disability as leader of the neighbourhood association, and disabled people were represented in the consultations on development planning, from the village to the regency level. Hence, the disabled participants were more interested in the technical aspects of the production rather than in the film's theme. For example, acting without beforehand memorising the dialogues left quite an impression on many participants, due to their experience with acting for drama. On the other hand, the Salam Rejo community had only started to work on

equal opportunities during the past two years, after their successful collaboration with the village administration to publish the local history book. The community of *penghayat* was also starting to be invited into the development plan meetings, again from the village up to the regency level. However, underlying this promising turn of events was a lack of cooperation between the adherents of the official religion and the believers of the traditional religion. Whereas the process of story development in Elu Loda went smoothly, it was more protracted in the Salam Rejo workshop, with more intense discussions, formal and informal, between the sponsor, the community, and the film professionals. The point of disagreement was mostly centred around the question whether love stories in the film would end in break-ups, or in the submission of one belief to another. A liberal solution of leaving the matter to the individuals was just not an option. This was because break-ups would be interpreted as promoting exclusivity, rather than inclusivity, whereas submission would be interpreted as inequality amongst beliefs. At the end, an agreement was reached to end the movie without full resolution, so that the audience would take the question home rather than responding to it with agreement or disagreement.

Javanese communal values which prioritise harmony rather than open conflict have shaped the way that the equalisation of power relationships works. We agree with Menchik (2016) that different religious communities are essentially tied together in an agonistic relationship, at least in terms of their truth claims, but in reality the believers want their social life to be in harmony. For example, the *penghayat* did not find problems in mixing their rituals with those of the Protestants. They tend to prefer not to have their belief stated on their ID, although the law now allows them to do that. Why is it important to discuss this in relation to the issue of participatory film making? Because this was exactly what the Salam Rejo community members communicated during the workshop as an important issue. According to some participants this was also important for the period after the film's production, when the result is screened and the participants symbolically 'make their case' in front of the larger communities. It goes beyond the technicalities of film-making and how much they are allowed to participate in the production; it has to do with their core identity and their core relationship with their community. In other words, the question of participation in participatory film involves not only how groups, positioned in differential power relations, work together on a collective project, but also how the relationships with other, more antagonistic, groups will work beyond the workshop. After all, the aspiration of the participants was to communicate a positive image of the *penghayat*, rather than disrupting the harmony in the communities where they live. From the participants' viewpoint, their embeddedness in their social relationships, before, during, and after the workshop, both with their fellow participants and with their communities outside of the workshop setting is of the utmost importance for them.

When the workshops were over, the participants returned to their former social positions, as village officers in Elu Loda, members or leaders of the youth organisation in Salam Rejo, NGO activists, or regular residents in one of the two communities. In these capacities and roles, they already knew how to navigate, negotiate, and accommodate

different interests in various settings, such as in consultative meetings on development planning, in organising festivals, administering public services in the village, and organising protests. The participatory film workshops provided them with additional technical and rhetorical skills that they could then use for individual and/or collective purposes, such as economic and career advancement, identity cohesion, self-representation, and, not least, artistic enjoyment. It is in these various regards that the importance of participation – we would like to argue – can be appropriately evaluated. And, we should add, the equalisation of power is not a purely formal measure (where everyone is allocated a vote), or considered culture-free.

## Conclusion

This article argues that we need to better understand the preconditions that shape the structure and dynamics of participation. Our two case studies explored the cultural practices that connected individuals with the public world, and there are three key findings that came out of our analysis. The first finding concerns how personal stories circulated in these communal groups and how some individuals used the films as a channel to distribute their perspectives. The communal ways of storytelling, that were used in the village before (drama and local history writing) gained little from the workshops, as the films did not sufficiently use and integrate them, thereby disconnecting the films from the already existing communicative practices. Second, these two case studies demonstrated that culture shaped the participants' opportunities for visibility, and how some participants developed the skills to become more visible, which further facilitated their participation. Third, the participants' belonging to their culture and community transcended the temporal frame of these workshops. In other words, there was community life before and after the films. This affected what they wanted to participate in, for what reasons, and whether they were more interested in the technical know-how and/or the content. These practices of storytelling, becoming visible and community life are cultural aspects that deeply impacted on the community members' position in the participatory film workshops. Marginalised communities and facilitators need to engage with these three practices, on their own or in collaboration with others, in order to maximize the benefits gained from their involvement in participatory processes. On the basis of our two case studies, we argue for situating participation within wider and long-term community practices, to avoid that participation becomes seen as an end in itself, instead as a practical framework to achieve individual, communal, and common goals.

At the same time, our analysis demonstrated that the participation of marginalised communities in media production remains important, for two reasons. First, their participation provides the external world with an opportunity to listen to their voices, which otherwise would not have been as authentic or as precise if they were spoken on behalf of them. Second, participants are able to learn new skills, that they can use, later on, to negotiate their relations with dominant groups. Finally, research on participation

and participatory research are also relevant for the academic community itself, as these types of research keep the study of media, communication, and culture grounded in the perspective, and in the interests, of those who participate. It forces us to remember what our research is all about.

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# Participation and intangible cultural heritage: a case study of "*Tava*, place of reference for the Guarani people"

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**Abstract**

The category of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), recently institutionalized by several countries (2000, in the case of Brazil) and, internationally, by Unesco (2003), requires the participation of groups and communities in the identification, safeguarding and maintenance of their heritage. Due to the recent nature of these policies, there is still only a small number of studies examining the levels and strategies of participation used in determining ICH. More recently, Rodney Harrison (2013) argued that is important to study not only the participation of humans in heritage processes, but also, especially in indigenous contexts, the participation of nonhumans. In order to contribute to these discussions, the article describes and analyzes the patrimonialization of the ruins of the São Miguel Jesuit-Guarani Missions, located in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, as "*Tava*, Place of Reference for the Guarani People". The process lasted a decade and initially encountered some resistance from the Guarani. However, the establishment of reciprocity and affinity relations between indigenous and non-indigenous agents, the recognition of ICH's political potential and the influence of spiritual aspects, including nonhumans, promoted the participation of the Guarani, who proved to be essential actors for the identification and registration of the cultural landmark in 2014.

**Keywords**
Brazil; dialogical heritage; Guarani; intangible cultural heritage; participation

# Participação e património cultural imaterial: o estudo de caso de "*Tava*, lugar de referência para o povo Guarani"

**Resumo**

A categoria de património cultural imaterial (PCI), institucionalizada no início deste século por diversos países (no ano 2000, no caso do Brasil) e, a nível internacional, pela Unesco (2003), exige a participação dos grupos e comunidades detentores dos bens culturais na sua identificação, salvaguarda e manutenção. Devido ao carácter recente destas políticas patrimoniais, ainda existe um número reduzido de estudos que reflitam sobre os níveis e estratégias de participação utilizados no PCI. Mais recentemente, Rodney Harrison (2013) defendeu a importância de não só estudar a participação de humanos nos processos patrimoniais, mas também, nomeadamente, em contextos indígenas, de não humanos. Com o intuito de contribuir para estas discussões, o artigo descreve e analisa a patrimonialização das ruínas da Missão Jesuítico-Guarani de São Miguel, localizadas no estado brasileiro de Rio Grande do Sul, enquanto "*Tava*, Lugar de Referência para o Povo Guarani". O processo durou uma década e encontrou inicialmente diversas resistências por parte dos Guarani. Contudo, o estabelecimento de relações de

reciprocidade e de afinidade entre agentes indígenas e não indígenas, o reconhecimento das potencialidades políticas do PCI e a influência de aspetos de ordem espiritual, incluindo de não humanos, promoveram a participação dos Guarani, que demonstraram ser atores essenciais para a identificação e registo do bem cultural em 2014.

**Palavras-chave**
Brasil; Guarani; participação; património cultural imaterial; património dialógico

## Participation and intangible cultural heritage

The category of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) was institutionalized at the beginning of this century, at the international level, through the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Unesco (2013) and, at the national level in Brazil, in 2000, through the National Program of Intangible Heritage (PNPI), coordinated by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN). Unlike tangible heritage, ICH can only be registered and safeguarded if it is part of the active life of groups and communities. For this reason, national and international ICH legislation introduces significant innovations in recognizing the crucial role of participation, of groups and communities, in ICH production, identification, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation (Blake, 2009). This innovation also stems from criticisms on tangible heritage policies that are exclusively regulated by the state and scientific experts (Harrison 2013; Smith, 2006) and from the need to develop "bottom-up" policies that recognize the knowledge and experience of the heritage holders (Herzfeld, 1991). This approach has become increasingly important in managing the dissonance inherent to heritage, particularly in plural societies (Ashworth, Graham & Turnbridge, 2007; Ashworth & Turnbridge 1996). In any case, as in other contexts (Cooke & Kothari, 2004), the use of participation has also been criticized because of the risks of its instrumentalization by the state or certain agents of the communities, and because of the dangers of essentializing and reifying concepts such as group, community and culture (Bortolotto, 2014; Noyes, 2006).

However, at the institutional level, and in most studies on this topic, participation in the ICH has only been equated in terms of human action. Drawing on the works of Bruno Latour and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and his work with Aboriginal peoples in Australia, in *Heritage: critical approaches*, Rodney Harrison (2013) expands on the idea of participation in a constructivist perspective in order to include the participation of nonhumans and things, and proposes the concept of "dialogical heritage". According to this thesis, heritage is not constituted by the attribution of meaning by human minds to objects and practices, but emerges in an interactive and mutually constitutive way through the relations established and continually reconstructed between humans, human and nonhuman, and between these and inanimate objects. This way of thinking the world breaks with the Cartesian divisions of mind/body, nature/culture and human/

nonhuman, and is based on a "connectivity ontology" that urges us to analyze how the connections between different elements construct the whole. As Deborah Bird Rose (2011) argues, "connectivity ethics are open, uncertain, attentive, participatory, contingent. One is called upon to act, to engage in the dramas of call-and-response, and to do so on the basis of that which presents itself in the course of life" (Rose, 2011, p. 143). Harrison further argues that the expansion of the concept of participation can promote the creation of "hybrid forums" in which experts, non-experts, humans and nonhumans participate in the construction of heritage in order to foster a "dialogical democracy". In short, if heritage is ontologically dialogic, it is essential to understand, as we will examine in this article, the participation and mutual influence of humans (experts and non-scientific experts), nonhumans, and things.

With this in mind, the article aims to understand how ICH emerges through the relations established between these various actors, describing and analyzing the case study of the IPHAN's patrimonialization of the ruins of the Jesuit-Guarani Missions in São Miguel as "*Tava*, place of reference for the Guarani people". Currently, the Guarani inhabit an extensive area of South America, including Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and the south and southeast regions of Brazil. Those who live in Brazil are divided into three groups: Kaiowá, Ñandeva and Mbya. This classification was proposed by Schaden (1974, p. 2) based on linguistic and cultural differences, but it is also recognized by the indigenous people, although the use of the ethnonyms may diverge, as is common in the case of native classifications (Castro, 2002a). The article, as do the Guarani themselves, alternates between the terms "Guarani", "Mbya" and "Mbya-Guarani". In methodological terms, the work used ethnographic observation among Mbya-Guarani and other actors, such as the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Video in the Villages, interviews with indigenous and non-indigenous participants, and archival research.

## The Jesuit-Guarani Missions and the Guarani that never left

The ruins of the Cathedral of São Miguel are part of the Jesuit-Guarani Missions built during the 17th and 18th centuries in the southern cone of America under Spanish rule. The purpose of the Missions was to "civilize" and catechize the indigenous peoples, mostly Guarani, in order to assimilate them as "productive" subjects of the Empire (Ganson, 2003). In 1750, Portugal and Spain signed the Treaty of Madrid, which updated the Treaty of Tordesillas, and determined that the former would transfer the Colony of Sacramento to the latter, in exchange for the territory corresponding today to, approximately, the southern and interior states of Brazil. In the twentieth century, these structures were classified as heritage by the nation-state (1938) and Unesco (1983). In both cases of patrimonialization, the supposedly civilizing dimension of the Society of Jesus was emphasized and the contribution and agency of the indigenous people ignored[1].

[1] For a more detailed analysis of the non-indigenous heritage discourses and images on the Jesuit-Guarani Missions, see "O Plano, o "Contraplano e o 'plano sem plano': imagens ocidentais e os Mbya Guarani das Ruínas de São Miguel" (Lacerda, 2018a).

Until recently, historiography and heritage discourses argued that the missions under Portuguese command had been quickly abandoned and that the remaining indigenous people had assimilated with the migrant population of the region. However, recent studies, including the work developed during the ICH recognition process, indicate that the structures continued to be used until the mid-nineteenth century, and that a part of the indigenous population took refuge in places far from colonization, continuing to frequently visit the Missions' ruins (Batista, 2015). In the 1990s, a group of Mbya-Guarani settled more permanently in São Miguel. In 2000, through the intervention of several non-indigenous allies of the Mbya, the Rio Grande do Sul State Government purchased the area of the Inhacapetum Indigenous Reservation where that group founded the Tekoa Koenju village. Due to the small size of the reservation, indigenous people continue to sell handicrafts at the São Miguel Archaeological Park to buy food and other subsistence products (Lacerda, 2018a).

## National Inventory of Cultural References

The PNPI established the Register of Cultural Goods of Intangible Nature and the National Inventory of Cultural References (INRC), as a methodology for mapping the cultural goods. The INRC consists of several steps: preliminary survey; identification; and documentation. The IPHAN Superintendent of Rio Grande do Sul (IPHAN-RS), Ana Lúcia Meira, proposed the application of this instrument to the minority populations of the state which had not been considered with regards to the processes of tangible heritage. Taking into consideration that the Cathedral of São Miguel is one of the main symbols of that state, and that the presence of the Mbya selling handicrafts at the Archeological Park was controversial at IPHAN, Meira, together with fellow historian Beatriz Muniz Freire and the anthropologist that worked at the main IPHAN office, Ana Gita Oliveira, decided to implement the INRC with this population. The government agency established a protocol with the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), and hired a team of anthropologists. This group was led by Catafesto de Souza, who had already worked in the areas of archeology and anthropology in São Miguel, namely with the Guarani population (Souza, 1998).

Right at the first meetings, Catafesto de Souza warned IPHAN that the Guarani are a reserved people due to the colonial and racist persecutions they suffered and continue to suffer, and because conviviality with the *jurua*, that is to say, the nonindigenous people, is dangerous in cosmological terms for their good living (Pierri, 2018; Pissolato, 2007). However, in recent years, due to the consecration of indigenous rights in the 1988 Constitution, the Guarani initiated a process of opening up to civil society in order to fight against the racism they are a target of, and to claim the demarcation of their lands, using policies of objectification of culture (Handler, 1988) or "culture with quotes" (Cunha, 2008), such as the recording of a music CD and regular presentations of the children's choir in the public market square of the state capital, Porto Alegre (Pires,

2007). Although the Guarani are one of the most numerous peoples in Brazil and have a continental presence, the demarcated lands are small and those that were bought by the states, such as Inhacapetum, are not recognized as such by the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI). In addition to the cross-cutting problems of indigenous peoples in Brazil, this situation is exacerbated by the intense agricultural colonization in the south of the country that has pushed the Guarani into increasingly small areas of forest, sometimes on the other side of the border, or, as the Mbya, who do not accept the territorial limits imposed by the nations say, "on the other side of the river". This conjuncture causes the national society to call them "foreign", "Argentine" or "Paraguayan" and to not recognize their right to land.

For these reasons, in spite of the distrust caused by the sudden interest of the state, that is, the IPHAN, to hear them now, after centuries of colonization and racism, the Guarani agreed to participate in the INRC when they recognized in the new category instituted by the state, heritage, the political potential to defend their land rights. Even so, when they became aware of IPHAN's inability to deal with these issues, they demanded the presence of FUNAI representatives at every meeting organized during the INRC. In order to guarantee the involvement of the Guarani and to establish relations of reciprocity and affinity between indigenous and non-indigenous agents, IPHAN-RS promoted and financed Guarani meetings in several villages, and anticipated some ICH safeguard measures (e.g., financial support for the naming ritual [*nheemongarai*], the construction of prayer houses [*opy*], and filmmaking workshops).

The team of anthropologists faced other dilemmas on the ground. According to the official documentation of the PNPI, the ICH must be owned by the community of a certain "site". However, the Guarani are characterized by their multilocality (Pissolato, 2007), that is, by traveling frequently between villages for, as they say, "visiting relatives", and changing their place of residence several times during their lifetime[2]. In addition, the socio-political unity of the indigenous peoples of the lowlands of South America is not, contrary to common sense, the village, but the extended family, constituted by networks of affinity built through marriage, commensality and conviviality. In this sense, as the team of anthropologists argues in the report of the identification stage (INRC, 2006), and other evidence presented later corroborates[3], the most appropriate translation of the concept of community to the Guarani way of life would include all the individuals of this people that live in several villages and states.

Nonetheless, at the beginning, the study was conducted solely with people living in the INRC-boundary site: the ruins, where the Mbya sell handicrafts and Tekoa Koenju, where they live. Due to the small size of the indigenous lands, a village is often divided

[2] This mobility is also based on the Guarani *ethos* of following the conduct of the deities who, like the sun (*Kuaray*), every day brings light and life on his course from the east (where *Nhanderu Tenonde* lives) to the west (where he visits the god *Tupã*).

[3] The demand for the expansion of INRC to the other Mbya villages in Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay during the "First Meeting of Indigenous Peoples and Heritage: the Mbyá-Guarani and the Missions" and the proposal to register *Tava* as belonging to all Guarani and not exclusively to the Mbya.

politically into several large families. According to the anthropologist Daniele Pires (2007), of the INRC team:

> from the political point of view, the village was divided into two groups at the time of the research: those who supported the then chief Floriano Romeu (Verá Xondaro) in his practices of co-opting politicians in the region, accepting resources from them in exchange for votes from the indigenous people, of not sharing with all the resources destined to the whole community, etc.; and those who revolted and stood against the cacique and his supporters because of these practices. The latter claimed to be more concerned with *Mbyá rekó* in the way of treating the people, not having an interest in accumulating money, always trying to be close to *Nhanderu* (god/our father), saying that greed for money is a *juruá* thing and that the *Mbyá* who enters this game is moving away from *Nhanderu*, is lost, is sick. (Pires, 2007, p. 96)

Thus, as Carlos Moraes, another anthropologist from the INRC team, summarized: "what was in fact in question was a dispute between two large families, who, due to lack of space, were forced to occupy and divide the same area" (Moraes, 2010, p. 35). During the INRC, a case occurred that uncovered this problem. At one point, Catafesto de Souza asked IPHAN for the main Mbya interlocutors to be paid as researchers. Since they did not have an individual taxpayer's registry (CPF)[4], the number of another Mbya was provided, whom should have transferred the payment to them, but did not do so. Catafesto de Souza went to the village to solve the situation, but was prevented from entering it. From there on, the research was suspended in that space. On the other hand, the INRC report (2006, p. 8) does not mention that episode and refers to "a series of contradictions, generated by the doubt about the benefits of applying the INRC", which would have been caused by external agents and which culminated in the substitution of the cacique because of interferences of political parties in an election year. Due to this obstacle, the INRC team extended the project to other villages with which they had affinity due to projects developed jointly with UFRGS and Cacique José Cirilo (see below). This was detected by IPHAN officials who tried to extend that universe during their meetings, inviting other Guarani representatives and indigenous and indigenist NGO [such as the Guarani Yvyrupa Commission (CGY)] and the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista (CTI)].

The second stage of the INRC was delayed for five months due to "administrative and financial contingencies" that led to some negative consequences, such as the loss of some Guarani events, a break in daily interaction and, above all, the demobilization of Mbya interlocutors. Due to continued political problems at Tekoa Koenju, in August 2005, the INRC team asked José Cirilo, chief of Tekoá Anhetenguá, the Mbya village closest to Porto Alegre, and named by some as *Mburuvixá Tenondé* General Cacique of Rio

[4] Equivalent to the tax identification number (NIF) in Portugal.

