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The experience of creating and developing a Visual Media Lab to promote digital literacy in social sciences courses in São Paulo (BR) and Lisbon (PT)

A experiência da criação e desenvolvimento de um Laboratório de Audiovisual para promover a literacia digital em cursos de ciências sociais em São Paulo (BR) e Lisboa (PT)ⁱ

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Abstract

The audiovisual language, which became popular with the emergence of new technologies, becomes increasingly common in everyday life and impacts the most diverse dimensions of social life. As Manuel Castells (2000) identified since the turn of the millennium, we are experiencing an intense social transformation supported by the emergence of new technologies. The popularization and intensification of computers and mobile phones have made accessible some contents previously restricted to mass communication media. As a direct result of this expanded use of digital technologies, the production and consumption of audiovisual content has become increasingly widespread and popularized. This material deals with the experience of planning, organizing, and executing audiovisual workshops for students, researchers, and teachers in the humanities. It also reports the preliminary results of this project initiated in 2016. On an overall balance of June 2021, more than 300 participants have completed the workshops and produced 65 short films.

Resumo

A linguagem audiovisual, que se popularizou com o surgimento das novas tecnologias, torna-se cada vez mais comum na vida cotidiana e gera impacto nas mais diversas dimensões da vida social. Tal como Manuel Castells (2000) identificou desde a virada do milênio, estamos vivenciando uma intensa transformação social sustentada pelo surgimento de novas tecnologias. A popularização e intensificação do uso de computadores e telefones móveis tornou acessíveis tipos de conteúdo antes bastante restritos os media de comunicação em massa. Como resultado direto desta expansão do uso das tecnologias digitais a produção e o consumo de conteúdo audiovisual tornam-se cada vez mais amplos e popularizados. Este material trata da experiência de planeamento, organização e execução de oficinas de audiovisual para estudantes, investigadores e professores das áreas de humanidades e reporta resultados preliminares deste projeto iniciado em 2016, que em balanço de junho de 2021, resulta na formação de mais de 300 participantes que concluíram 65 filmes de curta duração.

Keywords: Visual Media Lab; Digital Literacy; Sociology of Identities; Amateur Audiovisual Production

Palavras-chave: Laboratório de Media Visual; Letramento Digital; Sociologia das Identidades; Produção Audiovisual Amadora

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Research objective and methodology

The communication of this project in the thematic session on knowledge, science, and technology - digitalization, literacy, and inclusion (Table 5) of the XI Portuguese Congress of Sociology aimed to share preliminary results of an ongoing longitudinal project carried out in the context of the Ph.D. in Communication and Social Sciences by ICNOVA/NOVA and LAPS/USP. The project's general research objective is to identify how (and if) the identity expressions of the study's participants are registerable and possible to typify based on the amateur films they produce during the audiovisual workshops offered by NUPEPA/ImaRgens - ICNOVA/LAPS. The methodology employed includes applying surveys, participant observation, ethnographic recording of the practical activities, and analyzing the materials produced. The research has as specific objectives: (i) identify whether the materials (films) produced by the studied groups and individuals reflect their personal and social identities, (ii) observe how (and if) social, geographical, and cultural conditions (the social markers) are mobilized and registered in the produced audiovisual materials; iii) detail the process of formation of the working groups, their dynamics of action throughout the filmmaking process, and; iv) starting from the synthetic material (the film), through the analysis of the control group data, analyze in a reverse way how the materials produced to reflect the social and personal identities of the participants.

This is a study that blends elements of qualitative and quantitative analysis that does not intend to present in a deterministic way the cause and effect relationships of identity aspects involving the producer-product-producer relationship, but rather a study based on the analytical tradition of the social sciences that aims to observe, record and describe (ethnographically and sociologically) the elective affinity relationships (Weber, 1922) and experiences of the research participants to better understand the complexity of these relationships.

The main hypotheses of this research are that: i) the social identities of those who make amateur films in digital format can be recorded and identified in the amateur digital films they produce, as well as these materials can reveal remarkable aspects of their authors' social identities, and ii) there is a measurable, qualifiable and possible typifying correlation between the social and personal (identity-forming) life contexts and trajectories with the materials of their producers.

From the practical perspective, the project aims to train 600 to 800 participants over the research period who will produce approximately 120 short films (approximately one thousand minutes) with free themes in different genres and styles. These films are also a chronicle of the social context of the participants in this study.

