

Manuel Pinto & Helena Sousa, eds.

COMMUNICATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Rethinking crisis and change

'Communication and Citizenship: Rethinking Crisis and Change' was the general theme of the 2010 IAMCR Conference that was hosted by the Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho, Portugal, 18-22 July. This book comprehends Plenary Addresses on the general theme hoping that their publication will keep the debate alive. In a time of profound economic and social crisis, the scientific community is expected to shed light on contemporary deadlocks and uncertainties. These texts are part of the indispensable continuous critique.

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Foreword

The acceleration of change and the globalization of fear and uncertainty are features of the present. The speed of transformations in all regions of our volatile and hyper-complex world makes it increasingly difficult to read social reality and to act meaningfully. In a time of profound economic, cultural and moral crisis, citizens, groups and organizations have no choice but to rediscover how individual and social life can be lived.

Participation in political and social life is a fundamental contemporary value which is supposed to have a concrete and permanent impact on the quality of people's lives. As a right and a duty, participation is expected to improve societies. Traditional media all over the world haven't fully responded to social participatory needs. Despite well founded expectations regarding the media's role in terms of promotion of participation, this is not satisfactorily happening. In most countries, the media ended up as promoters of government's and big business interests based on a top-down conformist communication model. Taking advantage of new technologies, citizens are fighting back. Both in developed and developing societies, it is possible to identify new participatory ideas and practices.

Moving away from utopian and dystopian political and academic discourses on the Internet, it is noteworthy that in different ways and contexts, citizens and social institutions are circumventing traditional media and developing new forms of participation. Though technology per se is not a relevant explicative variable, it is an indispensable element to fully understand significant changes in terms of citizen's access to alternative contents and social networks. Still, having access to the Internet or other participative technologies does not transform individuals into citizens.

If the defense of public interest depends on the overall functioning of the entire media construct, state and professional media regulation is far from sufficient. Citizens' participation - at different stages and levels - is crucial to the continuous attempt to develop responsible and accountable media cultures. But citizenry implies social exigency regarding media professionals' training, media professionals' deontological codes, media company's strategies, state policies and, above all, a critical and participative attitude regarding traditional and new media.

This critical observation and consequential participation can only take place if media logics are understandable and if communication rights and duties are common knowledge. In the past, literacy was a necessary condition to become a citizen. Today, reading and writing is far from sufficient for full citizenship. Citizens must have the ability to interpret mediated discourses about the world and must have the power to act.

In the present-day economic and ethical crisis, communication and media research might perform a fundamental role interrogating the dominant communication models and opening up new debates on citizens' empowering and participatory mechanisms. This could be the contribution of the communication scientific community to shed light on contemporary uncertainties and deadlocks.

These words sum up the general theme of the 2010 Conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) that was hosted by the Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho, Portugal, 18-22 July.

Focusing on the relationship between Communication and Citizenship, researchers from different latitudes and backgrounds were invited to develop research as academics and also as citizens. More than 1300 researchers answered this call and the IAMCR community had a stimulating and vibrant week in Braga.

This book responds to the Local Organizing Committee attempt to collect plenary addresses on the general theme hoping that this contribution will keep the debate alive. We are profoundly grateful to the authors who managed to find the necessary time to put their thoughts in a written form and forever indebted to all who made the Braga IAMCR Conference possible.

The Local Organizing Committee Coordinators

Manuel Pinto and ***Helena Sousa***

Communication and Citizenship: Rethinking Crisis and Change – Reflections on the Theme of IAMCR's 2010 Conference

By Hopeton S. Dunn

The publication of post-conference reflections on the theme '*Communication and Citizenship – Rethinking Crisis and Change*' is both timely and important. The 2010 conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) was convened at a time when the world was in the grips of a debilitating economic crisis, in the aftermath of an inconclusive Copenhagen conference on global endangerment from climate change, and at a time when citizenship and migration had become pressing public policy issues within and outside of Europe, the locus of the conference.

