

## **Information, health and social networks: dialogs of knowledge in the Maré communities**

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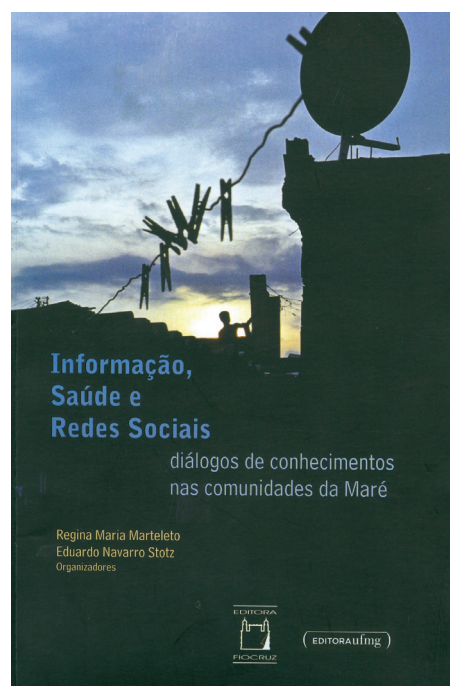
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“Knowledge does not belong to anybody. And it must circulate. If knowledge is imprisoned, it dies.” With this thought, Suely Correa, a body therapist and popular leader from Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, closed her talk during a recent event, in which took part health professionals, collective health researchers and professors and people from social movements, all discussing the education processes in health and public policies in a dialog with society. With a combination of simplicity and depth, Suely expressed the perspective of valuing dialog and the exchange of knowledge and experiences as the basis for the development of a collective and democratic project of health.

The legitimacy of several forms of knowledge is usually explicit in discourse, authorized and unauthorized, which does not mean that health practices are being capable of putting this discourse into practice. After all, in history there has always been the battle between a group who claim exclusiveness and legitimacy of knowledge to themselves as opposed to the others, the so-called impostors, and the capacity to organize, systematize and store, in a document fashion, knowledge which has been produced, in addition to erudition, have become central elements in the distinction between those who may and may not talk about health and care.

The advance of a science model centered around disciplinary fragmentation and specialization constitutes support to a medical rationality that confers centrality to the pathological process, to the mechanist view of the body, to reductionism, and gave rise to the organization



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of a model of assistance whose features, among other elements, are the rapid and non-critical incorporation of technology and the social division of health labor. The wear of this model has been pointed out for at least three decades, including, in Brazil, the movement of sanitary reform, and the government proposals to reorganize the offer of services through decentralization and territorialization strategies.

With reference to the complexity of the theme of collective health, its debate in Brazil seems to be reduced to a long quarrel which focuses on the issue of access to health services. The real historical difficulties in the supply of services and actions for health care are possible explanations, albeit insufficient, for the fact that other dimensions related to the process health-illness-care tend to occupy a peripheral or secondary position in the debate.

Educative mediation and information in health are understood, in that simplified conception, as dimensions which “cooperate with” or “facilitate” care, while access to them is understood as a constituting part of access to health, as a right. The answer is simple: it is only about producing or providing educative actions and information in health. Anyone who walks along the corridors of a health care center or ambulatory health care can attest to the amount of informative printed materials available in the form of signs and leaflets. In that context, it is not necessary to ask questions about who should produce and spread the information, and who should have access to it, that is, who *holds* and who *needs* information.

Another current of debate about health as a right seeks to incorporate popular concepts and projects for care produced inside the numerous cultural matrices which exist in the country. Originating from several popular struggles organized to fight back threats to freedom and civil rights, local experiences targeting the issue of health started making progress in their formulations, beyond the issue of access to services, in the perspective that public policies should be in conformity with the spectrum of needs and determiners, not only biological, of health problems. It is in this context that themes such as the production of knowledge, cultural diversity, popular participation, strengthening of individual and collective subjects, social networks and dialogical education emerge. Some subject fields which are part of the collective health, especially those of human and social sciences, contributed to expanding the comprehension of terms on which these themes are based, as well as to set in motion an increasing scientific production of an interdisciplinary nature.

The book “Information, Health and Social Networks: dialogs of knowledge in the Maré communities” consolidates a consistent and fruitful path of reflection and study about collective health, the production of knowledge and the right to popular health and education by its organizers Regina Maria Marteleto and Eduardo Navarro Stotz. In a fortunate convergence of trajectories and academic theory perspectives, a set of research and community interventions, focusing on the health

of groups and people, was conducted in the territory of the many communities which are a part of the Maré Complex, in suburban Leopoldina, Rio de Janeiro, a space marked by struggles and popular resistance.