The institutional history of the laboratory that supports the project

At the end of 2015, the Social Research Laboratory (LAPS) of the Department of Sociology (DS) of the University of São Paulo (USP) approved the proposal to create a Nucleus for Production and Research in Audiovisual (NUPEPA) with a double objective: 1) to expand the use of the language of audiovisual in the academic community focused on the themes of humanities, social sciences, and sociology; 2) to promote the use of the audiovisual resource as an object of study, a means of conducting researches and a way of returning the results to the scientific community and the wider public. In late 2019 the process of approaching and establishing a partnership between NUPEPA/ImaRgens and the Institute of Communication at Nova (ICNOVA) of the New University of Lisbon (NOVA) began. This process resulted in the formation of “NUPEPA/ImaRgens - ICNOVA/LAPS,” an initiative that gathers professors and doctoral students from both institutions and that has as its primary goal to act in the integration of teaching, researching, and extension activities related to audiovisual production in the academic environment and in society in general. The partnership is supported by international agreements established between the two institutions through their respective departments of international development and external relations, as well as by the commitment of experienced professors from both institutions who sign this project.

Grounds and contextualization

The primary motivation of this project has its origins in observations made during the practical activity of creating an audiovisual production and research center. The project initially aimed to build a collection of films of academic and social relevance in order to be exhibited to students of social science courses at the University of São Paulo and the community. At the time, this researcher, during his master’s course, proposed to

ImaRgens the creation of a Nucleus for Audiovisual Production and Research (NUPEPA) that has since been housed by LAPS as part of the ImaRgens initiative. NUPEPA provided students, researchers, and professors from USP and other Brazilian/Sao Paulo higher education institutions such as UNICAMP, UNIFESP, and UNESP the opportunity to materialize educational projects that aimed to integrate practice and research at the intersection of the humanities and audiovisual production. NUPEPA's first audiovisual workshop took place at the beginning of 2016 and was offered to a group of students from USP and UNICAMP and members of the artistic community who were carrying out projects and residencies in these institutions. This first edition of the workshop resulted in the production, by twelve participants, of two short films that are available on ImaRgens' website and YouTube channel and in the project's website: usp.br/imargens. Since this pilot project, the workshops have been held at least twice a year, and their audience has grown to an average of 30 participants and an average production of six films (per event). In this phase in São Paulo, six regular workshops and two special workshops were held, resulting in 40 films made by nearly 200 participants.

The exploratory analysis of the information collected and organized throughout the workshops allowed us to observe characteristics, patterns, and trends of social action that unequivocally contribute to the construction of scientific knowledge in the areas of communication and social sciences, especially when considered from sociological and anthropological perspectives. This initial practical experience allowed, therefore, that constitutive aspects of inherited community socialization and identitarian elective socialization could be measured and defined at the individual level (of the participants), at the group level (groups producing films in the workshops), and as a product (final films). Preliminary analyses carried out in this period indicated a strong tendency that what Claude Dubar (2005) describes as "identity forms" are observable in the materials produced by the experiment participants, in the interactions provided by the collective laboratory activities, as well as through personal information obtained in surveys and interviews conducted with them. Thus, although it is possible based on common sense to infer that identity aspects of individuals and groups affect the products resulting from their social actions, we did not find studies that prove, explain, and demonstrate how

this process of projection or crystallization of identity forms occurs in collective works in audiovisual format.

The process of projection of social identities in digital movies occurs in a two-way street in which, at the same time, in the process of subjectivization, participants share ideas, desires, and sensations among themselves in order to assimilate models, values, and worldviews coming from the environment in which they are inserted, and in another way, in the process of structuration, as defined by Giddens (1984), they begin to externalize - in this case, identity aspects - in the structures or social circles in which they are inserted (Giddens, 1984), for when they materialize the film, which is shared, visualized, and interpreted by several other people, they contribute to the updating of the imaginary that surrounds the social circles in which they are inserted, that is, to the structure. The current project starts from this context and initial idea and has as its academic objective to contribute to the formulation of a theory that aims to explain part or all of the process of crystallization or projection of individual identities in collective works, as is the case of short amateur digital films.