Expertly hosted by the University of Minho in the picturesque and welcoming town of Braga in Portugal, the conference was jointly organized with the leadership of the IAMCR, whose annual conferences are rotated each year among willing host countries around the world. Speaking for the Association on the eve of the Braga Conference, IAMCR's President Annabelle Sreberny appropriately observed that "this year's Programme is rich with diverse and contemporary debates." And so, indeed, it was! The programme unfolded seamlessly, with an unprecedented level of attendance, enthusiasm and with an emphasis on participation and citizenship.

The justification for selecting the theme for the conference lies in the acknowledgment by the Local Organizing Committee that "*Participation in political and social life is a fundamental contemporary value which is supposed to have a concrete and permanent impact on the quality of people's lives. As a right and a duty, participation is expected to improve societies. Traditional media all over the world haven't fully responded to social participatory needs. Despite well founded expectations regarding the media's role in terms of promotion of participation, this is not satisfactorily happening. In most countries, the media ended up as promoters of government's and big business interests based on a top-down conformist communication mode*". The local conference planners cogently argued further that "*Taking advantage of new technologies, citizens are fighting back. Both in developed and developing societies, it is possible to identify new participatory ideas and practices*"¹.

¹ See <http://iamcr2010portugal.com/content.asp?startAt=2&categoryID=1001&newsID=2309>.

It is doubtless the case that global communications technologies are challenging traditionally hegemonic media systems and are facilitating, in a sometimes subversive and disruptive manner, new and diverse forms of participation by citizens in civil society, irrespective of their locale and social class. The technologies are engendering the emergence of new conceptions and manifestations of citizenship or even contesting the notion itself. Among the young web-savvy 'netizens' who interact globally, the idea of being walled into a city, as the origin of the word citizen suggests, is far too confining. They have adopted a more global and homogeneous conception simply called 'friends' facilitated in large measure through the global desire to interact online with peers in whatever 'city' or location one may be, within our cyber-world. The technologies and applications that are continuing to emerge are supplanting or re-inforcing traditionally geographic, political and nationalistic notions of 'citizenship'.

New Forms of Global Citizenship in Action

The 2010 IAMCR conference in Portugal was in itself a microcosm of global citizenship. It was huge and diverse by any standard, with over 1,200 conference delegates representing more than 80 different countries in addition to a large number of volunteers made up of mainly university students. The youth presence was felt in the non-stop streaming online, in the elaborate conference blogosphere, in the social media networking presence including Facebook pages and constant micro-blogging updates through Twitter. The conference venue certainly appeared to be a site of 21st century citizenship at work.

On the academic side, the IAMCR in Braga showcased four appealing plenaries and six special roundtable sessions. There were approximately 292 academic panel sessions, most running concurrently with others, over the four days of conference activities. These sessions spanned the over 30 thematic Sections and Working Groups now active within the IAMCR. Not only was the conference expansive in the physical numbers of participants and conference panels, but there was sustained and in-depth analyses of a wide range of issues which were debated, contested and hopefully in some instances resolved. It was especially gratifying to note that at least two of the five special roundtable sessions were devoted to unpacking contemporary ICT issues as they relate to citizen rights and environmental sustainability. One roundtable focused on *'Confronting issues of ICTs, the*

Environment and Citizenship, while another debated *Contemporary Citizen Activism: the "Greens" and the "Reds"*. Other intellectually stimulating parallel sessions examined challenges such as *The Use of ICTs by Activists*, *Environment and Crisis*, *Rethinking Citizenship in a Globalised World* and another dissected the subject of *Digital Literacies, Inclusion and Education*.

Through its Global Media Policy (GMP) mapping project, the IAMCR Braga conference further advanced its pioneering mechanism that seeks to build collaboration through cross-disciplinary and multi-method policy research towards the ultimate goal of establishing a framework for ensuring stronger linkages among institutions and existing initiatives. In its Special Sessions in Braga the GMP again fore-grounded the concept of mapping as a way of linking people, varied research interests and different knowledge bases. Interestingly, this approach is increasingly being adopted globally. This interdisciplinary and multi-method strategy is, for example, being advocated by political scientist and Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom² and colleagues in the forthcoming book titled, *Working Together: Collective Action, the Commons, and Multiple Methods in Practice*.

