

PUBLIC JOURNALISM AND CITIZENSHIP

The dissemination of legislative information in Brazil¹

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ABSTRACT

This work analyzes the relation between the right to information and the exercising of citizenship, within the scope of the dissemination of legislative information. The study traces a parallel between the coverage by private media and by the public media maintained by the Chamber of Deputies. The creation of a specific communication system for the dissemination of legislative information is based on the presupposition that the internal dynamics of the private media do not favor the exercising of citizenship. In addition to the right to information, the right to opinion is emphasized as a basic element for the exercising of freedom of expression, for the consolidation of representative democracy and as an indispensable mechanism for the citizens' enlightenment.

KEY-WORDS

Public communication; public journalism; democracy; citizenship

Introduction

The right to information is cited in a consensual way as indispensable for exercising citizenship. In this paper, we are trying to go beyond this premise. In the first place, we consider it essential to refute the implicit argument that it is information which offers elements for the citizen to act in society. Taken as true, this argument would hide an unacceptable reductive premise, in addition to its deterministic nature, since it reduces citizenship to the status of "well-informed citizen", as if receiving information were sufficient. Besides, it conditions the exercising of citizenship on the reception of information via the media.

To place this discussion in perspective, we need to refer to the idea of citizenship and the meaning of being a citizen. Our purpose is not to compile all the concepts and definitions, but only to take as a

reference the concept we are utilizing here. An example of this discussion is found in the work of Roberto Da Matta, who on analyzing cultural valuating dynamics and their relation to social stratification, explains that citizenship is related to the public versus private duality. According to this reasoning, individuals form opposing groups in separate social spaces, according to social roles, the corresponding status and the social representations linked to these spaces, as well as stigmas, stereotypes, etc. Thus, according to Da Matta, it is in the dialectic between home and street, between the public sphere and the private sphere, that the distinctions and differentiations with relation to the ideas of citizenship are established.

In Da Matta's view, citizenship is performed in the intersections between the public interests and individuals' private motivations. This view is fundamental for the understanding of the dynamics of citizenship. In addition, he calls attention to the importance of private life for the citizen, contrary to utopian approaches which overstate public life, as if citizenship were restricted to the common sphere². However, it is observed that citizenship is directly associated with the satisfaction of basic private needs, such as food, housing, clothing, transportation, etc. According to classic Greek thought, only when the requirements of the private sphere were satisfied could individuals devote themselves to politics. Nevertheless, we perceive that today the opposite occurs: precisely because their basic needs are not satisfied, citizens end up organizing politically to obtain their rights. At the same time, interest in public matters is progressively diminishing, while people's investment in private activities and matters is increasing. To a large part, the commercial media have contributed to reinforcing this trend of contemporary culture. However, this is Roberto Da Matta's main argument: regardless of whether individuals are interested in politics, citizenship is exercised in the confluence between the public sphere and the private sphere.

Public communication, public journalism and citizenship

The political importance of the communication media has already been reiterated in countless studies. Many research works also indicate that the political rules begin to have an altered value with the growing social influence of the communication media (LIMA, 2001; MIGUEL, 2002; RUBIM, 1994) on the political field. Giovanni Sartori even utilized the expression "videopolitics" to define the new political power of television in contemporary societies to disseminate an event and with this action,

make it happen (SARTORI, 2001). A type of “*transferred capital*” begins to be important for the legitimacy of the actors, that is to say, characteristics, traits and the recognition obtained in other activities, such as the artistic field or the media themselves, begin to have value in the political dispute (BOURDIEU, 2006: 189-190; MIGUEL, 2001: 8).

On the other hand, the question of publicity with relation to governmental actions has already been duly advocated by Norberto Bobbio, according to whom “political power is public power (...) even when it is not public, it does not act in public, it hides from the public, it is not controlled by the public” (2005: 28). For Bobbio, the Republic is differentiated from authoritarian or absolutist regimes precisely because there is public control of power and free formation of a public opinion (2005: 28). The public nature of representative government is emphasized in the passage in which the author argues that

in cases in which the assembly is the meeting of the people’s representatives, when the decision would be public only for the latter and not for all the people, the assembly meetings should be opened to the public so that any citizen could have access to them (BOBBIO, 2005: 30).

