

**Manuel Pinto & Helena Sousa, eds.**

# **COMMUNICATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

Rethinking crisis and change

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# COMMUNICATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Rethinking crisis and change

IAMCR Braga Conference  
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Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade  
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## Foreword

The acceleration of change and the globalization of fear and uncertainty are features of the present. The speed of transformations in all regions of our volatile and hyper-complex world makes it increasingly difficult to read social reality and to act meaningfully. In a time of profound economic, cultural and moral crisis, citizens, groups and organizations have no choice but to rediscover how individual and social life can be lived.

Participation in political and social life is a fundamental contemporary value which is supposed to have a concrete and permanent impact on the quality of people's lives. As a right and a duty, participation is expected to improve societies. Traditional media all over the world haven't fully responded to social participatory needs. Despite well founded expectations regarding the media's role in terms of promotion of participation, this is not satisfactorily happening. In most countries, the media ended up as promoters of government's and big business interests based on a top-down conformist communication model. Taking advantage of new technologies, citizens are fighting back. Both in developed and developing societies, it is possible to identify new participatory ideas and practices.

Moving away from utopian and dystopian political and academic discourses on the Internet, it is noteworthy that in different ways and contexts, citizens and social institutions are circumventing traditional media and developing new forms of participation. Though technology per se is not a relevant explicative variable, it is an indispensable element to fully understand significant changes in terms of citizen's access to alternative contents and social networks. Still, having access to the Internet or other participative technologies does not transform individuals into citizens.

If the defense of public interest depends on the overall functioning of the entire media construct, state and professional media regulation is far from sufficient. Citizens' participation - at different stages and levels - is crucial to the continuous attempt to develop responsible and accountable media cultures. But citizenry implies social exigency regarding media professionals' training, media professionals' deontological codes, media company's strategies, state policies and, above all, a critical and participative attitude regarding traditional and new media.

This critical observation and consequential participation can only take place if media logics are understandable and if communication rights and duties are common knowledge. In the past, literacy was a necessary condition to become a citizen. Today, reading and writing is far from sufficient for full citizenship. Citizens must have the ability to interpret mediated discourses about the world and must have the power to act.

In the present-day economic and ethical crisis, communication and media research might perform a fundamental role interrogating the dominant communication models and opening up new debates on citizens' empowering and participatory mechanisms. This could be the contribution of the communication scientific community to shed light on contemporary uncertainties and deadlocks.

These words sum up the general theme of the 2010 Conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) that was hosted by the Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho, Portugal, 18-22 July.

Focusing on the relationship between Communication and Citizenship, researchers from different latitudes and backgrounds were invited to develop research as academics and also as citizens. More than 1300 researchers answered this call and the IAMCR community had a stimulating and vibrant week in Braga.

This book responds to the Local Organizing Committee attempt to collect plenary addresses on the general theme hoping that this contribution will keep the debate alive. We are profoundly grateful to the authors who managed to find the necessary time to put their thoughts in a written form and forever indebted to all who made the Braga IAMCR Conference possible.

The Local Organizing Committee Coordinators

***Manuel Pinto*** and ***Helena Sousa***