The publication "examines how different methods have promoted various theoretical developments related to collective action and the commons, and demonstrates the importance of cross-fertilization involving multimethod research across traditional boundaries. The authors look at why cross-fertilization is difficult to achieve, and they show ways to overcome these challenges through collaboration"³. These approaches are consistent with the growing practice of cross disciplinary academic presentations, now taking root more widely within the Association.

Citizenship and Media Accountability

In Braga, the plenary on *Building Accountable Media Cultures* offered one of best opportunities to both reflect upon and participate in an intriguing global dialogue on issues of citizenship and media accountability. By common agreement among panel members the concept of citizenship was regarded as important and changing, embodying a balance of both rights and responsibilities. Marcos Palacios reminded the conference that accountability was not inconsistent with media

² Elinor Ostrom is a political scientist and a world leading authority on governance of the commons. She is the 2009 Nobel laureate in economic sciences for her work in the area of developing solutions for the problem of the tragedy of the commons.

³ See <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/9209.html>.

freedom. This view was shared by Barbie Zelizer, who placed emphasis on the need not just for accountability but also for varied forms of responsibility in pursuit of the public interest. Divina Frau Meigs used the opportunity to call for more widespread media literacy among citizens, enabling them both to create their own output and as well as to better hold corporate media to account. Panel member Pradip Thomas, citing the experience of his native India, questioned the dominant role and accountability of large private media corporations and global conglomerates and underlined the countervailing influence of the emergent community media sector and of citizen journalism.

For me, the key question was who would watch the self-appointed media watchdogs of society? With the conventional press and even new media (such as Wiki Leaks of more recent controversy) continuing to assert their undoubtedly crucial roles as guardians of democracy, an *accountability gap* still remains in how society seeks to protect itself from the potential and actual ills of media corruption. Unethical or illegal practices such as corporate cover-ups, errors or misconduct, pay-for-play bribe-taking (called 'payola' in the music and broadcasting businesses) and illicit journalistic back-handers in return for favourable or unjustified media coverage, especially of the powerful, all still abound. In these circumstances, the right of citizens to balanced, truthful and unencumbered media output would appear to be at continuing risk.

In this analysis, we may benefit from the complex but enlightening discourse on modernity and communication offered by Jürgen Habermas. In his theory of communicative action, Habermas presents a diverse range of linked conceptual tools that can enable us to better observe patterns of communication and help to measure the communicative actions of different social players. He advances the notion of a competitive interest-oriented strategic action on the one hand and a dialogic values-oriented, communicative action on the other. The latter seeks out consensus around shared values and justifiable norms, while the former aims to satisfy competitive and strategic advantage within an oppositional framework. (Habermas, 1979, 1993: 294).

In discussing the complexities of the application of these and other theoretical constructs to the constantly changing communications landscape, Arens observes that Habermas "recognizes the ambivalent potential of mass communication, which has on the one hand, power and social control and on the other, emancipates by stimulating, disseminating and providing means of communication and reaching agreement" (Arens, 1988: 19).

Arens argues that it is possible to interpret Habermas as conceiving of communication as also embodying 'counterpower'. Such communicative counterpower is exercised by grassroots organizations and solidarity networks that "protest against the exclusion of issues and people from public discourse, where they claim and make use of the right to communication for all, where they work against distortion and obstruction in public communication, and for communication which is more participatory and free from restrictions, deception and domination..." (1988: 19).

