

Communication, creative economy and local development: the experience of the “Núcleo de Comunicação Bombando Cidadania”

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Abstract

This study analyzes the appropriations of the creative economy by the communicators from *Núcleo de Comunicação Bombando Cidadania*, in Bomba do Hemeterio, Recife, Pernambuco. This research is based on the theoretical and methodological perspective of the communication for development and on the approaches of the latin-american cultural studies about the popular cultures and cultural appropriations. As methodological tool, we use the semi-structured interview to comprehend the symbolic aspects of this appropriation. The bibliographic and documentary researches are combined to build up the theoretical scope of creative economy and local development. In this process we can highlight the use of the reports from Unesco, the documents of Creative Economy Secretary of the Culture Ministry of Brazil and the reports from *Bombando Cidadania* program. The research concludes that the appropriation of the creative economy contributes to the reduction of inequalities in the symbolic field, but there are serious material challenges to the construction of local development in the popular contexts.

Keywords: Communication. Creative economy. Popular cultures. Local development.

Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to report the results of the research conducted to analyze the appropriation of the creative economy by communicators of the *Núcleo de Comunicação*¹ *Bombando Cidadania*, in Bomba do Hemetério, district of Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil. Specifically, it seeks to analyze how these young and adult people, from a popular context, involved in a private local development program, appropriate up the proposals of the creative economy with the mediation of the Program. Furthermore, it seeks to analyze how it is linked to the construction of the local development in the community.

The *Núcleo de Comunicação Bombando Cidadania* is a community media group from Bomba do Hemetério, local known in Brazil for its artistic vocation. The group emerged from the work of the “Communication” axis of the Bombando Cidadania Program, which aims to build up the local development of Bomba do Hemetério and surrounding areas. The program is an initiative of the Walmart Institute (IWM), social institution maintained by Wal-Mart group in Brazil, and it has the technical advisory of the Instituto de Assessoria para o Desenvolvimento Humano (IADH) and support of companies, social organizations and governments (ZAPATA et al., 2011).

The Program has as its essential pillar the creative economy, which comprises the economic sector whose production requires essential application of creativity and whose value is defined by the symbolic and immaterial content (COHEN; DENATALE; Markusen et al., 2008; UNESCO, 2008). The purpose of the Program of building up a development project based on this vector is justified in the strong artistic vocation of the neighborhood and in the international movement around the creative economy.

¹ “Núcleo de comunicação” means communication hub in Brazilian portuguese.

Creative Economy

The creative economy is a field of study still in consolidation, and despite the critics about the conceptual gaps and about the risks of converting symbolic goods in commodities/merchandise (BUSTAMANTE, 2013), there are numerous optimistic publications about it around the world. The UNESCO seems to have special interest in this theme and already devoted three different reports about it (UNESCO, 2008; 2010; 2013). The last of these reports focuses on recommendations for the construction of local development from the creative industries, which include, according to Costa and Souza-Santos (2011), cultural heritage; arts; media; and also “design (interior, graphic, fashion); new media (architecture, culture and entertainment, research and development); and creative and related services” (COSTA; SOUZA SANTOS, 2011, p.4).

These sectors represent 7% of global GDP (BRAZIL, 2011), about 3% of total employment and 3.3% of the GDP of the European Union (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2014). In Brazil, the creative industries represent 2.5% of GDP, according to FIRJAN (2012). To grasp this trend and turn it into public policy, was created in Brazil, through Decree 7743 of June 2012, the Secretariat of Creative Economy (SEC) within the Ministry of Culture (MinC). And even before the promulgation of the decree, was released the Plan of the Secretariat of Creative Economy 2011-2014 (BRAZIL, 2011) as a national framework for actions in this field.

The Plan contains a critical review of the perspective of creative economy to be adopted in the country, categorizing the creative sectors and defining as core values “social inclusion, sustainable innovation and the appreciation of the Brazilian cultural diversity” (BRAZIL, 2011 p.21). The text also points out as guidelines of the mission of the Secretariat the “implementation and monitoring of public policies for local and regional development” (BRAZIL, 2011, p.39).