Grande do Sul[5], to accompany them and intercede with the people of the village. Cirilo was born in 1974 in Argentina, and moved to Brazil when he was very young. Eventually, he settled in Lomba do Pinheiro, where he founded Tekoá Anhetenguá [True Village] and a children's choir that makes presentations in Porto Alegre and other localities. His mother, *kunha karai*[6] Ana Pires, and his brother, *karai* Augustinho Duarte, both important spiritual leaders, are his main influences and, for these reasons, Cirilo "presents himself as a spokesperson of tradition that relies on the approval of many Mbya old people, adults, women and children" (Pires, 2007, p. 124). On the other hand, he also learned early on to collaborate with state projects and NGO in order to build allies for the struggle for the rights of his people, even though he also criticizes them. As explained by Pires (2007, pp. 131-132), who was supervised during her master's by Cirilo himself, he

> [d]iffers from most Brazilian indigenous leaders because he does not fight for equality and does not agree with the recurring discourse that one day the indigenous people will become politicians and presidents. For him, the goal is to consolidate recognition of the cultural difference of his people, where school, church, political parties and health do not exist as separate categories from the rest of life; and at the same time defend equality in the fulfillment of their rights, but differentiated, specific. (Pires, 2007, pp. 131-132)

Cirilo acquiesced to the team of anthropologists request and, during the first day in São Miguel, visited the house where the Mbya sleep, in the Archaeological Park, when they are selling crafts and cannot return to the village. They complained of the structure's lack of conditions, such as the absence of plumbing and electricity. At night, he attended the Sound and Light Show, which is held daily since the 1970s, and is based on the romantic heritage narrative, in which the Jesuit priests fought for the earthly and spiritual salvation of the Guarani. The next day he reported to the team that he had dreamed of Sepé Tiaraju, the mythical leader of the Guarani of the Missions, and that this was a sign of the gods for him to get involved with the INRC project. According to the report included in the INRC dossier:

> that night, in São Miguel, after having circled the Ruins and attended the Sound and Light Show – which shocked me a lot, I did not keep my tears thinking about why only the whites are telling the story of Sepé and the Guarani people - I went to sleep with these pictures on my head. First, I saw only one hill. Forcing the gaze I saw the Guarani person, wearing only *tambeó* [thong], I wanted to hold his hand. He said: I am Sepé and I am alive! There were a lot of rocks up the hill where he was standing. Beyond the stones the earth was very slippery and no one could touch it. The older Karaí had already said that Sepé was not dead, but I did not believe it. (...) This work appeared with the guidance of Sepé, with the truth. (INRC, 2006)

[5] It is, however, important to note that this category did not exist previously in any state in Brazil.

[6] The Mbya-Guarani male shaman is called *karai,* and the female, *kunha karai*.

This experience marked the definitive entrance of Cirilo into the project, and a greater openness by the cacique of Tekoa Koenju to the INRC.

In 2006, the team organized the "1st Meeting of Indigenous Communities and Heritage: the Mbyá-Guarani and the Missions" with the objective of discussing the INRC process. Cirilo translated the event to "*Nhemboaty Mbyá Kurey Tava Miri py* São Miguel Arcanjo" and, for the first time, the anthropologists discovered that there was a Guarani name to designate the ruins: *Tava Miri*. Etymologically, it comes from stone (*ita*) and person (*ava*), and can be translated as "stone house" or "stone village". *Miri* means perfect and heavenly, just as in *Nhanderu Miri*, those who got to the Land-without-Evil (the imperishable heaven abode). This perspective on the Missions had been transmitted to Cirilo by his mother and his brother, but he considered it important to hold the meeting to hear the voices of the other spiritual leaders and decide the validity of this proposition. For this purpose, Cirilo requested resources for "mobilization trips" to the villages to carry out the invitation personally, including not only political and spiritual leaders, but also young people, women, the elderly and children. On the other hand, Beatriz Freire, of IPHAN, admitted that they face problems in contacting the remaining villages, especially those that had no connection or were not allies of Cirilo.

The meeting was held from December 3rd to the 7th, 2006. The initial idea was to stay overnight at Tekoa Koenju, but visitors chose to settle near the ruins. During days 4 and 5, the Mbya visited Tekoa Koenju, and discussed various topics among themselves. Days 6 and 7 were dedicated to the discussion with the non-indigenous organizations involved, especially the IPHAN. The discussions were thus organized in the way that Cirilo considered most appropriate (Moraes, 2010): first at an intra-ethnic, then at an inter-ethnic level. During the meeting, several leaders demanded that INRC be expanded to all Guarani, including villages in other Brazilian states, Argentina and Paraguay. IPHAN was able to implement the first phase of the INRC, coordinated in this case by the CTI, in the remaining villages in Brazil, but the payment and methodology were not considered appropriate by any proponent to continue the process for the next steps. At the international level, Brazil presented the proposal for a cross-border inventory program with the Guarani at the 2006 meeting of the Regional Center for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Latin America (CRESPIAL), which produced, however, few concrete results[7].

## The "mystery dimension": ethnic borders of non-participation

At the end of the second phase of INRC, the team delivered a report to the IPHAN-RS in which they presented some criticisms and proposed which cultural aspects should be patrimonialized. Regarding the criticisms, in addition to some of the issues already mentioned, the document warned of the bureaucratic, over-schematic, superficial and not holistic approach of the identification sheets, which were inappropriate for

[7] Retrieved from http://www.crespial.org/pt/Proyectos/index/0003/inventario-del-universo-cultural-guarani

understanding the complexity, interconnection and dynamics of culture, especially given the radical alterity of indigenous peoples (Castro, 2002a).

Regarding the cultural assets to be patrimonialized, the report makes the following proposals: 1) the "mystery dimension"; 2) "access to forest areas"; 3) "officially recognize the right of Guarani to exercise their 'free territoriality'" (INRC, 2006, p. 27). According to the institutional classifications that, in the case of Brazil, are divided into the books of registration in "knowledges", "celebrations", "forms of expression" and "places"[8], the proposals of the INRC team are *sui generis* and reveal an attempt to use the report to draw attention to the main cosmopolitan concerns of the Guarani, which was not considered adequate by IPHAN.

However, for the sake of the topic under discussion in this article, it is interesting to analyze the proposal to patrimonialize the "mystery dimension". Firstly, this element refers to the conscious limits of communication that the team had experienced on the ground, including the non-disclosure of aspects of its culture that the Mbya deem dangerous to record and disseminate to the *jurua* (such as the sacred chants received from *Nhanderu*), and the prohibition of audio and/or visual recording or even of attending certain events (e.g., *nheemongarai*). These limits are, however, fluid, constantly under negotiation, and change from village to village or even from person to person. For example, in Rio Grande do Sul and Argentina, filming inside the house of prayer (*opy*) is prohibited, while in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, it is allowed.

Second, these limits are also political and ethnic. Certain elements, like Cirilo, consider that the Mbya must first discuss among themselves and, after reaching a consensus, pass on their opinions and claims to the *jurua*. For example, the meetings mentioned above were first organized with talks among the Mbya, and then followed by discussions with the state bodies on the following days. This approach allows for, on the one hand, the building of ethnic cohesion and, on the other hand, avoiding exploitation by external elements, and divergences and fractures within the group. However, this approach also favors the Mbya, who are privileged interlocutors with the colonial society. In short, as several authors argue, (Clastres, 1974/2013; Pissolato, 2007); Guarani power is intrinsically constituted by a diverse array of power foci (political leader, spiritual leader, extended families, etc.), and the state must promote and accept the internal discussion process, which can take years.

Finally, there is a weariness among the Mbya regarding the work of anthropologists in the villages, especially on the short-term projects of NGO, government agencies, and undergraduate and masters students that do not respect the people's way of life, "only ask questions" and do not produce a substantial return for the community.

In short, as EJ Milne (2012) states, non-participation, or the establishment of limits to participation, is also a form of participation that, in addition to allowing the protection of the (un)involved, is a demonstration of power and an opportunity to subvert the institutional agendas.

[8] Retrieved from http://portal.iphan.gov.br/pagina/detalhes/122

## The collaborative cinema of Video in the Villages and the Mbya-Guarani

During the INRC, some Guarani leaders expressed an interest in receiving training in filmmaking, since they consider that only the Mbya know when they want to speak and be filmed. For this reason, IPHAN-RS hired the NGO Video in the Villages (VNA), which has been working collaboratively with indigenous communities for 30 years and which, since 1997, has organized filmmaking workshops in indigenous villages. As we will see, the introduction of collaborative cinema reorganized intra and interethnic relations, leading to the emergence of new leaderships, and expanded the participation to other actors who brought new data to understand the ruins of São Miguel according to the Guarani ontology and cosmology.

The first workshop took place in 2007, initially at Tekoa Anhetengua, and then at Tekoa Koenju. The trainers of VNA, Tiago Campos Tôrres and Ernesto Ignacio de Carvalho, met in Porto Alegre (RS) with the Mbya-Guarani Ariel Ortega, who had traveled from São Miguel. Sandro Ariel Duarte Ortega was born in 1985 in Missiones, Argentina, at Tekoa Vera Guaçu. His name in Guarani is Kuaray Poty, but chose, as filmmaker's name, which he also uses on Facebook, a hybridization between the two: "Ariel Kuaray Ortega" Ortega is a very curious person, as Tôrres explains:

> Ariel is a guy that if you start talking about the World War, "Then there was the Cold War! Wow!" And such. A guy who's interested and hungry, hungry for the world... So that's it. Ariel was very much in the mood for battle and there we were introducing very interesting weapons. And he went mad with those tools. (Interview with Tiago Campos Tôrres, March 11, 2015)

Moved by this energy, Ortega, Tôrres and Carvalho arrived at Tekoa Anhentegua very excited. They were received by the cacique Cirilo, who criticized them for their non-Guarani attitude, and even questioned the workshop taking place. According to Carvalho,

> our arrival in the village was explosive. (...) We were at 100 miles an hour and he [Cirilo] was at 1. If the Guarani are generally meditative, contemplative, philosophical, Cirilo is even more. We met him and began to talk. My idea of how that moment should be conducted was to explain everything as clear as possible. But we were exhausted, off-kilter, wired and that was our first experience of the collision between the Guarani way of being and the white way of being. The way in which they relate to time and communication, dialogue, silence, despite living in the middle of the city, is radically different. We explained everything to Cirilo, from production to editing, the importance of the finished film, our eagerness to do the work. After listening to this explanation, this rushed outburst of ideas, Cirilo kindly said to us: "Well, you know, you whites are very different from us, you say everything straight away. We don't, we're different, we wait a while". That was when I finally realized what was happening. So I said to Cirilo: "let's start

> again". We went back to the car, arrived at the village and we began to talk about settling in, putting up the hammocks, sleeping. (Carvalho quoted in Carvalho, Carvalho & Carelli, 2011, p. 227)

According to Ortega, the workshop was very difficult. The VNA methodology is based on practical, intense and daily learning (usually during three weeks). After learning the basic technical aspects of the camera, the trainees begin filming the village using a direct cinema approach. In order to have a focus, trainers often suggest that students follow a character throughout the day. In the afternoon or evening, trainers and students watch and discuss the recorded material and plan the next day's filming. This immersive interpellation to the real catalyzes new questions and relationships that can give rise to significant political results (Lacerda, 2018b).

Despite the success of this methodology in other contexts, initially the workshop was closed to failure. First, most of the students appeared and disappeared and it was difficult to maintain continuity. Then, as already mentioned, the Guarani are suspicious of projects that come from the outside, are limited in time and do not usually bring a substantial return. This attitude began to generate an atmosphere of suspicion, namely that the students were being paid, because the VNA was present with expensive audio-visual equipment. As Ortega explains, "wow, it was really hard because I was like, 'no, that's not the point. It's the money from the INRC, and the IPHAN called them, but the idea is not to make money or give money. Because the movie is going to be ours [the Guarani's], it's yours'"[9].

Because of this, Ortega managed to persuade Tôrres and Carvalho to finish the workshop at Tekoa Koenju, something that was not part of the initial plan. However, the situation in this village was also difficult because of the problems already mentioned concerning the political division of the village and because Ortega did not belong to the extended family that dominated the community's relationship with the *jurua*. After a few days of tense atmosphere, the cacique Floriano Romeu decided to suspend the workshop and had the trainers of the VNA expelled. This decision led to a general meeting of the village which lasted throughout the night. Around three o'clock, they informed the non-indigenous that they had replaced the cacique and that the workshop could continue.

This intense process gave rise to over 100 hours of footage and the first documentary of this collective: *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá, two villages, one walk* (2008)[10]. The film is divided into two parts corresponding to the villages where the workshop took place and presents the colonial situation[11] of the Mbya, surrounded by the *jurua,* and dependent on them, due to the smallness of their lands, and aspects of the spirituality of that people.

[9] Interview in Portuguese with Ariel Kuaray Ortega, March 10, 2016.

[10] The documentary was screened at several national and international festivals and was awarded Best Film at the Forum-Doc.BH Festival in Belo Horizonte in the same year.

[11] Understood in this context as "internal colonialism" (Casanova, 1965) but also as "coloniality" (Quijano, 2010) in the sense of oppression and political, economic, cultural and epistemic exploitation of ethnic groups and/or racialized by other dominant groups with or without the presence of colonial administrations.

In the second part, the work shows the tense situation of the Guarani selling handicrafts in the ruins, and the speeches of the non-indigenous guides that highlight the Jesuit's "civilizing" mission and ignore the contribution and agency of the indigenous people in the construction of the Missions and the presence of the Guarani contemporaries. As the Mbya Mariano Aguirre says at the beginning of this sequence:

> the whites took everything from us and appropriated these ruins that our relatives built. Now they do not want to give us what is ours. (...) Our relatives built this, forced by the whites, the Jesuit priests. (...) Our relatives worked, faced suffering, to leave that here on earth. They left that and worked so hard for the whites to kill them all. The whites fought over that here. (...) All this is painful for us. If we think about it, it hurts to this day. (Aguirre quoted in Morinico, Beñites & Ortega, 2008)

*Two villages, one walk* was an important catalyst for discussions in various Guarani communities about their relationship with the ruins, thus contributing to the development of the ICH process. A few months after the conclusion of the film, Ortega was elected cacique of Koenju, a position he held until March, 2016. The following documentary, *Bicycles of Nhanderu* (2011), on Guarani spirituality, was even more successful, nationally and internationally, and is still today exhibited in indigenous film shows. On the other hand, this film began the process of separation between Ortega and Cirilo due to the fact that that cinematographic work shows the "white parties" of the village in which the Guarani, including the *karai*, drink alcohol and play cards. As Carvalho explains, "[the first] workshop and the others that followed put Ariel at the center of discussions and turned him into a political actor, reconfiguring alliances. Marriages were made and unmade. Video penetrated deep into the community and people's lives, catalyzing new situations" (quoted in Carvalho et al., 2011, p. 229). Thus, and as explained further below, through the cinema and collaboration with the VNA, Ortega became an important agent in the ICH process.

## The process of registration of *Tava*

In 2007, IPHAN organized the "International Encounter for the Valorization of the Guarani Cultural World", in São Miguel, in order to answer to the demands of the Guarani to expand INRC to other Brazilian states and bordering countries. Concurrently, IPHAN wanted the Mbya to decide which cultural item should be registered as ICH at this meeting. This phase of the event was tense and led to discussions between the parties involved, namely IPHAN, the INRC team and Cirilo. The disagreement was only resolved through the intervention of the older Mbya who, through their "soft talk" (Pissolato, 2007), calmed the moods. As a result of the meeting, a Guarani representative from Paraguay and 12 representatives from villages in six Brazilian states (Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo) requested the registration of the São Miguel ruins as an ICH of its people.

However, it is important to note that it is not clear how *Tava* was selected as the element to be registered. Taking into account previous conversations with the Guarani, the IPHAN-RS thought that the *nheemongarai* naming ritual would be their choice. Although this event is fundamental to Guarani life and is threatened due to the colonial situation, it involves the communication of the *karai* with *Nhanderu* and it was probably never the intention of the indigenous people to reveal this process. On the other hand, according to reports collected by the author, whose sources are not identified for ethical reasons, some agents consider that the IPHAN pressured the Mbya to choose the remnants, while others argued that it was the INRC team that suggested this idea to affirm the Mbya's land rights. In fact, as we have seen, the ruins were always a central and tense theme during the INRC, eventually becoming a focus in which the main Guarani causes intersect: colonial violence in the past and present; the expulsion of their territory and the near absence of land demarcation processes; racism and, on the other hand, romanticism and the colonial appropriation of its image and history; but also the importance of living where their ancestors lived in search of body maturation without going through death (*aguyje*). This focus, developed through encounters, lectures, interviews and even conflicts, led to the identification or, more concretely, to the emergence of the ruins as a synthesis, not of a culture, but of a past and present colonial situation understood through the Guarani metaphysics.

Following the request for registration, IPHAN-RS initiated the research process to develop the application dossier. Due to several factors, the state agency chose this time to hire the NGO Institute of Cultural and Environmental Studies (IECAM), instead of UFRGS, which, in turn, established contacts with the Catafesto de Souza team. After a year of work, the team returned to IPHAN with more information related to *Tava*, but the IPHAN-RS, dominated until then by technicians with training in architecture and history, therefore without an anthropological knowledge necessary for the processes of the ICH, had finally hired a Social Sciences graduate, Marcus Vinicius Benedeti, who was unhappy with the meager, dispersed, non-theoretical and cosmological framework of the collected testimonies.

In this context, IPHAN-RS again contracted the VNA in order to produce the documentation film that was also an essential part of the research. The final work, *Tava, A casa de pedra* (2012), is signed by the non-indigenous Vincent Carelli and Ernesto Carvalho, and by the Mbya-Guarani Ariel Ortega and Patrícia Ferreira and focuses on interviews with elderly members from villages in Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Argentina. The participation of Ortega was fundamental because, besides being a charismatic Guarani who knows how to listen and speak with the elders, he is also the grandson of Dionísio Duarte, one of the most important caciques of Argentina, whom every Mbya knows. Undoubtedly this was a key introduction card for getting the various testimonials about the ruins that were largely unknown to non-indigenous and even to a significant part of the Guarani. On the other hand, in an interview conducted by the author, Cirilo was very critical of Ortega's approach because he violated the "mystery

dimension". According to him, the filmmakers should have first discussed this with the leadership, and they should not have spread the polyphony of interpretations of the Guarani about the Missions.

The richness of the material obtained during the production of the documentary gave more confidence to the IPHAN-RS, which went on with the preparation of the registration dossier of *Tava*. At the latter's request, the dossier was drafted by Sílvia Guimarães, who had conducted her master's research with a Mbya-Guarani community in Espírito Santo, and at that time worked in the Registration Coordination of the Department of Intangible Heritage of IPHAN's headquarters. In this sense, the anthropologist combined a significant ethnological knowledge, with a relevant bureaucratic experience in registration processes. Guimarães did not receive any salary for this work, but she felt that she ought to do it because she had a "historical debt" to the Guarani since, it is thanks to them that she had a professional career. Before beginning the report, the anthropologist took advantage of a meeting of the CGY where several Guarani representatives met in Koenju, to confirm if they agreed with the heritage process. After their approval, the anthropologist wrote the report giving preference to the testimonies collected by the VNA, while using her master's degree research as theoretical support. When it came close to a final version, she returned to Koenju and met with *kunha karai*, with linguistic and cultural mediation from Ortega and Patrícia Ferreira, in order to verify the validity of her argument and to remove some ethnological doubts. Finally, Guimarães and IPHAN-RS met with the village in order to determine the official name of the cultural property. During the research process, it had been decided that the term *tava* was more consensual than *tava miri*, since these are perfect and imperishable (*miri*) and therefore exist only in the Earth-without-Evil. As the Mbya Mariano Aguirre explains in the above-mentioned film, "Tava miri we do not see, because it is not on this earth. It's where we see the lightning. This is an imperfect tava, which we see" (Aguirre quoted in Ortega, Ferreira, Carvalho & Carelli, 2012). In addition, one of those present at the meeting recalled that the Ñandeva and Kaiowá subgroups also visit the ruins, and it was decided to use the comprehensive ethnonym Guarani instead of naming the cultural good exclusively Mbya. The designation agreed was "*Tava*, place of reference for the Guarani people".