In a context in which we find ourselves in an environment experiencing accelerated social change and deep mediatization, which allows projects of international scale to be realized through the information and communication technologies available, that interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity present as paths to innovation and disruptive construction of knowledge, this project proposes, in addition to the essential work of knowledge production through traditional platforms for the publication of scientific articles in journals with high impact and excellent indexing, to serve the academic and extra-academic community by promoting literacy in audiovisual language, inclusion, and appreciation of social diversity, and by fostering the production of audiovisual content that is also a portrait of the authors' time.

Theoretical discussion and state of the art

This project contributes to scientific, academic, and social research at different levels. At the theoretical level, this study operates at the convergence of the disciplines of communication and social sciences in order to deepen and broaden the understanding of how students and researchers from humanities fields express their identities and

worldview through digital amateur films. At the practical level, this project provides the essential theoretical, technical, and practical support for the participants of the study (of the audiovisual workshops in the laboratory activities) to produce their own films for various purposes as observed in the already concluded experiments: either as a way to collect data or to present the results of an investigation, either to express themselves artistically or to intervene in society. At the methodological level, the research makes use of a set of combined techniques and methods that allow the collection, organization, and analysis of data obtained through forms filled out by participants, the recording of digital conversations, and the video recording of meetings and debates in fieldwork (when done in virtual format), through the research and testing materials generated during filmmaking, the films resulting from the workshop practices, as well as through observation and analysis of these materials by the workshop participants themselves (when analyzing their colleagues' materials) and by teachers and specialists in the fields involved who evaluate part of the films that circulated in festivals.

The methodological axis contributes to the development of studies in the area of communication and social sciences in an innovative way using combined methods that integrate classical approaches such as data collection through surveys, participative observation, interviews, narrative analysis of audiovisual material, and multiple correspondence analysis with contemporary techniques of quantitative data crossing through the use of Data Science tools such as R Software, SPSS, Python platform, and Tableau data visualizer along with qualitative analysis tools such as AtlasTi or MAXQDA and analysis and cataloging tools for text, video and sound corpus. The use of the quantitative and qualitative data crossover capability offers the possibility to navigate and understand the collected information universe in a multidimensional way, offering an analytics layer that is at once dynamic, interactive, and summarizable, detailable according to analytical needs while providing an excellent resource for data verification, hypothesis testing, and cause and effect relationship analysis, as well as providing a flexible and intuitive platform for generating research insights.

Theoretical context and state of the art: identities, social transformation and amateur audiovisual

Analysis of identities from the sociological perspective

From the start, the analysis of identity forms must be differentiated from the phenomenon of expressions of personal and social identities as perceived by common sense. It is necessary to separate the theoretical framework that supports the analysis and a typology of identities from what is socially and personally expressed as identity. There are pre-assumed concepts both on the side of those who do humanities science and those who consider that social and personal identities are fundamentally a terrain of pure subjectivity and self-determination that would make impossible any analysis of an organizational nature, of the search for patterns and ideal-types based on a certain degree of objectivity. However, it is one of the most important tasks of social scientists (as well as communication scholars) to perceive how behaviors, actions, and phenomena considered strictly personal and intimate reveal themselves as the result of social interactions, as postulated by one of the founders of the discipline of sociology, Émile Durkheim (2000), in his work on suicide, when he dismantled the psychologizing belief that such a summary act was the result exclusively of the most intimate and personal decision one could conceive. As taught by this founder of sociology, it is necessary to treat social facts objectively, as things, in order to separate, as much as possible, the social reality from subjective aspects that could generate distortions in perception and analysis - a task that, although it is aimed and tirelessly pursued by those who investigate society, is practically impossible to be wholly achieved - as argued by Max Weber (1999). By selecting a set of phenomena that are comparable to each other so that they can be analyzed and typified, the researcher has the chance to identify similarities and differences that help to better organize and understand the analyzed phenomenon, and thus to identify, and in some cases predict, with a certain precision (or with some imprecision - like someone looking at the glass half full or half empty), certain types of actions in the social context. This kind of knowledge can be treated in a contemplative and analytical way without necessarily aiming or prescribing social change, or it can be treated as a knowledge base to exactly promote, on the contrary, true social revolutions (material and consequently cultural) as already proposed by Karl Marx, together with Friedrich Engels, in the mid 19th century (Marx & Engels, 2005).