From the concreteness of this plural space and the specific situations emerge the key questions, which set in motion people, ideas and ways of conducting the research. The book is organized in three parts, which aim to address, respectively, questions related to theoretical-conceptual, methodological and concrete action dimensions. In general, each chapter starts with the more general theoretical bases of research or reports of experiences, leaning above all on the approaches of information anthropology and popular education and health.

Both theoretical perspectives have not been defined as theoretical or disciplinary fields. Under the name of popular education and health are gathered critical pedagogical concepts, movements of resistance and collective struggle around health themes, articulation experiences between health subjects and the expressions of popular art and culture. Especially after the decade of 1990, and with the undeniable facilitation of virtual communication, the perspective of popular education and health becomes more visible and active in the form of a network, constructed between people, aggregating an increasing diversity of views whose common denominator is acknowledgement and respect for the autonomy of several subjects in producing knowledge, and the commitment with popular struggles. Much more action than academic reflection, the perspective of popular education and health finds in Paulo Freire’s pedagogy some guiding presuppositions, amongst which we highlight the concepts of dialogical education, problematization of reality, critical conscience and the new-viable. With regard to research based on that perspective, there is a clear option for participatory and/or interpretive methodologies, leaning on the concept which authors from the field of qualitative research call revisited critical theory.

Information anthropology has a trajectory in which theoretical reflection is more evident and it stands as a rupture with the thinking of information disconnected from the idea of construction of social knowledge. The main criticism is targeted at the single direction of the processes of production and spread of information and scientific knowledge, which expresses the non-acknowledgement of the “other” - the individual or collective subject.

The space where views converge, in this bibliographical production, is that of practices - of research, of intervention. And, from the key-concepts point of view, the idea that, through dialog, men and women constitute themselves and constitute the world: the shared construction of knowledge.

The first chapter of Part I brings as a thematic design the concept of social networks, discussed by Eduardo Navarro Stotz from the idea of “concept of junction”, linked to the field of health. The social networks are discussed not from the point of view of their definition only, but especially as ways of collective organization,

which can both legitimize and confront the unfair social order imposed by the current accumulation models. It goes back to a debate that is still relevant in the area of health: the counterpoint between devices and practices of representative and participatory democracy, not as mutually excluding, but pointing to the collaborative networks as spaces to expand participation and to establish strengthening representativity processes.

In the second chapter, Regina Maria Marteleto discusses the production of scientific knowledge and its appropriation by society, positioning herself in favor of the understanding of science as a socially determined practice. In the debate on possible bridges between knowledge produced by science and common sense, a central position is given to the idea of science as practical, institutive, as opposed to the instituted science. In that sense, the author presents an important issue for the field of collective health, which is making explicit from discussion the relationship between scientific knowledge and common sense. Here too popular education and health present themselves as an integrative perspective, from the understanding, in Paulo Freire, that knowledge takes place in dialog and life's movement, allowing constant interpretation and re-interpretation of the world. Embracing that understanding, it is possible to agree with Edgar Morin when he states that science is just the tip of a non-science *iceberg*.

In the second part, the methodological paths are presented from a few theoretical-methodological approaches: in chapter 3, the authors discuss, from the gender perspective, originated from feminist studies, research-action as an option which allows the clarification of the gender condition and its political, ideological and cultural implications. From the narratives of men and women who live in the Maré slums, the feminine and masculine identities are deconstructed and re-signified, in daily life, as possibilities to establish new ways of female-being and male-being, highlighting the problematizing potential of research-action. Leaning on the idea of pseudo-concreteness, arising from the dialectics of the concrete in Karel Kosik, the text confers greater theoretical consistency to the debate about research-action, a methodology which has been little valued in the sphere of health studies.

Chapter 4 presents a methodology which aims to set in motion the concept of shared construction of knowledge - the elaboration of the Dengue Almanac, understood as the written production which organizes diverse knowledge, non-hierarchical, from several social actors. The idea of a "popular encyclopedia" is discussed, its axis being the relationship between the knowledge of common sense and scientific information. In addition to presenting a methodological proposal which progresses in the construction of a product, a systematization that expresses dialog between scientific and popular perspectives, the chapter graces us with a history on the role of almanacs as a means to circulate knowledge, that levels wisdoms, both from the symbolic and the literal points of view, through the social and geographical reach it has

obtained during the centuries. In the area of health, the construction process of a thematic almanac, such that of dengue, constitutes a qualitative research process of a hermeneutic basis, through the centrality of oral narratives, and, at the same time, participatory, through the inclusion of several subjects, reporting, discussing and reflecting on the proposed theme, and on how it affects their lives - which, inevitably, leads them to think about the possible concrete responses to the question.

