

### 'Public communication' education and extension: civic skills to talk and act on polis

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**'PUBLIC COMMUNICATION'  
EDUCATION AND  
EXTENSION:  
civic skills to talk and act on  
*polis***

EDUCAÇÃO E EXTENSÃO EM  
'COMUNICAÇÃO PÚBLICA':  
habilidades cívicas para falar e agir  
na *polis*

EDUCACIÓN Y EXTENSIÓN EN  
'COMUNICACIÓN PÚBLICA':  
habilidades cívicas para hablar y  
actuar en la *polis*

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**ABSTRACT**

Academia has a triple mission: research, education, and extension. This paper deals with 'public communication' as a matter for education and extension. The idea is that there is no citizenship or democracy without the training on 'public communication'

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abilities. Only citizens who are able to speak and act at the public sphere can participate on the social life. Such abilities are twofold: parliamentary (how to speak) and executive (how to act). The paper shows how is possible to effectively communicate through silent acts, as well as how 'public communication' can have a "dark side of the force". Finally, it states that all 'public communication' should lead to peaceful living and social cohesion.

**KEYWORDS:** public communication; education; extension; training; civic skills.

#### **RESUMO**

A Academia tem uma tripla missão: pesquisa, educação e extensão. Este artigo trata da "comunicação pública" como uma questão de educação e extensão. A ideia é que não há cidadania ou democracia sem um treinamento em habilidades de 'comunicação pública'. Apenas os cidadãos que são capazes de falar e agir na esfera pública podem participar na vida social. Essas habilidades são de dois tipos: parlamentar (como falar) e executivo (como agir). O artigo mostra como é possível comunicar de forma eficaz através de atos silenciosos, bem como a «comunicação pública» pode ter um "lado negro da força". Finalmente, afirma que toda "comunicação pública" deve levar a uma convivência pacífica e à coesão social.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** comunicação pública; Educação; extensão; Treinamento; competências cívicas.

#### **RESUMEN**

La academia tiene una triple misión: investigación, educación y extensión. Este trabajo se ocupa de la 'comunicación pública' como una cuestión de educación y extensión. La idea es que no hay democracia ni ciudadanía sin el entrenamiento en habilidades de 'comunicación pública'. Sólo los ciudadanos que son capaces de hablar y actuar en la esfera pública pueden participar en la vida social. Tales habilidades son de dos tipos: parlamentaria (hablar) y ejecutiva (actuar). El documento muestra cómo es posible comunicarse de manera efectiva a través de actos silenciosos, así como la 'comunicación pública' puede tener un "lado oscuro de



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la fuerza". Por último, se establece que toda 'comunicación pública' debe conducir a una vida pacífica y a la cohesión social.

**PALABRAS-CLAVE:** comunicación pública; educación; extensión; entrenamiento; habilidades cívicas.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Given that to Paulo Freire the communication is a pedagogical act and the education is a communicational act (PERUZZO, 1999:224), it is interesting to analyze, then, when the communication is, in itself, the vector for civic qualification on citizenship and democracy. The aim of this paper is the democratization of the civic parliamentary and executive skills to civilians, made possible through the education and extension on 'public communication'. The idea was giving voice to a concern: how to prepare citizens as communicators able to a democratic living?

Communication is a technical skill that must be taught to the children, young, and even adults during their qualification as citizens. Thus, the constitution of citizens requires education and training in 'public communication', in order to enable them to speak and act in public – at the *polis*. Both activities (speaking-with-you and acting-together) belong to the civic life: the parliamentary phase tools up to the confrontation via words, while the executive phase equips to perform or act into the public sphere. As a consequence, the communicational ability is on the basis of citizenship (taken as a set of citizens' activities) and democracy (seen as joint public expressions carried out in name of such citizenship).

## 2. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND CITIZENSHIP

While citizenship is a set of activities such as dialoguing and acting in the community, the 'public communication' is exactly the shared expression about common matters on the public sphere. In this sense, 'public communication' presupposes citizens interacting and debating over subjects that reach wider interests, so to establish meanings and statements together. Indeed, 'public communication' is eminently a parliamentarian activity - where the "expression" delimits the acting.

