



# **Qualification of Public Communication processes in the social and democratic strengthening of the right to information: the Portuguese and Brazilian realities**

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## **Abstract**

This article aims to show important concepts of Public Citizen Communication, comparing the communicational practices, within the scope of local power, between Portugal and Brazil, two countries united by the same language, but with different realities in the social and cultural planes. Based on the Authors' Survey (2018-2019), the work seeks to describe the analysis carried out in four Portuguese and Brazilian cities with the objective of knowing and evaluating the processes of information transmission, by the public power, as a social and constitutional. Through content analysis, the methodology starts from a triple sampling section through interviews with managers and professionals involved in the transmission of public information, in the application of questionnaires to citizens and, finally, through the documentary analysis of the printed and available materials in the internet (websites). The evaluation of the importance of dialogue and effective understanding of information was based on the precepts of Edgar Morin, Luiz Beltrão and Jürgen Habermas, within the scope of the Complexity Paradigm, Folkcommunication and Theory of Communicative Acting, respectively. When confronting the historical model and claiming the right to information to current public policies of transparency and total quality, the results highlighted the importance of dialogue as a democratic instrument for excellence in Public Communication for the benefit of citizenship. The conclusion recommends that the procedures for transmitting information, while public, respect the cultural background and life history of each individual: a new form of communication, dialogical, adopting a simplified language adapting technical knowledge to the common, allowing an effective understanding of the content.

**Keywords:** Public Communication. Public policy. Complexity. Folkcommunication. Communicative action.

## **Qualificação dos processos de Comunicação Pública no fortalecimento social e democrático do direito à informação: as realidades portuguesa e brasileira**

### **Resumo**

Este artigo busca evidenciar conceitos importantes da Comunicação Pública Cidadã, cotejando as práticas comunicacionais, no âmbito do poder local, entre Portugal e Brasil, dois países unidos pela mesma língua, mas com realidades diversas nos planos social e cultural. Tendo como base a Pesquisa dos autores (2018-2019), o trabalho procura descrever a análise realizada em quatro cidades, portuguesas e brasileiras, com o objetivo de conhecer e avaliar os processos de transmissão da informação por parte do poder público, como um direito social e constitucional. Através da análise de conteúdo, a metodologia parte de um recorte de tripla amostragem por meio de entrevistas com os gestores e profissionais envolvidos na transmissão da informação pública na aplicação de questionários aos cidadãos e, finalmente pela análise documental dos materiais impressos e disponibilizados na internet (websites). A avaliação sobre a importância do diálogo e da efetiva compreensão da informação teve como lastro teórico os preceitos de Edgar Morin, Luiz Beltrão e Jürgen Habermas, no âmbito do Paradigma da Complexidade, da Folkcomunicação e Teoria do Agir Comunicativo, respectivamente. Ao confrontar o modelo histórico e reivindicatório do direito à informação nas atuais políticas públicas de transparência e qualidade total, os resultados ressaltaram a importância do diálogo como instrumento democrático, pela excelência na Comunicação Pública em benefício da cidadania. A conclusão recomenda que os procedimentos de transmissão da informação, enquanto pública, respeitem a bagagem cultural e a história de vida de cada indivíduo: uma nova forma de comunicação, dialógica, que adote uma linguagem simplificada adequando o conhecimento técnico ao comum, permitindo a compreensão do conteúdo de maneira eficaz.

**Palavras-chave:** Comunicação Pública; Políticas Públicas; Complexidade; Folkcomunicação; Agir Comunicativo.

## **Calificación de los procesos de Comunicación Pública en el fortalecimiento social y democrático del derecho a la información: las realidades portuguesa y brasileña**

### **Resumen**

Este artículo busca resaltar conceptos importantes de la Comunicación Pública Ciudadana, comparando prácticas de comunicación, en el ámbito del poder local, entre Portugal y Brasil, dos países unidos por un mismo idioma, pero con realidades diferentes en los planos social y cultural. Con base en la Encuesta del Autor (2018-2019), el trabajo busca describir el análisis realizado en cuatro ciudades portuguesas y brasileñas con el objetivo de conocer y evaluar los procesos de transmisión de información, por parte del poder público, como un medio social y constitucional. A través del análisis de contenido, la metodología se basa en un enfoque de triple muestreo a través de entrevistas a gestores y profesionales implicados en la transmisión de información pública, en la aplicación de cuestionarios a la ciudadanía y, finalmente, mediante el análisis documental de los materiales impresos y disponibles en el Internet (sitios web). La evaluación de la importancia del diálogo y la comprensión efectiva de la información se basó en los preceptos de Edgar Morin, Luiz Beltrão y Jürgen Habermas, en el ámbito del Paradigma de la Complejidad, la Comunicación Popular y la Teoría del Actuar Comunicativo, respectivamente. Al confrontar el modelo histórico y reivindicar el derecho a la información a las políticas públicas vigentes de transparencia y calidad total, los resultados destacaron la importancia del diálogo como instrumento democrático de excelencia en la Comunicación Pública en beneficio de la ciudadanía. La conclusión recomienda que los procedimientos de transmisión de información, mientras sean públicos, respeten el trasfondo cultural y la historia de vida de cada individuo: una nueva forma de

comunicación, dialógica, que adopta un lenguaje simplificado adaptando los conocimientos técnicos a lo común, permitiendo la comprensión del contenido de forma eficaz.

**Palabras clave:** Comunicación pública. Políticas públicas. Complejidad. Comunicación popular. Acción comunicativa.

## 1. Introduction

Communication is a crucial part of the existential condition of every human being. Increasingly present in people's lives, it connects the world's events to society, influencing its behaviour, changing feelings and emotions in the relationship process, in short, reflecting society's behaviour based on the perception of its values and identity. By referencing the term identity, it is necessary to be aware that the human species is different from the others by its ability about cultural construction, respecting their geographical, symbolical or technological variations.

Within the scope of resuming the constitutional democracy undertaken by Portugal and Brazil, with an approximate gap of a little over a decade<sup>1</sup> between both processes of Public Communication - PC<sup>2</sup> which gradually changed the political, social and cultural landscape. Yet, while it is undoubtedly necessary to consider that Portugal and Brazil have common traditions, their different territorial extensions show equally distinct sociocultural regions.

The onset of the process of re-democratization enabled individuals in both countries to regain their political and social rights, strengthening the union of that marginalized segment of society, bereft of state protection, through community movements. Their differences notwithstanding, these groups were constituted as the sole representatives, and in the discussions held on citizenship their interest lay in valuing the basic rights of individuals as active participants in the construction of society. Among these rights is PC. This is a complex process, which begins with conveying information by the local authorities, and which will enable the action format to be defined by which the community must unfailingly be heard through the effective participation of individuals with a view to achieving their effective social emancipation.

In his work, Boaventura Santos (2002) highlighted the need to reinvent such emancipation, seeking to understand the possibilities of and alternatives to the globalization process produced by social movements and non-governmental organizations. For this sociologist, it is fundamental to broaden social awareness from the proposition of a different model of rationality. The perspective that every social action must be understood as a process of joint definition where ideas are devised from the applied technical knowledge, but at the same time discussed with the actual interested parties who, at the end of the day, will be the beneficiaries. This is a process that places the State beside society, forming joint leadership in the construction of citizenship in which communication plays an important role, as stated by Kunsch, through the cultural change of mentality, "both of public service

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<sup>1</sup> Portugal in 1976 and Brazil in 1988.

<sup>2</sup> The paper will adopt the abbreviation PC to substitute the concept 'Public Communication'.

and society, to regain the legitimacy of government agencies and their accountability, by means of constant social control” (KUNSCH, 2013, p.16).