In this way, Bobbio agrees with Carl Schmitt in the idea that “representation can only occur in the sphere of publicity” (2005:330) and that democracy requires the exercising of the rights of freedom and can only function when the actions of those in power are “scrutinized, judged and criticized when made public” (2005: 30). In order to comply with the obligatory nature of publicity for the actions and at the same time guarantee a favorable dissemination of information, governments have developed a series of strategies that range from the traditional press advisers to the new types of institutional media, passing through institutional publicity campaigns and promotion of events, among others.

We agree with the argument that political information is essential for democracy and the exercising of citizenship. In the specific case of public communication systems, as Pierre Zémor declares:

The messages are, in principle, issued, received, dealt with by the public institutions “on behalf of the people”, in the same way as laws are voted or judgments pronounced. Therefore, this communication is necessarily situated in the *public* space, viewed by the citizens. Its information, with rare exceptions, is in the public domain, since assuring general interest implies transparency (ZÉMOR, 1995: 1).

Public communication systems, such as the one maintained by the Chamber of Deputies, exist in theory to serve public interests. Regarding the discussion of this topic, Harwood I. Childs already declared in 1967 that “only that which the public says it is can be of public interest”. In this way, a public communication system is not sustained only by the issuance of information for citizens, but by activities whose objective is to implement democratic participation of the receivers and users of the information services offered.

Pierre Zémor, in the text mentioned previously, emphasizes the complexity of the relation with the citizen receiver. In *Public Communication*, he explains, the citizen is an ambivalent interlocutor. “At the same time that he respects and subjects himself to the public institutions’ authority, he protests the lack of information, or that their messages are poorly constructed, incomplete or poorly disseminated” (1995: 3). It behooves these systems, therefore, to take action which involves the citizen in a different way, “participative, establishing a flow of communicative relations between the State and the society” (MATOS, 1999: 1).

As a matter of fact, there is here an especially important point in our analysis. We agree with Matos in his argument that one of the duties of public communication media is precisely the publicizing of the conflicts existing in society and of their representations in the Parliament (MATOS, 1999: 7). Therefore, public communication media need to give the citizen the opportunity to define his interests by means of the access to relevant social information and of participation in the public debate.

In contemporary academic debates, it has become commonplace to consider information a relevant capital in the dynamics of social distinction and consequently in the differentiation between super-citizens and sub-citizens. This conception overvalues the information itself and exaggerates the role of the media and of journalists. Regarding this error, present in most of the current analyses of the relation between media and citizenship, there is a study which stands out due to its appropriately dissonant vigor with relation to the dominant voices. This is the study by Boris Libois, *La communication publique: por une philosophie politique des medias*. In his analysis, Libois reaffirms the right to public communication as a basic requirement for the consolidation of the rights of citizenship.

In the author’s view, nowadays the formation of personal and cultural identities of political communities is inseparable from media communication, in a context of visible weakening of the State in the face of the power of the media. Nevertheless, he makes a correction that, at the

same time, the media systems seem increasingly disconnected from the opinion of their publics and from the legal structure which regulates the sector. This scenario results in different crises of the contemporary public sphere, such as the crisis of political representation, of the integration of multicultural societies and dysfunctions in the media system itself, in the teaching systems and other cultural systems.

In the specific case of the relation between public communication and citizenship, Boris Libois highlights a series of errors, on different levels. One of them is from the philosophic point of view. In his opinion, public communication cannot be conceived in a merely instrumental way, since its purpose and its final objective is to offer better conditions for the exercising of citizenship. Therefore, there should be affinity between the public institution which provides information services and its publics. We should mention here the concept of public as a group of duly organized individuals, supplied with sufficient information on a specific matter, in permanent discussion of the latter, in the search for a mutual agreement (CORRÊA, 1998: 42). In this aspect, the viewpoint of Libois converges with the view of another European philosopher (although he does not mention him), the German Jürgen Habermas³, in his theory of communicative action, an idea which encounters support in several other theoreticians of language, such as Bahktin, Vygotsky and others.

