GOVERNANCE OF JOURNALISM AND ALTERNATIVES TO THE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT - The article supports the hypothesis that contemporary journalism is facing a crisis of governance, derived from the fraying of social relations between the media enterprises and their audiences (readers, sources, stakeholders, advertisers, subscribers). In contrast to the interpretations that limit the crisis to the funding issue or the business model, we argue that such difficulties are apparent manifestations of structural changes in relations between journalism and the public, affecting both production and circulation of journalistic information processes, particularly concerning its corporate organizational form. Each of these dimensions is affected by actions and representations of the audiences, heavily modified in just over a decade in response to the changes in technology and communication. The article demonstrates how the concept of governance gives a better understanding of the dimensions of the crisis and a glimpse into the possible solutions.
Key words: Journalism. Governance. Public. Management. *Mediapart.*

A GOVERNANÇA DO JORNALISMO E ALTERNATIVAS PARA A CRISE

RESUMO - O artigo sustenta a hipótese de que o jornalismo contemporâneo atravessa uma crise em sua governança, derivada do esgarçamento das relações sociais entre as empresas jornalísticas e seus públicos (audiências, fontes, *stakeholders*, anunciantes, assinantes). Contra as interpretações da crise que a circunscrevem ao financiamento ou ao modelo de negócio, argumenta-se que tais dificuldades são manifestações aparentes de transformações estruturais nas relações com os públicos, que afetam tanto os processos de produção e circulação da informação jornalística, quanto sua forma organizacional predominantemente empresarial. Sobre cada uma dessas dimensões incidem ações e representações dos públicos, fortemente modificadas num intervalo de pouco mais de uma década como reação às transformações tecnológicas e de comunicação. O artigo demonstra como o conceito de governança permite compreender melhor as dimensões da crise e vislumbrar possibilidades de saída.
Palavras-chave: Jornalismo. Governança. Público. Gestão. *Mediapart.*

LA GOBERNABILIDAD DEL PERIODISMO
Y ALTERNATIVAS PARA LA CRISIS

RESUMEN - Este artículo sostiene la hipótesis de que el periodismo contemporáneo pasa por una crisis de gobernabilidad, derivada del deshilachado de las relaciones sociales entre los medios y sus audiencias (los lectores, las fuentes, los *stakeholders*, los anunciantes, los abonados). Contra las interpretaciones que circunscriben la crisis a la financiación o al modelo de negocio, se argumenta que tales dificultades son manifestaciones estructurales de cambios profundos en las relaciones con el público, que afectan tanto a los procesos de producción y circulación de la información periodística, como su forma organizacional de negocio. Las acciones y representaciones del público, bastante cambiadas en un intervalo de poco más de una década en respuesta a los cambios tecnológicos y de la comunicación, afectan cada una de esas dimensiones. El presente artículo muestra como el concepto de gobernabilidad permite comprender mejor las dimensiones de la crisis e imaginar posibilidades de salida.
Palabras clave: Periodismo. Gobernabilidad. Público. Gestión. *Mediapart.*

The crisis currently hitting journalism, which has been credited mainly to the collapse of the financing (or business) model, has deeper roots than the fall in advertising, retail or subcription revenues: it is a crisis of governance, profoundly related to the erosion of credibility of the prevailing organizational structure of journalism in Western countries since the 19th century, the journalistic enterprise, along with the audiences to which it relates. If we accept this premise, the way to overcome the crisis lies less in pursuing new ways of making journalism profitable as a business opportunity offered by companies than in devising alternative forms of governance capable of recreating, in other bases, the relations between journalists and their audiences. For such a challenge, nowadays one can count not only on the immense contingent of journalists concerned with their professional future, but also on segments of society still interested in the subsistence of journalism. This is the hypothesis whose consistency we aim at supporting in the present article.

Governance is a relatively recent concept that responds to the needs for a holistic or multidimensional understanding of social and power relations in all kinds of organizations (Bevir, 2013). The concept has been more widely used to understand regulation and media policies (Puppis, 2010; Bevir, 2011), as part of good governance practices by public agents (James, 2006), and its widespread

adoption in this field has elicited criticism because of its imprecision or its catch-all character. In response to criticism, and by situating the concept under a post-foundational epistemological perspective, Mark Bevir (2013) developed a *theory of governance*, demonstrating how to adopt this idea in sociological or political studies. Other researchers have proposed analytical frameworks aimed at facilitating empirical applications of the concept, such as the classification of different media governance types in media systems (Ginosar, 2013). In this article, we intend to demonstrate the applicability of the concept to the understanding of journalism and propose an analytical framework that allows its operationalization in case studies.