Seen from this perspective, communication is not an easy task; in fact, there are no ready ways to achieve success in such an unbalanced relation, constituting a type of dynamics that consists of exchanging information on the basis of codes and symbols to uphold this relation. It is correct to consider that the success of this complex process (of countless alternatives) will be defined by the selection of the suitable methods to convey each message. For this reason, it is absolutely crucial to seek alternatives that are capable of strengthening the process, through scientific research and a suitable methodology, as a way of reinstating human valuing by inserting the individual, as the real sense of citizenship in a globalized world. By considering the urgency of revising this process from the stance of society, the present paper highlights the role of the public manager and their technical team as agents in the promotion of citizenship. The need to open space in the enclosed universe of public offices, casting a more humane vision on a group of citizens in a vulnerable situation, who, due to their living situation and social exclusion, find their greatest difficulty in the inability to understand technical terms.

Starting from what was stated above, the topic of the paper is circumscribed, adopting the concept of social inclusion from the perspective of PC, based on a research project undertaken at University of Coimbra – Portugal, based on the guidelines of community valuing and participation and the promotion of citizenship. The goal was to research the topic, using as sample the format of PC present in the relationship between socially unassisted communities and the political power, supported on a comparison between Portugal and Brazil. The definition of the *locus* established four cities with similarities regarding their hierarchical position in their respective country, as regards their area, population and socio-economic indicators<sup>3</sup>. For the Portuguese territory, research adopted the division by CCDR<sup>4</sup>, examining the following cities:

**Coimbra**, located in the central region, it is the 19<sup>th</sup> most populous city in Portugal, with 133.724 inhabitants (2018), an urban perimeter of 319.4 km<sup>2</sup>, it is subdivided into 18 parishes – JF (in the Portuguese acronym). Historically, it was the first capital of Portugal and is known as academic city because it hosts the University of Coimbra, founded in 1290.

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<sup>3</sup> The choice of cities took into account the data published in the latest Portuguese Census (2011) carried out by INE – Statistics Portugal, disseminated by IDEF – Institute for Economic, Fiscal and Tax Law – regarding the structure of expenses and the distribution of households residing in Portugal as well as the comfort conditions of these households. This index constituted an important element to determine and provide information for calculating the final consumption of families considered, where the calculated income corresponds to the total income. In this sense, the poverty risk rates are reference indicator for the study, by considering the distribution of monetary income in relation to family budgets. In Brazil, the latest Census (2010) of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE, was considered, which identified a large number of individuals living below the poverty threshold (8,5% of the population). The Continuous National House Sample Survey - PNAD researches several socio-economic features of society, such as population, education, work, income, etc., among other topics included in the research according to the information needs for Brazil.

<sup>4</sup> As Regional Coordination and Development Commissions – CCDR, correspond to the 5 regions of mainland Portugal (North, Center, Lisbon/ Tagus Valley, Alentejo and the Algarve).

**Portalegre**, located in the Alentejo region, is the 110<sup>st</sup> most populous city in the country with 22,359 inhabitants (2018), an urban perimeter of 447.14km<sup>2</sup>, it is divided in 7 parishes - JF and is located on one of the slopes of the São Mamede Mountain Range, an area with a wide variety of fauna and flora, part of which was declared a natural park.

Regarding Brazil, the choice fell on the cities of:

**Porto Alegre**, capital of the Rio Grande do Sul state, it is the 10<sup>th</sup> most populous city in Brazil, with 1,479,101 inhabitants (2010), an urban perimeter of 496,682 km<sup>2</sup>, composed of 84 neighbourhoods. It is one of the most forested cities in the country, with qualified and diversified culture, as well as significant historic heritage in centennial buildings and numerous museums.

**Guaíba**, with 95,204 inhabitants (2010) is the 297<sup>th</sup> most populous city in the country. It has an area of 376.16 km<sup>2</sup>, divided into 50 neighbourhoods. This is an important economic and cultural centre in the region, and benefits from broad energy infrastructure, communication services, education network and healthcare services, complemented by adequate supply of a skilled workforce and the presence of important exporting industries.

The general scope of the research analysed the variables that interfere in the communication between the technicians of public authorities and society, produced in specific regions of Portugal and Brazil, seeking, analysing and combining mechanisms that qualify the relation between the two brother countries. Specifically, the goals were directed at the field of interpersonal communication, aiming to qualify the procedures adopted in the development of social projects, their virtues and shortcomings in the communication process between the technicians from the local government and society. Starting from the analysis of the communities in a situation of social and cultural vulnerability in Portugal and Brazil, the study defined the following specific objectives:

- Review the format of conveying information to the communities, according to the communication policies and strategies in Portugal and Brazil, with a view to qualifying this communication process as constitutional right;
- Contribute to the qualification of initiatives carried out in the field of mass media, between technicians of the local government and society, through the development of a specific methodology which will produce legal devices aiming at their application;
- Promote initiatives and programmes that address the qualification of technical professionals involved in PC, intervening in the process so that it fosters community participation.

## 2. Different models of government

With different government systems, Portugal – parliamentary —, and Brazil – presidential —, historians<sup>5</sup> point to the interweaving of the Portuguese Constitution

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<sup>5</sup> According to constitutionalist José Levi Mello do Amaral Júnior, the intertwining between the Brazilian and the Portuguese constitutionalism is not recent. This explains that, as regards constitutionality control, from the early twentieth century there has been an extremely fruitful

with the Brazilian one, influencing the latter, especially in issues pertaining to the control of constitutionality. The Portuguese Constitution is in force since 25th April 1976, and has been revised in seven moments, the latest one in 2005. Portugal is a parliamentary semi-presidential unitary constitutional republic, represented by four sovereign bodies: the Presidency of the Republic, the 'Assembly of the Republic' (single-chamber parliament), the Government, and the Courts. Since it considers the importance of the local authorities, the study is aimed at the Town Halls – CM (in the Portuguese acronym), as centralizing element of the departments and services of municipal administration. As executive body of the municipality, the CM is its government, a collegiate composed of a president and a varying number of councillors, to whom special areas of responsibility may be entrusted, or not. The Mayor is usually the first name of the list with the highest number of votes in the municipal elections and, as a rule, the councillors with special areas of responsibility (those that work in the management of the municipality) are the remaining elements of that list who were elected. The local government is comprised by the Mayor and the councillors (city council).

On the other hand, the Brazilian Federal Constitution, passed in 1988, known as *Constituição Cidadã* (Citizen Constitution), because it was devised during the re-democratization process, has been revised six times. It comprehends a presidential government system and ensures the supreme right of a citizen who lives in a representative democracy, from the direct election to the offices of President of the Republic, State and Federal District Governor, Mayor, Federal and State Representative, Senator and Councillor. The executive local authority is represented by the Municipal Government – PM (in the Brazilian acronym), Mayors and their Secretaries. The legislative local power is composed by the Councillors, who make up the City Council.

### 3. PC as constitutional prerogative

Given the complexity of the topic, it is relevant to discuss, albeit in a simple way, some of the bodies and actions applied to public services, from the new legal concepts and the principle of efficiency and transparency in the management of public administration. When the right to information is addressed, it is important to define precisely what type of information and research one is talking about and how the legislation can ensure that such knowledge is, indeed, under the rule of the whole society, shaping their free access. Within the scope of the constitutional duty to inform, the Portuguese Republic also refers to public commitment among the rights of the citizens and the duties of the State within the scope of the CP. In it, Art. 48 states that

All citizens have the right to be objectively told about actions of the State and other public entities and to be informed by the government and

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exchange between Brazil and Portugal (source: *Revista Consultor Jurídico*, 30 March 2010. Available at <<https://www.conjur.com.br/2010-mar-30/encontro-luso-brasileiro-discute-direito-constitucional-lisboa>>. Accessed on: 15. June 2015.

other authorities regarding the management of public affairs (PORTUGAL, 1975).