Therefore, each citizen functions as a parliamentary agent for individual and communitarian causes, been constituted as such by specialized education and training. As a principle, all citizens do need to acquire some of the abilities of, for example, a councilman or lawyer – in order to come to the public sphere to speak, to deliver a speech, to interrogate, to disagree, to propose something, to denounce, etc. Such abilities should not be considered innate exclusive gifts or personal vocations; they rather need to be inculcated and developed among the children and young, as a social project for citizens formation, for ‘public communicators’ formation.

So, ‘public communication’ must be seen as a mandatory technical formation on society, as important as other basic disciplines to the communitarian life. A citizen would only be considered as such when capable to express publicly what s/he thinks and wants, and capable to become heard, to argue and to convince, and eventually not been convinced. Then, ‘public communication’ involves a deep conscience of each other’s human value, of the social relevance of each person, of the notion of the right that all possess to defend their peers and positions.

### **3. COMMUNICATION FOR CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRACY**

The parliamentary qualification of citizens must include studies and training in ‘public communication’. Ideally, the children and the young would have to learn by examples and experiences on how to express themselves, getting enough stimulation along their social and school trajectory to speak out in public – setting and defending a position. From the point of view of the ‘public communication’, it is necessary to introduce parliamentary activities that involve to speech, to dialogue, to debate, to deliberate; as well as the understanding that diversity, disagreement and conflict are natural.

On the other hand, the qualification of citizens must stimulate parliamentary activities that relate to the legislative process. The children should learn on how to formalize social demands, how to organize and lead campaigns for the defense of interests, and how to search for the necessary vote support over the matters they have been advocating for. That applies to the creation of new rules for a joint action, as well as to the elimination or adjustment of existing rules. The knowledge on how to cultivate a social capital stock that can make public projects possible (from talking to making) needs to be taught to children, to young, and even to adults.

The speech and writing abilities are, therefore, so essential to citizenship as socializing and persuasion are to democracy. The citizen is someone who was effectively educated and trained to speak in public and to determine the joint action. Although the citizen delegates some power to representatives through the vote, the citizen is also the one who never resigns from the civic duty of managing, personally, the public good or property (*res publica*). Here, citizenship and democracy are intertwined with what is done by citizens themselves.

#### **4. EDUCATION FOR THE PUBLIC COMMUNICATION**

The technical literature on citizenship education<sup>4</sup>, with several examples on how to put in practice the linkage between the youths and the society they live in, has provided the key to ask: what about the education on 'public communication'? More: how to stimulate practices of 'public communication' to all citizens (children, young and adults)? The natural evolution was taking academic extension as working model, in parallel to education, given the exigency to prepare citizens to the life in community.

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<sup>4</sup> MOLEDO & REGO (2009); REDE EURYDICE (2012).

The extension is then presented through a triple axis: knowledge transfer, technical training, and civic qualification. In summary: enabling to know, to make, and to judge if the acquired knowledge or action to be performed would bring benefits or damages to the community. It is not a simple task. Moreover, it shall be considered that 'public communication' can (as social capital does) also produce disturbing social situations – not always conscientious, intentional or predictable. It is advisable to avoid such technique's potential "dark side of the force".

## **5. COMMUNICATING PUBLICLY**

To express yourself at the public sphere is relatively complex, because there are parallel meanings that struggle with and against each other (as a collateral communication effect), and are originated from what it is said, by whom it is said, how it is said, and with which objectives. In other words, every communication suffers interference from the context that disturbs and modifies what "they have said or they have meant by saying".

For example, there is a remarkable aura of 'public communication' embedded in openly public situations such as: a monk who sets fire to his own body, the shout of a black woman who cries out to the front line troopers, the silent stopping of a Chinese right in front of a war tank, the desperation of a father who hugs the dead body of the son drowned while crossing the Mediterranean.

These cases illustrate how even silences, monologues, and disconnected talking can communicate with clarity, and how the context determines the public relevance of the fact. They show equally that the 'public communication' role is not restricted to the "parliamentary process" (as a dialogue for consensus); it goes further to denounce, to protest, to accuse, to defend, to protect, to demand, etc. (functioning as well as a cacophony for dissent).