Another error pointed out by Libois refers to the transposing of the private media's presuppositions to the public communication systems, which has contributed to reproducing the defects in the transmission of information to the citizens, such as agenda-setting and thematic accentuation as they occur in the private media. This idea is reinforced by Jean-Marc Ferry in the preface to the book (2002: 5-8). In his opinion, public communication, on imitating the private media, reiterates and reproduces the defects of the market, considered by him to be harmful to citizenship. Moreover, it transmits to the public the idea that the ideal standard of communication is that carried out by the commercial media, which should be copied. In this way, the agents of the public communication systems deprive the citizens of differentiated information services, going more deeply into the thematic aspect, plurality of approaches and diversity of agendas.

Marc Ferry points out two more orders of deficiency related to public communication. The first refers to the field of standardization. In his opinion, this specific area should not be governed by private law. He advocates the need for a specific legal structure for public communication capable of satisfying its specific needs. This measure, in his analysis, could provide many benefits for the citizens' different interests.

The other gap, in Ferry's view, is in the current conception of freedom of expression, generally associated with the demand for freedom of expression by journalists and communication institutions. This view, as Ferry sees it, is simplistic and bureaucratic. In addition, it contradicts one of the basic principles of public communication, which is the public's freedom of expression. As it is understood by the liberal view of the private press, this idea of freedom of expression serves only the economic interests of the communication companies, which demand in Brazil, based on the Press Law, "a private freedom, since it is the freedom of expression of the bosses and of the journalists only", Ferry explains (2002: 5).

In public communication, understood as providing public information services for the citizens, Ferry continues, this conception of freedom of expression can even be harmful for citizenship, since it institutionalizes and legitimizes the private monopoly of criticism and of opinion, based on a discretionary power of a professional category that does not have political legitimacy to represent the citizens' opinion. This category, in his opinion, also monopolizes the prerogative of defining the political agenda, with the resulting choice of the thematic and ideological framework for public debates (which in his view are not really public, since they are outlined by the journalists and by the media companies).

Along the same line of reasoning, Libois calls attention to a vicious circle of public communication. The first is inherent in the functioning of the public sector, they are the governmental defects of public communication (bureaucratic procedures) that hinder the efficiency of the public systems. In the author's view, public communication should not be confused with public administration, in the traditional sense, which results in paternalistic and social welfare practices. Many of the information services, in his opinion, suffer from these same afflictions.

Episodic and fragmented citizenship

Another approach we would like to highlight in this paper is that the private media's practice and routines contribute to an episodic and fragmented treatment of matters that could favor the exercising of citizenship. In the specific case of coverage of the Legislative Branch, especially of the Chamber of Deputies, the agenda, the selection criteria, the news values, the framing and the thematic treatment of journalists and media companies contribute to reinforcing a negative image of the institution which, far from offering criticism that would encourage

participation in the public debate, seems to contribute to deflating it. In this way, the population's knowledge of the Chamber and the Legislative Branch passes necessarily through the filters of the culture of the journalists who cover the Congress, of the editors who finalize the stories and, by extension, of the media themselves, which usually disqualify the institution and its role in a democracy. This discourse presupposes a view of the journalists – held by themselves and by the public – as representatives of the population with respect to the State – mediators of the conflict – and “responsible for the transparency of the public administration and for the denunciation and vigilance of political power” (ALDÉ, 2004: 178).

In general, we perceive in the discourse on politics a trend toward centralization of journalistic production in the cognitive mechanisms of the essence of the events, of the visual state of politics and of personalization (ALDÉ, 2004: 175), also present in the simplification proposed by the *fait divers*. In this way, voters and politicians are personalized, removed from the social context and inserted in narrative structures which classify them as characters in specific conflicts. In turn, the conflicts are reduced to practical issues, with sides easily identifiable for the readers. Images which identify politicians as characters in electoral conflicts or conflicts with the law gain strength, just as voters end up individualized in examples which are not representative of the entire population, but have the symbolic power to portray concrete life situations.