The legislation underscores the duty of the State to inform and enable access to all citizens, as a act which is indissociable of democracy. In Portugal, safeguarding particular constitutional exceptions (such as State secret), the Law of Access to the Information Documents - LADA<sup>6</sup>, is based on the principle of the open administration and ensures all citizens the right to access the documents produced by public authorities, of any nature or application (print or electronic). In its very first article, the law facilitates the exercise of the citizen's right to be informed by the public administration of the progress of the processes in which they are interested parties and to know the final resolutions taken on them, which is ruled by the Code of Administrative Procedure. The AMA<sup>7</sup> is the official institute responsible for the actions of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, in the areas of administrative modernization and simplification, which is where the principle of the CP is inserted, based on the simplification of service and ease so that citizens can access public services. AMA is the federal public entity responsible for promoting and developing administrative modernization in Portugal as well as for developing and managing a suitable service model which ensures efficiency in the State's interaction with society. In 1997, the Resolution of the Council of Ministers created a project aimed at citizen attention services, meaning to deliver fast and personalized service, with a view to promoting the necessary studies to implement and organize citizen attention services. On the basis of this resolution, the Portuguese government made available the physical access to service delivery through the *Lojas do Cidadão* (Citizen Shops), in an effort to draw closer the sectors of public and private services of society. Each of these places operates as a single desk, providing the services of several Portuguese entities. Later, AMA developed a digital medium and digital access, entitled *Portal do Cidadão* (Citizen Portal), a platform that enables society's remote access public administration services all over the country.

Brazil, after it had passed the Brazilian Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988) defined the new rules for society, imposing the intervention of the State for the protection of the citizens, between them and PC. Much of the effort devoted to the claim and conquest of rights has reflected on the Federal Constitution, when new tools were made available for citizens as a way of ensuring, with the latter's participation, the construction and the very maintenance of these values. The right to information is enshrined in the Brazilian Magna Carta giving all citizens the assurance of access to the information of public bodies, provided within the times of the law, under penalty of accountability, as stated in its Art. 216:

All citizens have the right to receive from public bodies information of their private interest, or of collective or general interest, which shall be provided within the time of the law, under penalty of accountability, safeguarding that which is indispensable to the security of society and the

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<sup>6</sup> Portuguese Law 26/2016.

<sup>7</sup> AMA – Agency for Public Services Reform.

State, as well as the right to access administrative records and information on government acts (BRASIL, 1988).

Consequently, the law does not only include the public freedom to inform, but also the right to access information, including the advertising of administrative acts of any and all public administration entity. Thus, communication, as well as other public actions, come under the constitutional requirement of protection to the consumer, or, in other words, to the users of society. At an official level, the Federal Government, the States and Municipalities, rely on their secretariats and/or communication consultancies, the centralizing bodies responsible for the guidelines of direct administration, special funds, local authorities, foundations and public companies, mixed economy partnerships and other entities controlled by them, whether directly or indirectly.

The *Secretaria de Comunicação Social – Secom* (Media Secretariat) – is the body of Brazil's Presidency that coordinates the initiatives of governmental communication. It must abide by criteria of transparency, efficiency and rationality in the use of resources, besides supervising the suitability of messages to the public. Recently, the Federal Government regulated the constitutional right to obtain public information, via LAI – Access to Information Law<sup>8</sup>, defining mechanisms to enable anyone to receive public information from bodies and entities.

#### 4. Theoretical framework

When considering the precepts of Edgar Morin, of Luiz Beltrão and of Jürgen Habermas, research sought to articulate the theoretical references with the social, economic, political and cultural realities in the process of PC in the cities analyzed. A Memory and historic experience were considered as important references of mass media in the construction of citizenship. The project highlighted the methodological analysis of the PC strategies mobilized by the Municipalities, their differences and similarities, at the level of the communication of promotion of citizenship towards their respective citizens.

It should be noted that the notion of PC, its characteristics and principles, must be contextualized from the processes of re-democratization experienced by Portugal and by Brazil. The legal interpretation starts to be meaningful from the grassroots social movements of the time, enhancing the need for dialogue to overcome barriers, in the acceptance that multiple views on any argument are possible.

Communication becomes the protagonist of that dialogue, agent responsible for the ordering of concepts that enable individuals to interpret the situations of the world in which they live, socially and culturally, acting to promote citizenship, by valuing the cultural identity representative of society. Conversely, it is necessary to assimilate that playing that role is directly linked to mechanisms that refer communication to processes instituted “in a political sphere which encompasses

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<sup>8</sup> Brazilian Law 12.527/2011.

State, government and society: a space for debate, negotiation and decision making regarding the country's public life" (MATOS, 1999, p.33).

Vygotsky (1991) argues that the act of dialoguing implies the existence of sufficient knowledge of the topic by the parties, as a process of mutual cooperation extending individual abilities. Dialogue then represents a chain of reactions, a universe constituted of replies and retorts, in which the interaction is indispensable condition that enriches relations by adding new elements and social values. Understanding based on dialogue may reveal that universe, until then unknown and which occupies the same dimension as the social relations of a parallel world, a dichotomic world, between the need for information and the way in which it is conveyed by local authorities. Dialogue is the key element for the exchange of that complex relationship by sharing contents in a multidisciplinary way, integrating and respecting experiences, asymmetries and singularities.

Edgar Morin (2005), the father of the Complexity Paradigm, calls for bringing together scientific practices and the forming of a new practice, articulated to the life and social sciences and to philosophy, adding a new paradigmatic methodological element: systemic, transdisciplinary complexity. Complex Thought is an alternative to understand the modern world, acknowledging the advances of science, while claiming a new way of articulating the construction of knowledge, reconciling human values (communication, art and philosophy) with multiple knowledge existing in society. Complexity is not understood

only in the quantities of unit and interactions that defy our possibilities of calculation: it also comprehends uncertainties, indeterminations, random phenomena. Complexity in a certain sense is always connected with chance (MORIN, 2005, p. 35).

The language used by most of society, be it Portuguese or Brazilian, is associated with the colloquial daily life without any concern for choosing the suitable words or even with the correct grammar. A daily life which can be found in the community space, as argued by Beltrão (1980) in his work.

Pioneer of scientific research on communicational phenomena, Luiz Beltrão, in his studies on Folkcommunication (from 1967 onwards), begins to follow the trajectory of individuals on the margins of power and decision-making centers: the marginalized<sup>9</sup>. By studying these processes, the researcher ascertained how these groups related to society, revealing a particular perspective on his people, very different from the image institutionalized by the agents of power. Just like the individuals of the cities studied in Portugal and Brazil, the daily conversations are present in the streets, in the barber shops, in the bars, with a common goal: to acquire wisdom and experience to survive and perfect the species and society. In the work of Beltrão (1980), these segments inhabit the isolated areas, forming the subordinate, destitute classes, with minimal conditions to access local mobility. In essence, they possess limited vocabulary, yet of a very particular nature. Their ability to convey and receive new knowledge does not go beyond the immediate

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<sup>9</sup> Luiz Beltrão defines 'marginal' as an individual at the fringe of two cultures and two societies which never fully interpenetrated and merged (BELTRÃO, 1980, p.39).

boundary of their daily language. Beltrão emphasizes the importance of the communication format present in these groups, stating that

the precepts of Folkcommunication are aimed at a world in which words, signs, graphs, gestures and attitudes, lines and shapes have very tenuous relations with the language and with writing (BELTRÃO, 1980, p. 40).

For Hohlfeldt (2002), Folkcommunication comprehends the communicational procedures by which the manifestations of popular culture or folklore are expanded and interact with other communicational chains. This author advances that they “undergo changes by influence of the massified and industrialized communication or are changed when appropriated by such complexes” (HOHLFELDT, 2002, p. 82). Working with language that is suitable for all layers of society means developing support mechanisms so that they can understand it and use it as a tool for integration. Language then plays a crucial role for the technician which aims to carve a space in the enclosed universe of the precision of bureaucratic offices. It is necessary to devote a more human view, to allow the implementation of an exchange process, adding to the practical function the necessary interpretation of the various forms of producing knowledge, be it technical or derived from community empiricism.