The argument will be developed in three stages. Firstly we argue that the limits of the financing model for journalism, adopted since the early days of its modern phase (Charon & De Bonville, 2016), are the apparent face of a crisis whose essence is revealed by the loss of credibility of journalistic enterprises among audiences. This phenomenon becomes more critical in countries where the journalistic establishment has decided to retrieve pre-modern proselytism (Chalaby, 1998; 2003) as a strategy to overcome its own crisis. Second, we argue that if the crisis of journalism is political rather than economic, it will be overcome in a political manner. In other words, its outcome will depend on the strategies towards the creation of new governance arrangements mobilized by the different social agents struggling in the journalistic field (Blair, 1995; Bevir, 2013), in order to restore the credibility of this discourse. The final part of the article reflects on experiences that in several countries try to reconstitute public trust in journalistic organizations – in some cases, beyond the limits imposed by corporate structures. Taking the French news website *Mediapart* as a prime example, we examine new governance practices in four dimensions: editorial, ownership and management, sustainability, and circulation and engagement.

The argument starts out from the idea that, since the 19th century, journalism comes to satisfy the profound needs of individuals and society that are theoretically independent of mercantile and capitalist relations, although these necessities grew out of and were determined by such relations (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 179-180). The difficulties faced by journalistic enterprises are here interpreted as the effect of a wide range of transformations in contemporary capitalism, in whose gaps it is possible to glimpse organizational configurations and possibilities that have until now

not been foreseen for the journalistic discourse. According to Genro Filho (2012, p. 23) the ambivalence of journalism stems from the fact that it is a phenomenon whose essence goes beyond the ideological outlines of its bourgeois genesis, in spite of being one of the forms of manifestation and reproduction of hegemony of the dominant classes . Coherently with this, the crisis also is the exact moment in which forms of organization for journalism emerge to challenge the premises that acknowledge the sector as a business activity (Cagé, 2015; Bruno & Nielsen, 2012). Aiming at producing a discourse more radically committed to their condition as a social form of knowledge (Park, 2008; Genro Filho, 2012; Donsbach, 2014; Meditsch, 2002; Pontes, 2015), such organizations experience new forms of governance that refuse to associate journalism with commodities and its subordination to the principle of profitability.[1]

1 A Political crisis, rather than economic: credibility at the matter

The problems faced by the news media were characterized as "a crisis of the financing model" by Nielsen, Esser and Levy (2013), Newman (2015), Brock (2013), in the studies carried out by Levy and Nielsen (2010), as well as by Costa (2014), who also summarizes the debate on the subject in the United States. Such an approach entails a certain simplification: a complex set of factors related to the transformations in contemporary capitalism dramatically affects journalism, and the pole of corporate sector income is only one of the most visible. We propose to analyze the problem as the combination of a crisis that is both economic, that of the financing model, but also technical, political, moral and organizational, as it radically affects the relationship between journalism and its audiences.

The technical crisis refers to the changes in the production process: new technologies have shortened the gap between an event and its dissemination; the old boundaries between the journalistic languages developed for different media were dissolved, opening space for new uses and the development of languages; they also reduced the costs involved in the creation of journalistic products, especially via internet, increasing competition between the old and new media, and between these and independent producers who work individually or in collective groups and cooperatives; dramatically expanded the supply of information, modifying both the sources and

the patterns of reading the journalistic media (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2013; Aguiar & Barsotti, 2015). It results in cost and job cutting, accumulation of functions, a longer workday for journalists and the multiplication of precarious forms of employment and professional practice (Newman, 2016).

The political crisis refers to the process of news circulation and the ownership structure. Readers became more critical in relation to the effects of owner´s intervention on the content, and credibility of journalism as private business has partially disbanded.The longstanding paradox between news and democracy has become obvious: journalism, long seen as a central institution of democracy, has been largely funded by the self-interest of the market (Waisbord, 2017, p. 206). Over time – and the new technologies helped enhance this transformation – readers have developed critical capacities before journalistic narratives: they have devised tricks that allow them to identify political or business interests embedded in an agenda or in the framing of a press coverage, according to several studies (De Certeau, 2000; Bourdieu, 2007; 2009). The circulation, in social networks, of opinions and critiques that largely target journalistic discourses amplifies the effects of these reading practices: the work of a journalist is now thoroughly scrutinized, including by the sources.

The decentralization of means of production and content distribution channels aggravates the scenario for the news media. While a few years ago these channels were more controlled by business groups holding radio and TV concessions, as well as the entire periodic news publishing apparatus, nowadays anyone can appropriate for themselves journalistic tools, produce content and broadcast it to social media. Thus, producers of various types of content add themselves to the traditional journalistic media, and journalism is only one of the possibilities available to the public (Deuze & Witschge, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2016). Such structural changes increase the plurality of discourses, since the media no longer have control of the paths by which they are disseminated (Peruzzo, 2009, p. 9). Some authors highlight that this fact may represent a shift in the locus of journalism, from the sphere of an institutionalized profession and specialized organizations to broader spheres of communication, which are not yet well established or easily defined (Heinonen & Luostarinen, 2009, p. 227).