The choice of the Secretariat in highlighting the construction of local development in their actions is guided by the UNESCO

arguments to defend the creative economy as a development vector. These arguments can be summarized in four aspects: a) potential misses claudication poverty and reducing inequalities; b) promotion of sustainable development; c) social inclusion of youth and d) access to new information and communication technologies (UNESCO, 2008).

With this background, the Bombando Cidadania started its activities in 2008 after a selection of communities, following the criteria of: socioeconomic contingencies; entrepreneurship; cultural mobilization; and commercial interests of the Wal-Mart group (ZAPATA et al., 2011). The Program was officially closed in the last months of 2013, after five years working of the following axis: Work and Income; Health and Environment; Education; Youth; Arts and Culture; and, since 2010, Communication.

The *Núcleo* is composed of communicators that work on other creative groups and projects of the Bombando Cidadania program. The main good of the group is the "Seu Hemetério radio", community radio that transmits the programs through loud speakers on electricity posts since October 12, 2011. For the radio, the group defined as mission: "to promote and accomplish the Human Right to Communication, in order to strengthen local sustainable development of Bomba do Hemetério and surroundings" (ZAPATA et al., 2011).

The main role of the *Núcleo de Comunicação* has become to concentrate and spread information about the Program and about the creative economy in the district. This function justifies its choice as the target of this research. As the group responsible for spreading the proposals of the Program, it is necessary to question how they appropriate the logic of the creative economy in the perspective of the communication for development.

The work of the *Núcleo de Comunicação* focuses on the 8,742 inhabitants of Bomba do Hemetério (RECIFE, 2013) and on the population of the neighborhoods. The biggest potential of this community is the cultural diversity, nationally recognized. The local population drives diverse artistic expressions and has the technical skills to keep it running. One can easily find people

working as roadies, scene illuminators and sound technicians (ZAPATA et al., 2011).

However, despite the symbolic wealth, there are a lot of material restrictions, typical from the popular contexts, just like absence of infrastructure services and low average income. As a “creative hub”, Bomba do Hemetério is seen as organized, but in need of policies focused in the creative sector and of support from the private sector (LIMA, 2012). In addition, the community does not monetize its vocation, maintaining as main economic activity informal trade (AGENDA 21 BOMBA DO HEMETÉRIO, 2011).

As a conceptual bet and an area still in consolidation in science, the creative economy is an important research challenge. This study is an answer to the need of going deep in the analysis of empirical cases of creative economy in the perspective of the construction of the local development. This work contributes to assess, in the field, if that bet has been viable or if, in the words of former Minister of Culture Gilberto Gil, has been another way to “reset the organizational models of exclusion in the name of knowledge and its access” (GIL; FERREIRA, 2013, p.26).

Because of this, this research is interested in the analysis of the experience of a popular culture, that is defined by its “contingencies” – that is, the unevenness and inequality in access to tangible and intangible assets (TAUK SANTOS; NASCIMENTO, 2006). And we question: how communicators of *Núcleo de Comunicação Bombando Cidadania* appropriate up the creative economy? And how are they articulated for the construction of local development in the community?

Local development

Local development comprises an outlook that goes beyond conventional development indicators, summarized by Eli da Veiga (2005) as: long and healthy life; education / training; access to resources needed for a decent life; and participation in community life. The term “local”, in this concept, refers to the social and territorial target of a systemic action based on identity (FRANCO, 1998), not limited to geopolitical boundaries.

Thus, local development includes the "economic, social, cultural, political and institutional development; territorial organization; and environmental management" (FRANCO, 1998, p.13) and has the effect of improving the quality of life in local. In other words, it can improve the economy and also "education, health and food security and nutrition, mobility, natural environment, social environment, public safety, government and politics in general, culture, leisure and idleness" (FRANCO, 1998, p.9).

This approach for development assimilates sustainability not only as a synonym for "environmentally rational", but as proposition "based on the harmonization of social, environmental and economic goals" (VEIGA, 2005, p.171). Moreover, it has as basic principle the local empowerment, which means "popular active participation, with power and decision control in social processes (public policies related to education, health, transportation, gender, income generation)" (PERUZZO, 2006, p.10).

Following this outlook, this study is interested in knowing the relation between the appropriations of the creative economy by the communicators of the *Núcleo de Comunicação Bombando Cidadania* and the construction of development in Bomba do Hemetério.

