

Environmental communication: exploring multiple interfaces

Comunicação ambiental: explorando múltiplas interfaces

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Understanding the role of media in environmental communication remains one of the primary challenges in environmental communication training. Particularly their role in the constitution of diverse environmental subjectivities, which gives rise to different political positions and ways of engagement. Since the 1960s, environmentalism has become a recurring subject in media coverage.¹ Themes such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, industrial agriculture, biodiversity, and mining have entered the public debate, and the public knowledge about these themes became largely based on that information.

Environmentalism emerged as a relevant issue in a process marked by conflict and disagreement. If the environmental discourse emerged as a counter-hegemonic response to discourses propagating the ideal of inexorable progress, the strengthening of the environmental movement elevated it to the status of a hegemonic discourse.^{2,3} Within the green public sphere,⁴ even those social actors, whose activities are recognized as harmful to the environment, employ the concept of ‘sustainability’ in their discourse. The construction of the idea of sustainable development figures, as a central factor in the appropriation of environmental discourse by the most diverse enunciators, drives its hegemonization. Alice Krieg-Planque⁵ argues that the concept of “sustainable development” operates as a conflict neutralizer. In her analysis of several international documents related to the promotion of sustainable development, the author verified the massive presence of verbs such as ‘conjugate,’ ‘ally,’ and ‘conciliate,’ which demonstrates the construction of a conciliatory discourse. By combining the ideas of progress and sustainability into a single concept, the concept of sustainable development “has a doxic dimension, since it inhibits counter-discourses and marginalizes counter-arguments”⁵ (p. 19).

The instability of the concept, however, and its appropriation by the most diverse social actors, has elevated the role of media to an arena for the discursive struggle about what concerns the ‘environmental’ in environmental issues. Media representations about the subject are among the main focuses of research in environmental communication. Hansen⁶ points out that despite the globalized nature of media and communication, the framing of environmental issues varies between continents, countries, and cultures.

In his analysis of Brazilian environmental journalism, Bueno⁸ has shown the existence of a series of “syndromes,” among them, the fragmentation of the news, which inhibits a systemic approach to environmental issues: debate depoliticization, which prioritizes technical aspects over social or political aspects; preference for established sources; “green indulgences” granted to companies that use environmental marketing to clean up their images; and spectacularization of the environmental tragedy, which often spills over into sensationalism.

In 2019, the environmental agenda was widely present in Brazilian media due to three distinct environmental tragedies: the rupture of the Brumadinho dam, the fires in the Amazon region, and the oil spill on the Northeastern coast. This tendency to approach environmental issues only in the context of tragedies brings a clear problem of temporality: tragedies are accomplished facts while environmental communication has the potential to generate awareness and urge citizens to be agents of change. Although reporting on tragedies is important, it cannot be the only or even the most important way for the environment to become the object of media discourse.

The discursive struggle about the environment constitutes one of the main focuses of environmental communication training in a field that relies on a wide variety of approaches and epistemologies. In one of his seminal works, Hansen⁶ emphasized how one key aim for environmental communication education has always been to understand the role played “by media and communication processes in the public and political definition and the elaboration and contestation of environmental issues and problems” (p. 7).

Research in environmental communication is essentially transdisciplinary. Academics in the field have been exploring multiple interfaces from science communication and education, over health communication, to political communication, among many others. Finally, environmental communication training might not have an epistemological unity; nevertheless, it is structured around the object with the materiality that necessarily unites the two broad concepts that give the field its name.

In this issue, Reciis collects different environmental communication studies. Among the papers published in the Communication and Environment dossier, most have journalism as their object, except one that addresses institutional communication and one that analyzes a documentary film. Regarding the themes, some of the papers focus on common subjects in environmental communication, such as pollution and mining, while others focus on uncommon themes such as the Olympic Games.

The dossier opens with a theoretical contribution before it moves on to studies that focus on particular case studies. The first paper, entitled *The contribution of the precautionary principle to the epistemology of Environmental Journalism*, is authored by Ilza Maria Tourinho Girardi, Eloisa Beling Loose, Débora Gallas Steigleder, Roberto Villar Belmonte, and Carine Massierer. It reports on a study into the epistemologies of environmental journalism. The paper seeks to verify the origin and background of different epistemological aspects at play in journalistic products that address environmental issues. Focusing on the precautionary principle, the paper shows that the literature on environmental journalism does not deal with the portion that anticipates risks and damages, even in light of scientific advances in terms of predictions, and concludes that the adoption of the precautionary principle is necessary for a society permeated by risks produced by humanity itself.