From the articulation between changes in production, the ownership structure and the circulation of information, some effects

spill over on journalism itself – and here is the moral crisis. Studies in several countries have verified the erosion of credibility of media companies (Pauwels & Picone, 2012; Gallup, 2016). In Brazil, the Global Trust Report 2015, a biennial survey carried out by the GfK institute, found out that confidence in media outlets (described as TV, radio, newspapers) dropped from 45% in 2011 to 29% in 2015, while internet trust ranged from 43% to 34% in the same period. The decrease was observed in several other institutions, but in none of them was as significant as in the media: in the government, the index varied from 29% to 18%, eleven points, while the fall in the media was 16 points (Aquino, 2015). According to this survey, 66% of internet users and 71% of other news media followers express distrust; other studies indicate smaller percentages, but still show erosion of confidence. In agreement with the Brazilian Media Survey, the confidence rate in 2016 was higher among small niche audiences, newspapers (60%), and decreased in the rest: radio (57%), television (54%), magazines (40%), websites (20%), social networks (14%) and blogs (11%). In other words: distrust varied between 89% and 40% of respondents, depending on the type of media (Ibope, 2016)[2]. Finally, if we take impartiality in journalism as a credibility parameter, a study carried out by MDA Pesquisa for the National Transports Confederation (CNT) in October 2016 found out that 41.4% of respondents affirmed that the media is not unbiased, and 29.6% believe that it is impartial only on some occasions; only 22.4% considered that it is always impartial (MDA, 2016).

Audiences, who have access to the most varied reports and varied versions for the same events, observe inconsistencies and differences between what the media conveys and what they can find on the internet. When they perceive omissions in the press or gaps in the coverage related to different interpretations of the same event, they end up feeling deceived, unheard or unacknowledged. This is especially true for historically excluded groups: What social movements and minorities – ethnicities and races, women, young people or homosexuals – ask for is not so much about their representation, but rather their recognition; to become socially visible in their differences (Martín-Barbero, 2006, p. 68). Dissatisfaction generates complaints that in the past were limited to the "letters from readers" section, and now can gain even more visibility than the articles they criticize.

The crisis affects the practice of journalism and leads it

away from the professional ideal. The countless concessions of journalistic organizations in the name of their corporate, political, or other interests (to the detriment of the quality of information and services to the public) have significantly deteriorated their credibility. They exposed contradictions, previously latent, between potential journalism and journalism in action. Today it is clearer for a significant part of the public that the full achievement of this ideal of journalism cannot simply take place in organizations vulnerable to pressures exerted by advertisers, state and political leaders, or in organizations committed to the varied interests of their owners, as has been the case of most press enterprises in Brazil.

In our opinion, the crisis of journalism can be more fully understood if we take into account all these dimensions of the phenomenon, and not only those of economic nature. Therefore, overcoming the financing crisis also depends on the rearrangement of a contract between producers and audiences about the journalism that is expected. Public dissatisfaction, the decentralization of power over the means of production and distribution channels, the available technologies of interaction increase the opportunity for the emergence of new types of organizations and journalistic vehicles, based on an honest and direct relationship between journalists and audiences. As Cagé (2015) and Benson (2016) state, journalism is ideally more compatible with forms of non-profit organizations, falling within the non-state public sphere, than with the imperatives of profitability, as occurs with business enterprises.

2 Dimensions of the governance crisis

The crisis of the business model of journalism is the apparent aspect of a deeper problem, concerning the relationship patterns between journalistic companies and their audiences. These patterns have changed in the last few years, perhaps irreversibly, due to the way audiences have reacted to the structural transformations produced in journalism and the media environment by the social appropriations of the new information and communication technologies (Moura, Pereira & Adghrni, 2015). In the Brazilian case, an intensified reaction, in a significant part of the public, was produced by the editorial options adopted by some of the main press companies in the country.

Structural changes and political choices have affected the relationship between journalism and all its audiences – readers, subscribers, sources, stakeholders and advertisers. Readers now have an unprecedented and growing volume of free information; the importance of a particular part of it is filtered and highlighted by opinion leaders or friends from internet. Today, all over the world, a growing share of readers have ceased to visit internet news sites and obtain information "via Facebook" (Newman et al., 2016). The sources are now barely distinguished: news from conventional media are blended with rumors created by blogs or political mobilization networks. Readers perceive the reality combining information derived from a variety of media and non media sources, sometimes with no credibility (Hidalgo & Barrero, 2012).