By arguing that “language only exists as language of a people”, Habermas (1968, p. 31) reproduces Hegel’s concept of the reason for using representative symbols as first determination of the abstract spirit. On the basis of the assumptions of the Habermasian Theory of Communicative Action - TCA, as a safeguard of democracy, the study sought to articulate the findings with the philosophical application of cognitive language instrumentalized by dialogue, born in the simplicity of daily life: the understanding that it is a duty of citizenship to ensure the individual the retention of informative content by the public government in a spontaneous, natural way, free from dictates. Habermas (2012) manifests the importance of communicational action vis-à-vis instrumental action as signaling a new, modern society, where both not only coexist, but also where the former commands the actions of the latter, strengthening itself as a power instrument of citizenship.

Interactivity and the respect for social differences are, undoubtedly, decisive elements for a modern, effective PC. This involves understanding communication as a human action, respecting the use of cognitive codes produced by inherited experiences and baggage accumulated throughout the individual’s existence. It is by it that the human being perceives the stimuli of the environment where they live, responding to social impulses, articulated between attitudes of cooperation or conflict. Habermas (2012) states that knowledge, within the rational philosophical conception, must be revised so as to aggregate human relation as the actual production of knowledge, so as to replace the paradigm of knowledge with the paradigm of mutual understanding among individuals, through speech, action, socialization.

[...] a change in paradigm towards the communication theory enables the return to an endeavor which, in its time, was interrupted by the criticism

of instrumental reason; this change may enable tasks of a critical social theory that were abandoned to be resumed (HABERMAS, 2012, p.665).

Maffesoli (2004), too, sees socialization as something connected to communication, but also to the social relations that are established among subjects in everyday life. This author idealizes communication as the *social cement* that binds people and keeps them in collective alignment with their groups, according to what he calls principle of the relation of individual understanding, possible only in the relation with the other. On the other hand, Hall (2005), by referencing national cultures, provides us with the basis to search the origin of the cultural identity of communities. Respecting the territorial scale, it is possible to admit that the construction of everyday meanings influences and organizes both the action and conception that each individual has over him/herself. Following Hall’s thought, it is “memories that connect their present with their past and images that are constructed of it” (HALL, 2005, p. 51).

### 5. Methodological path

With a view to understanding the characteristics that determine the communicational relation between the government agencies and the communities assisted by it, the decision was taken to carry out quantitative and qualitative research, adopting the principles of Content Analysis described by Bardin (2016), and its set of techniques for collecting and interpreting data, from three paths: the first sought to ascertain the view of the agents involved in communication via interviews with managers, politicians, communicators and teachers. The second was based on conducting questionnaires with the citizens, and finally, the third, involved performing a documental analysis of public notices in print format and online.

Table 1 - Research design

Locus	Categories of analysis	Corpus
 Coimbra Portalegre	Right to information	Interviews
	Local Government and Citizenship	Questionnaires
 Porto Alegre Guaíba	Social inclusion	Documents
	Language and technology	

Source: authors’ own elaboration

A. Interviews: during the research period 23 were carried out, divided among 11 managers (Mayors, Parish Presidents, Councilors), 4 press secretaries, 3 communication teachers and 5 journalists of the four cities<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> COIMBRA: Regina Bento (Councilor), João F. Campos (President of Coimbra Parish), António Coelho (President of Almalaguês Parish), Leonardo Martins (Communication advisor), João L. Campos (*Diário de Coimbra*), João Fonseca (*Agência Lusa*). PORTALEGRE: Adelaide Teixeira (Mayor), João Cardoso (Councilor), Francisco Martins (President Sé - São Lourenço Parish), João Manuel

Table 2 - Topics covered in the interviews

Interviewees	Topics covered
Municipal authorities	Initiatives carried out ■ Social inclusion mechanisms Citizen participation ■ Priorities in PC definition
Press advisors	Information transparency ■ Format of adopted PC Language use ■ Instruments / assessment
Communication professionals	Analysis of the efficiency of the PC adopted by local authorities Medium x public administration x community relationship
Communication teachers	Role of academia in the process ■ Digital convergence Challenges for new professionals ■ Communication Ethics

Source: authors' own elaboration

For the most part<sup>11</sup>, the interviews were carried out in-person, semi-structured in nature, enabling greater freedom for the development of the topics proposed.

B. Questionnaires: during the research period 350 questionnaires were administered to the citizens of the four cities being studied, specifically 170 in Portugal and 180 in Brazil. The definition of the participants was determined by the proportional percentage to the population of each country, referenced by the latest official censuses<sup>12</sup>, defining the proportions regarding gender, age group, professional activity and education level. The questions were formulated from the public spaces of the cities themselves, so as to preserve the urban references, enabling the interaction with the environment without external interferences, respecting the preliminary information and the acceptance laid down in the ICF – Informed Consent Form. The questionnaires administered were constituted by 10 closed questions (simple or multiple choice), using an ordinal scale. Safeguarding the differences between the two countries, two questionnaire formats were produced, which, albeit adapted, preserved the methodological essence in the gathering of data.

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Baptista Vivas (President Alagoa Parish), Ana Bicho (Communication advisor), Luis Peniche (Communication teacher), Manuel Correa (*Jornal Alto Alentejo*). PORTO ALEGRE: Gustavo Paim (Deputy Mayor), Mônica Leal (Councilor), Orestes de Andrade Jr. (Communication advisor), Adriana Androvandi (*Jornal Correio do Povo*), Paulo Germano (*Jornal Zero Hora*), Beatriz Dornelles (Communication teacher). GUAÍBA: José Sperotto (Mayor), Antônio Arilene (Councilor), Paulo Ledur (Communication advisor), Valmir Michelon (*Jornal Nova Folha*).

<sup>11</sup> Of the 23 people interviewed, strictly due to scheduling constraints, 10 answers were received by e-mail.

<sup>12</sup> In Portugal, the percentages used for the Center and Alentejo were collected by Statistics Portugal - INE, on the basis of the latest general population census national statistics in 2011 (the 15<sup>th</sup> edition, more extensive and consistent on the Portuguese population). In Brazil, the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics - IBGE carried out its latest demographic census in 2010 (the 12<sup>th</sup> edition, for which over 190,000 census workers visited 67.6 million Brazilian homes).

Table 3 - Questionnaire administered in the Portuguese cities, with results

<b>1. Do you know the name of the head of the Municipal Government?</b>					
Yes	COI 50,00% PAL 92,5%	No	COI 50,00% PAL 7,50%		
<b>2. How you evaluate the way the Town Hall communicates with you?</b>					
Excellent	COI 6,67% PAL 6,25%	Good	COI 22,22% PAL 28,75%	Average	COI 51,11% PAL 47,50%
Poor	COI 15,56% PAL 17,50%	Terrible	COI 4,44% PAL 0%		
<b>3. Are you in the habit of accessing the webpage of the Town Hall?</b>					
Always	COI 10,00% PAL 11,25%	Occasionally	COI 57,78% PAL 56,25%	Never	COI 32,22% PAL 32,50%
<b>4. Did you understand clearly what it is informing you of?</b>					
Yes	COI 13,33% PAL 8,75%	In part	COI 55,56% PAL 71,25%	No	COI 31,11% PAL 20,00%
<b>5. Are you in the habit of participating in the meetings organized by the Town Hall?</b>					
Always	COI 6,67% PAL 7,50%	Occasionally	COI 22,22% PAL 31,25%	Never	COI 71,11% PAL 61,25%
<b>6. Do you know the name of the President of the Parish?</b>					
Yes	COI 84,44% PAL 91,25%	No	COI 15,56% PAL 8,75%		
<b>7. How do you evaluate the in-person service at the Parish?</b>					
Excellent	COI 11,11% PAL 10,00%	Good	COI 26,67% PAL 25,00%	Average	COI 54,44% PAL 50,00%
Poor	COI 7,78% PAL 13,75%	Terrible	COI 0% PAL 1,25%		
<b>8. How do you evaluate the way the Parish communicates?</b>					
Excellent	COI 4,44% PAL 5,00%	Good	COI 26,68% PAL 36,25%	Average	COI 64,44% PAL 52,50%
Poor	COI 4,44% PAL 5,00%	Terrible	COI 0% PAL 1,25%		
<b>9. Do you have the habit of participating in initiatives promoted by the Parish?</b>					
Yes	COI 17,78% PAL 15,00%	No	COI 82,22% PAL 85,00%		
<b>10. Considering your rights as citizen, do you feel represented by the Parish?</b>					
Yes	COI 68,89% PAL 72,50%	No	COI 26,68% PAL 20,00%	No opinion	COI 4,44% PAL 7,50%
 Target group in Portugal = 170 people of which: COI Coimbra = 90 people PAL Portalegre = 80 people					

Source: authors' own elaboration

The defined participants took up the same coverage area (*locus*) preserving the necessary heterogeneity. Adopting criteria by Costa (2005), the respondents were defined from a similar socio-economic background and education level, avoiding inhibitions and constraints.