With a corpus composed of articles published from the 1940s to the 1970s in the *O Globo* newspaper, the paper entitled *The pollution in Guanabara Bay and the emergence of the environmental agenda in O Globo newspaper* shows how a particular problem contributed to the formation of an environmental journalistic agenda for agenda for the Guanabara Bay. The authors, Michel Misse Filho and Raquel Paiva explore how human health concerns helped this topic to reach a high level of reporting. Furthermore, they argue how this building process is associated with important theoretical landmarks in the field, such as the indispensability of ecological activism, and the need to expand the news focus and incorporate the knowledge of traditional populations.

Focusing on the socio-environmental disaster that occurred in 2018 in Barcarena, Pará, the article entitled *Mining disaster in Barcarena, Pará, and media coverage: differences in duration and listening directions*, by Rosane Steinbrenner, Guilherme Guerreiro Neto, Pedro Loureiro de Bragança, and Edna Maria Ramos de Castro, analyzes the media reporting on the event. The paper discusses differences between the disaster duration and reporting duration as well as directions from official/institutional voices and the presence/absence of popular voices from communities and social movements. The analyzes over a period of eight months draw conclusions on the reach and duration of media visibility and the influence of particular news sources on how media schedules and promotes a particular framing.

In *Questioning uranium mining: an analysis of the public communication stated by Indústrias Nucleares do Brasil (INB) in Caetité, Bahia*, Bruno Lucas Saliba de Paula discusses the public communication strategies adopted by INB through the 'INB space,' which is an information center located in the city of Caetité, in the state of Bahia, where the company performs uranium mining and processing. Such activities have raised numerous suspicions of environmental damage and public health problems since their beginnings. That paper aimed to understand how INB positioned itself against these suspicions and how it addressed the populations affected by these activities. The author argues that, by adopting a techno-enthusiastic and

technocratic posture, the company hinders an open and decentralized public debate about the controversies surrounding uranium mining.

The dossier closes with ‘Back to nature’ through ‘the miracle of Olympics’: narratives on the salvation of Rio de Janeiro in the television documentary *Naturopolis*. In this paper, Ana Teresa Gotardo brings an analysis of the *Naturopolis* documentary, relating it to official documents made available by the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Games Organizing Committee. The paper seeks to understand the discursive struggle about ‘sustainability’ in the context of building the Olympic city. In doing so, it focuses on the narrative line of the city’s salvation through mega-events concerning sustainability, evoking necessary changes for the construction of a new country from a transformation that can be brought about by politicians, by the “miracle of the Olympics” and by the population in general.

In the Review articles, one of the papers is also connected to this special issue: *Environment and Communication: an overview at scientific production in Latin America* by Ana Claudia Nepote, Luisa Massarani, and Mariana Rocha. The paper is part of an investigation that aimed to map the academic production in Latin America by providing an overview of publication patterns in Latin American journals about science and environmental communication research since the 1980s. The analysis reveals interesting data about academic production in the region, bringing a broad view of state of the art in Latin America.

In addition, throughout this edition, it is possible to follow works that portray the vulnerability of minority groups, the implementation of national policies, and the dissemination of news information, both in contemporary society and in the historical crossings built over time. The article *The misinformation network and health at risk: an analysis of fake news included in ‘The 10 reasons why you shouldn’t vaccinate your child’* by Carla Montuori Fernandes and Christina Montuori, exposes the fragility of the vaccination system in the middle the current expansion and democratization of the virtual space. In *Racism, eugenics and sickle cell disease: the case of a population screening program* by Gabriela dos Santos Silva, Clarice Santos Mota, and Leny Alves Bomfim Trad problematize the relation of eugenic assumptions linked to population policies since the 20th century in Brazil, pointing to the need to break with the old but permanent institutional practices that contribute to racism and sexism.

Finally, with its production still in the midst of the Covid-19 global health crisis, the edition is singularly marked by the short note prepared by Luiz Marcelo Robalinho Ferraz recording the advances and developments of the news coverage about the coronavirus pandemic in Brazil, and the interview by Christovam Barcellos, one of the scientific editors of *Reciis* and one of the coordinators of Covid-19 Observatory of Fiocruz, pointing out the main national research challenges to face the pandemic. Thus, with this edition, *Reciis* continues to highlight the interfaces of communication, information, and health that guide and define its role in the scientific community.

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