In their attempt at simplification of the language and of the reports of the events, newspapers and journalists end up inserting in their stories moral assessments reinforced by generalizing structures (ALDÉ 2004: 179-180) which reinforce the sense of usefulness of journalism (2004:181). The “public utility” of journalistic information is connected with the view that concedes a practical nature, almost social welfare, to journalism and which confers on it legitimacy as representative of the people. As Aldé states, the denunciation complex reinforces the heroic nature of journalists, “spokesmen for the questions and criticisms which the people would like to make” (ALDÉ, 2004: 180) or

courageous men who force the government to “tell the truth” – a stereotype or explanation that reflects the discourse of the media themselves, self-promoted as guardians of the truth, of justice and of the civil order (ALDÉ, 2004: 180).

We note, therefore, that journalism follows the parameter of mass industry on adopting the processes of “*vulgarization*” verified by Morin in the 1960s (1984: 54). According to the author, simplification and Manicheism are part of the four elementary processes of vulgarization, besides modernization and updating. For Morin, the simplification process observed in the adaptation of literary works for the movies, for example, consists of the “schematization of the plot, reduction of the number of characters, reduction of the characters to a clear psychology, elimination of what could be difficult to understand for the mass of workers” (MORIN, 1984: 54).

The trend toward popularization of journalistic coverage was also identified by Fontcuberta, who points to the emphasis on the strategy of giving more value to news of a private nature, concerning other people’s lives, especially because we are experiencing a progressive customization of the day-to-day and other people’s lives can give us explanations or replies to personal questions or particular situations (1991: 48). In addition, Fontcuberta states that personal histories give public resonance to personal experiences, in an epoch in which private space has been converted into a place where the “democracy of passions” is expressed and private life is converted into the reflection of many social trends (1993: 48-49).

With reference to journalistic coverage of the Legislative Branch, the popularization mechanisms are producing, for example, the almost complete invisibility of the work of the legislative committees, in which 90% of the bills are handled in a conclusive way, that is, they are approved without the need for voting in the Plenary Session. Information about laws approved in these spaces is practically not published. On ignoring the work of these committees, the commercial media also deprive the citizens of the debates held in these committees. There are dozens of public hearings and seminars with the presence of authorities, academic figures and technicians. In these debates, there is an exceptional space for the public use of reason and for freedom of opinion. After all, public debate is one of the main functions of the parliament (from the verb *parlar*) whose origin is in the traditional conception of Greek democracy, in which the citizens met in the Agora for public debate. Nevertheless, the debate by the congressmen is ignored or ridiculed by the media, especially by television. The editors prefer the display of offensive passages, with the sensationalist tone of “lack of decorum”. Now, is it possible to have debate without disagreements?

Among the relevant factors to be analyzed in order to initiate a more thorough discussion of the problem, the media's role in the dissemination of knowledge about the Legislative Branch comes into sight, since the framework of knowledge currently disseminated to the population necessarily involves the media. Thus, it would be appropriate to question: (a) would the ignorance or partial, biased knowledge be the direct result of the media coverage of legislative activities? (b) does the deficiency lie in the misunderstanding of the journalists? (c) does this gap result from the public's lack of interest in the matter? (d) has the existence of public media maintained by the Legislative Branch itself contributed to changing this picture?

There is a principle of the Theory of Information according to which "information generates publics". Well, if information generates publics, why then do journalists seem to believe that there is no public interested in legislative information? The presupposition mentioned is confirmed by the observation of the emergence of topics completely uninteresting to the public which were transformed into media super-topics, as in the case of the environment. Up to the beginning of the 1970s, the matter was ignored by newspapers and magazines. There was no space for ecological news. Little by little the topic acquired status of first magnitude, with the creation of special desks and sections in the newspapers and an equally favorable space in radio and television stations. This process even generated a specialization in the press: environmental journalism, today considered essential for the exercising of citizenship. Surely the consolidation of the environment as a media topic is based on the increase in environmental problems and on the strengthening of the environmentalist movement. But this evolution is also the result of a change in the journalists' view of the world, when they began to incorporate the environmental issue as a task of the media.