The research process

This case study is based on the perspective of communication for development and on the insights of the Latin American cultural studies about popular cultures and appropriation. Such approaches are relevant to this work insofar as these consider the "relations that structure and precede the links that are established with life and not only with the *media*" (SOUSA, 2006, p.23-24). Such concepts allow us to "discover the gaps, distances and reworking that occur between production and appropriation in communication processes" (CANCLINI, 1987, p.8).

In the perspective of cultural studies, as Williams (1979, p.116) said, "the reality of the cultural process should therefore always include the efforts and contributions of those who are

in one way or another, outside, or on the banks of the terms of the specific hegemony”. In this direction, points Canclini, the popular is no longer seen as mere replicator of the hegemony and is not conceivable as uniform, but as plural (CANCLINI, 1989). Therefore, this paper seeks to understand the possible relation between creative economy and local development analyzing the case of the *Núcleo de Comunicação*. This way, it aims “to understand the social uses of the communication and the production of meaning in general and in detail” (GÓMEZ, 2002, p.20), in this specific scenario.

As methodological tool, we use bibliographic and documentary research for data collection on the subject and on the local of the experience. Are fundamental to this stage the following documents: the Plan of the Secretariat of Creative Economy 2011-2014 (BRAZIL, 2011); the Creative Economy Report of UNESCO (2008; 2010; 2013); The creative economy in Pernambuco: A Study of Six Creative Industries in the Recife Metropolitan Area and Policy Recommendations (TANKHA, 2012); the Mapping of the creative industries (FIRJAN, 2012); the book *A experiência de desenvolvimento local na Bomba do Hemetério: um olhar sobre a concepção pedagógica* (ZAPATA et al, 2011.), that contains data and the logical framework of the program; and reports from Walmart Institute.

Moreover, with the implementation of the semi-structured interviews, we analyze symbolic issues related to the appropriation of the creative economy mediated by Bombando Cidadania program, such as beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations of the people. For this analysis, were constructed the following categories, raised from the theoretical basis of communication for development and of creative economy: poverty eradication and income generation; reducing inequality; promoting sustainable development; social inclusion of youth; access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); popular participation; social organization; strengthening local identity; local-global articulation; education; and quality of life.

For the interviews, four communicators were selected according to the following criteria: involvement with different tasks in the group; involvement with other activities of the Program; participation in the group for at least three years, i.e. since the inauguration of Seu Hemetério radio; and residence in Bomba do Hemetério on neighborhood areas. The minimum age set for the respondents was 18 years old, since the analysis spans categories involving work and income. Within this selected group, two persons are 19 years old; one is 36 years old; and another is 40 years old.

The proposals of the Bombando Cidadania Program

The Bombando Cidadania program was initiated in July 2008 with an initial budget of R\$ 5 million (ZAPATA et al., 2011). In the process, the budget was upgraded because of the support of its partners, just like: Sebrae, Instituto Aliança, Aliança Empreendedora, Auçuba, Fundação Gilberto Freyre, Instituto Qualidade no Ensino, Centro Pernambucano de Design, Habitat Brasil, IFPE, Prefecture of Recife, Pernambuco State Government and Ministry of Tourism of Brazil.

According to IADH data, the purpose of the Walmart Institute with the program was:

to promote integrated and sustainable local development of the territory, through actions which contribute to increasing income, improve the quality of basic services, strengthen local cultural events, mobilization, environmental sustainability, community organization and communication (ZAPATA et al., 2011, p.31).

To manage the program, IADH built a Logical Framework Analysis (LFA). In this LFA are described 27 big activities, from which 14 relate to the creative economy, denoting it as the central focus theme in Bombando Cidadania. To ensure the longevity of the goals described in LFA, the program took some priority actions, as: to train the team of a local NGO named Universidart to maintain the cycle of creative projects in the community; to

create a visual identity for the Bomba do Hemetério creative hub; to develop conceptual products for the local cultural groups; to create the Gastronomic Festival Delícias da Comunidade; to make the district a municipal official hub for the Carnival and St. John celebrations; to bring regulation for garbage collection in the district; and to activate a community-based tourism route.

However, there are three big goals that weren't achieved: the wide inclusion of the youth in the program; the creation of a blog for Bomba do Hemetério creative hub; and the construction of the Cultural Centre Seu Hemetério, the place that would be designed to host the heritage of the program.