It was always assumed that the reach of printed newspapers was socially and politically significant, although it was not precisely known whether the news was actually read on a scale comparable to that of the entertainment news, or the circulation one would expect of a "major" subject. The transition from printed newspapers to the digital format (with access to more accurate audience data) casts doubt on this belief by showing that frequently the issues raised by journalists and considered of great relevance do not reach significant reading rates. Journalism is valued and legitimized as it disseminates a wide range of socially important themes – although, paradoxically, most audiences will only pay attention to a small portion of them.

This scenario has clear implications for financing. Press companies have always been successful in convincing the advertisers that they had readers and thus advertising would be a good deal. Nowadays, advertisers have more accurate metrics on reading practices – and have their own strategies for reaching customers directly on the same online channels as those of news media.

Just like advertisers, the sources also take into account these transformations. They keep up with the changes in editorial offices – with fewer and fewer reporters, most of them inexperienced and underpaid, and undergoing precarious work regimes. Some give up talking to reporters; others mobilize journalists who are responsible for press consultancy services to take care of these issues; still others, usually entrusted with public functions, continue to deal directly with journalists, who are always skeptical, patiently explaining the basics again (Schmitz, 2011).

Finally, investors and stakeholders also react to changes. Some of them give up this field: they transfer participation in media

channels to prioritize the sale of wine and beer, as in the case of the Brazilian group *RBS.* Others subsidize, with combined internet businesses, the newspaper operations (as in the relationship between the daily *Folha de S. Paulo* and *UOL* news portal, see Costa, 2014). Quite a few order proselytizing turnabouts in the editorial framework of their coverages in search of public loyalty, in a scenario of political polarization.

We propose to contemplate the crisis of journalism as a crisis of governance, in order to better understand a particular period that puts in check the whole interweaving of relations between the profession and its various audiences. Governance – a term consolidated during the last decades in areas such as management, political science, international relations – is the set of legal, cultural and institutional arrangements that determine what organizations can do, who controls them, how that control is exercised and how the risks and returns of the activities they encompass are distributed (Blair, 1995, p. 3). "Governance refers to all processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market, or network; whether over a family, tribe, corporation, or territory; and whether by laws, norms, power, or language. Governance is a broader term than government because it focuses not only on the state and its institutions but also on the creation of rule and order in social practices" (Bevir, 2013, p. 1). Bevir proposes an decentered theory of governance, committed to the historicism of human action: "Changes in governance are not products of ineluctable social processes. On the contrary, governance, whether conceived as social organization or as a new politics, is a series of disparate social practices that are constantly being created and recreated through concrete and meaningful human activity." (Bevir, 2013, p. 5)

A sociopolitical review of the concept was recently performed by Claumann (2015), who explains:

> The term "governance" appears in the literature on political sciences and international relations, and means the inclusion of the whole of society in the decision-making processes of governments. Implementing governance would lead to a greater articulation between the public and private sectors for the design and implementation of government policies, involving stakeholder participation in political processes in different branches of power. Hence, government structures would become more democratic and participatory by including political parties and lobby groups as well as informal networks and associations. [...] Making a parallel to state governance

structures, companies should allow stakeholders to interfere in their orientation. However, corporate "governance" tended to restrict the broader meaning of the word, ensuring shareholder participation and excluding other parties that enable the company to influence management (Claumann, 2015, p. 64).

The adoption of the concept of governance promotes a broader interpretation of the transformations that took place in journalism. Focusing on the various types of relationship between the organization and its audiences, the concept clarifies important aspects of the crisis that were not at the heart of the discussions about the subject, emphasizing, for example, the organizational structure of journalism (as an enterprise or in another form), its accountability and the transparency of its ties with sources, advertisers and investors. The proliferation of journalistic initiatives that operate as cooperatives, collectives, agencies, associations, non-governmental or civil society organizations is already a response to this neglected aspect of the crisis.[3] To understand it in a more complex way, we propose to understand the crisis of journalism as composed of four dimensions.

The first dimension corresponds to the **editorial governance**. In all aspects that refer to the professional knowledge of journalists – recognition, procedures and account (Traquina, 2005) – there are challenges from the audiences that have their own claims regarding the agenda, the diversity of points of view and the style and nature of the articles. Such claims directly affect the professional beliefs of journalists, related to the myth of truth, impartiality or fairness and objectivity (Deuze, 2005). In order to understand public aspirations (to *understand*, not necessarily *subordinate* journalists' convictions to them), companies and professionals should perhaps put their own convictions on hold (Deuze & Witschge, 2016).