Discussing similar issues of communication rights from a North South perspective, I have elsewhere described this process as *globalization from below*, in which the marginalized, the minorities and oppressed peoples all over the world are able conceptually to master the adaptation, use and management of the emerging communication and information technologies, including systems of design, patenting, marketing and consumer operation (Dunn, 2001: 66-67). Writing a decade ago, I further observed that: "We have to learn the ropes, so to speak, with the ultimate objective of originating a significant proportion of our own software and hardware needs... With such an approach, the present dominance in the form of a rampant *globalization from above*, via conglomerates, multilateral agencies and wealthy states can be mitigated by the creative adaptation of appropriate tools, media and content, deployed by ordinary citizens and their local organizations for their own use and for global inter-linkage" (Dunn, 2001: 67).

The technologies that are often implicated in these communicative processes are not neutral but purposive and often designed within specific contexts. "Where ever these technologies are in use, it is an inescapable reality that most of these tools were created initially to address the military and other strategic needs in the United States and Europe... While some imported technologies can be of immense professional and societal value outside of their cultures of origin, they have to be systematically adapted to the circumstances of their new use in order to gain maximum social advantage" (Dunn, 2001: 66).

Citizenship in the Global Commons

Against this background, citizens are regarded as having an important, even activist role in advocating or implementing change whether at the macro or micro level. Partnership with other global friends or citizens becomes essential within the

now prevalent process of networking. In this way, citizenship ought not to be seen just in the traditionally narrow meaning of the sovereign rights and responsibilities ascribed to individuals within their particular geographic and legally established national boundaries. The nature of the technological and natural environments, characterised by interdependence and indivisibilities, is anathema to a principally jurisdictional or geographical definition of citizenship. What is needed is a re-commitment to the concept of 'dual citizenship' of the global and the local, enabling people all over the world to share in a more comprehensive understanding of each other's interdependent roles in a digitally and environmentally interconnected global space, while remaining empowered within their local contexts.

It is the global ICT networks that lend glue to our inter-linkage and that facilitate instant communication between digitally connected individuals anywhere. Equally, it is our common dependence on the global ecology that binds us into a single community, disproportionately endowed, but equally vulnerable to the impacts of such environmentally threatening phenomena as climate change. Utilizing the Braga conference sub theme of 'Rethinking Crisis and Change' as an ongoing point of departure, we should constantly acknowledge the inter-related elements of **access to communication** and **care for the environment** as twinned and indivisible values representing key requirements for effective citizenship.

Citizenship, ICTs and the Environment

The communications sector is ultimately dependent on a constant flow of energy or electricity, most usually supplied by non renewable fossil fuels. Researchers such as Boccaletti, Löffler and Oppenheim (2008) note that emissions from the manufacture and use of PCs alone will double over the next 12 years as middle class buyers in emerging economies go digital. Similarly, worldwide growth in the use of mobile phones will triple their carbon footprint by 2020, in large part because of their consumption of silicon and rare metals.

According to these researchers "the fastest-increasing contributor to carbon emissions in the ICT sector will be as a result of growth in the number and large size of data centers, whose carbon footprint are projected to rise more than five-fold between 2002 and 2020 as organisations in all sectors add more servers to meet rising demand, even as companies and governments alike attempt to become more energy efficient" (Boccaletti et al, 2008: 2). Not only are ICTs con-

tributing to increased green house gas emissions, they are also contributing to the accumulation of e-junk such as old mobile phones, computers, printers, scanners among others that clutter our urban landscape. This e-waste problem could potentially get worst as digital switchover in the broadcasting sector becomes even more mainstream and citizens begin to replace their analogue television sets with digital TV. In addition, the increasing accumulation of disused or abandoned orbiting satellites and other ICT debris in space is also a growing public policy issue that should form part of the citizen agenda for public policy considerations well before they become crises.

Not only can the large global media and fast rising alternative new media systems play an important role in communicating the key issues surrounding climate change and other environmental challenges globally, but they can also seek to reverse the sector's own levels of unsustainable energy consumption. Through their mediating role and visibly exemplary leadership, new media and ICT service providers can shape perceptions and catalyze action even among the most unconcerned and nonchalant citizen.