The last text of that part (chapter 5) addresses the systematization of social practices as methodology and political action that also operates as mediation between the logic of construction of wisdoms of scientific practice and common sense. Here, the product/process, named third knowledge, is not a hybrid or a juxtaposition of concepts from different ways of producing knowledge, but a concept whose constitution process is close to what Boaventura dos Santos names a second epistemological rupture - the confrontation of hyper-scientization and the fragmentation of wisdom through the clarification of emancipatory meanings and practices. The systematization of social practices, a methodology well known in Latin America under the same of systematization of experiences, conducted by Oscar Jara, proposes, through the identification and discussion of steps followed in a collective experience, the clarification of intentions, peculiarities and interests, with a dialog between action and its collectively theorized representation. It presents, therefore, a methodology that stands as an attempt to grasp the moving reality, focusing on collective projects which aim at the objective and subjective production of subjects, but whose products must necessarily return and feed back the path of collective construction.

The third and last part of the book is dedicated to some reports of socio-cultural interventions in which are evident the relationships between the world of theoretical-conceptual representations and the world of practices and daily life, corrupting the role of information and knowledge. In chapter 6, community associativism as a social network is examined from the local experience of Maré communities. The report describes the process of structuring residents' associations as a space for representation and urban struggle for better living conditions and access to collective equipment, and the transition in these groups' organization, which began generating different configurations in the local population's relationship with the State. From the first urban struggles to the wear of the model of representative associativism, and finally to the structuring of Non-Governmental Organizations, the report clarifies the ability for *poiesis* and regulation of popular collective forms of organization starting from their own demands, and only from the emptiness of the State's presence through social and health policies. In the context of the debate proposed by the book about the production of wisdoms and the relationship between academia and population, the following fact becomes relevant: that the experience which supports this report took place through the actions of an NGO organized by leaderships and residents who have gained, through university education, a certain mastery of academic and

institutional codes, the CEASM. In the process of reflecting on the education processes themselves, they focus on the issue of access to and quality of public education in their collective action, transferring to the public sphere the individual conquests.

The following chapter returns to an experience of dialog and collaborative action between the academic sector and people and leaderships from one of the Maré communities, included in ELOS - Center for Local Studies on Health, linked to the Sergio Arouca National School of Public Health of Fiocruz. In an growing process, but which is still unusual in the academic world, some research and community intervention initiatives in health converge, giving rise to a project for the civil monitoring of the local health situation, the Health Observatory, whose main channel for communication and transmission of information was an Internet page - and, therefore, the chapter makes reference to the windows to knowledge. The report clarifies a set of activities, proposals, mediations, difficulties and change, including the consensual understanding by the participants with reference to the proposal's epistemological place - what is to observe, and who observes what, after all? The dialog between research and intervention gave rise to several studies and conceptual progress, and increased the group's maturity in terms of finding in the term "interface" the most appropriate expression to the intentions of dialog and shared construction of wisdoms in health. With reference to the limits of virtual communication, and the apparent volatility of projects, which come to an end after sources of funding and management forms are terminated, one concludes that this temporary feature can be seen as a consequence of flexibility and constant reinvention of forms of collective organization and of the local social networks, and that nothing is lost in the transition processes to other initiatives.

The experience of developing local social networks is then presented from the perspective of CEASM's community activism, which then operates through a "network of networks" that is extremely versatile and intensify concrete processes of collective strengthening. The starting point is the neighborhood, Maré - the territory and the people, the needs, the groups, the dynamics of life. The projects clarify the critical intention to make participants think, taking as a starting point the place, the city, the state, the country in their structural bases and different situations. Like a great circle of Freirian culture, Maré directs its look to itself and the globalized world, using as communication and knowledge production channels the several informal and institutional networks organized by CEASM.

Finally, the book presents a chapter in which the report travels through the space of inter-subjective production of health issues, mediated by the gender dimensions. The intervention presented refers to a group of women, a circle of talks about each of their lives, a space for listening and talking, for collectively re-signifying individual suffering, of welcoming and comforting. In a world in which suffering has no space for expression and recognition, the women's narrative is not only that of victimization, and makes it possible to configure a mosaic of wisdoms, in the sense that sharing experiences and the mutual feeling of compassion evoke issues and perplexities that, at the same time, signal the possibility of confrontation, constructed and realized right there, the moment they share. A text of a more intimist nature, that reminds us that the tough struggles the popular classes need to face also take place in the micro-spaces of daily life and inter-subjective relationships.

From these perspectives, the organizer's option is to make a contribution to construct a public sphere from local experiences. There is, thus, the intention to offer for wide debate the assumptions, analyses and results obtained, defining the position of the researcher as the intellectual who is involved, like Bourdieu tells us, someone who is not to be confused with the militant, but who has surpassed or re-signified, in his practice, the traditional academic ways of producing knowledge. This is not about proposing a new process or a different educational technology, but acknowledging, in current social mediations, the processes in which the wisdoms arise, circulate, are named, and appropriated in life; no longer in order to "know more", but to "become wise" and be able to confront, collectively, oppression, inequity, and social injustice.

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