These same fathers of sociology have described, each in their own way, what has remained or changed in different social groups or societies. The search for the mechanisms that govern, regulate, or allow us to better understand the dynamics of social actions is, therefore, one of the main objectives of social scientists. Many times social phenomena are naturalized, making it difficult to observe and perceive them in an amalgam of actions, thoughts, and sensations that we are performing uninterruptedly in society, even when they are not observing us. The presentation of analytical models, be they about types of social actions (Weber, 1999), types of interactions between individuals (Goffman, 1988), or about identity forms (Dubar, 2005), should not be perceived or accused of being unique versions of the truth, but rather, they should be seen as provisional models that serve as support for analyses and understandings about society until new models or proposals emerge with more precise, complete, and elucidative explanations. In summary, this project aims to present a sociological explanation for a phenomenon that also belongs to the universe of communication studies and, for this reason, needs to be located in this intersection of knowledge areas.

Identities and communication

The subject of identities was also analyzed from the perspective of communication and cultural studies as proposed by Hall (1992) in a work that deals with the identity transformations in the period described by him, polemically, as “postmodernity,” while Jung and Hecht (2009) presented an analytical and multidimensional typology to address the issue of identities in the area of communication studies. These authors emphasize the importance of communication exchanges in the formation of identities and propose the use of different analytical layers such as the personal, the relational, the performative, and the communal, which are considered in the theoretical and analytical stage of the research. We highlight the work of Jung and Hecht (2009) for the propositional character of new typologies for the analysis of identities, which will be mobilized together with the analytical model proposed by Claude Dubar (2005) detailed below. Pierre Guiraud (1972) defines that it is the task of those who analyze society from the perspective of communication to understand how identities are expressed through the use of identity signs (such as badges, signs, flags, uniforms,

among others). This analytical approach of identities from the semiotic perspective is considered in particular in the step of analyzing the audiovisual materials generated in the laboratory activities together with the tools for analyzing audiovisual material (films) proposed by Sorlin (1977), Aumont (1993), and Nichols (2000).

José Alberto Correia (1991) proposes that the studies which analyze identities are not restricted to the observation of what remains unchanged and cohesive in the trajectories of groups and individuals. For the Portuguese author, it is not only what remains stable over time that characterizes the identity of people and groups, but also that which differentiates or delimits the differences between oneself and the other.

Sennett (2015) notes that the constancy of personal and social identity over time is seen as an essential aspect of the formation and maintenance of what society associates with the term “character.” According to the author, the inconstancy resulting from identity fragmentation and the rupture in social relations leads to what he called in his book of the same name “the corrosion of character,” a dynamic that can be related to what Dubar (2005) and Correia (1991) call the “crisis of identities” (SENNETT, 2015; DUBAR, 2006) and that also allows relating to Bauman’s (2001) conclusions about the factors that “liquefy” social processes in the context of what he defines as liquid modernity and that derives “from the abandonment of an established modern illusion” and “the deregulation and privatization of modernizing tasks and duties” (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 37).

The issue of identities is, therefore, central to the study proposed here and is inserted in a convergence that integrates perspectives dear to humanities studies such as social sciences and communication sciences.

Social transformation and amateur audiovisual

Personal and social expression mediated by the language of the audiovisual, or film, has been increasingly discussed in academia from both communicational, as well as sociological and anthropological perspectives. Salazkina and Fibla-Gutierrez (2018) present an overview of academic research on amateur filmmaking that is “done in such borderline spaces between institutions, power relations, and knowledge” that it ends up being “often left out of the story precisely because of its ambiguous/declassifiable

nature. This is certainly the case with the amateur film” (Salaskina and Fibla-Gutierrez, 2018, p. 11).

The analysis of social dynamics, processes, and materials with the aim of better perceiving the reciprocal, diffuse, and difficult-to-measure influences between the part and the whole has become increasingly flexible, comprehensive, and multimethodological, shedding light on phenomena and patterns that were hitherto barely divisible and perceived. In the overview, when they outline studies of amateur audiovisual production, Salazkina and Fibla-Gutierrez (2018) highlight the different subjects and approaches they have cataloged: the actions of colonial authorities to discipline colonized peoples; filmmaking in the industrial/union environment; studies on how amateur producers get their films circulated and exhibited through informal networks in contexts of intense political pressure; the intersection between amateur and professional practices in heterodox ways; and the intersection of different educational and filmmaking initiatives in more or less institutionalized ways (Salaskina and Fibla-Gutierrez, 2018, p. 6). These last two points of attention are the ones that most directly converge with the empirical results preliminarily collected for this research work, as they also offer the opportunity to observe whether and in what way the process of filmmaking by amateur participants in laboratory activities transforms or reinforces their perceptions of their identities.