Table 4 - Questionnaire administered in the Brazilian cities, with results

<b>1. Do you know the name of the Mayor?</b>	
Yes	POA 90,00 % GUA 55,00 %
No	POA 10,00 % GUA 45,00 %
<b>2. How do you evaluate the way the Town Hall communicates with you?</b>	
Excellent	POA 0,83 % GUA 5,00 %
Good	POA 19,17 % GUA 16,70 %
Average	POA 55,00 % GUA 43,30 %
Poor	POA 18,33 % GUA 30,00 %
Terrible	POA 6,67 % GUA 5,00 %
<b>3. Are you in the habit of accessing the webpage of the Town Hall?</b>	
Always	POA 14,17 % GUA 16,67 %
Occasionally	POA 58,33 % GUA 55,00 %
Never	POA 27,50 % GUA 28,30 %
<b>4. Did you understand clearly what it is informing you of?</b>	
Yes	POA 12,50 % GUA 11,70 %
In part	POA 64,17 % GUA 65,00 %
No	POA 23,33 % GUA 23,30 %
<b>5. How do you evaluate the service of the Town Hall in your neighborhood?</b>	
Excellent	POA 0,83 % GUA 0 %
Good	POA 14,14 % GUA 23,30 %
Average	POA 54,17 % GUA 40,00 %
Poor	POA 19,16 % GUA 30,00 %
Terrible	POA 11,67 % GUA 6,67 %
<b>6. Are you in the habit of participating in the meetings organized by the Town Hall?</b>	
Always	POA 5,00 % GUA 8,33 %
Occasionally	POA 30,00 % GUA 25,00 %
Never	POA 65,00 % GUA 66,70 %
<b>7. Do you know the name of the President of the Parish?</b>	
Yes	POA 42,50 % GUA 23,30 %
No	POA 57,50 % GUA 76,70 %
<b>8. How do you evaluate the in-person service at the Parish?</b>	
Excellent	POA 0 % GUA 0 %
Good	POA 19,16 % GUA 20,00 %
Average	POA 53,34 % GUA 43,30 %
Poor	POA 25,00 % GUA 33,33 %
Terrible	POA 5,00 % GUA 3,33 %
<b>9. Do you have the habit of participating in initiatives promoted by the Parish?</b>	
Yes	POA 10,00 % GUA 18,30 %
No	POA 90,00 % GUA 81,70 %
<b>10. Considering your rights as citizen, do you feel represented by the Parish?</b>	
Yes	POA 29,17 % GUA 30,00 %
No	POA 61,67 % GUA 65,00 %
No opinion	POA 9,16 % GUA 5,00 %
 Target group in Brazil = 180 people of which: POA Porto Alegre = 120 people GUA Guaíba = 60 people	

Source: authors' own elaboration

3. Documental content, composed of two parts, print material and online documents. The former was defined from the collection and reading of public notices in the proportion of a bimonthly reading for each city, totaling 12 individual reading accesses per municipality. The option for public notices aimed to identify this official communication format as the instrument by which public authorities inform of acts, summons and/or the performance of legal procedures, that must be

complied with by society. The Portuguese term is derived from the Latin *edictum*<sup>13</sup>, and the document is responsible for advertising announcements; hence, a public notice is a statement of an official nature with the goal of disseminating knowledge among the population in general, regarding a particular topic of public interest. For this reason, even if it is an administrative document, it must be clear in its language, especially in the care with the use of excessively technical words, the use of acronyms, abbreviations and with the meaning in Portuguese, when accompanied with terms written in different languages. It should be noted that in the cities of the study, access to the documents was made easier by their release and filing in digital format on their webpages<sup>14</sup>.

Defined as a qualitative stage of analysis, after reading the documents, the more significant and relevant elements were articulated regarding their clarity and the language present in their content. As reported by Bagno, this is an important condition in conveying information, and it is necessary to “find the balance point between two axes: that of suitability and that of acceptability” (BAGNO, 1993, p.128). From this perspective, the research identified the use of terminology which is difficult to understand even for more learned individuals, as is the case of the noun **simulacro** (simulacrum) and the verb **exortar** (exhort), present in Public Notice 157/2019 of the Coimbra CM<sup>15</sup>. In Portalegre it was possible to identify two other situations where a less learned individual would find it difficult to understand the content of Public Notice 57/2018<sup>16</sup> should they not grasp the meaning of the verb **ajudicar** (award, as in a proposal or tender) or even the meaning of the acronym **FNRE**<sup>17</sup>, to which the important building of the local conservatory was competing for an important governmental investment. In the Brazilian city of Guaíba, the use of more obscure terms may cause a barrier to many individuals' comprehension, such as the word **jetom**, derived from the French word (used to indicate the remuneration councilors or MPs receive for sessions attended), in Public Notice 001/2018<sup>18</sup>.

Conversely, it is common knowledge that, with the process of globalization, loanwords have been adopted by the language spoken by Brazilians in their daily

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<sup>13</sup> *Edictum*, document used in ancient Rome as a legal tool, published by the magistrates, where the rules to be followed by the people were recorded.

<sup>14</sup> Information accessed during the years 2018-2019 on the cities' webpages:

Coimbra: available at: <<https://www.cm-coimbra.pt/areas/e-balcao/editais-2>>. Accessed on: 5 November 2018;

Portalegre: available at: <<http://www.cm-portalegre.pt/pt/editais-avisos>>. Accessed on: 5 November 2018;

Porto Alegre: available at: <<https://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/dopa/>>. Accessed on: 19 October 2018;

Guaíba: available at: <<https://guaiba.atende.net>>. Accessed on: 19 October 2018;

<sup>15</sup> Available at: <[https://www.cm-coimbra.pt/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Edital\\_157\\_2019.pdf](https://www.cm-coimbra.pt/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Edital_157_2019.pdf)>. Accessed on: 12 November 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Available at: <<http://www.cm-portalegre.pt/pt/component/phocadownload/category/224-2018?download=2766:edital-66-cmp>>. Accessed on: 15 January 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Fundo Nacional de Reabilitação do Edificado (Fund for the Rehabilitation of the National Buildings).

<sup>18</sup> Available at: <<http://www.guaiba.rs.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/EDITAL.pdf>>. Accessed on: 15 July 2018.

life. These expressions range from the **login** of the computer to the **ticket** to gain access to the theater, or even the famous **like** of social media. All these words are popular and frequently used in the everyday workings of individuals; still, this does not mean that everyone is obliged to know them, let alone as part of a Brazilian official document. A clear example of this situation was detected in Public Notice 166/2018<sup>19</sup> of the Porto Alegre Town Hall, by using such terms as **walkman**, **notebook**, **palmtop** and **receptor**, to refer to specific electronic devices. It seems clear that these words, unaccompanied by their respective translation, increase the difficulty to understand the document when we consider that the vast majority of the Brazilian population does not master English<sup>20</sup>, but needs correct public information for their lives.