It is a dramatic problem, especially in relation to newsworthiness – journalists rightly believe that some economic and political issues should take priority over other topics (daily life matters or curiosities); readers may agree on such choices, but the reasons for the usual public decision to ignore journalists' editorial priorities must be restated. In addition, the audiences today also produce and disseminate contents (besides consuming or reading); the proliferation of content producers websites or profiles, for example, reflects both a broad dissatisfaction with the content of press companies and the creative willingness to produce content

with a personal touch or from a specific point of view; taking up those discourses and sometimes reframing them (e.g. regarding their form), helping producers expand the scope of what they really want to discuss – all that will probably be important for journalism in the future (Deuze, 2006; Bakker, 2014).

The second dimension consists of **ownership and management governance**. Similarly to private companies, press organizations subject the design of their operational structure, their guidelines and their frameworks to the priorities dictated by the quest for profit (Cagé, 2015). In countries whose media companies are not publicly traded ones, as in Brazil, it is extremely difficult to know the profit rates of press companies over time in order to publicly discuss the relationship between investment, risk and profit in this business field, as it happens in industry sectors characterized by a strong presence of publicly traded companies. Media conglomerates impose subjects or frameworks in their best interest, run campaigns on behalf of the public, dismiss journalists, and reduce the salaries of new hires – all this and much more, without being accountable to audiences, sources and advertisers. The recognition that business priorities are, in essence, incompatible with journalism (conceived in ideal terms) is widespread today (Waisbord, 2017). One of the boundaries of this dimension of governance is the emergence, in different patterns of relationship with society, of organizational forms that are considered more appropriate for the existence of journalism, like foundations, institutes, CSOPIs, NGOs, cooperatives, among others, provided that they are sustainable and long-term (Benson, 2016; Cagé, 2015).

The third dimension is the **circulation and engagement governance**: part of the scope of any journalistic content depends on the distribution and, in the case of internet, this is directly related to the involvement of the public. To like, share and comment are more than casual commitments of readers with journalism: the reach and social effects of news reporting are now directly connected with these actions (Mitchell, 2016). In order to maintain or increase its relevance, news media must establish relations with the audiences based on cooperation, exchange and allegiance. On that will depend the circulation of journalistic information from now on.

Finally, resulting from the previous ones, the fourth

dimension is the **sustainability governance**. Should the news media accept ads? How to do it without affecting coverage? New forms of storytelling between journalism and advertising, such as sponsored content, are acceptable, in the name of a greater good, the subsistence of quality information? If there are readers, even in small numbers, interested in quality journalism, do they accept to fund it? If so, do they prefer to treat it as a commodity for their own use or do they agree to ensure the right of public access to information? Journalism financing must come from extrajournalistic activities – events, trademark licensing, sale of ancillary products (such as books or special issues of magazines or newspapers)? The answers to these questions will only come up when, within each territory, the impasses related to the three other dimensions of governance (editorial, engagement and ownership and management) have also been overcome by journalists and society.

Thus, the crisis faced by journalism in Western countries is not limited to the business model, as most of the interpretations on the subject has held. Such an outlook starts from the premise that the organizational form that dominates the journalism supply since the mid-19th century – that of the enterprise – has no relation to the causes of the crisis or its configuration. Conversely, the predominance of the business character, which subordinates journalism to the market logic, explains much of the crisis.

It is possible for companies to reinvent themselves with a new mode of governance, in which interactions with audiences occupy more than just a secondary position. This strikes us as highly improbable, since most of them have appropriated readers and spectators' contributions to construct news stories, without an effective change on the fundamentals and hierarchies mobilized by journalists in such a production (Waisbord, 2017). Their constitution as business calls for a reasonably stable organization, leaving little room for structural changes that put at stake the presumptions of the activity they perform.

To ensure the right place for audiences amid the four dimensions of governance explored in the present article – in excess of the limits set by the corporate structure –, the new governance of journalism deserves its own name. If we call it "social governance", it would not be a matter of redundancy, but of reiteration: an effort to fix what will be, in fact, a social model of governance that considers the audiences as actual players of journalism.

3 Alternative forms of organization

The model of journalism as a private business shows signs of fraying ahead the profound transformations that mark the profession nowadays – effects of new information and communication technologies on the behavior of readers and advertisers, erosion of media credibility, insecurity of journalistic work with visible deterioration of information quality, and this ensemble produces several sociopolitical effects. Today, most people do not feel represented by politicians (or by the political system itself), and something similar happens in relation to journalism. Frequent criticisms can be read as a denunciation of the systematic breakdown of an implicit agreement between the audiences and the news media, the reading contract (Verón, 2004). As traditional journalistic vehicles tend to deal with similar issues and under similar perspectives, both communities and independent journalists have sought ways to create spaces for different views on the world. However, the social standing of journalism has not yet been completely altered, and certain reading preferences and practices towards conventional news media have remained unchanged amongst the public (Waisbord, 2017).