This character of the 'public communication' is paramount when it comes to its social function: it serves as a tool to empower the citizens for the action. Without a doubt on its importance as a "parliamentary process" though, the 'public communication' is also "an executive" vector: therefore, sometimes to simply act is a way for speaking out and in the name of all.

Here is where the 'public communication' joints the extension: the *academia* prepares the citizens to express themselves (through words or acts) at the *polis*, doing that with conscience and criterion. Such pursuit for a (new) balance between speaking (parliamentary process) and making (executive proceeding) is, in a way, both spontaneous and motivated – because that is the reason for the extension in 'public communication'.

## 6. CIVIL EXECUTIVE SKILLS

A less worked facet of 'public communication' happens through acts, when the body goes beyond conversation and becomes a multimodal vehicle for citizens' expression. Conversely, does not matter if there is a simple body or a set of bodies, if the body stands still or if the bodies are in motion, as long as the bodies bear that aura capable of communication at the public sphere. This performative communication, not-verbal and not-oral, aims equally the public issue and the public relevance – inserting itself at the power game on *polis*.

The public expressions acquire, thus, the format of manifestations, parades, performances, and, together or not with the verbal-oral modality, can be used to protest, to denounce, to accuse, and so on. For example: women who undress against the genre-based violence, activists that simulate corps in reference to slaughters, a person that chains herself to the door of a hospital in a search for attendance, civilians who block a road against its unsafe conditions.

Even though such examples would be executed in deep silence, as when people muzzle themselves against censorship, they would still feature 'public communication': they are acts that create a communication prone to change the community life. This action to intervene at the *polis* has an intentional expressive charge, brought to effect at the public sphere. This performative communication that wants to govern differently (in a diverse way) is the executive face of the 'public communication'. 'Executive' because accomplished by acts.

One interesting point relies on the contribution of both the parliamentary and executive sides of 'public communication' to the social convergence. Indeed, there would be communication only if there is convergence of meanings; whereas there would be 'public communication' only under the assumption of social convergence. However, it is not trivial figuring out on the how much the statements, conversations, dialogues, debates, and deliberations really do contribute to the convergence of meanings (immaterial by definition).

On the other hand, the promotion of convergence in a community presupposes to manage conflicts, to search for a pacific togetherness, to seek for social cohesion. However, part of the 'public communication' has unfortunately the opposite effect: verbal (parliamentary process) or performative (executive proceeding) interactions can result in disagreement, resentment, desire of revenge, scaling of sabotages, etc. (MATOS; NOBRE, 2016). People may not accept some rules, decisions, and winners – even if they were able to grasp the meanings. The same way what happens to the social capital, 'public communication' bears a potential "dark side of the force".

Due to that, it is not enough to define 'public communication' based only in the appearance on the public sphere, not even if such expression is related to issues with public relevance and interest. According to the criterion of "social convergence",

any 'public communication' must avoid the conflict and rupture in the community. This "new" criterion sets a moral bias (different from ethics) for the civic interactions: an affair of humanity, not ruled out by the reason.

## **7. ACADEMIC EXTENSION AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION**

SAARI (2010) considers sixteen parliamentary abilities necessary to communitarian leaders. Then, each person would need to know how: to receive a motion to start or to close a debate; to raise an issue of order; to direct an appeal to the board's decision; to receive a motion that suspends the rules; to receive a motion that objects the appreciation of a matter; to direct an information request; to receive a motion for further analysis or to attend most urgent matters; to forward the agenda; to receive a motion and direct it to a committee; to receive and modify a motion and/or its amendments; to receive and submit a motion to appreciation; to receive a motion to vote the original matter; to receive a motion of reconsideration; to receive a motion that rescinds the previous action; to permit that the board takes part in a debate; to convoke new voting for a matter.

The author is clearly based on the official parliamentary process that regulates the activity of the members of the Congress and Senate. However, it would be interesting to adapt such protocols for the civil activity, translating the jargons and simplifying the particular phases. This applies both to the civil parliamentary abilities, as well as to the civil executive abilities.