Web 2.0 is a powerful platform for advocacy because of the sheer number of users there. It provides alternative channels to traditional mass media for finding and disseminating policy-relevant and citizen-friendly information. As an example, Technorati, an online blogging research company, is indicating that based on their research, bloggers are having increasing influence on the direction of policies in government, technology decision-making, celebrity action, business decision-making, computing issues and the environment as the top six impact areas. The Technorati research study further notes that "In the United States, blogging was an integral piece of the 2008 presidential campaign, where it was a key forum for citizen commentary on everything from Sarah Palin's clothes to healthcare policy". On average, respondents think that the blogosphere was as accurate as traditional media sources on the presidential election and that it was, in some cases, much more up to date. Further, many bloggers believe that blogging was a big reason Obama enjoyed a significant fundraising advantage throughout the campaign⁴. While we must be cognizant of the high likelihood of distortions in the web 2.0 space, it is undoubted that this new platform has emerged as a potent force for social and political messaging that can contribute to transformation through citizen journalism.

⁴ Read more: <http://technorati.com/blogging/article/day-5-twitter-global-impact-and/page-2/#ixzz0tbf1uCEh>.

Hilgartner and Bosk's 'Public Arenas Model' (1998 :58) offers a framework within which to consider these possible responses. Their model contends that media are among the key "public arenas in which social problems are framed and grow". Boykoff & Boykoff (2007), citing Nelkin (1987) and Wilson (1995) also reinforce this idea, and relate it to the climate change discourse, saying that "since the public (of which policy actors are a part) learns most of what it knows about science from the mass-media, scrutinizing the media's portrayal of climate change – and exploring how and why information about climate change is translated into news – is imperative".

The IAMCR has a leading role to play in advocacy and academic work on media and climate change and in stimulating participatory models to engage and coordinate global research within this arena. We are not and cannot be bystanders. As the largest global body of academic and research specialists, we collectively have access to broad and diverse audiences, including our students, publics and peers. The IAMCR 2010 conference was a forum at which we exercised the moral responsibility of our sector to spread this message about citizen responsibility and environmental sustainability.

IAMCR, Environmental Audits and the Academic Community

One of the most hopeful outcomes of Braga 2010 was a decision by the IAMCR General Assembly to establish a special committee within its Global Media and Communications Policy Task Force to conduct an environmental audit to consider the Association's own carbon footprints. This proposed self-examination, if pursued appropriately, should guide future decisions about how we convene our conferences, deploy resources and could even extend to influencing the approaches taken by our global network of academic member institutions. Because the academic sector is no small player in energy consumption.

It is estimated that there are more than 10,000 universities around the world, not including community colleges and other non-chartered institutions in the tertiary education system. Most operate air conditioned offices and lecture theatres, generate significant runtime energy demand for lighting, printing and other campus activities. Their operations also make extensive use of paper and printing supplies. Academics travel millions of air miles globally attending various conferences, symposia and fora annually. One can therefore begin to appreciate that our aca-

demic sector itself is a significant contributor to climate change at all levels, including direct, indirect and systemic.

Besides being scholars, we are also citizens with an equal obligation to help protect the planet. It is this reality that will hopefully inform each member and our Task Force in generating new recommendations for IAMCR action.

Concluding Remarks

IAMCR's continuing intellectual leadership on current and pressing global issues was a major highpoint of the 2010 annual conference. Among them, the pre-eminent issues of Citizenship, Media Accountability, Climate Change and research collaboration received significant attention in a manner that demonstrates our global interconnectedness as neighbours.

It is in this context that we must move apace towards meeting the still many un-met goals of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The technology strategies and targets emanating from the UN's Internet Governance Forum, from our lifelong partner UNESCO, from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and from other multilateral and post-WSIS channels should be more actively researched and pursued but with a renewed emphasis on active and global citizenship, collaboration and on the environmental implications that were so meaningfully highlighted at the Braga Conference.

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