In the last decade, when some sectors of society realized that there is a gap between what the press says/does and what these agents believe should be said/done – and when many individuals have the tools to create their own reports – groups, cooperatives, movements emerged, going over "what really happens in a particular place", "the other side of the story", "what the traditional media does not tell". These initiatives have gained support due to the fact that a significant part of the public started to question the credibility of the press. The organizations that came about from this will have different arrangements.

Regarding the agenda and scope, some operate at a local or community level: although they can reach people from all over the country, they report the daily life of a community that is not acknowledged in the journalistic discourse, personally assuming the capacity to produce meanings about their problems and their environment. Following the same logic, there were already a number of national initiatives in place (when covering the street riots in 2013) and even international ones (the case of *Indymedia*). As for the characteristics of information producers, there are both activist

initiatives – mobilizing political causes and collaborative practices, in which anyone can produce contents – and journalists' or media professionals organizations.

As for the organizational structure, some responses to the crisis have been assessed by: a) traditional press companies, whether individual or in media groups; b) non-journalistic companies interested in developing contents to gain an audience; c) new press companies, in general, small business initiatives notable for their mastery of storytelling and multimedia language; d) the state, at various levels of government; e) the sources, amid a myriad of journalistic products they constantly distribute; and f) by journalistic experiences harbored in new forms of organization. The last group, the most visible in Brazil, includes non-profit organizations created by journalists, such as *Ponte* and the *Agência Pública* (Diab & Schwaab, 2014), based on the will to do independent and quality journalism (Caires, 2010) that is not influenced by those funding the traditional media, nor geared towards people who can afford it. These initiatives in Brazil are mostly supported by donations from foundations and volunteers or crowdfunding, inspired by similar projects carried out in other countries (Fontoura, 2012).[4]

Most of journalism experiences are initiatives of professional collectives who believe in the social importance of a quality journalism, particularly stringent in relation to certain values, ethical guidelines, practices. They start from the idea that quality journalism must be produced in first place, and then there will be readership and perhaps sustainability. One clear problem is that the audience for what these initiatives call "quality journalism" is, at least in Brazil, very small. Nonetheless, it is possible to collectively manage alternatives based on a closer contact with the local public and the subjects of their interest.

Journalism is a historical, dynamic phenomenon, whose storytelling practices and forms adjust somewhat speedily to the transformations of the society in which is inserted (Ringoot & Ruellan, 2007). The institutions, however, tend to have slower responses to social changes, and this is equally true for both the state and the business sector. Some journalistic companies have tried to reinvent themselves in order to regain credibility (Sampio, 2015; Serrano, 2014). The responses of the traditional media to the challenges that this scenario imposes are, however, limited by the corporative nature

and the imperatives for profitability. The operation as a business company tends to restrict the journalistic autonomy by increasing the dependence of journalism on fields beyond the control of the audiences, through which media owners, advertisers, politicians circulate. Given the complex articulation of crisis-generating factors that involve both the production process and the circulation of information and the ownership structure, as well as the symbolic dimensions surrounding both, the crux of the matter is not how to find resources to finance journalism in companies, but to build an understanding between audiences and journalists, oriented around a new operation model for journalism. The idea of social governance can be a relevant starting point for the conception of new forms of organization and interaction, as well as new theoretical paths that accompany and support them.

Below we will describe the innovations of social governance adopted by the French news website *Mediapart*, according to the concept and dimensions of governance presented in this article, with the aim of demonstrating the pertinence of these categories of analysis for diagnosing problems and proposing solutions to the crisis faced by journalism. *Mediapart* was founded in 2007, establishing itself from 2010 as an independent and sustainable vehicle thanks to subscriptions, without conveying advertising messages (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012). Wagemans, Witschge and Deuze (2016) – from interviews with Mediapart founders and journalists, as well as a document analysis of the business plan, annual budgets, mission statement and the *Mediapart Live* issue that addresses the subject – argue that the vehicle didn't create a new concept of journalism, but adopted certain practices, in relation to the public and professionals, that allowed the journalistic organization to operate as close as possible to the professional ideals and values (which the authors call ideology) established many years ago. Based on the notion expressed by the authors that the theoretical or diagnostic works developed dealing with this type of initiative usually limit the identification of causes underlying success or failure by using more or less exclusively business terms, the study proposes to identify other factors that could affect this result, such as the social and symbolic capital of the founders, forms of organization, among others.

Criticisms to the purchase of *Le Monde*, where one of the *Mediapart* founders worked, by an investment group as the main event

that led to the creation of the new vehicle, as well as testimonials from journalists, highlight the role of the current ownership form to structure the work contexts to which journalists are subjected. In the interviews, the professionals assure that the control of the company by an economic group prevents the accomplishment of the journalistic work according to the core values of the profession. The authors argue that *Mediapart* aims at responding to three crises: democratic (where a presidential system empowers a person to dictate the entire journalistic agenda), economic (relative to the difficulties in the financial sustainability of journalism), and moral (in which the economic dependence, dictating editorial choices, destabilizes values of the professional culture).