Bomba do Hemetério and the 'Núcleo de Comunicação'

The Bomba do Hemetério district is a typical popular context scenario situated on the North Zone of Recife. The community has a strong artistic and cultural vocation, representing 30% of the carnival groups of the city (ZAPATA et al., 2011). The district hosts more than 60 different cultural groups (INSTITUTO WALMART, 2012) and was mapped as one of the three creative hubs of Recife (LIMA, 2012). The youth is the most part of the population: half of the inhabitants are under 30 (INSTITUTE WALMART, 2012).

The name Bomba do Hemetério (that means Pump of Hemetério) came from a story of solidarity. It refers to the past, when an old resident of the neighborhood named Mr. Hemetério shared the water of his water pump to the people. So, was common going to the "Pump of Hemetério" to collect water.

The *Núcleo de Comunicação Bombando Cidadania* is composed of communicators between 12 and 62 years. The group had 23 members, but now there are only nine maintaining regular contact with the activities. Twelve different programs were designed to be played on the Seu Hemetério Radio, but only nine got on air at least once. The most part of the programs goes on air on Saturday, and there are only two programs being played in business days. The programming grid was never totally filled.

All the communicators interviewed for this research have technical or higher education. Two of them have a background in Radio and TV Production; and another have background in Audio and Events Production. In all cases, the contact with the *Núcleo de Comunicação Bombando Cidadania* has influenced the professional choices.

The common wish of the group is the web transmission of the radio. They wrote and sent a proposal to the Walmart Institute, but it was not possible because of the legal irregularity of the space that hosts the activities of the Bombando Cidadania program and because of the technical unavailability of broadband connections for the place at that time.

The appropriation of the creative economy

The analysis of the appropriations of the creative economy by the communicators and the possible relation of this process with the local development is presented, into topics, following the category structure built during the search and already presented in this text.

Strengthening the local identity

The symbiotic relationship of the communicators with the community is the boldest transformation point. For being a popular context, is remarkable in the speech of the respondents the shame they had of the place where they live. The overcoming of the low self-esteem and of the low esteem for the neighborhood is a common point to the communicators interviewed, and it is one of the main changes brought by the Bombando Cidadania program. This can be illustrated in the speech of Respondent 2:

Today people are proud to live in Bomba do Hemetério. Before, we lied about where we were living, saying we were living in Arruda or in Água Fria... But nowadays, if you go anywhere in the north or in the south of the city, if you talk about Bomba do Hemetério, the people know the district. And the people have a positive outlook about our community, not a negative outlook. The Bombando Cidadania program helped a lot on this².

2 Interview conducted by the researcher in October, 2014.

This finding is consistent with the speech of Karina Zapata, consultant responsible for the actions of creative economy of Bombando Cidadania program, when she says that the “cornerstone” of the program is to build up “self-esteem, trusting, relationships, identity and commitment”³. And it is aligned with the LFA, which comprises as activities of the program “promotion of integration of generations and of social and historical resignification” (ZAPATA et al., 2011).

The elevation of the self-esteem is directly related to the priority that the program gave to the local cultural groups, strengthening their creative skills. The coaching process for these groups, and the development of projects with them and for them, renewed the artistic life in the district and made it visible to the public.

The Respondent 3 points out “now the residents themselves can see the culture they have, because they did not know it some time ago”. The Respondent 2 says the same: “the Bombando Cidadania has contributed [...] even to the empowerment of the groups, to make them understand that they are capable”. And the Respondent 2 completes: “it was important to me to create an identity and respect for the community where I live”.

This strengthening of the self-esteem is fundamental because without it is impossible to increase the organizational capacity of a local, bring significant improvements to the quality of life and generate empowerment (PERUZZO, 2006). The community needs to know and recognize their own potential, valuing it, to can overcome inequalities and construct the local development.

Access to ICTs

One of the remarkable attributes of the *Núcleo de Comunicação* is the intense use of social media. The Respondent 4 says “the person wakes up and can do anything in the day, but must to check the email, Facebook”⁴. All of them have computer and mobile phone, and they use these devices to surf the Internet.

³ Interview conducted by the researcher in October, 2014.