Finally, on December 3, 2014, the Advisory Council met with the presence of IPHAN-RS members, Ariel Ortega, Patrícia Ferreira and other Mbya-Guarani representatives. Despite some controversy, the registration was approved unanimously. Thus, after a ten-year process, in December 2014, the Jesuit-Guarani Missions were recorded in the ICH's Book of Places. At the end of the meeting, Ariel Ortega asked to speak:

> first, thank you for this beautiful moment. I think I speak on behalf of the entire community of my village, of all my grandparents, my ancestors who lived there in the Jesuit reductions. I have no doubt that they are present here, accompanying us. I think it's a very important moment for our grandchildren, my grandchildren, future generations, for all Guarani, this

> recognition is important for us (...) because today we only have 234 hectares in São Miguel das Missões, when before the vast territory was all ours. I thank Nhanderu very much for this moment, for enlightening each one of you, Council. I am sure that all the Karaí, the spiritual leaders were also meditating for this moment to happen. So I want to thank you for that moment, thank you. (IPHAN, 2014, p.74)

## Evaluation of the process by the Guarani

The concrete consequences of this process for the Guarani seem to be, at least for the time being, somewhat ineffable. In an interview conducted by the author[12], Cirilo argued that what is most important is that the INRC has helped prove that the Guarani are entitled to their traditional territory and that they are not "foreigners", "Argentine" or "Paraguayan", as many people, and even institutions, including some within the IPHAN, call them. Moreover, he criticized the fact that the *Tava* was not recognized as a World Heritage Site[13]. At this level, we can argue that the non-indigenous interpretation of the Missions at the Unesco level has a greater symbolic power than the Guarani patrimonialization of the Missions at only the national level. In addition, Cirilo regrets that INRC has not continued, or explored some elements more in depth, such as Guarani ceramics, which his son teaches at the school in the village today.

One of the demands of the Mbya of Tekoa Koenju and Cirilo, is that they may be able to work as guides at the Archaeological Site. As he explains, "it must be the indigenous themselves working there to be able... It looks more beautiful, does it not? A Guarani talking about his history"[14]. This proposal is not related to a property regime because "there has to be freedom"[15]. The main hindrance seems to be that the guides are obliged to take a course at the Ministry of Tourism which has a prohibitive price for the Mbya. In fact, the measure of the safeguard plan chosen by the Guarani for 2016, was a tourism workshop, rather than the production of a bilingual book to be distributed to indigenous and non-indigenous state schools, as IPHAN was expecting, based on previous conversations.

Another of the demands of the Mbya is, that one part (12.5%) of the income from the ruins reverts to the "community". IPHAN and the City Hall (owner of the Sound and Light Show) do not oppose this idea, but IPHAN warns that the revenues cannot even finance the management costs of the Archaeological Park, and that there is no legal framework for passing on these funds. Alternatively, IPHAN proposes using that

[12] Interview in Portuguese to José Cirilo Morinico, April 7, 2016.

[13] As an example, the "Kusiwa art: Oral and graphic expressions of the Wajapi", and the "Yaokwa, the Enawene Nawe people's ritual for the maintenance of social and cosmic order" were classified as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by Unesco, following their registration at the national level by IPHAN.

[14] Interview in Portuguese with José Cirilo Morinico, April 7, 2016.

[15] Interview in Portuguese with José Cirilo Morinico, April 7, 2016.

percentage on community projects. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Brazil is undergoing a deep political and economic crisis and that the future of the financing of the safeguard plan, and even of IPHAN, is uncertain.

Meanwhile, in May 2015, the Jesuit-Guaraní Missions, Moxos and Chiquitos were declared Cultural Heritage of Mercosur[16]. This category was created in 2012 as part of Cultural Mercosur and aims to strengthen the cooperation and integration of countries through the identification, conservation and promotion of heritage shared by more than one of the countries. The IPHAN site[17] on this patrimonialization focuses on Western and/or Jesuitical history, making no mention of the relevance of the Missions to the present Guarani. However, at the "XVII Meeting of the Committee on Cultural Heritage of Mercosur", on October 30th and 31st, 2018, responding to the demands of the Guarani representatives, Mercosur recognized *Tava* as a Mercosur Cultural Heritage, meaning

> the recognition of the ancestral presence of the Guarani in the Yvy Rupá territory, which today integrates Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, in which they organized a great ethnic network, formed by villages, paths and sacred sites. Moving freely through this territory, as did their ancestors, the ancients, is one of the foundations of the well-being that the Guarani wish to preserve.[18]

## Conclusion: dialogical heritage

At first instance, the case study of the patrimonialization of the ruins of São Miguel confirms the importance of the participation of non-scientific groups, communities and "experts" in the identification of the ICH. Even though the bibliography on the Guarani is one of the most extensive of the Amerindian peoples of South America, the different ontology and cosmological importance of the ruins for that people were practically unknown to non-indigenous, and even to some Guarani[19]. This was only possible through the participation of the Guarani in the research process and through their understanding of the benefits that they could obtain from this. It is also important to emphasize that the participation of the Guarani was only made possible through a strategic hybridization between the indigenous and non-indigenous political approaches, including the anticipation of several safeguard measures and the training of indigenous researchers

[16] Mercosur refers to the Common Market of the South, an intergovernmental organization founded in 1991 that includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela (currently, suspended). Bolivia awaits bureaucratic procedures to become a full member. The official languages are Portuguese, Spanish and Guarani (proposed by Paraguay but still not adopted institutionally). In the beginning, Mercosur was mainly a customs union within which there is a regime of free trade and a common commercial policy, but its area of operation has been expanding.

[17] Retrieved from http://portal.iphan.gov.br/uploads/ckfinder/arquivos/Decis%C3%A30%20MERCOSUL.pdf

[18] Retrieved from http://portal.iphan.gov.br/rs/noticias/detalhes/4883/lugar-de-referencia-para-o-povo-guaran-can-around-patrimony-cultural-of-mercosul

[19] There was, however, already some evidence in Ladeira (1992/2007).

and filmmakers, in order to establish, according to Amerindian logic, degrees of affinity (Castro, 2002) between indigenous and non-indigenous agents. Some of these relationships already existed (for example, between Catafesto de Souza and Cirilo due to the activities promoted jointly with UFRGS), while others were established during the process, but with some distance from the governmental body (for example, between Ortega and the VNA). At this level, it is interesting to note that the connections have not only been established within ethnic borders, but also through different interethnic alliances.

However, as Harrison (2013) advocates in his proposal for a "dialogical heritage", heritage does not only emerge from the relations between humans (experts and non-scientific experts) but also through connections with nonhumans and things. In the case study under analysis, the Guarani action is determined by the gods (Schaden, 1974). Everything that happens is decided by the gods and the Guarani try to understand the deliberations of those through dreams, song-pray, "beautiful walk" and other aesthetic-ethical practices of corporality, commensality and conviviality. One of the examples mentioned was Cirilo's dream with *Nhanderu Miri* Sepé Tiaraju that led him to decide to support the ICH process. Similarly, Ariel Ortega's speech at the end of the Council acknowledges that the success of the process was only due to *Nhanderu*'s intervention. According to this framework, the process of patrimonialization was only made possible through the influence of nonhuman persons.

Moreover, the very historical and symbolic value of the ruins of São Miguel had influence in its transformation into heritage. On the one hand, according to the Constitution of modernity, the ruins are one of the most evident arenas of the colonial Guarani wound, since these, due to the smallness of the lands bought or demarcated by the state, are forced to survive through the sale of handicrafts to the *jurua*, which, in turn, discriminate them and classify them as "acculturated" or "foreign" ("Paraguayan" or "Argentine"). This focus of tension contributed to the emergence of the ruins as a synthesis, not of a culture but of a past and present colonial situation. According to this perspective, the patrimonialization of the ruins as *Tava* is a recognition of the historical relation of the contemporary Guarani with those structures and, implicitly, of their right to the demarcation of indigenous lands. On the other hand, according to the Guarani ontology, the ruins are not just inert physical structures. *Tava* points out where the ancient Guarani lived on their way to the Land-without-Evil, and therefore is a place chosen by *Nhanderu* for the good living of this people. In this sense, the ruins are not only an object of the past, but a place where the past bends over the present and where the Guarani can find signs of the gods to reach the state of corporal maturity (*aguyje*) in order to reach the imperishable heavenly abode.

Finally, the cinema and the camera were also part of the heritage process. The camera was not only used to represent a preexisting reality, but it instigated reactions and connections, namely in the relationship with the tourists in the ruins *in Two villages, one walk* and in the research carried out between Guarani of several villages of the South American continent, which, in turn, led to discussions that resulted in the registration of

the ruins as *Tava*. As the old wise man Adolfo Werá Silveira states in *Tava, the stone house*: "since you are filming, I will tell you the truth" (Silveira quoted in Ortega et al., 2012).

In short, despite the occasional moments of dissonance inherent to these processes, the patrimonialization of *Tava* was an important experience in expanding the concepts of heritage and participation in which the various non-indigenous actors "took seriously" (Castro, 2002b) the Guarani ontology and cosmology, giving rise to a "hybrid forum" (Harrison, 2013) in which humans, nonhumans, and things participated in a more dialogic democracy that takes into account different ways of constructing the world. The challenge now, as Cirilo and Ortega's testimonies point out, is to continue this process and integrate this new constructivist and comprehensive perspective of participation in the management of IPHAN and, specifically, of the Archaeological Park of São Miguel.

Translation: Rodrigo Lacerda

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# Online platforms for citizen participation: meta-synthesis and critical analysis of their social and political impacts

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**Abstract**

The technological and communicational development of recent years has led to the creation of online platforms both by governors and by civil society sectors, with the promise of enhancing citizen participation. Despite enthusiastic discussions regarding the issue in different spheres, not enough is known about the real potential of online participation and its effectiveness in the political decision-making process. This article proposes a critical analysis of citizen participation on online platforms, their social and political characteristics and consequences. Two systematic literature reviews (SLR) are conducted on case studies – the first one exclusively in Brazil and the second one on cases all over the world – using the Web of Science, Scopus and DOAJ databases, between 1995 and 2015. Primary results indicate a significant growth in participatory platforms in Brazil and the world, however with more rhetorical than practical effects: the majority of the initiatives are promoted by top-down style governmental electronic portals, with little or no influence in the real decision-making process. This article concludes that power – and not technology – is the key obstacle for effective online citizen participation, whose barriers are nurtured by a traditional political elite with little interest in building a transparent, inclusive and collaborative democracy. A new research agenda is suggested to develop public information transparency indicators – methods to measure the social and political impact of the governmental online platforms – as well as investment in empirical studies about civil society initiatives that could promote solutions for the problems, side effects and contradictions intrinsic to online political participation.

**Keywords**
democracy; meta-synthesis; online platforms; political participation; systematic literature review (SLR)

# Plataformas online de participação cidadã: meta-síntese e avaliação crítica de seus impactos sociais e políticos

**Resumo**

Com o desenvolvimento tecnológico e comunicacional dos últimos anos, as plataformas online começaram a ser criadas tanto por governantes quanto por setores da sociedade civil com a promessa de aumentar o engajamento civil. Apesar do entusiasmo das discussões sobre o tema em diferentes esferas, pouco se sabe sobre as reais possibilidades de participação online e

sua efetividade no processo de tomada de decisão política. Este artigo propõe uma análise crítica sobre as iniciativas online de participação cidadã, suas características e consequências sociais e políticas. São realizadas duas revisões sistemáticas de literatura (RSL) sobre estudos de casos no mundo e no Brasil, usando a base de dados Web of Science, Scopus e DOAJ, entre 1995 e 2015. Os resultados das duas RSL são comparados e 179 plataformas são classificadas de acordo com o novo modelo de análise proposto, mensurando a participação política e o impacto decisório de cada plataforma online estudada. Os principais resultados sugerem um crescimento significativo de plataformas de participação no Brasil e mundo, porém com efeitos mais retóricos do que práticos: a maioria das iniciativas são promovidas por portais de governo eletrônico no modelo descendente, com pouca ou nenhuma influência no processo decisório real. Conclui-se que o poder – e não a tecnologia – é o principal entrave para a efetiva participação cidadã online, cujas barreiras são cultivadas por uma elite política tradicional pouco interessada na construção de uma democracia transparente, inclusiva e colaborativa. Sugere-se uma nova agenda de pesquisa voltada para a elaboração de indicadores de transparência das informações públicas, o desenvolvimento de métodos para a mensuração do impacto social e político das iniciativas governamentais e o investimento em pesquisas empíricas sobre iniciativas da sociedade civil que possam revelar soluções para os problemas, os efeitos colaterais e as contradições inerentes à participação política online.

**Palavras-chave**
democracia; meta-síntese; plataformas online; participação política; revisão sistemática de literatura (RSL)

## Introduction

Taking into account the problematic legitimacy of the political and electoral models, new digital technologies have been adopted in order to modify the contemporary political scenario. The adaptation to digital media by governors and citizens has allowed the emergence of initiatives aimed at reducing the gap between civic participation and political protagonists. However, questions about the role of citizens remain, namely whether if their role is genuinely reinforced by the use of digital platforms and if the decisions taken by administrators are influenced by such online political participation.

In addition to social networks or websites, which at certain times end up constituting a stage for public debate, there are online platforms[1] exclusively created to allow and/or encourage the public to engage in political issues. They work based on people's motivations to stand up for their rights, to discuss and to vote, or by simply facilitating access to information and to the government. Such is the case of DemocraciaOS[2] – a free software developed in Buenos Aires to broaden public participation in political decision making, and of Code for America[3] – an open-code technology and networks association to make the "government services simple, effective and easy to use" for US citizens.

The objective of this paper is to identify types of participation experienced through online platforms and the impacts of this participation in the decision-making process

[1] In this article, it is assumed that an online platform is an electronic space composed of html pages, links and resources that enable actions and interactions in the virtual environment of the internet (Jiang & Xu, 2009).

[2] DemocraciaOS official website. Retrieved from http://democracyos.org

[3] Code for America official website. Retrieved from http://www.codeforamerica.org

of public managers. The research question is: to what extent are the political decisions taken by governors influenced by citizens' participation in online platforms?

Hence, two systematic literature reviews (SLR) were conducted, the first had a global scope and the second limited to Brazil, in order to identify how the issue had been studied within different contexts of the scientific community, the characteristics of the cases studied, research questions, methods and conclusions reached to date. The systematic review enabled a comparative analysis between the worldwide and Brazilian scenarios, as well as allowing a meta-synthesis of the results (Nye, Menlendez-Torres & Bonell, 2016). Thus, these two reviews provided a selection of 44 articles for comparative analysis and meta-synthesis.

Subsequently, the Assessment Model for the Online Political Participation is proposed in order to measure the existing types of engagement and their consequent impacts on decision-making. This model was applied in all the case studies found in the articles of the SLRs, excluding those articles that presented a number of platforms impracticable for analysis and those that were published by the same author on the same case, thus avoiding a duplicate count of platforms. In this final assessment, after this exclusion, we considered 35 articles and 179 cases studied both in the world and in Brazil.

## Systematic literature reviews in the world and in Brazil

For this paper, it was decided to use the systematic literature review (SLR), an appropriate methodology to organise primary studies, maintaining the necessary transparency and thoroughness in accordance with pre-established criteria and definitions. Following the instructions of Brereton, Kitchenham, Budgen, Turner and Khalil (2007), all the decisions over the course of the process are reported, allowing them to be reproduced and compared in future studies using the same method.

For the first SLR, of a worldwide scope, the main collection of the Web of Science (WoS)[4] was used as the database and some pilot tests have been conducted in the search to assess combinations of terms. The expressions defined [*(politi* participat* OR politi* engage* OR civic participat* OR democra* OR citizen*) AND (technolog* OR internet OR platform* OR online)*], were found in 434 articles after simultaneous application of the following filters: time stamp - between 1995 and 2015, considering that internet began to be broadly disseminated in civil society in the mid-1990s; only scientific papers, which are the main sources of primary research; only in the article titles.

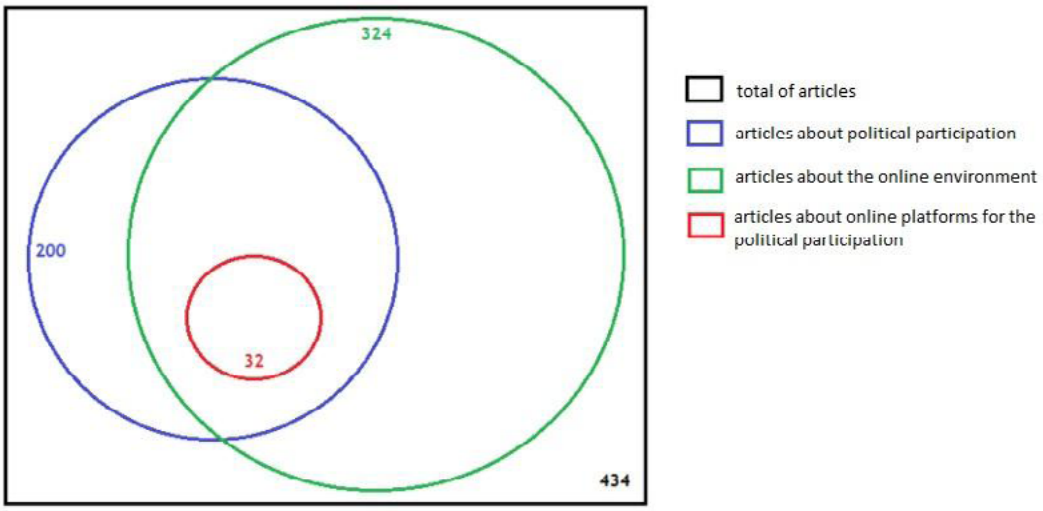
The next step involved the analysis of all 434 titles, abstracts and keywords found, assessing them in accordance with previously defined inclusion and exclusion criteria in question form. These were:

1. does the article address the political participation or engagement of citizens?;
2. does the article address online media, the Internet or ICT?;

[4] We are aware that the focus on WoS excludes publications using the book (chapter) format.

3. does the article analyse citizens' political participation using online platforms, social networks or any other online tools in general?;
4. does the article present empirical research based on one or more case studies of online platforms designed to promote citizen political participation?

By applying the criteria to the abstracts, keywords and titles of the articles, it was found that almost half (200) of the articles address the political participation of citizens, while the majority (324) address the internet or online environment in general (see Graphic 1). Those that failed to match the first two criteria deal with an array of issues related to the development of education and citizenship, newspaper content analysis, public policy theories, and consumerism or user behaviour on social networks, for example.




Graphic 1: Empirical research into online platforms designed for citizens' political participation

Where the two initial criteria overlap, which covers studies about the internet and political participation, 171 articles were found. Of those, 139 address general aspects of the usage of the online environment or social networks, which corresponds to the third exclusion criterion. In the end, 32 articles were defined as pertinent to this study, presenting empirical research into online platforms designed for the political participation of citizens.

For the second SLR, with a nationwide scope, some of the criteria were maintained and others were altered in order to suit the specific characteristics of the Brazilian scenario. An initial search in the same database of the previous review, the main collection of the Web of Science (WoS) brought rare examples of Brazilian cases. Therefore, the search was expanded to all its collections, which includes the SciELO Citation Index (SciELO CI) (Packer, 2014), as well as Scopus[5] and the DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals)[6].

[5] *Scopus: Quick reference guide*. Retrieved from https://www.periodicos.capes.gov.br/images/documents/Scopus_Guia%20de%20refer%C3%AAncia%20r%C3%A1pida_10.08.2016.pdf

[6] Directory of Open Access Journals. Retrieved from https://doaj.org/about

These pilot tests were conducted separately in each database, as they have different search processes and, therefore, the same term expression could result in different number and quality of papers. In the WoS, the analysed expressions were identical towards the first SLR, filtered for Portuguese language, between 1995 and 2015 and only articles. In the Scopus and DOAJ search, it was necessary to include the search terms not only of the titles, but also of the abstracts and keywords. Unlike the tests in the WoS, the expression that brought the highest number of pertinent articles was that with reduced terms: [(*politi** OR *participat**) AND (*internet* OR *online*)], a language filter for Portuguese, only articles, between 1995 and 2015.