It is worth noting that amateur films transcend the thematics and limitations of commercial films or state-funded productions that tend to deal with themes of broader and more general appeal or interest. Amateur cinema combines industrial, activist, or educational film practices to different degrees in ways that are particular to each time and place (Salazkina and Fibla-Gutierrez, 2018, p. 7). This more granular, idiosyncratic, and particular (but also collective in character) type of production that reflects the identities of small groups or individuals offers analytical opportunity at a level of detail that would never be possible to detect by pure discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, or analysis of the final production of large commercial films or amateur films themselves. The possibility of closely following and monitoring the activities of amateur producers, of observing how they organize, produce and disseminate their films are factors that also maximize the analytical opportunity of studies on end-to-end processes, i.e., that are not restricted to analyzing only the final product, or a part of the process, but that is

dedicated to observing as much as possible of the process chain that involves the studied phenomenon.

In terms of contextualizing projects and works that involve the study and practice of amateur audiovisual production, there are numerous research centers that integrate communication studies and social sciences that contribute to the reflection on this perspective, either by offering similar or divergent paths of action or by presenting solutions and difficulties that contribute to the enrichment of the study. Some of the most relevant initiatives for the context of this type of research are those led by researchers such as Drs. Boris Petric (CNE), Greg Scott (IVSA), Paolo Gerbaudo (CFDC), Cristina Ponte (ICNOVA), Amélia Lopes (CIIE), Sylvia Novaes (LISA), and Álvaro Comin (LAPS). These academic research centers act by fomenting audiovisual production (but without necessarily emphasizing the recording of the filmmaking process) and/or by analyzing the content of the films, without, however, observing or investigating the practical activities of the making of these materials and/or without sharing the methodology for the reproduction of these practices since this is not the objective of their initiatives (CNE, 2020; IVSA, 2020; CFDC, 2020; CIIE, 2020; LISA, 2020; LAPS, 2020)ⁱⁱ.

Claude Dubar's theoretical model for the analysis of identities

Conceptualization of identity, identity forms, and identity strategies

The concept of identity is defined by Claude Dubar (2005) as “the result at once stable and provisional, individual and collective, subjective and objective, biographical and structural, of the various processes of socialization which together build individuals and define institutions” (Dubar, 2005, p. 136). The author places the subjective dimension, the life experiences and the psychic elaborations of individuals at the center of the sociological analysis on the subject. These “subjective worlds” that are experienced and expressed are therefore possible to capture empirically (Demazière and Dubar, 1997) . For Castells (2000), identities originate from a process of “construction of meaning based on a cultural attribute, or a set of interrelated cultural attributes, which(s) prevails over other sources of meaning”

(Castells, 2000, p. 22). For Dubar (2005), the identity approach is necessary to understand the “eventual splits as products of a tension or contradiction internal to the social world itself” (Dubar, 2005, p. 137).

Dubar (2005) borrows from Erving Goffman (1988) concepts about identities. The author highlights heterogeneous situations arising from Goffman’s sociological theory that emerge from this approach. The first of these situations is that which Dubar relates to “identity for the other”:

The attribution of identity by institutions and agents that are in direct interaction with individuals [...] and that results from the power relations between all actors involved and from the legitimacy of the categories used [...] and that generates what Goffman calls “virtual” social identities (Dubar, 2005, p. 139).

The second situation is that of “active internalization,” which, like the first, depends on some social legitimization for the individual himself and for the group on the basis of which he defines his own identity and to which he feels he belongs. As Dubar explains:

The embodiment of identity by individuals themselves [...] can only be analyzed from within the social trajectories by and in which individuals construct ‘identities for themselves’ which are nothing more than ‘the story they tell themselves about who they are’ and which Goffman (1963) calls ‘real’ social identities (Dubar, 2005, p. 139).

The notion of identitarian strategy as described by Dubar derives from the Goffmanian concepts of real and virtual identity (Dubar, 2005, pp. 141-142, 2018). “Real” (or “for oneself”) identities are formed in the articulation between the action systems of “virtual” (or “for the other”) identities and “lived trajectories.” It is through “negotiations,” agreements and disagreements, continuities and ruptures between “inherited” and “aimed” identities that “subjective” identities are constituted. These, in turn, generate other “inherited” and “targeted” identities when confronted with new “virtual” identities, which are proposed or imposed by others; and “real” identities internalized or projected by the individual (Dubar, 2005, pp. 141-142).