Mediapart's innovations derive, to a large extent, from **ownership and management governance**. The website is not owned by a corporation or a large company: it was created by experienced journalists who had social and symbolic capital to sustain credibility and give visibility to the vehicle. *Mediapart*'s initial capital was 2.9 million euros: 1.3 million euros from personal investment made by the founders; 1.1 million euros from other two investors; 504,000 euros from *Société des Amis de Mediapart*, made up of 40 friends, acquaintances and sympathizers who invested between 5,000 and 50,000 euros, driven so far more by the will to support to the cause than for economic interests. The ownership is not concentrated, thus quotas and decision-making authority are distributed among the various investors, ensuring, among them, the participation of readers' representatives.

In operational terms, the initial team comprised 25 journalists, a technician and an administrative employee, and was later expanded as they realized that more non-journalist employees were needed to support the operation. With the expansion, a team composed by 50 people was established: 35 journalists, 10 employees in the technical department, 4 in the marketing department and one responsible for managing relationships with subscribers. Even with the expansion of the staff, the number of people working at *Mediapart* is still considerably smaller than the average for large traditional media vehicles, and this has some advantages from a management point of view.

Wagemans et al. (2016) argue that management challenges in creative industry business can be significantly mitigated if the employees' professional goals match the

ultimate goals of the organization. The authors also point out that a good part of journalists working for *Mediapart* feel that the other places in which they used to work did not allow them to consistently exercise the profession in consonance with their professional values, and in *Mediapart* this became possible. A smaller organization, where the objectives and means to reach them are in tune, focuses on a more flexible and less hierarchical organizational structure. But the researchers also highlight that the figure of the boss (two, in fact) still exists, as well as some job positions, similarly to the traditional vehicles: in *Mediapart*, the traditional editors-in-chief positions are held by journalists that integrate part of the referred organizational structure called *"le central"*, corresponding to the chief editor. Maybe this subtle change has a real effect on practices, maybe not. Journalists affirm that they are less concerned with organizational issues such as revenue and time, placing content production and interaction with the public at the core of their concerns.

Regarding **editorial governance**, the most significant change achieved by *Mediapart* is the editorial independence derived from financial independence. Journalists are free to set their own standards, which are not dictated or censored by higher authorities. The news site produces three daily issues, but does not follow the continuous content model, focusing on more in-depth, lengthy, and relevance-driven rather than immediate news articles. Among other factors, this affects the relationship with the sources, who feel more free to specify their claims, as they know there is room for longer quotations in the reports. Similar to other media vehicles, *Mediapart* produces various types of content, from written materials and web documentaries to talk shows. But unlike most vehicles, it also invests in offline discussions and festivals, expanding discussions beyond the online platform – journalists emphasize the importance of maintaining contact with readers both virtually and in person. *Mediapart* also makes a clear distinction between what is produced by its journalists and what comes from subscribers, published in readers' blogs.

In relation to **circulation and engagement governance**, internet was chosen as a platform due to the lower relative cost and the greater possibility of interaction with the public. The *Mediapart* website has an interactive platform called *Le Club* (which does not require subscription), where the public can comment on the stories, discuss with

other people, experts and journalists, and publish their own content. Journalists acknowledge, however, that interaction with users was more helpful in the initial phase of the new vehicle, when the audience seemed more like a community. With an increase in the number of subscribers, relevant comments and suggestions are sent by emails, not published on the website. The vehicle also promotes offline events, aiming at an interaction outside the digital platform.

Regarding **sustainability governance**, *Mediapart* consolidates as a model that does not accept ads, by understanding that they would affect the editorial independence. The vehicle only works with revenues from subscriptions, in a restricted paywall scheme: readers can freely access the homepage, with short articles summaries and the *Le Club* platform. The organization reached 10,000 subscribers in the first six months, a number that gradually doubled, when in 2010, due to an investigative scoop, subscriptions went from 26 thousand to 42 thousand. A stable growth was observed in 2011, 2012 and 2013, reaching 100 thousand subscriptions.

The type of start-up funding, with contributions from journalists, investors and readers is considered relevant by Wagemans et al. (2016), especially to support the ideological argument about journalistic independence mobilized since the launch of the vehicle and to maintain the initiative. *Mediapart* faced financial difficulties during the first three years of operation, but established itself with a revenue of 8.8 million euros and a 1.5 million euros profit in 2014.