Gathering all the documents selected from each database, five from each, and excluding those that were found in more than one database, there were 12 pertinent articles obtained in total. The data extracted from the articles analysed in the two reviews are presented and compared in the following section.

## Comparative analysis and meta-synthesis

The results of the two SLRs, one covering Brazil and the other worldwide, revealed some differences and similarities between the global and national contexts, in relation to both their research characteristics and the platforms found (Table 1):

| | First SLR (SLR 1) | Second SLR (SLR 2) |
|---|---|---|
| **Scope** | Global | National (Brazil) |
| **Database** | Web of Science Main Collection | Web of Science, Scopus and DOAJ - all collections |
| **Total Pertinent Articles** | 32 | 12 |
| **Research Areas** | Communication (12), Government and Law (eight), Sociology (five), Information Science (four), Computer Science (four), Studies of the Area (four), Public Administration (three), Engineering (two), International Relations (one), Urban Studies (one) | Communication (three), Government and Law (one), Sociology (four), Public Administration (three), Political Science (five), Economics and Business (three) |
| **Origin of Platforms** | Governmental (13), Mixed (10), Non-governmental (nine) | Governmental (11), Mixed (one) |
| **Initiative Model** | Government Portals (nine), Governmental Discussion Forums (four), Non-governmental Discussion Forums (seven), Opinion Consultation (three), Participatory Platform (five), Online Poll (two), Online Petition (one), Voting Advice (one) | Government Portals (four), Governmental Discussion Forums (three), Opinion Consultation (four), Participatory Platform (one) |
| **Research Questions** | Citizen-Platform (21), Government-Platform (two), Platform-Government-Citizen (six), Platform only (three) | Citizen-Platform (five), Government-Platform (one), Platform-Government-Citizen (six) |
| **Research Methods** | Content Analysis (25), Comparative Analysis (15), Questionnaire (nine), Interview (four), Experiment (two) | Content Analysis (12), Comparative Analysis (five), Questionnaire (one), Interview (two) |

Table 1: Comparative analysis between first and second SLR

The first discrepancy emerged in the data search, requiring a more in-depth analysis, in addition to the main Web of Science collection, in order to find a significant number

of Brazilian journals. This reveals a question of knowledge policy: either the cases from Brazil are not being studied by the international community and/or Brazilian authors are failing to achieve deep penetration in one of the world's biggest databases. The quantity and relevance of Brazilian cases are limited, as well as the capacity and inclusion of Brazilian researchers in the WoS main collection. According to Packer (2014), the Brazilian scientific community still needs to promote major efforts to enhance quality, especially in its journals and research funding agencies, in order to attain greater international exposure.

By analysing the publication data, it is observed that 10 documents published between 1995 and 2005 were selected in the worldwide SLR. The Brazilian SLR generated only one article, considered relevant in the same timeframe of analysis. However, the increased production on this subject is clear in both reviews, with 14 articles in the first SLR and seven in the second, published between 2010 and 2015.

Regarding the research agendas, other differences can be highlighted. The first SLR presented no articles in the areas of Political Science or Economics and Business, whereas the second brought a majority of articles in these two areas. No Brazilian article was found in the areas of Information Science, Engineering or International Relations, while more than three articles from the first SLR fell into each of these areas. Furthermore, Government and Law is one of the most frequent areas in the first review, but in Brazil there is only one article included in this field. Other areas such as Communication, Sociology and Public Administration are found in both reviews.

The origin of the platforms is the other divergent piece of data when comparing Brazil to the rest of the world. While in the first SLR we found a balanced distribution in the case studies, with 13 government platforms, 10 mixed and nine non-governmental platforms, in the second review, 11 were governmental, one mixed and none of the platforms were created by sectors of civil society alone. As to the initiative models, both present a majority of governmental models – nine in the first and four in the second SLR – followed by discussion forums and public opinion consultation.

It is important to stress out that no examples of non-governmental discussion forums were found in Brazil, whereas seven were found in the global SLR. Cases of online voting, petitions and voting advice were also only found in the first review. This reveals that political participation platforms based on diverse kinds of origin and models are studied around the world, whereas in Brazil non-governmental cases are not studied by academics or simply do not exist in numbers comparable to governmental platforms.

In terms of the research questions identified in the articles, both reviews found a majority of analyses about the relationship between citizen and platform, the characteristics and use of technological tools to favour civic participation, or the relationship between platform, government and citizen, in terms of interaction between political representatives and citizens through online initiatives. Another similarity between the two SLR relies on methods: content analysis is the most common methodology in the selected articles. The second most frequent method is comparative analysis.

In addition to the comparative analysis, it is possible to identify advantages and disadvantages of online platforms according to their impact on political engagement, uncovering more similarities, differences and even complementary characteristics between the cases studied in the two reviews. Both globally and in Brazil, governmental websites seem to view the citizen as a simple consumer of information and public services (Liste & Sorensen, 2015; Polat & Pratchett, 2014; Saylan, 2009), establishing a government-to-citizen type of relationship and a model that bears little or no traits of being participative in a largely unexplored digital democracy (Pinho, 2008; Rossini, 2014; Silva, 2005).

State surveillance and control, with government websites reinforcing political propaganda, was only highlighted in the first review (Jiang & Xu, 2009; Polat & Pratchett, 2014). Moreover, studies from both reviews are beginning to glimpse advances in participation, as websites are being increasingly designed to look after citizens' needs (Welp, 2008), as underlined by Marques (2010) in the case of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies' web and its variety of participation mechanisms available to users.

Some advantages are found in the cases of online discussion forums in studies both in Brazil and abroad. The erosion of spatial, temporal and financial barriers seems to facilitate citizen participation and debate in the digital arena (Klein, 1999; Westholm, 2002), while subjects closely related to those that directly affect the lives of citizens can help in the deliberative process (Sampaio, 2012). Shen and Liang (2015) identified that most users of the forums studied stand more as information consumers, than they actively contribute to the debate, while Miola (2009) highlights the existence of individual and hierarchized dialogues, focused primarily on the state-citizen relationship and barely on the citizen-citizen one.

As Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) point out, both types of communication should be encouraged: vertical, with access to political representatives, and horizontal, with interaction between users. In an overall perspective, online discussion forums studied around the world produce a low level of deliberation among users (Hung, 2003; Loveland & Popescu, 2011; Strandberg, 2008), yet in Brazil, cases with a high degree of argumentation and respect were identified, representing a good indicator of deliberation (Sampaio, 2012).

Online public opinion consultation involves the same advantage in both reviews: the possibility of connection and partnership between governors and citizens, with greater exposure to the democratic principles and civic education (Balla, 2014; Mendonça & Amaral, 2014). However, one of the most troubling aspects is revealed in the case of the Belo Horizonte Digital Participatory Budgeting, where the consultation results were not taken into account, the meaning of the tool was lost and the loss of credibility caused by its ineffectiveness led to diminished participation (Abreu & Pinho, 2014).

In the cases of participatory platforms, several advantages were found in both contexts. Pickard (2008) believes that they enable the practice of different forms of democracy, while Wells (2010) identifies greater levels of attraction among youths to the models of free interaction. Penteado, Santos and Araújo (2014) consider that the influence

of citizens in political decisions relies on networked models by such participatory platforms. This is the case of the *Rede Nossa* São Paulo, a civil society movement that uses digital technologies to interact and develop projects with its members and partners. Working with both public and private sectors, it plays a decisive role with political representatives. Studies also highlight that, from the first SLR, most the platforms studied are not the result of collaborative effort between citizens and public agencies (Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2014) and few are bidirectional tools, in which citizens actively participate in decision making (Steinmann, Krek & Blaschke, 2005).

Furthermore, digital exclusion is still considered one of the main problems in terms of its effect on civic participation in online platforms (Desouza & Bhagwatwar 2014; Maia & Marques, 2010; Oliveira & Rodegheri, 2012; Sampaio 2012; Saylan, 2009; Welp, 2008). Another limiting aspect for the inclusive dimension of participation deals with the dominance of privileged citizens, who have higher levels of education, income or political interest in the online platforms (Balla, 2014; Mambrey, Neumann & Sieverdingbeck, 1999; Mendonça & Amaral, 2014; Ribeiro, Costa, Costa & Ribeiro, 2013; Sani, 2004; Solop, 2001; Strandberg, 2008; Tettey, 2001; Westholm, 2002).

Considering the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the studied online platforms, there is a noticeable need for more in-depth critical analysis of the effective impacts of citizen participation on the deliberative process and on political decision-making. The next part of this article considers some of the existing assessment models of political participation and a new model is proposed for subsequent classification of the data found in the reviews.

## Assessment model for online political participation

In general, the assessment models found in the articles of the SLR (Arnstein, 1969; Gomes, 2005; Jiang & Xu, 2009; Smyth, 2001) have very few stages of participation, with a limited scope and few theoretical definitions. Moreover, they were developed from a governmental perspective and, therefore, fail to comprise bottom-up participation, from the citizens to the government.

The format for classifying political participation, which has become established in academic and institutions circles, should not be seen in a rigid or definitive manner. Considering their restrictions and flaws, a new assessment model (see Figure 1) was developed with the aim of standardising the studied cases and analysing them in accordance with a single and non-hierarchical, more complete, realistic and critical indicator:

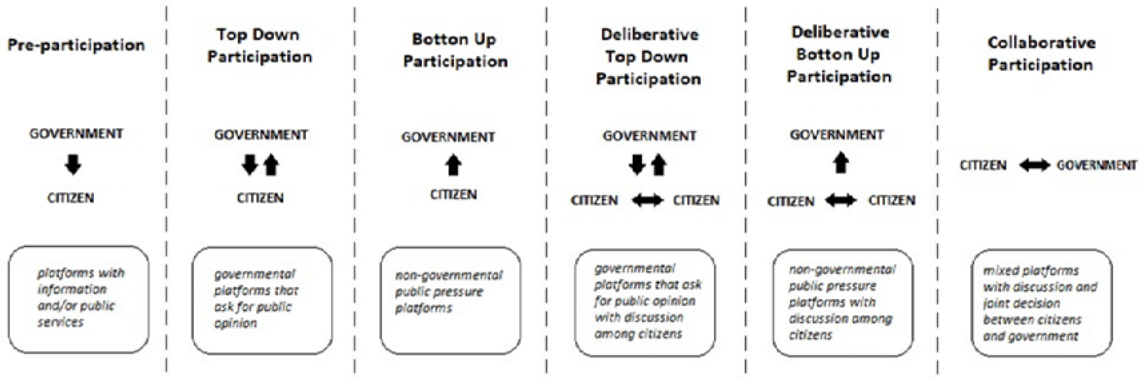



Figure 1: Online political participation assessment model

Based on the cases studied in the two SLRs the online political participation assessment model includes categories that are entirely compatible with the platforms found, thus ensuring that no types of participation were found to be superficial or merely theoretical. The forms of participation are presented in a non-hierarchical perspective and may differ according to the origin of the platform: created by the governmental sector, represented in the model by the term "government", or by the non-governmental sector, with the latter covering all layers of civil society, social movements, NGOs, private institutions and the common citizen himself, represented in the model by the term "citizen". The flow of information between the two segments is demonstrated by the arrows, both vertical and horizontal, unidirectional and bidirectional.

The model presents six categories of participation: pre-participation, in which the citizen is informed and does not actively participate; it is primarily represented by government portals that present news of government actions and programs in a vertical, unidirectional manner, as well as supporting access to public services; top-down participation, with a vertical, bidirectional flow, where the citizen participates in reaction to government request, expressed in the cases of online public opinion consultation; bottom-up participation, in which sectors of society have the autonomy to create an online platforms, such as online petitions, collections for campaigns or legislative bills resulting from popular initiative; deliberative top-down participation, in which the government asks for public opinion with spaces for online discussion, following a simultaneously vertical and horizontal flow, in publicising the platform and in the citizen debate process; is represented by governmental discussion forums and online participative budgeting; deliberative bottom-up participation, similar to the last category, but with initiatives promoted by sectors of civil society, involves an horizontal flow of discussion among citizens to subsequently lead to possible feedback to the government; it is represented by non-governmental online discussion forums that allow users greater freedom to create topics, participate and deliberate; finally, collaborative participation, as partnerships between segments of civil society and the government are created, having in mind platforms for horizontal and bidirectional information flow, with the decision-making power split between them, such

as in the cases of mixed participatory platforms, organised by public institutions, political representatives, academics, activists, experts and other interested citizens.

The main distinction found in this model deals with the separation between governmental initiatives and citizen-led ones, highlighting the autonomy of societal sectors in different formats of participation, including deliberative participation. Citizen autonomy and deliberation, essential aspects that characterise participation (Prieto-Martin, 2010) are clearly represented in the proposed assessment model. Nonetheless, there are some recognisable limitations, such as the difficulty in evaluating social, cultural and economic dimensions of the participation. As it is based on the cases found in the two SLR, the model also tracks the limitations of the review method used, not allowing for a complete coverage of all the platforms in the world or in Brazil – the model might be considered insufficient for classifying other platforms that were not studied by the articles reviewed in this research.

## Results

Unlike the analysis conducted in the SLR, the evaluation proposed in this model considers all identifiable cases studied in the articles. There were limits to this analysis, because of the excessive number of platforms and the lack of specific information about each one, such as in the article by Musso et al. (2000) about 270 municipal portals in California or in that by Shen and Liang (2015) about the 103 political discussion forums from 75 different countries.

For similar cases published by the same author in different articles or with similar results, only one of the cases was assessed to avoid any double counting of platforms. From the worldwide SLR, we should highlight the following articles: on the public opinion consultation about China's health system reform, analysed and published by Steven J. Balla, in 2012 and 2014; on the online voting process in the Arizona primaries, published by Solop (2001) and Gibson (2001); on the online participative budgeting forum, in Belo Horizonte in 2008 (Sampaio, 2012; Sampaio et al, 2010). This was the only one considered in the assessment of the Brazilian articles. The three different editions of the same budgeting forum in 2006, 2008 and 2011, studied by Cunha, Coelho and Pozzebon (2014) and Abreu & Pinho (2014) were considered once. After applying these exclusion criteria, 25 papers were collected from the first review and 10 from the second, to assess a total of 134 platforms from around the world and 45 from Brazil.

All the 179 platforms were then categorised in accordance with the online political participation assessment model. However, the mere organisation of the platforms into different types of participation would not *per se* suffice to allow for the evaluation of the consequences of each participatory intervention in the political decisions:

> since the political institutions develop virtual participation platforms to enable interaction between representatives and those they represent, control and monitoring of political activities, it is pertinent to ask whether this

> opening up of the institutional political structures to participation of the civic sphere is effective, in the sense of ensuring to the citizen the opportunity to influence various decision-making processes. (Rossini, 2014, p. 119)

For this study, the analysis was conducted to determine if the proposed assessment model works, enabling the distinction between those platforms that integrate citizens' participation and those that actually apply such suggestions to the decision (public consultation, the execution of projects voted for in participatory budgeting, or the application of solutions developed by citizens in discussion forums).

The following tables show the quantitative results of the assessment, taken from the articles of the two reviews – SLR1 (Worldwide) (Table 2) and SLR2 (Brazil) (Table 3) –, the types of participation based on the proposed model and the decision-making impact of each platform. The platforms that influenced the political decision were classed as "yes", those that had no influence were counted as "no" and when the impact was not evaluated by the authors or not clearly exposed in the article, it was defined as "N/A".

| | Cases from SLR 1 by category of participation | Decision making impact: YES | Decision making impact: NO | Decision making impact: N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-participation** | 37 (27,6%) | 0 | 2 (5,4%) | 35 (94,6%) |
| **Top down participation** | 30 (22,4%) | 1 (3,3%) | 1 (3,3%) | 28 (93,3%) |
| **Bottom up participation** | 2 (1,5%) | 1 (50%) | 0 | 1 (50%) |
| **Deliberative top down participation** | 28 (20,9%) | 6 (21,4%) | 1 (3,6%) | 21 (75%) |
| **Deliberative bottom up participation** | 35 (26,1%) | 3 (8,6%) | 0 | 32 (91,4%) |
| **Collaborative participation** | 2 (1,5%) | 2 (100%) | 0 | 0 |

Table 2: Assessment of cases from SLR 1 (Worldwide) according to the online political participation assessment model and the identified decision-making impact, in amount and percentage

| | Cases from SLR 1 by category of participation | Decision making impact: YES | Decision making impact: NO | Decision making impact: N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-participation** | 35 (77,8%) | 0 | 34 (97,1%) | 1 (2,9%) |
| **Top down participation** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Bottom up participation** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Deliberative top down participation** | 20 (9%) | 0 | 2 (22,2%) | 7 (77,8%) |
| **Deliberative bottom up participation** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Collaborative participation** | 1 (2,2%) | 1 (100%) | 0 | 0 |

Table 3: Assessment of cases from SLR 2 (Brazil) according to the online political participation assessment model and the identified decision-making impact, in amount and percentage

In both cases, pre-participation is supported, representing 27,6% of the total articles from the first review and 77,8% of the articles from the second. The decision-making impact of the vast majority of the platforms from around the world was not demonstrated in the respective article and only two cases were assessed as having no influence on the political decision: the national and municipal governmental electronic portals of Turkey, through which citizens cannot participate in the decision-making processes (Saylan, 2009). In the articles from the Brazilian authors, only one did not have its impact confirmed. According to the analysis of the Presidency of the Republic's website, it was not possible to find "sufficient elements to assert the existence of artifices aimed at encouraging the political engagement of citizens in the discussion or even in the production of decisions about public policies" (Marques, 2010, p. 128). Official websites from Brazilian state capitals (24) studied by Silva (2005) have shown few possibilities for citizens' participation and influence in public decisions.

In the category of top-down participation, 30 platforms were found in the first SLR, the majority of which were not analysed by the authors in terms of impact on decision-making. This is the case with an article which evaluates all the governmental portals of the 18 Latin America countries and considers seven of them (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Panama and Peru) as the most advanced in terms of symbolic spaces for interaction with the government, but without identifying the political results of participation in those platforms (Welp, 2008). In the case of online voting in the 2000 Arizona primaries, concurrently, there seems to have been a direct impact on the decision, contributing toward increasing the active influence of the city's citizens (Solop, 2001). In the studies of the second SLR no examples of top-down participation platforms were found.

The next category – bottom-up participation – is the least represented in the first review, with only two cases: the online petition promoted by Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* (Vaccari, 2011), in which the media initiative is seen as an extension of its editorial campaign and the decision-making impact is not assessed. Move On, a platform created in the USA, considered by Pickard (2008), as effective in giving voice to an underrepresented electorate and influencing specific policies, with popular direct actions such as anti-war petitions and collections for pro-peace policies. Once again, there was no Brazilian initiative for this category of participation.

Examples of deliberative top-down participation were found in both reviews, with 28 cases worldwide and nine in Brazil. There are examples in eight governmental websites of Chinese provinces, which offer chat platforms and discussion forums (Jiang & Xu, 2009) and in one Virtual Legislative Community of the E-Democracy portal, of the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil, which allowed people to debate and contribute to the development of a legislative bill about the *Marco Civil* (Freitas, Lima & Lima, 2015). Only two studies present the decision-making impact of the platforms. The first one, the online discussion forum of a US Transport Department agency, which opened a planning process to citizens and, at the end, enhanced its action strategies based on the participants' comments (Stanley & Weare, 2004). The second one is the article about the lack

of decision-making impact in the public consultation of the Minas Gerais Legislative Assembly in 2011, which served more to fuel public debate on a relevant issue than to "subsidise members of parliament in a decision" (Mendonça & Amaral, 2014, p. 197).

For the deliberative bottom-up category, no cases were found in Brazil, while 35 cases from the first SLR presented civil society initiatives involving online discussion. Most of the analysis missed on the impacts of the participation on the decision-making, such as in the 18 participative platforms of US cities, where the citizens create and interact with one another to discuss problems and find solutions. In this case, Desouza and Bhagwatwar (2014) highlighted that the decision to implement the solutions remains in the hands of the public, without exposing any effective influence on the decision. Whether in the case of the online forum created by an association of citizens from Boston, Klein states that it was likely that decisions taken by local representatives had been "influenced by the fact that the local citizens had organised themselves in relation to the issue, attracted substantial public interest and pressured the legislators" (1999, p. 218).