The analysis of identities for Dubar (2005) undergoes stages such as the analysis of the objective and subjective transactions which are respectively constituted of: (i) when

the individual tries to accommodate the identity “for himself” to the identity “for the other,” that is when he tries to adapt to the virtual identities assigned to him - this specific process is called objective transaction and is motivated by a process external to the individual; b) when the individual tries to safeguard his inherited identities in the face of the identity offers presented to him (and this is not a process of refusal of external identities, but a way of protecting important identity elements for the individual) so that at some point they can be again exposed or conformed to the new identities targeted when there are better conditions for this - this specific process is called subjective transaction and is motivated by a process internal to the individual. There are also situations in which the accommodation of identities does not occur, whether by way of the objective or subjective process, which causes situations of identity crisis to occur.

Depending on the different groups and individuals, some situations can have a significant impact on the definition of individuals’ real and virtual identities, such as when they suffer a criminal conviction, when they are diagnosed with a disease, when they are given titles, or when they are publicly recognized for their technical, intellectual, or artistic work. When an audiovisual material, even if produced amateurishly, is created in a reproducible format like the digital one, it permanently stores, that is, it “crystallizes” in the digital version, worldviews, expressions and, consequently, traces of the real identities of individuals that, in the process of structuring social activity, become part of a mosaic or amalgam endowed with meanings that may generate identification or repulsion for the other individuals who have access to such product. This flow that materializes in the producer-product relationship, when systematically analyzed, allows the observation of the real identity aspects (or the identity for oneself) of its creators, which, in the film, are converted into virtual identity aspects (or the identity for the other) that can be accepted or rejected by those who have contact with such contents. On the other hand, the product-consumer relation allows us to observe, from the analysis of the identity elements crystallized in the audiovisual materials, how the “identities for the other” are or are not absorbed and assimilated by the individuals who have contact with the film.

The analytical model proposed by Dubar for the analysis of identity processes

Dubar organizes his model based on the identity processes presented, whose origins go back to authors from sociology, psychology, and other human sciences, as well as analyses that he and other researchers have carried out from various empirical works. The processes we present below play a central role in the approach proposed by Dubar. They are the “biographical,” the “relational,” and the “generational” processes (Dubar, 2005, pp. 146-156).

Regarding the “biographical process,” Dubar (2015) details that the identity strategies that individuals generate throughout their lives are subject to tensions between identities formed earlier in their lives, such as: i) the “identities for the other” that are attributed to them; ii) the inherited social identity and; iii) the targeted school identity. This “field of the possible” where the definition of new identity strategies takes place is constantly redefined based on this accumulated history and based on the new possibilities that present themselves through assigned identities. These experiences marked by ruptures and continuities of identity define conditions for the adherence or formation of new identities or maintenance of old ones (Dubar, 2005. p. 148).

The conditions of each country, community, and social group, to a greater or lesser extent, will influence these aspects of identity formation, but, in addition to these factors, there are also the economic condition, the various crisis situations such as work crisis, (the one experienced by the pandemic), or those resulting from the process of technological modernization (Dubar, 2005, p. 149). For Dubar, this transition process that used to occupy a relatively small period of the lives of those entering adulthood becomes a continuous process, without end, because of the perennial condition of instability resulting from the various types and dimensions of crises (Dubar, 2005).

About the “relational process,” the author resorts to the work of Renaud Sainsaulieu (1985 *apud* Dubar, 2005) to highlight that the biographical construction of identities and, therefore, the social construction of individuals depends on the relations to which they are exposed in their diverse environments (such as work, school, etc.). This form of identity production corresponds to the way different groups identify themselves with their peers, with their evaluators (such as teachers, jurors, or evaluation committees), and with other groups. Identity is, for this author, founded on distinct collective

representations, constructing actors of the social system (Sainsaulieu, 1985, p. IX, *apud* Dubar, 2005, p. 151).

Here, the approaches of Dubar and Sainsaulieu are opposed. Dubar adds:

For Sainsaulieu, identity is less a biographical process of self-construction than a relational process of self-investment: the notion of ‘self actor’ refers not to a simple passing role in a provisional scenario but to an essential investment in lasting relationships that put into question the reciprocal recognition of the partners (Dubar, 2005, p. 151).