In the specific case of coverage of the Legislative Branch, it is curious that politics has always been a super-topic on the agenda of the media and political journalism was one of the first areas to become specialized. For many decades there have been in Brazil journalists "sectorized" in the coverage of the parliament, who work daily in press committees located in the Congress. However, within the scope of current political journalism, coverage of the activities and functions of the Legislative Branch occupies a secondary place, subordinated to the coverage of the Executive Branch. The impression is that journalists perceive the Chamber and the Senate as auxiliary institutions of the other Branches of the Republic and contribute to the consolidation of this perception by the public.

The lack of information for the public about the Legislative Branch compromises the legitimacy of popular representation and of the parliamentary mandate. After all, visibility is of the nature of power, as Thompson (1995) emphasizes. The deputies and senators are elected by the people. How can they then represent their voters if the population is not duly informed about their routine activities, such as pronouncements, bills, participation in committees? Without information about parliamentary activities, how can we require the population to be vigilant and continually demand results from the activities of those who were elected to advance their interests?

In the case of Brazil, it is frequently disseminated that TV reaches more than 90% of the population and the majority receive only the news from the daily TV newscasts. Well, these newscasts treat the Chamber and the Senate as if they were competing institutions which advocate opposing interests or which act in a disassociated way. The political party disagreements and the political game characteristic of the democratic system are presented by these newscasts as a defectiveness of the two institutions. The underlying idea is that the Chamber and the Senate hinder democracy. This bias is more visible when the vote on a specific matter is postponed; when the parties begin obstructionist tactics; when there is no quorum for voting in the Plenary Session; when there is no agreement among the leaders, etc. However, this posture shows not only the ignorance of the journalists themselves regarding constitutional principles and the specificities of the legislative process, but also the conditioning of journalistic work and the uncontrolled search for audience. The political resources presented, despite contradicting the immediatistic view reiterated by the media, are all provided for in the by-laws of the two legislative houses, which have the force of law and form part of the political game.

The Congress is formed by deputies and senators from different political parties, with their characteristic ideologies and interests. In addition, the Parliament is the place which should accept the most diverse social demands, which, in most cases, are contradictory, as are environmentalists and farm bloc members in debates over agro-ecology. Diversity of opinions implies necessarily controversies and contradictory positions. In certain situations, the prolonging of the debate is more productive for democracy, and not the precipitated and hurried voting for the purpose of ending the discussion. On ending a controversial debate brusquely, society is deprived of the different currents of opinion. On the contrary, when these different views are explicit, the population has the

opportunity to ripen its points of view, to express its opinion, to support or repudiate the opinion of certain parties, leaders or congressmen in particular.

The maturing of democracy necessarily requires freedom of expression – which necessarily includes freedom of opinion. As a matter of fact, in Brazil the media are ardent defenders of the free expression of ideas. Nevertheless, contradictorily, they deprive the Brazilian people of the freedom of opinion of their legitimate representatives. It can be counter-argued that the media are not the congressmen's spokesmen. On the other hand, the mechanisms for dissemination of celebrities' opinions in all the media are an impressive phenomenon of outsourcing of popular representation. Well, if these famous people speak on behalf of the people, why then not permit their legitimate representatives to also have a voice in the media? Obviously, we cannot fail to consider the factor of competition of the media with the politicians for popular representation, which could partially explain this behavior.

It is notorious that there are permanent political voices in the media. However, of the total of 594 congressmen (513 deputies and 81 senators), few have space, except if they are involved in scandals, gaffes or information leaks. The so-called "high clergy" (prominent congressmen) are always present in the media, but the space is guaranteed for other reasons, other forms of capital, remote from the status of popular representative, so much so that there are deputies and senators who are completely unknown by the population. Their recognition is limited to their state of origin, to their electoral corners, and for this reason these congressmen often control local media.