⁴ Interview conducted by the researcher in October, 2014.

As highlighted by the Respondent 2: “The computer is my daily work tool [...] and when I’m away from home, I access my email and social networks via cell phone”.

Regarding the consumption of other media, radio appears as the preferred vehicle, especially for access to information; the TV is used by the young respondents, especially for entertainment; only two of them have the habit of reading newspapers, doing it occasionally; they consume no magazines; and reading books has low rate between them, turning around “two a year”, as the Respondent 1 says⁵.

All of them use Facebook and some of them use WhatsApp and Instagram too. They do personal use of these platforms in the most of time. However, they do professional use of these platforms too. The *Núcleo* has influenced this way of using social media and we can see a clear example of this professional use in the speech of the Respondent 2 about the activities of the group in social media “we have a fan page and a group on Facebook and WhatsApp, [...] and we have e-mail too”. This finding is consistent with the notes of UNESCO (2008) that say the creative economy is a good way to promote access to ICTs.

Social organization

Access to ICTs is an important tool for social organization of the *Núcleo* because it saves time and distances and makes the communication and the relationship of the communicators easier. This function, that is a fundamental condition for the construction of local development (FRANCO, 1998), is expressed in the speech of Respondent 2: “we created this WhatsApp group to gather everyone in this work of art⁶. We communicate to keep this dream live”.

However, the use of these media has failed to connect the group to the external contexts. We can see in the group a tendency to restrict the use of virtual spaces to interpersonal relationships, what can be proved comparing the high number of

⁵ Interview conducted by the researcher in October, 2014.

⁶ Brazilian portuguese expression that means “a big work made step-by-step with persistence”.

publications in the groups (restricted to members) with the low number of posts of the Facebook Fan Page and Twitter profile, that are focused on the external public.

Local-global links

The local-global connection is a crucial step for the construction of local development (FRANCO, 1998). In this point, despite the incipient use of social media to connect with external contexts, the *Núcleo* has created partnerships with public and private institutions, which supported the *Núcleo*'s works and projects. There are as examples of these partnerships the conquest of the title of official Carnival and St. John hub; and the community based tourism route, which has already received visitors from Germany, England, United States and Brazil.

It also contributed to change the way the community is represented in media. Before, the community was reported as “one more violent slum”, but now the news shows the district as creative hub. The work of the program and of the press officers from the program's sponsors has helped on this.

Popular participation

Popular participation is a “necessary condition, but not sufficient, for successful local development projects” (FRANCO, 1998, p.12). In the case of *Núcleo*, the popular participation and the articulations with the public and private sectors were responsible to make possible a lot a projects currently managed by the community. One of these projects is the Bombarte – Feira de Cultura, Artes e Gastronomia da Bomba do Hemetério (a public fair, monthly organized), which has been coordinated by one of the communicators of the *Núcleo*. In addition, some institutions involved in the program has contracted people from the community to work in their events and to work as technical assistants in their projects. For example, some of the communicators interviewed talked about their jobs in projects promoted by IADH and by the State Government of Pernambuco.

These findings point to the empowerment of the community, since this was legitimated as social actor able to negotiate with governments and companies. There two evidences of this empowerment that can be highlighted: the conquest of the title of official Carnival and St. John hub, already quoted in this text; and the recently approved project named “Bomba Mais Verde”, that aims create wooded sites and organize the local landscape.

Social inclusion of youth

The potential of social inclusion of the youth is highlighted by UNESCO (2008) as a strategic quality of the creative economy. However, in the case of Bombando Cidadania, there is only a little participation of the youth, category that comprises people between 15 and 29 years old (CASTRO; AQUINO; ANDRADE, 2009). The case of Bombando Cidadania contradicts the suggestion of UNESCO, since this youth is the majority of local people, but the major part of the participants of the program are adults.

One of the respondents criticizes this fact: “I think it was a lack of the program, there was only few ideas to bring to the program more young people from Bomba do Hemetério”.

Education

The Respondent 3 says that the *Núcleo* “was where I knew better my profession, what I had to do, what I like, which is Journalism” And Respondent 4, that wants to study Advertising, emphasizes that chose this course in Faculty “because of the experiences with the *Núcleo*”.