Finally, the category of collaborative participation is represented by two cases in the worldwide SLR and one case in the Brazilian SLR. In the paper by Desouza and Bhagwatwar (2014), only two of the 25 platforms analysed in the US cities were classified by the authors at the final stage of the collective intelligence model, where the information flow is bidirectional, and the solutions developed by citizens are implemented in partnership between them and their governors. Whereas, in Brazil, Penteado et al. evaluated numerous examples of actions by the *Rede Nossa* São Paulo, and concluded that despite the limitations of pressure actions on the State, "it can influence the agenda, the implementation and evaluation of public policies" (2014, p. 229). Collaborative participation, as a category, involves a great importance to the democratic process, bearing in mind that analyses of all its examples confirmed some influence in the political decision-making. Nevertheless, the platforms represent a very small sample when compared to the other categories. It is possible to assume that this category is far from being important in modern society or simply academics do not feel attracted in this study.

The few examples of bottom-up participation in the first review also reflect the lack of studies of, or initiatives for, direct civic participation, such as petitions and other formats of public pressure without prior discussion. The high number of platforms that enable deliberative bottom-up participation may indicate that citizens are more focused on promoting discussions and debates rather than pressuring the governments to promote citizens' deliberation.

In the assessment of the Brazilian studies, the categories of top-down, bottom-up and deliberative bottom-up participation were not represented by a single platform, whereas those classified as pre-participation were the majority among the studies. Moreover, the types of participation repeated among the papers are: four analyses of the Digital Participatory Budgeting of Belo Horizonte and another four about the Chamber of Deputies' portal. Hence, it is observed that the few governmental initiatives that go beyond Pre-participation offer spaces for discussion and interaction between citizens and/

or governors, yet these are limited to very few cases. Non-governmental platforms, on the other hand, seem to have been neglected by academia or do not exist in sufficient number for analysis.

The standout point in this evaluation is the lack of analyses by the authors regarding the decision-making impact of the investigated platforms. As we know, the influence of one action on another should not be measured only by using a positive or negative category, but the purpose of this simplified questioning is precisely to check that the impacts of the civic engagement on the political decision-making are being assessed. The effectiveness of participation is ultimately evaluated by the authors' judgement, rather than sustained on ground-based conclusions. Those evaluations seem to be superficial and tend to be followed by an explanation about the government's decision-making power: "the decision to respond to or incorporate the viewpoints of the citizens relies in the political decision makers and the politicians who can choose whether or not to be receptive" (Tettey, 2001, p. 144).

Few articles tried to establish a relationship between social aspects of participation and government actions in this regard. Platforms are not studied in-depth. Most of the articles seem to convey the authors' perceptions, rather than a well-defined set of parameters of evaluation. Despite the complexity of the study towards the decision-making process, there is an urgent need for more critical evaluations. It is also fundamental to avoid naïve assertions about increased political participation and to support the construction of assessment indicators with a level of participation that is more compatible with their actual impacts.

## Final remarks

Although internet has provided different expectations, in terms of its political impact, this paper seeks to assess the possibilities of political participation through online platforms and its real impact on decision-making processes. The growing adaptation of governors and citizens to digital environments has allowed the creation of various platforms with the promise of increasing civic participation in political matters. However, it is pertinent to question to what extent the use of these platforms is truly capable of broadening the political role played by citizens and influencing the decision making of the authorities.

Two systematic literature reviews were designed to map the empirical studies about online platforms for civic participation around the world and in Brazil. From the 434 articles found in the first SLR, 32 were selected for quantitative and qualitative analysis, as were 12 papers selected from the Brazilian review. From these, 179 platforms analysed by the articles were categorised according to the new online political participation assessment model revealing its impact on the decision-making process.

Considering the results, it is observed that most of the platforms found in the two SLRs are governmental initiatives that foster a top-down information flow (Liste & Sorensen, 2015; Polat & Pratchett, 2014; Rossini, 2014; Saylan, 2009), with some possibility

for interaction and discussion between citizens and governors (Balla, 2014; Marques, 2010), but little or no influence on the political decision-making process. Taking into account this sample, 8% of the cases in Brazil and the world were evaluated as having some impact on the final decision, whereas 22% had no apparent impact and 70% were not analysed by their authors in terms of influence on decisions. On one hand, the evident lack of impact analysis hinders assessment of the initiatives and, on the other, such analysis is limited by the lack of feedback from governors and transparency in the results of the participation, thus complicating the researchers' efforts to correlate citizen demands to the decision of the political representatives.

Thus, one of the most crucial aspects of this article deals with the argument that participation represents little more than opportunistic rhetoric on the part of political representatives. Several online governmental initiatives communicate a promise of promoting civic participation, but are, in practical terms, complex, closed platforms, controlled and monitored by their managers and with very little or no feedback about the result of the participation, caracterizing a kind of "participation washing". Furthermore, behind the so-called participatory processes, informal hierarchies and other disguised power structures can be hidden, acting in an authoritarian manner and in the interest of small groups. The rhetoric of participation promoted by governors may result in an environment of elitist citizenship, a false politicization, and an example of manipulative participation and the rise of a new kind of populism.

There is another problem for civic participation in politics: the lack of total transparency of public data. It is only possible to participate efficiently in political matters if the information related to the public sphere is fully available and accessible for citizens to use and understand. However, governors seemingly have yet to accept the commitment to be held accountable by society for their own actions. In the 2001 second Global Forum, the government's role should go beyond creating technology-enabled websites with basic services and information (Jardim, 2000). Investment is required to increase genuine transparency of public information and political education in order to instil a greater understanding of citizenship and create a culture of broad and conscientious participation. Undoubtedly, such investments involve complex planning and considerable financial outlay for the state, both in the implementation of new technologies and staff training for information management, and in the educational projects for the whole population. The problem, however, seems to go beyond the financial conditions; it lies in the governors' interest in opening political processes to the citizens.

According to Jiang and Xu (2009), online structures are not naturally participative tools; they rely directly on the political and cultural environment in which they are involved. In this regard, with an authoritarian, conservative political model still in force in Brazil, new technologies have not been used to their full potential and the best experiments have been those aimed at increasing tax revenues ((Pinho, 2008; Sampaio, Maia & Marques, 2010). This lack of governmental incentive for online platforms to enable civic political engagement is explored in the studies of both the reviews. These analyses

conclude that government representatives, in both Brazil and the rest of the world, appear averse to creating and maintaining such initiatives. Citizen participation in decision-making signifies power sharing, a diminished role exercised by those public agents and the loss of control over the public agenda (Freitas et al., 2015; Marques, 2010; Stanley & Weare, 2004).

The results of this study indicate that online political participation is not only a technological question, but also a question of power. The efforts to enable effective political participation in online platforms go far beyond the creation and implementation of new digital platforms. On the government's part, it is necessary to create control and audit agencies to guarantee transparency and accountability of political acts; to shape the financial conditions for the development of political education; and, primarily, to renounce the rhetorical discourse and share decision-making powers with the citizens. As for the citizens, they need to encourage the creation of bottom-up initiatives and counter-power mechanisms; to acknowledge their responsibility to press governors for transparency in the decision-making process and control government actions; to disseminate information and develop interest in political issues so that they can claim their democratic rights.

The scientific community also has a fundamental role to play in the development of online political engagement: It must apply a research agenda that encompasses analytic and critical studies of the practices, uses and concrete results of citizen participatory platforms, especially of the platforms created by the sectors of civil society. The need arises to create methods and indicators, which can measure the effectiveness of the online participation in political processes around the world, in their different contexts. It thus becomes even more urgent to develop empirical studies into the transparency of public information and the uses of the technology itself to generate fraudulent results, among other possible strategies to manipulate online participation for the self-legitimation of political agents in the light of the crisis of representativeness and authority that characterises the modern world.

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# Meaningful participation via negotiated narratives

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**Abstract**

This article analyses the project "Red Branch Heroes", an interactive, transmedia prototype that was set in Northern Ireland. This piece of practice based research investigates the writing techniques that can be used to promote useful participation. The article suggests a form of participation that acknowledges the power balances that exist between author and audiences in digital narratives. It advocates a range of techniques that promote a greater sharing of that power so that those power positions are challenged. But it also advocates for the role of author as one of conductor or orchestrator, a role that is defined by a process of negotiation. Such a process results in a "negotiated narrative".

**Keywords**
interactive transmedia; narratives; participation; storytelling; web series

# Participação efetiva com recurso a narrativas negociadas

**Resumo**

Este artigo analisa o projeto "Red Branch Heroes", um protótipo interativo e transmédia, lançado na Irlanda do Norte. Este projeto de investigação ação analisa as técnicas de escrita que podem ser utilizadas para promover uma participação eficaz. O artigo sugere uma forma de participação que reconhece os equilíbrios de poder que existem entre o autor e as audiências em narrativas digitais. Defende uma série de técnicas que promovem uma maior partilha desse poder, para que essas posições de poder sejam desafiadas. Mas também defende o papel do autor como o de um condutor ou orquestrador, papel este que é definido por um processo de negociação. Tal processo resulta numa "narrativa negociada".

**Palavras-chave**
narrativas; participação; *storytelling*; transmédia interativos; websérie

## Introduction

"Red Branch Heroes" (RBH), a prototype project set in Northern Ireland and developed by a core team of three, including the author of this article, was part performance and part game, using websites, social media, game play and fictional video production to tell its story, along with songs, comic books, photostories and a host of other media.

In this sense, it could be considered to be an interactive transmedia project. This term has been applied to large-scale Hollywood productions and small-scale self-funded arts projects (Dena, 2009, p. 4) and the RBH project falls into the latter category.

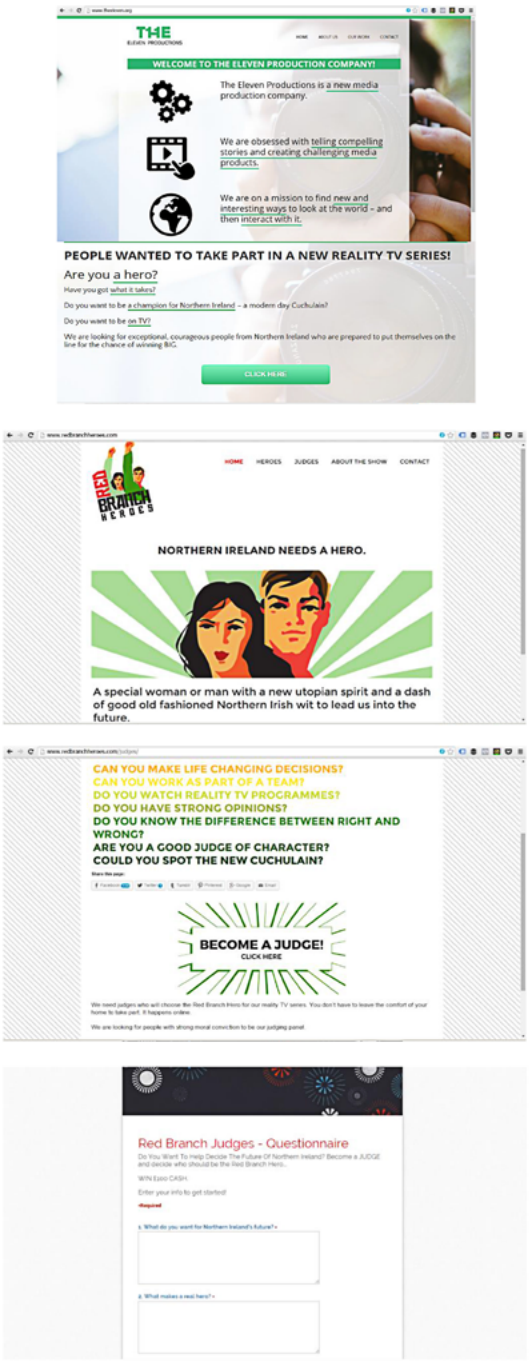


Figure 1: Project website
Source: http://www.redbranchheroes.com/ and http://www.theeleven.org/

Many transmedia makers suggest that forms of participation are crucial to its success (Gomez, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Phillips, 2012) but currently available programmes

often only offer predetermined storylines which are author-led and have disappointed audiences (Manovich, 2001; Rose, 2012; Ryan, 2001). The RBH prototype and the associated practice based, action research methodology investigated both the writing processes used and the role that such storytelling practices could play in post conflict societies such as Northern Ireland.

The project was set in Northern Ireland as it is a place rich in social capital and has a vibrant civil society that values participation. This is evidenced through the many cultural, voluntary and sporting organisations that are currently found there. Family and community continue to be of considerable importance. However, the relationship between this society and political institutions is fraught with tensions (Coulter & Shirlow, 2019; Dawson, 2019; McQuaid, 2012).

The RBH project aimed to contribute to existing debates about storytelling in the context of Northern Ireland, and the role that storytelling/participation can have in the rebuilding and reimagining of that society, or in any other post-conflict society. There are many who suggest storytelling is a way for people to understand their world and to represent it; to take it apart, and to reconstruct it (Berger, 1979; Zipes, 2011). Other scholars have gone further to suggest that stories have a broader effect and can transform societies (Arendt, 1958; Gomez, 2011; McGonigal, 2011). Le Hunte and Golembiewski suggest in their abstract that

> humans place themselves in stories, as both observer and participant, to create a 'neural balance' or sweet spot that allows them to be immersed in a story without being entirely threatened by it – and this involvement in story leads to the formation of empathy – an empathy that is integral to forging a future humanity. It is through empathy, we argue, that stories have the power to save us. (Le Hunte & Golembiewski, 2014, p. 1)

Many storytelling projects in Northern Ireland are keen to utilise such empathetic traits but I do not maintain that storytelling in Northern Ireland (or in any transmedia or interactive context) has the power to radically change the society we live in. Rather, it is my contention that such practices offer us a way to reimagine our world together through old and new tales, and to engage in jointly telling these tales in new immersive ways that help us learn and understand our hopes and aspirations for the future. These practices also allow us to rethink and reconfigure participation, moving into more balanced power relations.

This article analyses RBH, paying special attention to its participatory dynamics, and how the design techniques promote a greater sharing of creative power. RBH is seen to challenge the traditional positions of author and reader, who are instead in collaboration to create a negotiated narrative. Their creative work is characterized by a liminality that not only supports conflict transformation, but also allows for a multivocality that is intrinsically democratic. In addition, RBH is not only produced by imagined

communities, but also produces these communities, again demonstrating the socially beneficial capacities of participation. Moreover, the protective positioning of the authors – the project team – is seen to mediate against the negative aspects of online participation known as "dark participation".

## "Red Branch Heroes"

RBH[1] was a project that encouraged participants to become judges in a fictional reality TV project (one that challenged the conventions of reality TV) to elect a new "hero" for Northern Ireland. Judges were presented with artefacts that belonged to fictional characters and were asked to interrogate these submissions to understand who these people could be. This interrogation was used by the authors/production company (which, as mentioned before, included the author of this article) as a feedback loop to help build characters and story for a web series. The main participants in the production were as shown in Figure 2, but there has been a much broader consultation on the project throughout Northern Ireland.


Figure 2: Project participants

To give an example of the character development: The character Mary Doherty submitted the contents of her handbag for scrutiny. From this the judges began to think about who she was and what she was like. As they made their observations through a chat application, the authors watched and fed this information into the character profile of Mary releasing further information on her in the form of visual images, psychological profiles and character quotes, that reflected the judges' views. The feedback loop helped create, deepen and strengthen the characters. The judges were then asked to vote for

[1] More information on RBH can be found on the website http://www.redbranchheroes.com/phd/practice/

their favourite character and three were chosen to be further developed. This time the judges were able to meet their creations face to face as we cast actors to play them. The judges interviewed these "candidates" and eventually used this information to decide who they were going to promote to the outside world as a suitable "hero" character for Northern Ireland. Friends, relatives and the public then voted for their favourite candidate. The character Leo was eventually chosen as the "hero" and would be the first character to feature in the proposed web series.


Figure 3: Candidate application Mary Doherty
Source: Bellyfeel/Author

Figure 4: Mary as played by actor
Source: Bellyfeel/Author

The RBH websites were designed to work primarily on mobile phones and tablets[2]. However, not everyone has access to a smart phone and so participation was already

[2] Although the major reason to set the project in Northern Ireland was related to the legacy of the Troubles, the levels of tablet ownership and smartphone usage suggested that Northern Ireland was a useful place to carry out an online experiment. A recent *Communications Market Report: Northern Ireland* by OFCOM (2013) shows that Northern Ireland has one of the highest take-ups of tablet ownership in the UK. This report also shows that social media continues to be popular, with 53% of Northern Ireland's population accessing Facebook, Twitter and other similar online services (Base: Adults aged 16+ who use the internet at home or elsewhere, n=376, Northern Ireland 2013).

curtailed to those that did. Broadband availability was also an issue with many complaining about limited access to the project. The project team also realised that people were needed to participate in the project to study the form, which made external incentives important, to motivate participation and had to be properly applied. We offered a financial reward (£100 for the best participant) for participation, and made it clear that the project was "not for profit" and was in common ownership.

As an online project, RBH is functioning in a global context that Shoshana Zuboff (2018) has labelled *The age of surveillance capitalism*. Admittedly, RBH did use a type of surveillance practice to create its stories, however it is one that is recognised and supported by its users and relies on a process of recognition and negotiation designed to find a mutually-agreed approach to the construction of a web-based drama that is democratic. Instead of declaring "our private experience to be theirs for the taking, for translation into data for their private ownership" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 19), the team alerted our players to the power imbalances at play so that all could engage in a dialogue, through a gamified project. This article therefore necessarily is an attempt to contribute in part to what Quandt (2018, p. 44) calls "a future agenda" for participation research, where both the positive and negative perspectives in participation are considered. He suggests research "must accept and include both perspectives, light and dark, and it needs to offer clearer benchmarks on the societal relevance of both phenomena and everything in between".

Zuboff and Quandt are not the only one to suggest that online participation can have negative consequences. For instance, Lutz and Hoffman write that "online content creation, however, can be associated with significant individual and collective disadvantages. Users may become associated with causes they do not support. Participation might engender online confrontation, strife, incivility, defamation, bullying, persecution, and stalking" (Lutz & Hoffman, 2017, p. 877).

In a post-conflict environment such as Northern Ireland I was nervous of what the "dark side" of participation would produce and aware that participation can have unforeseen consequences. I was keen to find a writing context that could deal with such occurrences and minimise conflict. In this sense I fell into the trap that Quandt (2018), and before him Cooke and Kothari (2001) and Miessen (2010), identified: My participation research focused on observable acts of content creation, and somewhat ignored the broader setting, the limits it imposed on the participatory practices under scrutiny, and the lack of participation in this broader setting itself. However, subsequently I questioned this position and investigated user motivation and the quality of that participation when large numbers of participants did not materialise to test the work. As such I take into account the participation that did occur but also the participation that did not. Many of the results from this project were positive but, in this article, I consider the lack of broader participation in the project and how negative or disruptive participation is mediated in the design processes used.

RBH, as a prototype, can be seen as a low-fi technological test that developed simple tools to explore the idea of a future and idealised Northern Ireland. In this way it can

be seen as a probe. Madden, Cadet-James, Atkinson and Watkin Lui (2014) write about probes and prototypes that aim to obtain culturally appropriate design for individual wellbeing. Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti (1999) developed the idea of using cultural probes to explore design for the elderly. Probes are simple, flexible tools that allow designers to learn about potential users. Since then, probes have been used to inspire design, to increase participation and to build and facilitate dialogue. Technology probes have also been used in this context (Mattelmaki, 2005) and are low-fi applications that are used to garner information relating to ITC use and the environment of the participants in order to inspire further design. Problems have been identified:

> increasingly, we see technology probes used not in an inspirational sense, but as a way of generating functionality requirements to determine the one best way forward. Indeed, we see this as one of the ways that technology probes veer away from the standard cultural probe design. (Madden et al., 2014, p. 42)

In general, the participants were not particularly interested in the mechanics of writing but expressed an interest in taking part in something that contributes to a better Northern Ireland. Such ambitions were identified by the participants themselves in pre- and post-project questionnaires, but it was not the aim of the project that all these aspirations were met. This implied that it was important that expectations were managed from the very start. For this reason our website featured a section explaining the project and all questionnaires sent out included a personal history of our work which demonstrated our approach. Some people will have been put off by this information. However, we were able to make clear that the aim has not been to use community participation for business development or economic gain but to test and react to local circumstances in a continued loop of exploration and improvisation. In this way, the research avoids the identified dangers of functionality by using a combination of participative design and participatory action research to create a negotiated narrative (see below). Such concerns do, however, limit the numbers of people who participate and the type of participation that can be achieved. The need to make clear our intentions destroyed many of the immersive techniques commonly used to engage people in fictional works and as a result the number of participants was low. Our feedback also shows that our need to collect data acted as a major barrier to participation when people had to fill out forms and give personal details. Such factors would be minimised if further work was carried out.