Another aspect which should also be analyzed meticulously is the way that journalists and their guests refer to those they call the "political class". Besides the obvious error, there is the renowned effect on public opinion of the third person, a form of distancing popular representation. The congressmen are always mentioned as "they", the others. All negative types of behavior are attributed to them, such as corruption, lack of commitment to popular interests, exclusive attention to private benefits, among others. In fact, there are shameful cases of corruption, of lack of ethics and parliamentary decorum. But would the generalization not be a defect resulting from the classification of the media coverage?

On generalizing, the media simplify the political process. This posture reduces the action of the Legislative Branch to the sphere of deviating and disastrous events. This classification hinders the contextualized comprehension of the activities of the National Congress, on contributing

to the direct association of ostensive cases of corruption or of scandals related to parties and to congressmen with the institutional image of the two houses of the legislature.

We are not advocating here the omission of the media in the face of the indecorous cases that occur in the Parliament. Everything that prejudices democracy must be denounced. The problem lies in the adoption of a focus which restricts the Legislative Branch to the errors of its members. We believe the Brazilian political culture still presents marks of personalization and of the resulting indistinctness between public and private, constantly reinforced by the media culture. Nevertheless, even when the press succeeds in touching lightly on the structural reasons for these errors, it does not achieve an approach which gives importance to the possibilities of parliamentary action as a democratic space.

We are also not minimizing here the fact that in a more general scenario, the world's parliaments are going through a double crisis of legitimacy. On one hand the very crisis of the system of political representation stands out. On the other hand, a crisis of the electoral systems caused by mistrust both of the voting results themselves as well as of the possibility that these results have no relation to the popular will, even when there are no frauds, thanks to the manipulation of public opinion (URBINATI, 2006: 199). Once again, what seems to us to be in question is that the coverage performed by the media of the parliaments' activities is characterized by reinforcing the crisis, without having on its horizon any prospect for contributing to its overcoming.

Final comments

The Chamber of Deputies, on institutionalizing a public journalism system, with radio, TV, printed newspaper and online news agency, has as its base the constitutional principle that citizens have the right to publicity of the acts, decisions and other legislative activities. After all, in theory, the work of all public institutions should be accessible to society⁴. The creation of the Chamber's journalistic media is also based on the diagnosis that it is the institution's duty to supplement the action of the press in publicizing parliamentary activities, seeking to compensate for the deficiencies of the private media as instruments of public communication.

Public journalism is based on conceptions such as the strengthening of public life, the conception of its public as citizens (and not just as consumers), the concern with the training of the citizens (and not only

with perishable information), the awareness of a social responsibility and the search for a truth which, if not objective, at least can be less slanted (Traquina, 2001).

Although political journalism is usually related to the practices of government media or Third Sector media, one of the most recurring hypotheses regarding the matter is the American movement called *Civic Journalism*. According to the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, a foundation concerned with the propagation of the idea, this type of journalism is an attempt to abandon the idea that journalists and their public are “spectators” of the political and social process. “In the center of the idea of civic journalism is the belief that journalism has an obligation to public life, which goes beyond the simple reporting of news or the discovery of facts”⁵.

In Brazil, however, some analysts consider that “public journalism is emerging with its own characteristics and, contrary to what occurred in the United States, here there were no intentions and actions aimed specifically at founding a journalistic category” (SILVA, 2002: 2-3). In Brazil, the concept was related to the “public sector”, in general associated with the state and federal governmental spheres.

Public journalism, then, would be that which is practiced from the newsrooms at the service of the Federal and State governments or by government-owned stations, which obviously is inaccurate, since nowadays, according to some authors, among them Maria Cunill Grau, society has been rethinking the public space, assuming more and more a degree of subjectivity in the preparation and execution of public policies. We would add that civil society entities have also been increasingly taking upon themselves the role of disseminating facts of public interest and of fighting for them to win space in the mass communication media (SILVA, 2002: 3).