The same appears in the speech of other respondents. The Respondent 2, for example, wants to “invest in my intellectual part, concluding a master’s degree outside of Brazil”. The educational process of the *Núcleo*, that has offered various courses to the people in the group, has stimulated them to keep studying.

The encouragement of the schooling is premise of local development (FRANCO, 1998) and potential advantage of the creative economy, according to UNESCO (2008). However, only these factors cannot reduce the asymmetry in the access to material and symbolic goods in the community.

Eradication of poverty and income generation

In the case of Bomba do Hemetério, the main creative activity is what FIRJAN (2012) has characterized as “cultural expressions” – which include crafts, dance, music and other popular expressions – activities that often have lower pay.

All respondents have generated income with the creative activities since they joined the program. However, the communicators struggle with three big challenges to the income generation via creative economy. The first is the belief that their work is not directly a creative work. The Interviewed 1, for example, responds that *Núcleo* makes a creative work only in the “dissemination of the local craft and cultural products”.

The second is the perception of the respondents that the work done by the *Núcleo* is a volunteer activity. This belief creates barriers to the income generation in the group. Is curious that even if communicators deal professionally with creative economy outside the group, it is common to hear that “what we do in the *Núcleo* is a volunteer work. I never did it to earn profit”.

The third challenge is the informality, common feature of popular culture. The group wishes to access public notices, but “the bureaucracy is a barrier”.

Reducing inequalities

The Program has created new spaces for popular participation and local-global links, helping to reduce inequalities in the symbolic field. This finding comprises a deep contribution to the construction of the local development (FRANCO, 1998; JARA, 2001).

As indicator of this reduction, we can highlight the elevation of self-esteem and the ability of social organization and popular participation. Nowadays, the people from the community occupy deliberative spaces and can construct partnerships with the public and private sectors. However, the instability of the creative market imposes restrictions on popular culture. This way, the creative activities tend to be only an “extra income”, as said by the Respondent 1.

Sustainable development / sustainability

UNESCO (2008) says that the sustainability is strength of the creative economy. Moreover, sustainability is one of the pillars of local development (JARA, 2001; FRANCO, 1998). However, this research showed barriers to the development of the sector in the popular cultures. Sustainability comprises the strengthening of the social, economic and environmental objectives (VEIGA, 2005), but because of the volatile market and of the dependency of public tenders, the creative economy brings an imposition of an entrepreneurial profile that the popular contexts are often not prepared to assume.

In addition, the program must face as challenge the non-construction of the Cultural Centre Your Hemetério and the absence of new members coming to the group.

Quality of life

All the respondents admit improvement in quality of life after the contact with the program. This is remarkable in the speech of Respondent 3, that says: “today I know myself, I know who I am and what I want in my personal and professional life. The *Núcleo* showed me this”. And the Respondent 2 says that the experience “changed my life”.

In addition, the gains of infrastructure for events are important indicators of the possibility of long and healthy life on the district. Other indicators can be highlighted, just like: creation of the Gastronomy Festival *Delícias da Comunidade*; the title of official hub for Carnival and St. John; regularization of trash collection; and the community based tourism route.

Conclusion

The results of this research point to a possible relationship between the appropriations of the creative economy and the construction of the local development. As empirical experience in a popular culture, the Bombando Cidadania Program shows us the development gains of creative activities especially in strengthening

the identity and social representation, in social participation and in local empowerment. However, this experience exposes the challenges of building an institutional communication action with sufficient power to generate income, especially because of the volatility of the creative market, which maintain the inequalities in the access of the popular contexts to material goods.

The experience of Bombando Cidadania offers an important reflection about the need of participation of the youth. Despite of the texts that highlight the creative economy as attractive and inclusive for this age group, the experience of the Bombando Cidadania has an incipient participation of the youth. The need to professionalize the use of ICTs for local-global links, and the access to these technologies are challenges that still must to be overcome. In addition, the nature of creative sectors demands an uncommon entrepreneurial attitude to the popular cultures, what points to the need for specific and systematic training to overcome this obstacle.

All the findings of this research point to the need of new researches to analyze other empirical experiences of appropriations of the creative economy in popular contexts, field still little explored by science. Only by this way will be possible establishing a framework that allows us to reflect on the feasibility of the construction of the local development via creative economy in such contexts.

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