The study noted that in the four cities researched the former information media such as newsletters (printed leaflets), which in the past were distributed to the citizens, are no longer edited, but rather disseminated in public panels (murals). Moreover, the research noted that the official legal communication is also disseminated in the newspapers that circulate in the regions within the area of influence of the analyzed cities, and on the *internet*, extending the penetration of the information. By way of illustration, it's apt to mention an unusual situation found in the city of Coimbra, regarding the notice of closure of a particular street to carry out works. Since there was no mural nearby, the suggested alternative was to staple the public notice to the trunk of a tree on site.

Figure 1 - Dissemination of public notices



Source: authors' own elaboration

It should be mentioned that, whether bound to the ecological issues or to rationality and budget constraints, both Portugal's public administrations and Brazil's are reducing the number of documents printed and have started making the information available online.

<sup>19</sup> Available at:

<[http://dopaonlineupload.procempa.com.br/dopaonlineupload/2676\\_ce\\_239546\\_1.pdf](http://dopaonlineupload.procempa.com.br/dopaonlineupload/2676_ce_239546_1.pdf)>. Accessed on: 12 September 2019.

<sup>20</sup> According to research carried out by the British Council, only 5% of the Brazilian population knows how to communicate in English and of these only 1% shows some level of fluency. Brazil is the 41<sup>st</sup> on a 70-country ranking. The full study can be found at:

<[https://www.britishcouncil.org.br/sites/default/files/demandas\\_de\\_aprendizagem\\_pesquisa\\_completa.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org.br/sites/default/files/demandas_de_aprendizagem_pesquisa_completa.pdf)>. Accessed on: 18 May 2018.

The second item of the documental analysis assessed the webpages of the Town Halls, in the proportion of one bimonthly access, totaling 12 individual accesses per municipality. Several aspects were appraised: objectivity, the language and its accessibility to benefit those citizens who have special needs. According to Oliveira et. al. (2003), this is not about designing specific websites<sup>21</sup> for special needs citizens, but rather ensure suitable access by all. Considering a complete and comprehensive model, compatible with the proposal to evaluate the webpages of both countries, the study based its assessment criteria on the Method to Assess the Websites of the Portuguese Government.<sup>22</sup> The possibility of having remote access, an asset of the internet, benefited the monthly collection of the necessary information, with a view to carrying out the correct assessment. Below are the more relevant findings.

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<sup>21</sup> The English word *website* used in the study is equivalent to *sítio eletrônico* (European Portuguese) or *endereço eletrônico* (Brazilian Portuguese), and means the set of pages accessible by the world computer network, aka Internet.

<sup>22</sup> Table based on the Resolution of the Council of Ministers 22/2001, of 27 February, which regulates the websites of direct and indirect administration bodies, with a view to assessing how often the available information is updated, how clear its presentation is, how easy information search is, as well as the fulfilment of legal provisions, from their Content, Updating, Accessibility and Navigability. The score resulting from the evaluation process was defined on a scale of 0 to 5, with the following meaning according to each evaluation criterion: 5 - Excellent: Great content diversity, updated quite regularly. 4 - Very Good: with demanding accessibility and navigability criteria. 3 - Good: reasonable diversity of regularly updated content. 2 - Average: Poor content diversity, relevant delays in updating. 1 - Insufficient: contents show little diversification, are quite limited and the information is outdated.

Table 5 - Assessment of the websites in Portugal and Brazil

Criteria	Indicators	COI	PAL	POA	GUA
1 Contents	1 Description of the entity: a.Mission b.Structure c.Services	4	4	3	3
	2 Contracts	5	4	3	2
	3 Publications	5	4	2	2
	4 Breaking news	5	4	2	1
	5 FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)	2	2	2	1
	6 Services and contact information(including email)	3	3	3	1
	7 Information on forms to download	5	4	3	3
2 Content updating	1 Legislation	5	5	4	3
	2 Information (organigram and Organic Law)	5	5	4	3
	3 Scheduled or on-going events	5	5	3	3
	4 Financial statement and activity plan	4	5	3	2
	5 Activity plan	4	3	3	1
	6 Statistics, publications and studies	4	3	2	1
	7 Further information	3	3	2	1
3 Access	1 Webpage opening (different browsers or versions)	5	5	5	5
	2 URI in all the basic documentation	5	4	3	4
	3 Main search engines	5	4	3	5
	4 Webpage load time	4	4	5	5
4 Navigation	1 Webpage opening (different browsers or versions)	5	5	5	5
	2 Sitemap	3	4	3	4
	3 Page load time	2	5	5	5
	4 Access links on navigation bar (main page)	4	5	3	3
	5 Access links on navigation bar (other pages)	4	5	3	1
	6 Search engine	4	5	2	1
	7 Active links	4	3	2	1

\* Template based on Method for Evaluating Websites of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Portugal  
 Adopted assessment indicators: **5** Excellent **4** Very Good **3** Good **2** Average **1** Insufficient  
 Coimbra **COI** Portalegre **PAL** Porto Alegre **POA** Guaíba **GUA**

Source: authors' own elaboration

The observations collected from the webpages of the city of Coimbra surprised positively by the wealth of information and the graphic beauty of their contents. The sophistication of the graphic dimension is a motivational factor, and the technology was put to good use as a way of guiding the user by direct commands. The webpage can be opened in several browsers, and the informational elements such as the main news, press releases, agenda, transparency are laid out and visible on the side bar. The contents show updated information featuring legislation or activities carried out by the CM. The area devoted to the transparency of information allows direct access to all legal documents, public notices and press releases. Forms, in the DOC format<sup>23</sup> and easy to fill out, can be accessed on a user-friendly platform. Another observed positive featured was the constant updating, which enables the chronological change in information to be observed, which in turn ensures the reliability of access.

As regards Portalegre, the analysis of the webpages highlights the performance benefitting the citizen, both concerning the promotion of content and its optimization to meet each user's need. The CM webpage is a good example of

<sup>23</sup> The DOC extension refers to Microsoft Word files.

the use of technology at the service of information, where contents are presented in a clear, orderly fashion in a modern, attractive environment, all this without using images that are excessively large (heavy). The assessment carried out highlighted the concern with information updating. The language used is quite clear and access to the documents to be filled out and sent online use the PDF format<sup>24</sup>. The webpages proved to be easy to navigate and their contents were accessible in several browsers. With respect to the online documents and forms, in four attempts access to them was not possible, suggesting the possibility of technical problems.

The periodic assessment of the webpage of the Porto Alegre municipality, unlike those of the cities previously analyzed, shows a simple, plain presentation. Still, even with modest graphic resources, the opening of ulterior pages is not compromised, and navigation by users is easy, even by those with greater difficulties. The informational content is presented in a clear and objective way, although a valuable space for communicating with the citizen is squandered. The page enables search using its own tools, facilitating the search for items that are not directly laid out on the portal. About the information transparency requirement, it provides good indication of access to the citizen by simplified language. The access paths to legal documents and materials use little iconography, nearly always accompanied by complementary text. Updating is continuous, which provides reliability to municipal initiatives. The information presented on the page meet the needs of the users, by opening available documents in software developed by the administration itself.

Among the webpages analyzed, that of the Guaíba municipality is the weakest, bereft of features that may be attractive for the user; moreover, its informational content is quite limited. Not having a suitably programmed webpage, which combines key information with attractive design, ultimately frustrates the users' navigation expectations. The problem may lie in the layout of the minimalist information, attesting to the absence of an online communication strategy, not offering graphic resources that stimulate the citizen's interest in accessing it, except when the need arises. The scarce navigation elements are presented in clustered boxes, standing apart from the other information on the website. Legal information is visible, indicated along the access bars, which enable forms, in PDF format, to be opened (the forms are easy to read, featuring a suitable text type). Another important detail is the limited periodicity of updating, which may determine the lack of interest in accessing it.