## A negotiated narrative

The RBH prototype suggests that writing for interactive transmedia is a writing process that needs to have the interests of the reader/audience at the forefront and that the role of the author could be akin to that of the conductor or orchestrator. This is similar to Barthes' idea of an author as "scriptor", a person who produces the work. However, in

RBH, readers make an active contribution to the scripting and production process of the text through their own participation so they also produce the work. I suggest that both readers and authors are scriptors and readers in this context, although the author bears more responsibility for the quality of the final text. The work here is drawn, as Barthes suggests, from "innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes, 2001, p. 210), rather than from one individual experience. Although immersion is common to all forms of text, a different experience of immersion is achieved in this interactive transmedia context by adopting a "gamification" approach of fictional narratives (Alderman, 2015). Through what Jenkins terms "convergence culture" (2006), and now more commonly through convergent technology such as smart phones, people are able to enter the actual world of the story and take action. Improvisation plays a central role in this type of writing process (Millard, 2014), although forms of collaborative practice have yet to be fully developed to facilitate such effective participation.

It is the "liminality" of form and situation that makes participation so crucial in this context. The transmedia/interactive form necessitates "liminality", an ambiguity where the reader/user is in a process of change or disorientation where the usual hierarchy of author and reader are reversed. A certain liminality across many different forms is also afforded by the mix of platforms and methods used in which the usual order of writing is disrupted. Northern Ireland is a society undergoing a particular, though not a unique, process of transition and stasis – often termed "post-conflict" – and I argue that such liminality requires the adoption of a narrative that is constructed from the many voices involved in its making and that actively includes discursive elements: in other words, a discourse[3].

To build this argument, we can return to the Frankfurt School critique, which expressed dissatisfaction with the cultural and political implications of mass media during the twentieth century. Jürgen Habermas (1991) suggested that twentieth century industries had sophisticated methods of persuasion that had displaced dialogue among equals. However, he also proposed a critique of the public as a mass audience, one manipulated by mass communication methods. I recognise that many of the theorists working within this critique were writing in the shadow of the *Third Reich* and were thus concerned about the powerful deployment of propaganda in print, radio and cinema. Indeed, in contemporary culture I understand how transmedia methods could be used effectively for similar propaganda purposes, but I question the idea of audiences as uninformed or passive participants. Indeed, much of such passive behaviour is now contested in fan culture and audience studies (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Jenkins, 2012). While some audiences are content to watch and consume, there is an increasing number who aim to perform.

[3] I use discourse here in the postmodern sense of the term, specifically that of Foucault (1977, 1980) who argues that power is always present in communication, producing 'truths' but also producing their limits and constraints.

This observation has been upheld by my research, not only in the way people were willing to perform on the project but also in the way people were keen to volunteer information that aided the project's construction. Nonetheless, the prototype could be perceived as useful in developing a neo-liberal consensus in relation to civic life in Northern Ireland. For this reason, I argue that the author role is as important as the role of the reader in this transmedia form. One role does not dominate the other. The author has the responsibility for setting up a pretext, a process drama term for a dramatic 'elsewhere', "a fictional world which will be inhabited for the insights, interpretations, and understandings it may yield" (O'Neill, 1995, pp. 12-13). Within this dramatic world, online debate and story construction occurs. It is incumbent upon the author to be cognisant of the implications of this dynamic and for readers to be aware of the views and intentions of that author if the element of discourse is to be fully maintained throughout the project.

Barthes concludes that "we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (2001, p. 213). While understanding that this reversal is more complex than it first appears, and that Barthes is as sceptical of the reader as he is of the author, his work is useful here as it suggests that both reader and author have equal roles to play in relation to the text. However, in RBH, the author is continually being reborn only to die again. The reader in this transmedia context is in a similar position, sharing as they do part of the scriptor role. In this way greater parity or power was achieved between author and reader. The relationship between author and reader is critical in such a context given the collaborative nature of the project, and the trust and empathy that this kind of production requires.

The readers/participants were constantly trying to evaluate what the purpose and meaning of pre-text and information presented implied and so Barthes' assertion that the Author is dead is slightly problematic in this case. At the outset it was important that the audience was aware who the author was and what was motivating their practice. Without this knowledge (that I was brought up in Northern Ireland within a particular community) the negotiation would be based on suspicion and could result in conflict. In Northern Ireland, where notions of territory are often disputed, the idea of a negotiated project – one that is constructed by a range of people, both professional and non-professional – opens up possibilities for the transgression of established boundaries.

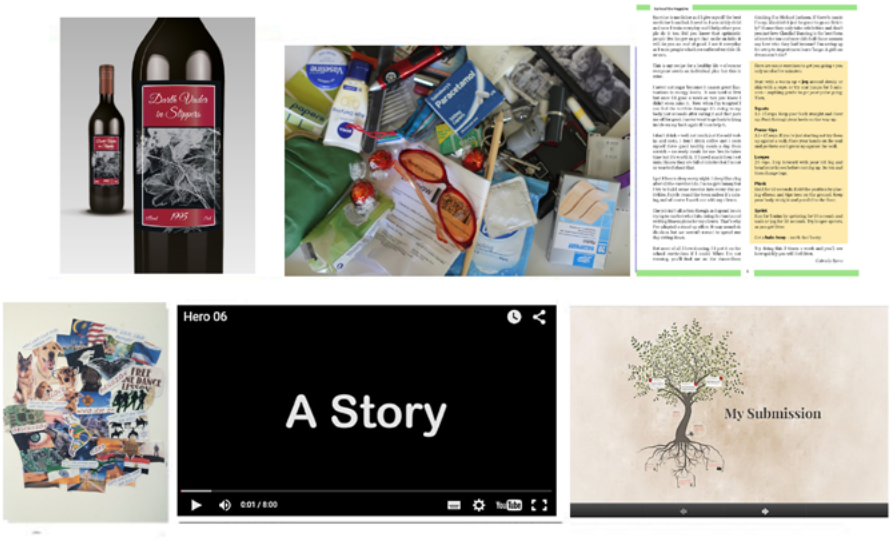


Figure 5: Applicant submissions
Source: Bellyfeel/Author

Tony Watson (2001) used the term "negotiated narrative" in relation to critical management education and learning – more specifically, ways to teach and build management practice. He uses the term (which he, in turn, borrowed from literature studies) to synthesise a range of "stories" in the management process (the practitioner story, the academic research story and the theory story) to discover "the story behind the story" (Watson, 2001, p. 388). I have adapted and used his concept to imply a synthesis of stories (stories proposed by people from Northern Ireland, my own stories, myths, theories of writing, and re-workings of other writers) but, in RBH, this synthesis results in the creation of a new and negotiated narrative, reflecting the "story behind the story".

In a negotiated narrative, the narrative is constantly changing due to the negotiations, so my use of the term implies an evolving, liminal concept rather than a fixed position. Moreover, I use the term narrative in a fluid way, not only to refer to the action that takes place in the project and the transformation that results from this action, but also to involve the interventions and interruptions that are caused in the negotiation stages of the project. This necessarily involves discursive and experimental elements that would not usually find themselves part of any narrative text, but which are commonly used in installation art and digital arts projects. The negotiated narrative in RBH acknowledges that the process of creation and its emotional impact is as important to the creation of the online performance as are the fused stories that will contribute to the final product. The aesthetic rules of such a narrative are more akin to world building games like *The Sims* rather than literature of film and television. To be interactive or to participate in this project has meant the need to build a direct link between audience and creator; a communication that has the potential to inform or impact the process of creative development.

## Imagined communities

The interactive nature of the project provided the opportunity to engage (participate) with audiences from different communities by building safe fictional environments that audiences could populate to create "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) which house opportunities for comment and collaboration, opening up possibilities for the future in the real world. While Anderson's phrase was coined to refer specifically to nationalism, where he attributed the spread of nationalism to the development and rise of print media, I am using the term more broadly (by referring to a community of interest, or see also Said's (1978) concept of "imagined geographies") to emphasise elements that can be created from an investigation of presumed agreed characteristics. These presumed characteristics were defined by those who answered our questionnaires and then took part in our drama.

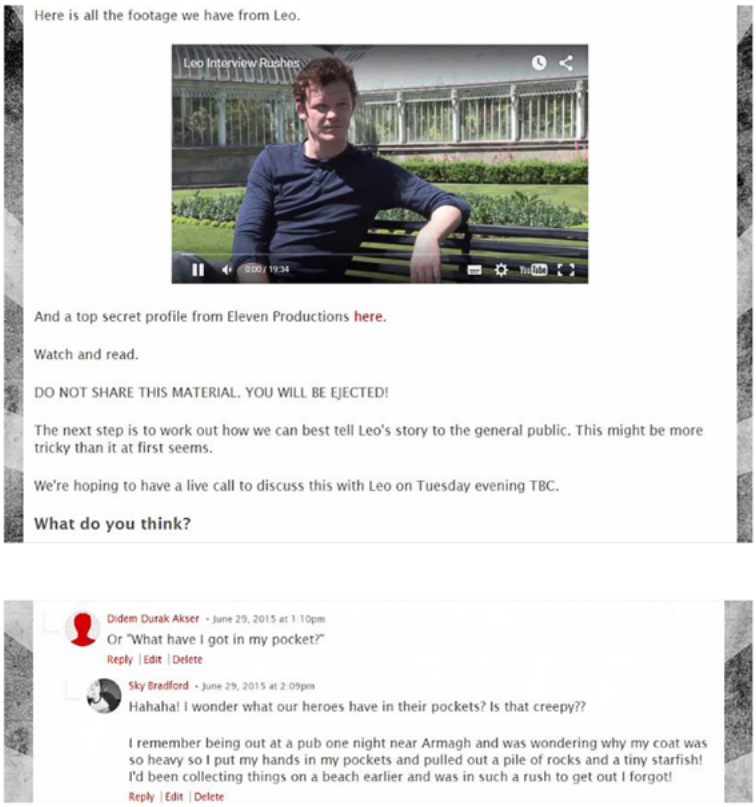


Figure 6: Leo and the discussion forum
Source: RBH Forum (no longer online); Bellyfeel/Author

However, the term also usefully refers to those "imagined" or "perceived" attributes that are afforded by the internet and could equally refer to both utopian and nationalistic elements that are represented there. The project provided the following example where the creation of an online character through a feedback loop could be seen as being problematic in the context of Northern Ireland. Leo offered a photostory of his local area

as his application artefact (see Figure 6) and in doing so suggested he may belong to a particular community. The judges had to interrogate this story to find out who he really was. As people discussed his likely identity there was a strong possibility that some polarisation could occur. To some extent this was avoided as I began to build participant's comments into Leo's character regardless of their contradictory nature. People (although informed) were not really aware that I was using a "surveillance technique" for character creation, but they were delighted to see a complex character emerge from their views. In this way Leo, initially an unpopular choice of hero who received few votes, became an engaging character who reflected people's concerns and to whom people could relate, as one of participants indicated in the feedback:

> I thought it was a game ... but I had no idea what to expect. I thought it was quite interesting when Leo revealed his dubious past. I found the thing about the way people present themselves interesting – I was surprised I chose Leo, but he seemed more real. (Player 1, player feedback)

I was also surprised by this outcome, especially as the majority of participants were women over thirty years of age and Leo became an unemployed, absent father. However, it is also the case that a number of participants were nervous of making their views public in this way. The project contained a number of judges who lurked on the sidelines, who wanted their views to have effect as was evidenced by their voting behaviour but who did not want to contribute to character creation. To do so could open one up to conflict and in the context of Northern Ireland such conflict could have consequences. So, story conductors in such projects need to be as aware of the needs of inactive participants as much as those of active players. Using an imagined community as the building block for the prototype proved to be extremely immersive for participants and so a strong community of players was born.

A fiction built on imagined communities – communities built by the imagery, texts and discourses of a range of people – therefore builds and extends on Hugh O'Donnell's (1999, p. 10) idea of "soaps" or continuing drama series as "sites of a complex on-going process of negotiation between producers and consumers itself taking place within a much larger framework". It is also similar to the proponents of entertainment-education (EE), or educational soap operas that have adopted a social action approach, as soap operas have long been seen as a useful vehicle to promote social change. In the early 1970s, Miguel Sabido created a new genre for Mexican television that was an entertainment-education soap opera, an educational programme promoting social development (Singhal, Cody, Rogers & Sabido, 2008). His efforts have influenced many similar projects in other countries for both radio and television and now for the web. Since the 1980s, programme makers have used this strategy as one part of their communication campaign in Latin America, Africa and Asia (Singhal, 2006) to promote peace and conflict resolution. Singhal suggests that such entertainment-education could be heading

towards socially engaged transmedia and perhaps interactive production. The RBH project therefore owes a debt to such popular forms of entertainment and education, but a negotiated narrative does not necessarily aim to promote social development above all else; although such development is at the core of the narrative structure. Indeed, such a practice could be manipulated by a range of authors to promote very different messages. In this way I agree with Zuboff's (2019, p. 19) statement that "surveillance capitalism is not technology (....) Surveillance capitalism relies on algorithms and sensors, machine intelligence and platforms, but it is not the same as any of these". The form of the project and its associated structure is not the aspect that necessarily promotes discourse and democratic participation, although it does in part contribute to it and make available new ways to engage in that discourse. Instead, it is the intention of the author and the context within which the author and reader find themselves that is key to the success of the project.

## Analysing the prototype

Despite a growing body of evidence which details the negative aspects of online participation and the anti-democratic views of some highly motivated and organised actors in the online realm, I believe that this is often to be found in online forums that are not moderated to any significant extent. A negotiated narrative is by its very essence a moderated narrative and one where every contribution can be challenged so Quandt's assertion, that "positive forms of participation now seem awfully outdated" (Quandt, 2018, p. 44), is overcome by using a negotiated approach to content creation, what Kligler-Vilenchik has termed "good participation":

> there is a continued need to understand good participation, but instead of an abstraction derived from idealistic notions, we should do so in a way that is empirically informed by the actual participation practices of real people (even if a select few). (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2018, p. 13)

In this way, my study (which is based on 40 participants) acknowledges that those participating were in the main from community and arts groups within Northern Ireland who were concerned with the ways in which stories are told and supported there. This limits the study, to some extent, and it is important to acknowledge that storytelling which involved a wider range of participants from different backgrounds would no doubt have been a more difficult and challenging proposition given that prejudices and positions could have surfaced more readily. That does not invalidate the experience of the prototype however. The participation, and the conflicts that did occur, were analysed in the prototype and the knowledge gained has be used to inform further work.

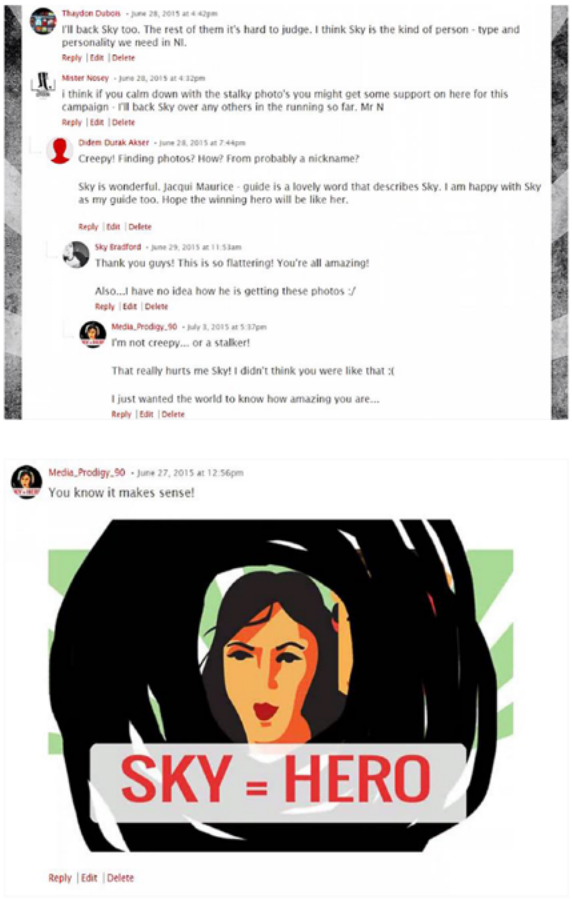


Figure 7: Discussion forum
Source: RBH Forum (no longer online); Bellyfeel/Author

It was crucial that different communities were present in this project. Of the 40 who signed up 27 were over 30 years of age and 13 were under 30 years of age. Twenty two were female and 18 were male. The majority of these were from large cities, such as Belfast or Derry/Londonderry, but a surprising number were from small towns and country areas. Very few identified themselves as religious but, of those that did, five were from a Catholic background and three were from a Protestant background. Twenty were born and bred or have lived in Northern Ireland most of their lives while six had no connection to the place and fourteen had tangential connections, such as being married to someone from there. In online projects that are not connected to large and popular franchises this number can be considered to be a healthy sample. Small numbers did not necessarily undervalue the usefulness of the information obtained. Lance Weiler (2015a, 2015b) has used groups of 12 participants to test his Sherlock prototype and asserts that small groups of five to six people are ideal for granting agency and understanding the work. More importantly for me, it was a sample that represented a wide range of people. Of those 40 people, ten people contributed regular posts although there was a core group of about six who were constantly engaged. This means that the majority of participants took a less active role. Again this could be seen in a negative light, that a self-selected

group of people have taken ownership of the project. However, given that the core group was a very varied and diverse group of people not all known to each other I suggest that this was not the case.

Perhaps it is important to detail here what is often referred to as the 1:9:90 Rule, where out of every 100 users of the internet, only 10% will interact with it, while the other 90% will simply view the material (McConnell & Huba, 2006). Of those 10%, only 1% is likely to be a content creator. Charles Arthur (2006, s.p.) argues that "you shouldn't expect too much online. Certainly, to echo *Field of dreams*, if you build it, they will come. The trouble, as in real life, is finding the builders". While some suggest that this dynamic is changing, this project found the builders in these 10 people, meaning 25% of the test group and the majority of those people were over 40 years of age; a real surprise as this age group are not often seen to be builders for online projects. A further important discovery was that those builders were more likely to promote and enliven the project for those who were viewing. So the builders encouraged and prompted those watching to comment and vote and that probably resulted in further participation. This suggests that having an element of control could be a more central concern than participation. Alison Jeffers (2017, p. 209) maintains when writing about participation in Northern Ireland:

> despite the success of the GFA in setting up a power-sharing government based on an understanding of the legitimacy of both unionist and nationalist views, many issues remain unresolved. These include "[t]he question of how to deal with the legacy of the past" and the fact that "division remain[s] an unfortunate fact of life". (McKittrick & McVea, 2012, p. 305)

The work of writers for film, television and new media products since that time, is, in part, defined by the fact that such writers grew up during the Troubles[4] and that their work is therefore influenced by that period. It could be argued, as Heidemann does when talking about post-Agreement literature, that their work "concerns itself with subject identities suspended between a 'repressive' past and a 'progressive' future' and that the resultant work 'neither attempts to 'heal' nor 'resolve' the political conundrum of Northern Ireland" (Heidemann, 2016, p. 251).

Instead, she suggests that post-Agreement literature (novels, poetry and drama) concerns itself with, "restructuring, recasting and, more importantly, diagnosing the passive absorption of the country's violent past into an 'agreed upon future', and that the 'violent past does not necessarily configure as a dominant trope of their writings'" (Heidemann, 2016, p. 251).