The first step to extension is the transfer of knowledge applicable to the reality of each citizen. Here it is necessary to emphasize the symbolic value of the public acts, meaning the public expression done individually and/or collectively. The second step to extension is the technical training that enables citizens to act as social agents, when social mobilization and engagement become critical.

The third step to extension is the moral qualification of the citizens, so that the just-acquired abilities should be used to promote the peaceful living and social cohesion. As any other technique, the knowledge and knowhow on 'public communication' could be rather used to scale conflicts and to create ruptures in the community - despite any good intention that may be at stake (for example, to defend a minority). That is why is so important acquiring a critical capacity to judge means and ends in order to prevent disruptive initiatives.

## **8. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION EXTENSION AS TRAINING**

There is a plethora of activities that can be used as academic extension in order to transfer applicable knowledge, to enable technical performance, and to qualify the civilians in a society. For instance: workshops, games, sports, team working (competitions), performances, theatrical acting (role playing, staging), simulations, interactions, exercises, etc. This paper is especially interested on training, that can also involve one or more of the previously mentioned activities.

It is relatively simple to find on Internet special training thought to qualify citizens into different aspects of the social life. For example: qualification of citizens on how to lobby local authorities; training of citizens to deal with natural emergencies or disasters; qualification of citizens to interact with candidates to the presidency; training of citizens to participate on the search for solutions in the community they live in; training of workers to civic engagement; training so the citizens can become observers on elections; training of citizens on first-aid techniques; training of citizens to record illegal activity from cops; training of citizens on how to deal with antisocial behaviors; training on how to engage marginalized civil groups; training of citizens to act in social projects at the local community level; etc. (MATOS; NOBRE, 2016)

The type of training that focus on the 'communicational qualification' involves the acquisition of the following abilities, to name a few: "listening skills, influence skills, responding to conflict, (...) assertiveness skills, negotiation, facilitation, (...) public speaking, (...) speaking skills", interacting skills. Some civil associations do exist with the sole purpose of to promote such communicational abilities along the society, as for example the ToastMasters ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)), the PowerTalk International ([www.powertalkinternational.com](http://www.powertalkinternational.com)), and the Association of Speakers Clubs ([www.the-asc.org.uk](http://www.the-asc.org.uk)).

To design such activities and training, so to fulfill the *academia's* triple mission on 'public communication', is a challenge. For the parliamentary side of the 'public communication', MATOS; NOBRE (2014) suggested to create opportunities for real interactions between authorities and citizens, to simulate the participation of citizens in advisory committees, to structure deliberative processes, to consider exercises of mutual inquisition, to use the model of the United Nations to stage multistakeholder sessions, to emulate civil candidacies to electoral processes, and others.

For the executive side of 'public communication', it is necessary to think on concrete actions over the social reality - going beyond the verbal modality. Some possibilities would include the participation in public manifestations (walks and parades), the voluntary work in not paid social projects (e.g. immigrant aid), enlistment in social movements for civil rights defense (e.g. LGBTTT), the combat of health problems (e.g. Dengue and Malaria), denunciatory performances (e.g. Group FEMEN), artistic installations (crosses at the Congress' field), etc. In theory, they could all be conducted in silence, and still they would qualify as 'public communication' - with effective expressive aura at the public sphere.



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## 9. CONCLUSION

Facing 'public communication' as a matter for academic education and extension brings some interesting issues. Initially, it is an advance to consider 'public communication' as a transferable technical skill. Later, it is also interesting to think about 'public communication' as a civic action: the civil parliamentary interactions as public performance, and the civil executive actions as endowed with an expressive aura at the public sphere. This sets 'public communication' as one of the pillars for civic life, somehow independent from the State and market.

From another point of view, it highlights the social function of the 'public communication': to help to manage conflicts and to promote a peaceful living and social cohesion. To consider that 'public communication' possesses equally a potential to the opposite, which means to promote conflicts and lead to rupture (as the "dark side" of the social capital), seems to be original as well. That was why the moral criterion has been introduced.

Thus, the qualification of civilians in 'public communication' abilities (parliamentarian and executive) would be in the base of the citizens' formation. To talk and act in a community has to serve to the peers (*gens*), and aim that the citizens do live together in a sustainable way (*inter civis*).

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