## 6. Result interpretation by categories

The study revealed interesting findings, which pointed to some of the major difficulties present in the relationship between public authorities and the communities of the cities researched. The division of the *corpus*, along three different paths, made for a more practical inquiry, allowing in-depth observation of the issues raised at the beginning of the study, considering the categories of analysis, *a priori*: 1 – The Right to Information; 2 – Local Government and citizenship; 3 – Social Inclusion; and 4 – Language and technology.

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<sup>24</sup> The PDF format extension refers to sharable files created by Adobe.

The first category analyzed concerned the right to information and the need to acknowledge it as a dialogical instrument which will enable information flow and horizontal knowledge.

Wolton (2010) defends the differences between informing and communicating. For the French scholar, information is the message, while the act of communicating is a much more complex relation and its practice. When done incorrectly, it does not increase communication or understanding, quite the contrary, it follows a path the author names *incommunication*. Distinct from the communication carried out by private organizations, for which profit is financial capital, PC emanating from public authorities pursues the goal of human capital, to benefit society. In this sense, Duarte emphasizes the value of a PC focused on the citizens' interests by ensuring the right to information and to free speech, "but also to dialogue, to the respect for their characteristics and needs, to the stimulus to active, rational and co-responsible popular participation" (DUARTE, 2007, p. 61).

As advocated by the Complex Thought theory set forth by Morin (2011), this participation opens alternatives in the attempt to break the pattern of Cartesian thought, building relations that develop joint knowledge which in turn will enable a significative understanding of the whole, through the multidimensional nature of the supportive, humane interactive process. Hence, it is possible to admit that this complex process (of countless alternatives) will only be successful in the choice of the suitable language for the transmission of each message.

Considering the answers on the fulfilment of requests, the citizens from both countries questioned were unanimous in manifesting their full disapproval with the PC conducted by public authorities, both in the Portuguese parishes and in the Brazilian neighborhoods, pointing to the absence of a closer relationship centered on the daily life of the community. This is an observation that fosters understanding of its importance as a space for exchanging information among neighbors themselves, creating a spontaneous free communication process. This becomes a specific universe of exchanges, where the transfer of information coming from the citizens themselves is made, and consequently it acquires a higher worth than the communication made by public authorities.

The community understanding of the joint construction of knowledge may be exemplified by Morin (1999), by deeming that the search for being and knowing reveal a new form of understanding, where undeniable truths pave the way for the discovery of new truths. Mistakes are progressively corrected in that the adjustments are being perfected, pointing to both sides, allowing both to coexist along the path, in the construction of new knowledge. Going from this paradigm evidenced by Morin (1999), it is possible to reflect on how the citizen becomes protagonist in the process alongside public authorities, in a web of relationships, united and multiple at the same time. Morin (1999) teaches that it is the human unity that carries in it the principles of its multiple diversities, since "to understand the human is to understand its unity in diversity, its diversity in unity" (MORIN, 2011, p.50).

The view that is up to the governance to ensure that each and every individual has the right to absorb the informative content spontaneously, naturally, without impositions, as advocated by Habermas (2012). The discourse used admits

multiple meanings, but it must minimally ensure that it is understood, so that communication between knowledge, action and speech is established.

Thus, the importance of community dialogue in PC resurfaces, by the exchange of information between public authorities and citizens, consolidated by Beltrão (2001), in the respect for individuals' experience of day-to-day life. A plural relationship, which aggregates knowledge and strengthens citizenship through mutual and spontaneous relationship, validating the concept of a healthy coexistence between technical and popular knowledge. The awareness that modernization in PC processes must transgress in the use of a cultured language, adopting a compatible and balanced communication, sometimes dramatized, which through this provides marginalized individuals with the understanding of the message as a constitutional right. The excessive communicative rationality adopted in PC should be refuted through continuous processes, instrumentality and standardization in the stages that involve the constitutional right to information.

In this sense, answers such as Adelaide Teixeira's, Mayor of Portalegre, refer to the constitutional role of communication as a guardian of citizenship. Also, the Deputy Mayor of Porto Alegre, Gustavo Paim, considers that information is a citizen's right, and its transparency is indeed a duty of the State. In the study, the interviewees reported the valorization of public authorities in the execution of PC processes, through transparency and agility in user care services, but mention the lack of budget investments in training. These data can be illustrated in the testimony of the Mayor of Portalegre, when she states that working with a small budget implies the need to make some choices, to the detriment of more urgent ones. Understanding the importance of PC in this process of information intermediation requires that public authorities know the cultural and identity elements that make up the universe of each parish or neighborhood, and their importance in the process of social inclusion.

Regarding the degree of understanding of the PC processes practiced by the public authorities, based on the total percentages for each country, it was possible to perceive how distant the PC done by public authorities is from their citizens. The answers obtained to the administered questionnaire reinforce the importance of communication from the adoption of instruments that ensure the sharing of information with their users, especially in the relationship with citizens in social, economic and cultural practices. Among the 170 individuals questioned in the two Portuguese cities, only 31.94% reported understanding the information passed on satisfactorily (between good and optimal). In the Brazilian context, the result extracted from the research is even more negative. Among the 180 citizens heard, just over 20% considered the communication performed to be positive (good and great). The answers indicate that awareness about the importance of plural PC is still a complex process, which requires the perception of much of society, involving macroeconomic and social development issues. The reduced value of investments can be demonstrated by the accounts of the citizens questioned in the two countries, expressing the difficulties about their degree of understanding of the information passed on by the local authorities, exposing the flaws present in the process.

The second category concerned local power and citizenship, and prompted the debate on the importance of developing interactivity in the PC process

established by public authorities, with a view to reducing the barriers raised by social prejudice.

As previously seen, in Portugal local power is established through the Municipal Councils and their Parish Councils, while in Brazil the Town Halls, through regions and neighborhoods, fulfill this role for the benefit of citizenship. However, considering that printed public notices are physically available on murals, published in some newspapers or on the internet, a question remains: how can those disadvantaged individuals, who live in the peripheries, without the resources to journey to the city center, to buy a newspaper or to own a computer, access these official documents? It is known that the advancement of electronic technology in the media has made the use of paper obsolete (reducing correspondence sent) and, thus, making it difficult for a portion of society that occupies the most peripheral areas of cities to access information. But how can local authorities strengthen their proximity to the citizen? One of the answers may be in in-person meetings between the local government and its citizens. From a legal and constitutional point of view, personal proximity with local authorities is sometimes the only opportunity that individuals have to participate in the development of their city, thus becoming a true citizenship initiative. Joint participation is an associated opportunity for collective planning, where the public entity abdicates from unilateral decision-making power, making room for the managers and technicians of the public authorities (and civil society itself) to contribute more actively in the PC process by sharing many of the public communication initiatives with citizens. In this sense, the interview with the President of the Parish Council of Alagoa (Portalegre), João Martins, gives us a glimpse of the inclusive process of the local authority drawing closer to the citizens in meetings scheduled at the seat of local power, thereby fulfilling the constitutional right to information. Still in the Portuguese territory, Councilor Regina Bento (Coimbra) understands that one of the ways to perform this proximity lies in the wide openness to the discussion of ideas, so that people know who they can count on at any time, by the extension of public service hours (including Saturdays).

In the same context, the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, divided in administrative regions, holds Regional and Thematic Assemblies where the population is informed and has the possibility to determine priorities for the municipality. Its advisors and delegates participate in their regional forums and thematic discussion groups, as their representatives. In the interview, The Deputy Mayor, Gustavo Paim, bestows on the local government an important role in the field of citizenship. For Paim, every citizen initiative is participatory. The Participatory Budgeting - OP Digital tool allows the citizen to participate before in-person assemblies.