Taking into account the four dimensions of governance favors the empirical analysis of the relationship patterns between the journalistic organization and its various audiences. Therefore, it is useful for a complex (or multidimensional) interpretation of the governance arrangements that contribute to making an organization attainable. In the case of *Mediapart*, it is clear that ownership and management governance, with readers' participation in the business capital, monitoring both the control group formed by journalists and the interests of investors, reinforces the credibility of the venture with all audiences. Circulation and engagement governance establishes more stable bonds between journalists and subscribers, who also publish opinions or collaborate with news topics or assessments, in a participatory dynamic. Wagemans et al. (2016) point out the limitations of the initiative, since some of

the structural changes still exist as discourse rather than practice, and it does not seem to stem something necessarily new in terms of experiences and conceptualizations of journalism. In spite of this, *Mediapart* has built, in the context of editorial governance, a renewed agreement between journalists and their audiences, in which professionals exercise their autonomy to a great extent; journalism gains coherence through its relation to professional values; readers have an independent vehicle that produces more quality content and offers greater openness towards interaction (although still little explored). *Mediapart*'s financial governance, which does not include advertisements and is based primarily on subscribers, has become feasible due to the different types of new relationships established with the public in the other dimensions of governance, and not only in those appropriate for the business model adopted.

4 Concluding remarks

In this article, we argue in favor of the adoption of the concept of governance to characterize, in a more complex way, the structural transformations of journalism and its crisis, responding to the theoretical limits of the approaches that restrict it to the business model (Peters & Broersma, 2017). Adelmo Genro Filho suggested that journalism would be "historically linked to the development of capitalism", but also "endowed with potential to surpass it" (2012: 197); thus, for this author, journalistic practice can be built beyond the context and business organizations that shaped the way the profession has evolved until today. *Mediapart* governance innovations indicate that new types of organization respond creatively to the crisis of journalism – in this case, with private property control systems conducted by readers, participation dynamics affecting the relationship between professionals and audiences, increased editorial autonomy for journalists and exclusive financing by subscribers.

The changes in contemporary capitalism have made it possible to practice alternative forms of journalism that undermine the idea that the profession is subject to the market, in favor of models of governance that give the public a leading role in all the dimensions of the activity. *Mediapart* demonstrates how

governance innovations respond to situations in which "people adopt new beliefs that lead them to modify their actions, and their new actions coalesce in organizations and new patterns of public action" (Bevir, 2013, p. 5). Not all audiences will participate actively and constantly in the journalistic process, but new forms of journalism governance, including non-profit journalism, may allow us to think of dynamics in which society can have an influence on the decisions of those basic journalistic practices that have hitherto not been transformed by social participation (Waisbord, 2017). If the majority of the public is today so discontented, disenchanted or disinterested in quality information, new governance arrangements are likely to be useless: journalism will have been superseded by other forms of social circulation of knowledge. But if there are readers who are distressed due to deformation, misinformation, omission, but also eager for alternative news vehicles they can trust – then a social governance for journalism may allow the creation, with the public, of something really new.

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NOTES

1   The article is part of the research project "GPSJor - Governance, production and sustainability for a new kind of journalism", developed in cooperation between the Bom Jesus Ielusc Lutheran Educational Association, from Joinville, and the Graduate programs in Political Sociology and Journalism of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, with funding by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

2   According to the study, annual trust in news press ranged positively from 53% to 60% between 2014 and 2016, while it ranged negatively in blogs, from 22% to 11%, in websites from 28% to 20%, and in social networks from 24% to 14%, in the same period. In the case of radio, confidence increased from 51% to 57%, in television from 49% to 54%, and in magazines, the values remained stable at 40%. The long political crisis in Brazil appears to have undermined public confidence in internet-based journalistic media and bolstered the credibility of print

newspapers (whose preference levels, however, remain very low, approximately 3% of respondents) and radio broadcasters (Brasil, 2014; Ibope, 2016).

3 Between 2005 and 2010 the J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism, from Washington, related more than 1,000 non-profit journalism initiatives in the United States within the scope of the Knight Community News Network. In Brazil, the cycle of economic growth with income distribution registered between 2003 and 2013 was positive for the traditional media, which expanded the number of print titles and diversified investments in online platforms. There are no systematic data on the journalistic startups created since then in response to the varied effects on the sector of the profound economic and political crisis of the 2014-2017 cycle.

4 Sampio (2015) analyzes fifteen entrepreneurial journalism initiatives that have emerged since 2009 and resorted to innovation to survive. They consist of digital or printed projects geared towards diverse themes, and businesses are supported by sponsorship, publicity, signatures, single sales, donations and/or micropatronage. Serrano (2014) brings together a set of means that have challenged economic adversities by offering what he calls "the journalism we need". The initiatives studied present creativity and innovation, funding solutions combined with the permanent search of editorial quality, a more transparent governance and clear and non-negotiable editorial principles. Through the readers, these media find support networks for the dissemination of products and services and are inspired by the citizenship to decide their contents.

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