[4] 'The troubles' is a frequently used term to refer to a conflict that happened in Northern Ireland from 1960s to 1990s. The conflict although often seen as a religious conflict (between Catholics and Protestants) was primarily a political struggle fuelled by historical events. Unionists/Loyalists wanted Northern Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom and Irish Nationalists/Republicans wanted to establish a united Ireland.

The design and writing of RBH shows similar traits. Maybe such passive absorption of not only the Troubles but also the practices of digital media were a worry to many of the participants in RBH?

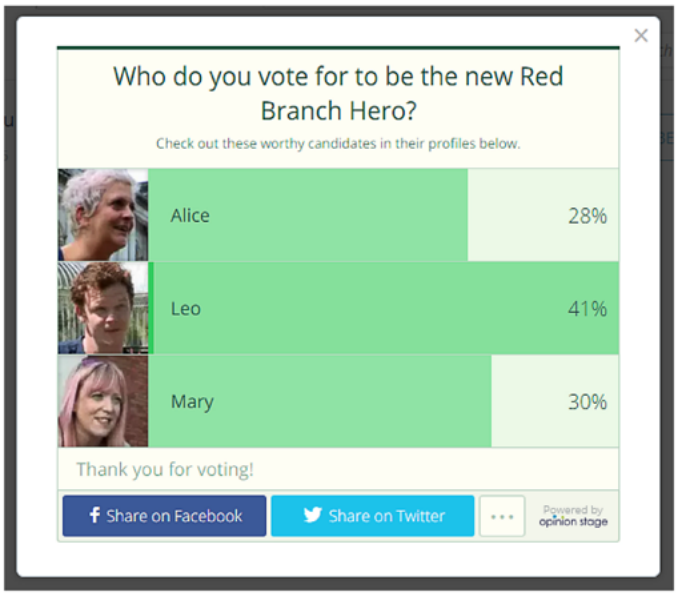


Figure 8: Voting for candidates
Source: RBH Survey (no longer online); Bellyfeel/Author

Heidemann talks of theorists (Nordin & Holmsten, 2009) who read Ireland as a postcolonial society and apply the concept of liminality as "a site of negotiation and re-identification" (Heidemann, 2016, p. 8) and as an enabling state. She takes issue with such a position, suggesting that what characterises Northern Ireland is a state of "negative liminality" (Heidemann, 2016, p. 10), a disabling condition which resists closure and resolution. However, she does not see this as a negative concern or one that is a pathological condition of post-Agreement Northern Ireland. Rather, she suggests that "'post-Agreement' writers are predominantly concerned with the private predicaments of their literary characters as opposed to discursive reading of the political structures themselves" (Heidemann, 2016, p. 51).

My concerns have also been driven by trying to gain an understanding of how people have been influenced by these experiences. Finding a form that has been able to accommodate a range of views has been instrumental in facilitating such a project. Therefore, the project design became a mix of popular forms that are able to bring difficult ideas to larger audiences alongside the development of complex characters, which better exemplify the current concerns of people living in Northern Ireland. Playing in this space has meant that we have all been able not only to critique and investigate characters but also to look anew at some of what it means to be Northern Irish. However, in this context I am mindful of Jeffers' comment that "participation alone is no guarantor of the necessary

redistribution of authority that may lead to positive social change" (Jeffers, 2017, p. 210). As a result, participation, defined as meaning the providing of access, per se was not the central aim of the project. Instead, the project aimed to create a type of participation that promoted and challenged the authority of the authors. When writing about participation in community plays in Belfast she further asserts "the value of thinking about authority is that it allows us to identify and examine different types of power and the role of knowledge and relationships in developing these" (Jeffers, 2017, p. 218). Such a practice was central to the RBH project and its participants frequently contested the actions of the authors and the storylines suggested, inventing their own to replace these.

Heidemann (2016, p.192) suggests that it was not until the 1970's that the "aesthetic collusion between art and politics has emerged as the defining feature of contemporary Northern Irish drama". She suggests that more recent productions such as Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* (2006) and Daragh Carville's *This other city* (2010) adopt Stewart Parker's "working model of wholeness" (Heidemann, 2016, p. 192) and apply it to a new political situation: the pitfalls of neoliberal politics in Northern Ireland. As such, the plays she examines "provide a provocative commentary on the 'progressive' neoliberal nation-state building" (Heidemann, 2016, p. 193). RBH mirrors this practice. My aims therefore go beyond the idea of "widening participation" for audiences and are related to ideas of "cultural democracy" (Kelly, Locke & Merkel, 1986, n.p.) that emphasise a shift in power between artist/author and participant (Webster & Buglass, 2005, p. 21). Jack Linchuan Qui (quoted in Allen et al., 2014, p. 1133), who has extensively researched Chinese internet usership, sees no correlation between bottom-up inclusive frameworks and the flattening of political structures of control and suggests that "instead, the structures of control seem to have gained from the new wealth of user-generated content, which benefits the powers that be more than anyone else". There would be no point in engaging in the construction of a participative online negotiated webseries if the purpose behind it is to "breed a *different* kind of 'conflict', one that is certainly less violent but gestures towards new forms of violence exerted by the Agreement's rhetorical negation of the sectarian past and its aggressive neoliberal campaign" (Heidemann, 2016, p. 4).

Such a process would be participation without agency and control, and mere participation as access and interaction. This is not what this research is recommending. The participants of RBH had real ownership over what was created in the project using a critical approach to story creation, even if they were few in number.

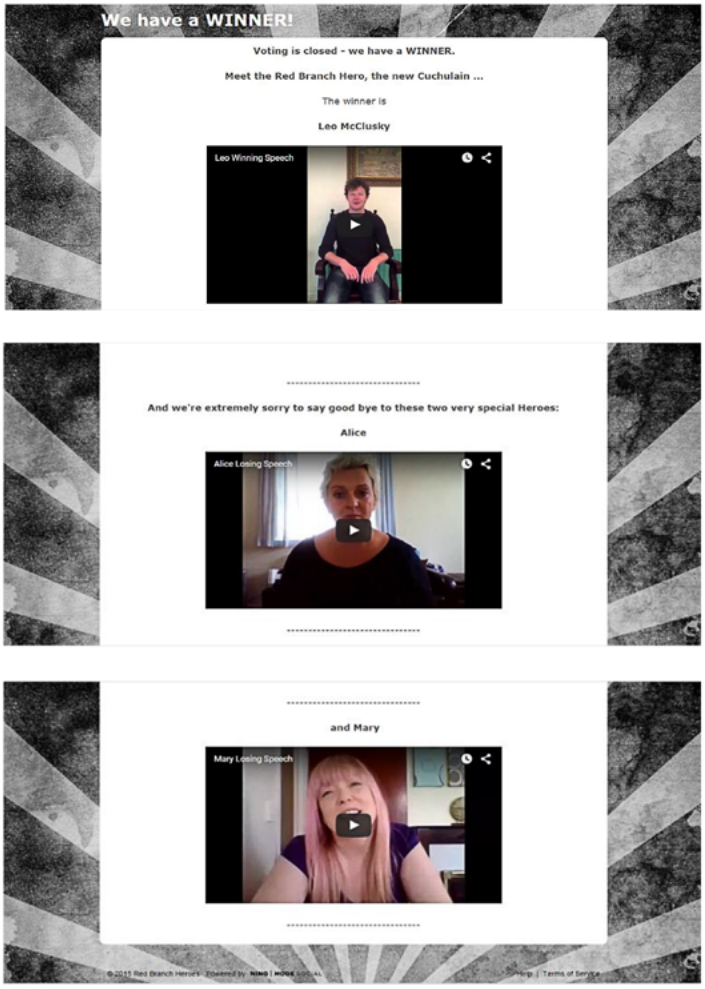


Figure 9: The winner
Source: Bellyfeel/Author

In RBH, while the production personnel are in possession of a greater control and understanding of the processes at play, they are in a similar position to the audience members in that they were "accepting that genuine participation has risks as well as potentials: that it involves vulnerability on the part of the performers and participants, as both parties open themselves up to unexpected experiences and outcomes" (Freshwater, 2011, p. 409).

Setting that task in a polarized society further complicates that process and a discourse was necessary in order to establish how this task was to be undertaken. Some judges wanted more direction in this task:

> I think the constituency has to be properly engaged with the story/context/issues. (...) the phase where we were supposed to 'help our chosen hero to develop their story' was confusing. I didn't really know what we were supposed to do. (Players 2 and 3, player feedback)

We were not clear enough with our participants about what time span and with how much negotiation our characters would be created. We created a process and we assumed that this process would be evident to the participants and reach the required result. The process did indeed create rounded characters through investigations and promotion by the judges but we should have made clear when that process was complete. We mistakenly brought the process to an abrupt ending which had the effect of ensuring that people wanted more but also left them a little bereft as they missed the close community created. A lack of involvement on the part of the orchestrators often provoked the judges to fill the gaps and move the story along and make it their own and we possibly should have involved the participants in the ending of the work. While the discussion about Northern Ireland on the site was low-level and very tentative, the eventual successful characters seem to embody the negotiated characteristics of that discussion. This is perhaps the biggest lesson learnt from the writing point of view – control and story cohesion was less of a concern for our participants than the media gurus (Gomez, 2011) of transmedia would have us think and participants are able to understand more fully what a story needs even if they don't necessarily know how to create that themselves.

I received very little feedback on how this type of project could be "useful" in the context of Northern Ireland. On the whole, all participants avoided answering it and some even deleted it from their forms. It is difficult to speculate why this would be. Again this lack of participation is worth considering. Perhaps it is due to the ways in which film and television have been used in relation to the Troubles. Lance Pettitt's (2000) research into the drama documentary suggests, that although such films are based on journalistic research they use the conventions of fiction films to tell their stories and mediate the real world. Maybe if we had asked this question within the drama rather than afterwards we would have gained a better response. People have felt more able to speak in the fictional environment.

Jimmy McGovern's film, *Sunday* (2003), makes no attempt to mimic the style of documentary and is clearly presented as a fictionalised version. Nonetheless, it is based on the stories and talks that he had with many people and in some respects is the culmination of such activity. He mediates the truth of what has happened through a story he creates himself. This is not dissimilar to the process that RBH used, except that this approach goes one step further and asks that the victims and families not only provide the stories, but respond and contribute to the mediated truth produced, in a public forum. Although more drama than documentary, the programme asks the audience to play with these concepts. As Sarah Edge (2009, p. 185) suggests "the docudrama is an especially powerful genre in which the signs of realism and fiction have become conflated". The work of RBH not only conflates the real and the fictional world to represent the current climate of Northern Ireland, but also utilises the more contested forms of semi-real or semi-fake worlds in reality television, a genre usually associated with attributing derogatory characteristics to ordinary working people. In this instance, the intention was to use

the genre conventions for more positive ends. The voyeuristic elements associated with reality television and social networks were used to motivate investigative approaches to story design. In short, I was asking people what was important to their lives as we played a story game that embodied these ideas.

The dynamic relationship between author and audience did create a strong sense of belonging in this project and ensured that people from both communities were able to take an active part. There was a surprising consensus about what kind of hero was needed for the modern world and what attributes such a hero should have, as the conversation thread in the project shows.

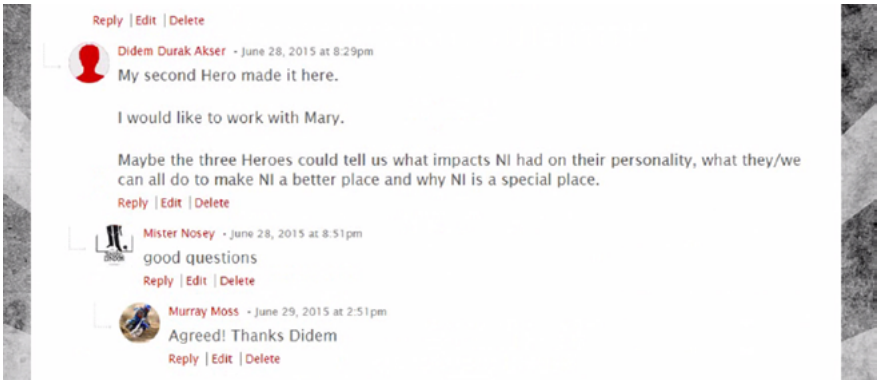


Figure 10: Conversation thread in NING network
Source: RBH Forum (no longer online); Bellyfeel/Author

There was a desire to understand the complexity of human behaviour rather than to take sides. When faced with difficult information the judges tried to find positives and move past stereotypical character portrayals and into a process where deep character is revealed. Such a successful outcome would suggest that the performative and game-playing elements were crucial to building a convincing narrative and that the narrative created was not negatively impacted by such participative elements. If we were to develop this project further, however, we would include live events in our transmedia and interactive practices so that people can meet and share experiences together in neutral spaces where elements of the story can be extended and developed so that that the online experience can be extended in their own lives.

## Conclusion

It is necessary to therefore acknowledge that participation per se does not automatically result in democratic practice or meaningful creative production. Neither can we overlook the skill and experience that the author brings to the creation process. It is my contention that we need to recalibrate and rethink how and why we offer opportunities to participate so that we can ensure these opportunities result in meaningful

creation. In this context it is not about how many people contribute, how much and how often they contribute but about the participatory quality of their contribution and the terms under which this contribution is included, rewarded and acknowledged. For these reasons, I have found the term "negotiated narrative" useful in this context as it recognises that the interactive and participative process is a consultative one, one that results in a synthesis of stories produced by all parties in the project. As Carpentier points out, the real issue is that of control and power: "struggles about the distribution of power in society in fields such as media, the arts, and development, and the attempts to make that distribution more equal, are what participation is about" (Carpentier quoted in Allen et al., 2014, p. 1132).

In this way, interactive transmedia and the technology that delivers it does not offer a revolution in storytelling as such. However, its liminality as a form contributes to opportunities that can be used for immersive possibilities. More importantly, this liminality and multivocality, which are generated through the participatory process that offers the reader/user/player greater power and control, also support a more democratic, decentralized society. Participation here is seen to matter, because it moves us away from the hard dichotomies that sustain (violent) conflict, by showing that the many grey zones and the pluralities that characterize contemporary societies can coexist with senses of belonging.

As always, it depends very much on who is controlling such opportunities. A negotiated narrative recognises the ways in which narratives can be hijacked to promote a particular point of view and suggests that discursive decision-making as a central element of participative story making mediates the likelihood of this happening. It also recognises the problems created by "surveillance capitalism" and although using similar but not machined techniques, suggests that such methods can be used for more positive outcomes if the inherent power relations are laid bare, made clear and can be dynamic. Offering opportunities where real life and fiction overlap helps develop online communities where strong links can be made between diverse groups of people. As a result, this research and this article raise the possibility that all is not lost in terms of the beneficial aspects of participation. Let us analyse further the potential of interactive production to better understand its benefits and difficulties.

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# Participation as a talisman: a metaphorical-theoretical reflection about the conceptualization of participation

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**Abstract**

Even if participation has been a key word in many research areas within Communication and Media Studies, there are still theoretical disagreements about its definition. The inevitable coexistence of different approaches to the concept has hindered the development of a unique theoretical framework. However, the efforts to conceptualise participation and to understand the increasing participatory practices in/through media in the last years has nourished the field of participatory communication and participatory culture with insightful ideas that serve as common ground for future research. Most of these ideas, while apparently contradictory, follow similar patterns and interests that could potentially lead to a shared understanding of what participation is or should be. This article tries to contribute to the objective of *rescuing participation* by theoretically reviewing the conceptual apparatus of participation in Communication and Media Studies and introducing the idea that participation can be conceptualized through the metaphor of the talisman. Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), this article argues that the way we conceptualize phenomena has an influence on how we perceive our practices. If we assume *to rescue* as an act to save from danger or evil, we should reclaim an understanding of participation as a powerful amulet. In that sense, the theoretical review of the conceptualizations of participation in the field of Media and Communication Studies that this article offers, will argue that participation can, at least partially, be structured, understood, defined and used in terms of a talisman. Specifically, the text will discuss four aspects that structure this metaphorical concept: participation as a fantasy, the authenticity of participation, the ritual of participation, and its (aesthetic) value.

**Keywords**
fantasy; media studies; metaphorical concept; participation; power

# A participação enquanto talismã: uma reflexão metafórica e teórica sobre a conceptualização da participação

**Resumo**

Ainda que a participação tenha sido uma palavra chave para muitas áreas de investigação no âmbito da investigação no âmbito da Comunicação e dos Média, não existe ainda um consenso sobre a sua definição. A coexistência inevitável entre diferentes abordagens ao conceito tem travado o desenvolvimento de uma estrutura teórica única. No entanto, os esforços para conceptualizar a participação e para compreender as crescentes práticas participativas nos/através dos média, nos últimos anos, têm alimentado a área da comunicação e cultura participativas com ideias elucidativas que servem de denominadores comuns para investigações futuras. A maior parte dessas ideias, embora aparentemente contraditórias, seguem padrões e interesses

semelhantes que poderiam conduzir a um entendimento partilhado acerca do que é ou deveria ser a participação. Este artigo tenta contribuir para o *resgate da participação*, ao rever, do ponto de vista teórico, o seu aparato conceptual no campo da investigação em Comunicação e Média, e ao introduzir a ideia de que a participação pode ser conceptualizada através da metáfora do talismã. À semelhança de Lakoff e Johnson (1980), este artigo defende que o modo como conceptualizamos os fenómenos influencia a forma como percebemos as nossas práticas. Se assumirmos que *resgatar* significa salvar de um perigo ou mal, deveríamos reclamar um entendimento da participação como um poderoso amuleto. Nesse sentido, a revisão teórica das conceptualizações da participação no campo da investigação em Comunicação e Média que este artigo oferece irá defender que a participação poderá, pelo menos parcialmente, ser estruturada, percebida, definida e usada como um talismã. Mais especificamente, o texto irá discutir quatro aspetos que estruturam este conceito metafórico: a participação como uma fantasia, a autenticidade da participação, o ritual da participação e o seu valor (estético).

**Palavras-chave**
conceito metafórico; estudos dos média; fantasia; participação; poder

## Introduction

If there is a need to rescue participation it is because, too often, within the framework of Communication and Media Studies, the concept has been taken for granted. Despite its centrality in many discourses, approaches and analysis, the use of participation in many contexts has ended up turning it into a broad and indefinite term. As Carpentier (2011a, pp. 353-354) puts it, "at some point participation simply stops being participation. Participation is a floating signifier that can take on many different forms. Potentially and theoretically it can shift in any possible direction". Similarly, Jenkins, Ito & boyd (2016) stress that "we need a more refined vocabulary for distinguishing between competing models of participation, especially at a time when the rhetoric of participation gets deployed by institutions which have done little or nothing to broaden who gets to participate". The conceptualization of participation is a complex task: even if we considered the manifold approaches that have been concerned with theoretically defining it, we could be accused of being imprecise, given the broadness of the term. However, it is important to defend, as Reifová and Svelch (2013, p. 264) wrote, that "rather than to dismiss the concept of participation, we need to invest it with meaning – to identify, examine, question, and critique it in its specific contexts". In that sense, the way we conceptualize participation will have important implications in the reflections of what we expect from the processes that make it possible.

This article enters the debate about the concept of participation by introducing the theory of the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2004), activated as a way of understanding one idea, in this case participation, in terms of another, in this case a talisman. Metaphorical modelling as a research method is based on the idea that knowledge is structured through the process of establishing analogies between conceptual domains (Pärn, 2017). This text proposes the metaphor of the talisman as a way of understanding participation, in terms of an appreciated element that has been ritually invested

with beneficial and protective power. Participation, similar to amulets and talismans, has been defined as being (in)authentic, symbolically empowering, phantasmagorical, dark, aesthetic or valuable. Through a literature review, ranging from Journalism Studies to Cultural Studies, from Education Studies to Political Sciences, this text connects ongoing debates and theoretical proposals with the metaphor of the talisman, aiming to rescue participation by acknowledging it as a driving force and by recognizing the power it represents, its protective role and the importance of the rituals that shape it and make it authentic. The objective of this paper is to acknowledge and appreciate how theories that have dealt with participation consistently connect to the metaphor of the talisman and to demonstrate the relevance and value of this way of thinking participation. At the same time, it is important to point to the limits of the metaphor (which are simultaneously one of its strenghts), as the metaphor is grounded in an always imperfect equation, that necessarily entails a reduction.