Another important point of the research refers to the degree of closeness of the citizen in the direct relationship with their rulers. In the Portuguese context, 50% of the citizens residing in Coimbra know the name of the Mayor of their city. In Portalegre the percentage grows, certainly because the territory is smaller (favoring its proximity), indicating that 92.5% knew the name of their Mayor. In Brazil, the responses for Porto Alegre show that 90% of citizens recognize their Mayor by name, while in the city of Guaíba, 55% reported knowing the name of the municipal

authority. The results indicate a positive sign, that there is a favorable recognition by the community about the individual at the head of local government in the city.

By considering the urgency of reviewing PC processes, the analysis of the third category, Social Inclusion, reinforces the role of the public authorities as social agents promoting citizenship, through transdisciplinary dialogue as an element that validates community participation. Identifying the main points of analysis in this process, the study detected the feeling of exclusion of many citizens from the dynamics of PC produced by the government. Therefore, meetings constitute an important step within the citizen's participatory process in the city's management policies. In this case, the mission of PC is to make the individual effectively understand about what will be decided, becoming aware not only of the program (agenda, dates and times), but also feel invited to participate.

Asked about the importance of meetings in Portuguese cities, 33.82%, just over a third of the interviewees, reported having the habit of participating, always or occasionally. It is, therefore, perceived that the issue of local authority within the scope of PC necessarily involves the transparency of the information from government organizations within the parishes or neighborhoods. In the opinion of journalist Leonardo Martins, communications advisor of Coimbra CM, transparency begins with the dissemination in the general press, informing the community about all activities carried out by the municipality. It is always important to remember that meetings are necessary, playing a key role in the communication between the local government and its closest communities, but the results seen above evidence discredit regarding their effectiveness.

Asked about the importance of actively engaging in government initiatives, specifically in their parish, just over 16.39% of the Portuguese from Coimbra and Portalegre reported having the habit of participating. A brief analysis of the feeling of revulsion for the meetings, referred to by the vast majority of Portuguese respondents may reveal important elements of a possible social exclusion generated by demotivation. This finding can be associated with several factors, whether cultural in nature or related to the difficulty to express their ideas due to the rigid formalism of the ritual. During the research period in the Portuguese territory, it was possible to observe that the spaces where such events take place, in Coimbra or Portalegre, are too compact and uncomfortable. Although the Municipal Councils accept the oral participation of citizens, through previous registration, the agendas only attract their interest when the topic in evidence is controversial. On these occasions, the small space destined to the public does not allow an expressive amount of people to be incorporated.

In the Brazilian territory, the situation is similar, even though the spaces for meetings are larger, and the participation rate is equally low, with only 34.16% of the interviewees showing interest in participating in the meetings promoted by their city halls. Given this situation, Porto Alegre Councilor Mônica Leal envisions the possibility of a greater dissemination of information from the constant monitoring of the various sectors of society. This public official informs that the agenda of the meetings is available on the website, and that the meetings of the Permanent Committees are open to the public. On the other hand, Presidency and Board meetings are attended by invitation, but it is possible to negotiate participation if there is a project of interest to the community. Thus, every citizen can individually

establish priorities by the ability to involve councilors, permanent committees and demonstration in public hearings, but the ideal situation is for the community organization to schedule visits, whether to the offices of councilors, of permanent or of temporary committees, or to be present in public hearings.

As for the interest in participating in initiatives in their neighborhoods, the results collected in the Brazilian cities of Porto Alegre and Guaíba, 9.65%, display the low level of interest of respondent citizens, signaling a flaw in the institutional relationship between the public authorities and their citizens. The results show that the public authorities should pay special attention to this relationship, considering transdisciplinary dialogue as an instrument of community cultural development.

Finally, in the last category, Language and technology, the study collected positive results, even though there are aspects to be improved in the PC process adopted by communication managers in Portugal and Brazil, mostly, regarding the clarity and format of the language used. Generally speaking, the printed documents follow a mandatory (legal) line and present a positive final result, especially in the parishes and neighborhoods of cities where the local government uses a practical and economical communication format for dissemination: external panels. Regardless of the formats or their application, difficulties arise from difficult language, given the official wording which prevents appropriation by the ordinary citizen, due to the legal, technical and objective terminology. The results of the research revealed that it is essential to transgress in the use of cultured language, adopting a compatible and balanced type of communication, and even dramatized, if necessary.

With regard to digital information, the evaluation of the study considered the role of the webpages as powerful instruments of social inclusion, understood as a way of using universal access, even of those citizens who do not have much technological knowledge or who have special needs.

The analyses of the Portuguese webpages (Coimbra and Portalegre) showed a higher quality in the field of information, through clear and attractive communication, although sometimes their access can be slightly hampered by the number of illustrative videos. Among the residents of Coimbra, the habit of using these pages is 67.78%, indicating that a low percentage of individuals have difficulty accessing them, a figure which is very close to Portalegre, with 67.50% of favorable responses to the use of the medium, always or occasionally.

In the Brazilian municipalities, the study detected that the acceptance rate rises to 72.5%, in Porto Alegre, while in the neighboring city of Guaíba, 71.67% said they access their city hall's webpage always or occasionally, even though it presents some difficulties, according to the analysis of the research. The positive results show that the local government is on the right track but must move forward in the search for the reasons why some citizens still refuse to access information online. Many of the factors may not be linked to CP processes, but to economic reasons, operational disability, or also resistance dictated by the old age of the users. It is up to the local authorities to endeavor to find alternatives that overcome the barriers that access in a digital format present society, acknowledging this technology as a facilitating instrument in the transmission of information as a democratic duty for the benefit of citizenship.

## 7. Conclusion

At the conclusion of the project, the results suggest that a possible improvement in PC processes lies in opening the dialogue to ideas from the poorer communities, reinforced by the understanding that it is not only up to the intellectuals to produce knowledge. Taking into account that the Constitutions of Portugal and Brazil integrate mechanisms for the protection of individuals, with regard to social justice, for freedom of speech and access to information, it is up to the public authorities to improve the creation of management models that effectively meet society's demands as implicit recognition of the right to quality PC for all social strata.

The analyses on the Portuguese cities, probably because of their historical cultural legacy, indicate a better understanding of individuals regarding the appreciation of citizenship, used in the formulation and implementation of public policies in the field of PC. Conversely, in Brazil, the results indicate that awareness of the importance of plural PC is still a slow, complex process, one which requires the perception from much of society, especially considering macroeconomic and social development issues. In this area, the issue of poverty is still a worrisome phenomenon in the country, one which hinders the cultural development of individuals who inhabit the degraded areas of many Brazilian cities.

Complexity, within Morin's transdisciplinary process, reaffirms the invitation to the dialogue between the various fields of knowledge, where those who hold knowledge begin to divide it in a healthy, not imposed, but free and enlightening way. This paper reiterates the important role of managers and technical staff in the social engagement and in the creation of public policies for the benefit of the qualification of PC processes. Paiva (2007) explains the importance of social engagement in communication, by enhancing the language used and new forms of expression based on the "effective intervention in the change of social stances" (PAIVA, 2007, p. 141). The PC processes must appropriate the daily experience through language, such as that practiced in the world of *life* advocated by Habermas (2012), as an instrument that transforms human relations, represented here by the interactive dynamics between the citizen and the representatives of public government. The results advise combining the PC initiatives, by listening to the communities, respecting their life experience, expanding the skills related to information transmission and reception. The proposal to use principles contained in Beltrão's Folkcommunication makes it possible to break with the cultural barriers linked to outdated PC procedures, where the new PC begins to take the individual as partner, adopting simplified structures that bring the conditions of communication closer to society.

Finally, the recommendation regarding the need to aggregate the information and communication technologies currently available, for the benefit of citizenship. With the advancement of computer resources, it is possible to use more modern and appropriate technology that favors understanding by individuals of low-income communities. This will lead to the certainty that the PC processes produced by public authorities, enriched by the involvement of the whole society, will be important for the necessary awareness about the importance of quality

communication, ensuring not only the right to information, but the construction of its own identity.

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