One of the peculiarities of the political and communications systems in Brazil is the democratizing role played by the government media such as those maintained by the Chamber of Deputies. Brazilian television, for example, “arose and was consolidated as private business, concerned with the market” and bordering on monopoly (RENAULT, 2004: 28). In this situation, the coverage devoted to legislative activities, as was emphasized earlier, has always shown itself to be restricted and prejudiced. On seeking to construct a space for its own visibility, by means of the production of information disseminated in media such as radio, TV, newspapers and the Internet, the Parliament placed at the citizens’ disposal previously inaccessible information. Besides being offered directly to the public by

the specific media, this data is beginning to be utilized by private media, both national as well as regional, expanding their agenda.

The opening promoted by the legislative houses by means of these communication initiatives is considered by some specialists as a change in the rules of the political game, with potential for increasing the interlocution of the Legislative Branch with civil society and for increasing the degrees of accountability and of responsiveness of these institutions (ANASTASIA *apud* RENAULT, 2004: 45).

With this text we intended to raise some relevant problems regarding the relation between journalistic coverage of the activities of the Legislative Branch, the right to information and to opinion and citizenship. We have emphasized the deficiencies of the coverage carried out by the commercial media which, although they rely on freedom of expression, contribute more to the wear and tear of democracy than to its evolution, on being guided by reducing stereotypes of the parliament's role.

The supplementary journalistic activity engaged in by the media maintained by the parliaments intends to correct these deficiencies. Some studies already performed on the topic show that, to some extent, this has been happening, since information previously not accessible to the ordinary citizens is available today, thanks to the action of these media. But it would still be necessary to analyze more deeply the scope of the expansion provided by them. Are they in fact guided by the concepts of public communication and of public journalism to which their professionals refer? Do they succeed in offering new classifications, different from those limited to stereotypes regarding the uselessness of the Legislative Branch? More than this, are they capable of advancing in the offer of opportunities for participation by the public in the debates and decisions, instead of limiting themselves to furnishing information?

These reflections are necessary when the first parliamentary journalistic media are completing a decade of activity in Brazil.

NOTES

- 1 This paper is the result of institutional activities within the integrated research project "Communication actions by the Chamber of Deputies for the promotion of democracy and popular participation". The group is affiliated with the "citizenship and democratic practices of representation and political participation" line of research of the Postgraduate Program in

Institutions and Political Processes of the Legislative Branch in the Center for Training and Improvement (CEFOP) of the Chamber of Deputies. The group is registered in the Research Group Directory of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq): www.cnpq.br.

- 2 This view which overvalues the public sphere as a space for the exercising of citizenship is the heritage of a reading of the Athenian practice, in ancient times, when citizenship was restricted to those who devoted themselves exclusively to public affairs, in the debates (face-to-face) of the *agora*. As a matter of fact, the public sphere was conditioned on a specific physical space in the *polis*, as Hannah Arendt describes in *The Human Condition*. However, it should be recalled that the citizens who devoted themselves to public affairs counted on support from a private sphere (*oikos*) which assured them perfect conditions for the satisfaction of their private needs, which guaranteed them comfort and free time for exercising the public use of reason. This situation was only possible because all the activities linked to work were performed by others, considered non-citizens.
- 3 The reflection of Jürgen Habermas can be utilized in the analysis of the various forms of institutional communication, in the public agencies, in private companies and in the third sector. Strategic action (*systemic world*) is associated with strategic functions and tactics, such as the planning of corporate communication, opinion survey, communication auditing and evaluation. Communicative action (*living world*) is associated with practices which encourage the promotion of local culture, of citizenship and of social responsibility. This idea is developed in the essay *A teoria de ação comunicativa aplicada à comunicação institucional : a relação entre o sistêmico e o vivido* (The theory of communicative actions applied to institutional communication: the relation between the systemic and the living). In KUNSCH, W.L.; KUNSCH, M. *Relações públicas comunitárias: a comunicação institucional numa perspectiva dialógica e transformadora* (Communitarian public relations: institutional communication from a dialogical and transforming perspective). São Paulo: Summus, 2007 (on the press).
- 4 According to §1 of article 37 of the Federal Constitution, “the publicity of the acts, programs, works, services and campaigns of public entities should have an educational, informative nature or provide social guidance, without containing names, symbols or images which would characterize personal promotion of authorities or public servants”.
- 5 Available at www.pewcenter.org.

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