The concept of talisman, with its origins in Greek and Arabic cultures, refers to a magical element which is thought to possess the ability to avoid evil and attract good luck. Amulets or talismans are symbols, converted sometimes into tangible objects. Human credulity then allows for the attribution of magical and extraordinary powers and virtues to these objects (Hildburg, 1951; Lecouteux, 2014). The use of talismans goes back to antiquity and their uptake through cultural exchanges has shaped the creation of these amulets. The possession of amulets, made out of different forms and materials, has been understood as a fundamental practice to battle against different forms of evil. Its use can still be observed in people from all economic and cultural backgrounds, although as a socio-cultural practice it has lost its aura of power. Supposedly, its effect can be curative or preventive, but its attraction has been also closely related to adornment, so that, in addition to protecting, talismans serve as a sign of identification or ostentation, and have an aesthetic value (Martín Ansón, 2005).

That duality of the talisman, as a symbol with potential power and as a decoration indicating status, is shared by many conceptualizations of the ambivalent and contradictory nature of participation. Arguably, the metaphor of the talisman also helps to understand the relationship between the "parody of symbolic participation" (Prado, 1986) and its "promise of empowerment" (Carpentier, 2016). At a time when so many media and communication platforms offer interactive affordances, we must ask ourselves if participation is a *fetish* object, disconnected from social reality, or whether it serves a meaningful purpose, also as talisman. At the same time, corporate decisions to invite audience participation can be considered *preventive*, as they follow the generalized trend of digital and convergent media logics, or they can actually grant *status* or *value* to the contributions of the citizen. Also, the talisman requires a specific ritual to *invoke* its power and guarantee its *authenticity*. Similarly, the democratic *potential* of participatory processes is shaped by the norms and agents that rule over these practices.

## Approaches to participation

In the last two decades, and especially in the last 10 years, the academic and industrial interest in the participatory turn in media and communication processes has produced a significant research output. A number of these initiatives has specifically dealt with participation *in* and *through* media, if we attend to the useful distinction by Carpentier (2011a). A reason for the success of this research theme has to do with the interactive affordances of new technologies, media and platforms. Moreover, participation is intimately related to other relevant concepts, like interaction (Carpentier, 2011b), engagement (Bergillos, 2017) or empowerment (Barry & Doherty, 2016).

Many research forums, journals and books illustrate the interest of researchers, from around the world (Pasquali, Noguera Vivo & Bourdaa, 2013). The European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) framework funded an action on the theme "Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies" (COST Action IS0906), which devoted one of its four working groups to "Audience interactivity and participation". Academic journals such as *Participations* [volumes 9(2) and 10(1)], *Communication Management Quarterly* (volume 21), *International Journal of Communication* (volume 8), *Communications* (volume 3), *International Journal on Media Management* (volume 14-2), *Comunicazioni Sociali* (volume 3), *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture* [volume 5(3)], *Observatorio (OBS*)* (volume 34) or *Media and Communication* [volume 6(4)], among many others, have dedicated special issues to this object of study. Important academic events have hosted conversations between scholars with different theoretical backgrounds. For instance, the symposium "Transmedia generation" celebrated in Prague in 2012 was a timely event that served as a meeting point for some of the most important scholars in the field. The papers published after the conference in *Convergence* [volume 19(3)] are key references for any researcher that is interested in the complex and nuanced interpretations of what participation means in a convergent and digital media environment.

Key aspects in all those debates are the context in which participation takes place and the power imbalances that shape participatory practices (Couldry & Jenkins, 2014; Dahlgren, 2013; Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). On one hand, Cultural Studies has served as a framework for analysing the participation of active audiences. For instance, Fan Studies, or the research on fan communities, has addressed the activities of groups that seek a closer relationship with the texts they consume, as well as their increased participation in the construction of culture. Fan Studies researchers emphasize that the audience, organized in communities, adopts a critical perspective towards the producers. Participatory culture is defined here as a context that is in constant change, in which "rather than talking about mediators and consumers occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a set of rules that none of us fully understands" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). The capacity that citizens have today to produce and edit messages, and to distribute them freely through different media has raised, is then seen as the democratization of the production of audio-visual content. However, Jenkins et al. clarify that

> no single ideological orientation (...) has a monopoly on the virtues of a more participatory culture. (...) Like internet culture, participatory culture has countercultural and anti-authoritarian valences reflecting its roots, but it is also increasingly intertwined with commercial and capitalist forms of cultural and technological production. (2016, p. 182)

This is an important reminder that not only audiences and fans are willing to take advantage of the opportunities offered by digital technologies and convergent media: the corporate appropriation of participatory culture (Deuze, 2008) complicates the situation.

Although participatory culture was not born linked to a specific technology, or at a specific historical moment, it became an object of study in the eighties, when authors such as Fiske (1987) or Jenkins (2006), from culturalist perspectives, analysed the collaborations and collective knowledge production of active audiences in relation to media texts. The development of home computing, the emergence of the internet, and the growth of broadband technologies were some of the trends that then accelerated the academic interest in participation (Delwiche & Jacobs Henderson, 2013) and that were also associated with the enthusiasm for researching interactive communication (Quiring & Schweiger, 2008). From the perspective of Communication and Media Studies, interactivity has certainly had a close relationship with participation, since both terms have been widely discussed as important affordances of digital technologies. Andrejevic (2004), for instance, introduced the idea of *participatory interactivity* as a promise of new media convergence; that of getting access to the tools of media production and distribution so that media audiences can take an active role in their experience.

As many key communication concepts, interactivity is (like participation) a complex and inconsistently used term without a clear and unique definition, and with different research traditions, from Sociology to Psychology or Computer Science having tried to define or measure it. However, definitions are often imprecise or even contradictory, since they approach the concept from different perspectives, which include interactivity as a process of communication, as a characteristic of new media or as an element perceived by users (Jensen, 2008; McMillan, 2006; Quiring & Schweiger, 2008; Rafaeli, 1988). The most important aspect of interactivity, for this article, is its *potential* to create a sense of *empowerment* in the communication process. Barry and Doherty (2017) argue out that *empowerment* is a dominant mode of interactivity, and in public discourse there are constant references to its *potential* actions, strategies or outcomes, even though the specific examples of interactivity that are then used, very much depend on the technologies of its time.

At the same time, participation is considered an expression of political action, or political involvement. Hence, it is always framed, at least to a certain extent, within struggles in which power imbalances should be identified (Carpentier, 2011a; Delwiche, 2013). As Carpentier (2011b) notes, political theory urges for a differentiation between what participation is and other terms that cannot be considered the same as participation, even if they are related, like access or interactivity. From that perspective, participation

still functions in a relationship with different concepts, but participation's defining characteristics then become the decision-making processes and the power imbalances that influence them. Carpentier (2014, p. 1002) defines participation "as a situation where the actors involved in (formal or informal) decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to some extent) egalitarian". There are maximalist and minimalist forms of participation, depending on who retains or shares control over participatory processes and its outcomes. From an analytical point of view, this distinction is very useful. Carpentier (2016) himself has developed on that basis what might be the most nuanced analytical model for the interpretation of participatory media processes. It is important to note, however, that the fact that maximalist forms of participation offer a more balanced power distribution of the agents involved in decision-making does not mean that these participatory processes are always desirable. Similarly, engagement in minimalist participatory practices that create an illusion of empowerment does not mean that we are facing a democratic process. In that sense, more than ever, it is necessary to defend the concept of participation.

In an inspiring conversation between the two representatives of these approaches to the concept of participation in Communication and Media Studies, Jenkins and Carpentier (2013) suggest a deconstruction of traditional theories to move towards an integrated and complementary model for the analysis of participation that offers a nuanced language to communicate the complexity of the concept. One of their conclusions is the acknowledgement that full participation or the ideal participatory culture is an utopian goal, that consequently will never be achieved, but can still serve as points of reference for the critical evaluation of participatory practices. Based on that idea, the fantastic or chimerical nature of participation features as the first element to explain why participation is a talisman.

## The participatory fantasy

Like in the case of talismans, there is, at a theoretical level, a tension between the abstract principle of participation and its reality. If talismans are usually related to mystical circumstances, participation has been interpreted as an uncomfortable *myth* (Domingo, 2008), as *dark* (Quandt, 2018) or as a democratic *fetish* (Carpentier, 2011a), and therefore usually located on an imaginary or groundless sphere.

The Lacanian concept of fantasy was introduced in the theoretical debates about participation by Carpentier (2014), who avoids an exclusively negative interpretation of the term. As García-Catalán (2012) argues, Lacan puts forward dark concepts that end up giving light. Carpentier (2014) turns to Lacan to define fantasy as having protective and generative capacities. As a driving force that is connected to desire, it also shows the "paradox of simultaneously desiring the object and of fearing the impossibility of fulfilling this desire" (p. 1003). In relationship to participation, he connects the concept of fantasy to his own theory of maximalist forms of participation and Pateman's (1970)

concept of full participation; the aim of reaching balanced power relations between all actors at every social level:

> this end point is unreachable and utopian – phantasmagoric – but it arguably also serves as a crucial driving force for attempts to "deepen the democratic revolution" (Mouffe, 1988, p. 42), for the "democratisation of democracy" (Giddens, 1994, p. 113) or for a "more participatory culture". (Carpentier, 2014, p. 1004)

However, Carpentier (2014) notices that the participatory fantasy interacts with other fantasies (the fantasy of universality and homogeneity, the fantasy of leadership and the fantasy of freedom and agency) which – at different levels – create drawbacks, structural limits and dependencies between participatory practices and the participatory fantasy.

In the conceptual structure of participation as a talisman, the participatory fantasy illustrates its belonging to an abstract framework, as well as the tensions with other fantasies that hinder or protect its potential. Under the Lacanian interpretation of fantasy, we can further understand it as a way of engagement. We participate and are engaged within the frame of our *fantasme*. As Carpentier (2014, p. 1013) stresses, "the focus on participation as a fantasy also allows showing the complexity of participatory practices and the very deeply embedded drives that sometimes work in its favour and sometimes against it".

## The authenticity of participation

Usually, defining participation also means to differentiate it from what participation is not. This has been especially important in the last years, when participation has become a buzzword in many disciplines. In the field of Communication, some authors have turned to concepts that are closely linked to the conceptual system of the talisman in order to establish what kind of participation is meaningful:

> attempts to counter this softening-down of (the signifier) participation have been based on the construction of dichotomized systems of meaning. In these dichotomies, specific forms of participation are described as "real" and "authentic", while other forms are described as "fake" and "pseudo". (Carpentier, 2007, p. 87)

For instance, Prado (1986) points to the *symbolic* nature of participation, in those cases when it does not provide the tools or frameworks to raise the voice of social actors and minorities. In the field of communication for development and participatory communication, Servaes (1999, p. 187) underlines that "utopian visions of development communication have been called 'genuine' and 'authentic' participation, as opposed to the manipulative, pseudo-participation". This *illusion* that simulates processes of participation and intimacy with audiences has been identified in Communication and Media

Studies (McQuail, 2005, p. 444), but was defined earlier in Political Sciences, as Carpentier (2007) recalls:

> in the field of so-called political participation, for example, Verba (1961, pp. 220-221) points to the existence of "pseudo-participation", in which the emphasis is not on creating a situation in which participation is possible, but on creating the feeling that participation is possible. (Carpentier, 2007, p. 87)

(Pseudo)participatory processes and practices of engagement are very present in media, although increasingly intertwined with the promotional interests of corporations and the purposeful intentions of engaged publics (Jenkins et al., 2016). In the case of the former, corporations can take advantage of the energy, the time, the effort and the creativity of audiences and users, whose activity and dedication enriches contemporary cultural production and political communication. In the case of the latter, participation could become a demonstration of an affective commitment with ideas, values and arguments. In a moment when social media and popular culture are crucial for political communication (Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thomson & Zimmerman, 2016), exploring the invitations that frame participation in different contexts can give us a nuanced understanding of the agreements, the tensions or the "authenticity contracts" (Enli, 2015) that these processes facilitate. However, as McQuail (2005, p. 444) puts it, "in practice it is difficult to empirically distinguish 'real' attachment from 'artificial' attachment". But we can still consider these initiatives as strategies for the construction of *mediated authenticity* or a participatory appeal (Klein Shagrir, 2018). Following Enli (2015), mediated authenticity benefits from participatory practices since they usually serve as a catalyst for spontaneity, immediacy, ordinariness or ambivalence in media.

## The ritual of participation

The authenticity of participation, or the perception of authentic participation, comes usually from the *ritual* that makes it possible. It is not about participation itself, but rather about the process or event that takes place, the (magical) knowledge required to make it possible, including the conditions required to activate its power. Participatory practices are complex, unique and sometimes contradictory; they are based on processes that are shaped by the interplay between agents whose power relation is (un)equal. From a cultural perspective, a key reference is James Carey (1989), who presented communication as a *ritual*; a *symbolic* process that (re)produces and transforms reality. Carey's (1990) ritual model is closely linked with terms like association, sharing and participation. In a similar vein, for talismans to be considered authentic, it is important that certain conditions are guaranteed during its preparation and implementation, such as the moment in which they can be applied, the person who manufactures the object or who officiates the ritual. Helck (1984, quoted in Velázquez Brieva, 2004, p. 34) explains that esoteric rituals were first lead by shamans or priests who knew the practices and possessed the

special qualities to invoke powers and virtues. Later on, through writing and learning, this exercise was extended to more layers of society, who had access to the tools and the knowledge to manufacture amulets. There is a certain parallel between the history of talismanic rituals and the "waves of media democratization" (Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali, 2013) that have permitted an easier access to participatory tools that once were limited to experts or elites. Interestingly, when underlining the potential danger of embracing the participatory rhetoric in the analysis of the role of journalism in democracy, Peters and Witschge (2015) use repeatedly the verb to *invoke* in order to warn against the often celebratory discourse of the democratisation of media through participation. In addition, Carpentier (2014) warns that there is a fantasy of participation about the disappearing media professional that leads to a democratic-populist fantasy that articulates media professionals as unnecessary. All in all, it seems that there is a need to identify who can participate, the relationship between ordinary people and experts who lead the process and the importance of contextualizing participation as a ritual.

A second element that serves to ground the idea of the ritual is the fact that media *invite* our participation. This is a key aspect in Carey's ritual model, but also other authors from a socio-cultural approach have pointed out the invitational nature of participation (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2011; Johnson, 2007). Hille and Bakker (2013, p. 4) underline that "the audience needs to be stimulated and invited by the media before they will provide (meaningful) contributions. This suggests that participation is not the result of offering opportunities but is also dependent on active 'participation' from the medium itself". Johnson (2007, p. 78) says that "multiplatforming allows the audience to enter into new cultural spaces, but the significance of that invitation remains ambiguous, at once both empowering and exploiting the audience". Gaventa (2007) establishes three possible spatial categories of participation; one of them is that of invited spaces. Unlike closed spaces or created spaces, the invitational spaces are those in which there is an explicit invitation to different agents for decision making. In relation to television, Ross (2008) categorizes three types of invitation: overt, organic and obscured. Gulbrandsen and Just point out that

> the relationship between invitation and participation becomes a major concern, since it is clear that how users are invited to participate may condition their actual participation – not in the sense of determining the participation, but by creating the framework or path that one may either follow or go up against (Just, 2008). At the same time, however, any specific invitation is conditioned by already existing participation – any invitation is also a response. (2011, p. 1104)

From another perspective, Carpentier (2011b) defends the invitational nature of participation, but moves away from a hierarchical invitation where only some have the control over the process. He turns to the concept of invitational social change that acknowledges the agency of the participant and his right not to participate:

> I concur with Foss and Griffin (1995, p. 3), who contrast invitation and persuasion (the latter being fed by the "desire for control and domination"), and Greiner and Singhal (2009, p. 34), who develop the concept of invitational social change, which "seek[s] to substitute interventions which inform with calls to imagine and efforts to inspire". These kinds of reflections allow participation to be seen as invitational, which implies that the enforcement of participation is defined as contradictory to the logics of participation, and that the right not to participate should be respected. (Carpentier, 2011, p. 22)

In their conversation on participation and politics, Allen et al. (2014) add further nuance to the points already made. Invitation is an integral part of the participatory process, but sometimes it is the lack of it that drives activism. Participation then comes from individual engagement that fuels activism. In that sense, Dahlgren (2013, p. 20) adds that "the subjective engagement behind it and the participation in which it results can have varying degrees of affective intensity (...). It is also the political circumstances that will shape the emotional character of the participation of individuals and groups". Thus, the invitation does not necessarily come from a powerful agent that enables participation, but from the participatory process (the talisman) itself, that invites to take action and creates a sense of empowerment.

## The aesthetic value of participation

A final aspect that supports the idea of participation as a talisman is its aesthetic value. Some authors have observed that in some media contexts participation is more important for what it represents, rather than for the outcomes of its process. The corporate appropriation of participation and participatory culture (Deuze, 2008) has tended to mean that interactive and collaborative affordances are in many cases nothing more than a showcase. For instance, in the field of journalism,

> as more and more news outlets introduced comment sections and participatory formats, it became fashionable to do this, and many just did it because everybody else did it. This bandwagon effect was quite pronounced; not to be left behind and having the appearance of being "modern" was often the primary motivation. (Quandt, 2018, p. 38)

Much of this participatory excitement has been very much related with the possibilities of new technological affordances and platforms. Mosco (2017) turns to the concept of totem, a synonym for talisman, to explain how these tools and systems represent different meanings:

> next Internet systems, especially the "internet of things", are more than banal instruments to meet economic or political goals. They are also cultural objects that signify a range of meanings. Like tribal totems, they have

> magical qualities that embody the sublime. (...) They take admittedly tiny steps to ground these mythic beliefs but they also participate in a technological complex that contains profound political economic and cultural power. (Mosco, 2017, p. 100)

Participation, as a talisman, serves as a symbol of power and a guarantor of status. There is, however, a substantial difference: today, gemstones and amulets are produced by the millions. Their magic powers play a secondary role and they mainly function as facilitators of social recognition or simply as decoration. Similarly, media participation has been heavily implemented as a cosmetic way of integrating audiences but still needs to rescue the democratic, pluralist and cultural values it represents.

## Conclusion

Recently, Quandt (2018, p. 45) has called for "the development of integrative theories on the conditions of participation that are neither driven by wishful thinking nor doom and gloom". From cultural and political approaches, Jenkins and Carpentier (2013) have defended the theoretical reconstruction and shared understanding of the central concepts that define participatory practices. They all argue that future research on participation should care for the complexities and ambivalences of this research object.

Inspired by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), this article has introduced the metaphor of participation as a talisman, as a way of understanding participation, as – at least partially – structured as a symbolic element over which a ritual is performed in order to enrich it with power. Previous conceptualizations and categorizations of participation already introduced aspects of the term around this metaphor: participation is articulated with *power*, participation *invokes* democratic values, participation is *authentic* or a *fetish*, participation is *symbolic* or a *myth*, participation requires a certain *ritual* that *empowers* and it *engages emotionally*, ... This text has tried to coherently organize four aspects of the metaphor: the participatory fantasy, the authenticity of participation, the ritual of participation, and the aesthetic value of participation.

Participation matters. And how we think, metaphorically, about participation matters too. Under the umbrella of Communication and Media Studies, participation as a talisman invites us to embrace the ambivalence of the concept and to attempt to integrate the contributions from different fields. Hopefully, this text will also serve as a guide for future conceptualizations of the metaphor. If participatory actions and practices continue to be associated with it, they could reinforce its power. The interpretation of participation as a fantasy brings to the table a series of questions, not only regarding its authenticity or the ritual that goes along with its creation, but also about its potential use in different contexts, the sense of empowerment and engagement that it inspires, and the generative capacity it has. If we understand participation as a talisman, we can protect it, and rescue it, by enhancing the belief in its potential. Bringing back our faith in its power, we will be better equipped for the emotional and sentimental democracy (Arias Maldonado, 2016; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018) that we are currently living in.

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