Dubar (2005) bases a good part of his theory on Sainsaulieu’s propositions of “identity dimensions” and, however, presents a revision of these theoretical bases in the cited work, reinforcing the importance of the biographical dimension in the analysis of identities (Dubar, 2005).

According to Sainsaulieu’s approach, the objective transaction (construction of virtual identities for the other) has a structuring character and “is organized around the recognition or non-recognition of competencies, knowledge, and self-images that constitute the nuclei of claiming identities” (Dubar, 2005, p. 155). Whereas for Dubar, this process also occurs by virtue of the subjective dimension observable in the biographical process that takes place as construction over time, by individuals, of their social identities:

From the categories offered by successive institutions (family, school, labor market, company) and considered both accessible and valuing (“subjective” transaction) (Dubar, 2005, p. 156).

The relational process concerns the “recognition, at a given moment and within a given space of legitimation, of the identities associated with the knowledge, skills, and self-images proposed and expressed by individuals in systems of action” (Dubar, 2005, p. 156).

Although Dubar’s analysis emphasizes the professional identities dimension, his study extends to the other dimensions of social life and offers a model that can serve as a starting point for analyses of other perspectives of a social life besides those he has addressed.

The identity models proposed by Dubar can be organized based on two axes: a) subjective transaction - through which individuals are affected by the “continuity” or the “rupture” in their social trajectories from a subjective perspective (in terms of yearnings, desires, fears, etc.), and the second: b) objective transaction - through which individuals perceive from the “other” the signs of “recognition” or “non-recognition.” For each of these combinations, one of the identities proposed by Dubar (2005) emerges, as follows: i) identity of exclusion; ii) identity of blocking; iii) identity of recognition, and; iv) identity of adaptation. Each one of these identities is analyzed by the author based on different perspectives, the main ones being: a) identity for the other; b) “biographical” identity for oneself; c) “relational” identity for oneself; d) identity configuration and generation; e) the type of identity and f) the articulation of transactions (Dubar, 2005, p. 326).

Dubar’s model as a starting point for this investigation

This study does not intend a simple transposition of the model proposed by Dubar for the analysis of identities, but the use of this theoretical reference and analytical model as a starting point to be confronted with the empirical data collected and treated in a way closer to what is proposed by approaches such as grounded theory in order to let the data collected “first speak for themselves” before being submitted to already existing theoretical models. With this kind of approach, it is possible, in the same process (and project), to present the patterns and trends that can be directly observed through the collected data and compare these results with one of the most robust models of identity analysis available in order to also test the scope and limits of this model.

The negotiation of the offers and demands of possible identities and that must be categorized as “identities offered to the individual” and the negotiation that the individual does with himself concerning the weight or value of the inherited and targeted identities in relation to those proposed by the external offerers of identities, and the identity demanders take place in such a way that neither side is sure which should be the virtual identities to be proposed - in what resembles the structuring process proposed by Giddens (1984). Moreover, this “identity negotiation” is irrevocable and takes place through a complex communicative system that culminates

in an “authoritarian labeling” of identities previously defined on the basis of individual trajectories (for example, professional categories, educational titles, biological definitions, medical or other formal and informal institutions).

The quality of relationships (between individuals and groups) are among the factors that contribute to defining the dynamics of identities, as they redefine criteria and conditions of these dynamics of labeling. This complex dynamic is carried out jointly and confirms objective and subjective identities (Dubar, 2005, p. 142). The objective and subjective processes of identity construction influence each other mutually and result in the generation of “real identities” in individuals and “virtual identities” formulated by individuals circulating in the social group through emitters who want these to have adherence to other members of the social group, becoming their “real identities” (Dubar, 2005, p. 142). For example, the individuals who get together to make an amateur film, depending on the relations they establish in the group, may have more or less possibility to expose their identities and adapt to the other identities exposed by the other members, or they may safeguard aspects of their identities in order not to put at risk the feeling of belonging to the groupⁱⁱⁱ.

Faced with the observation of this complex movement Dubar indicates that it is not possible to reduce the debate neither to the functionalist approach that postulates a “functional harmonization” associated with the idea of “communities,” nor one to an approach of instrumentalist character or of “societal” order (Dubar, 2005). For the author, no macrosocial mechanism is able to guarantee that socialization of a communitarian character will produce “optimal” individuals for “the social systems of tomorrow”; on the other hand, the present harmony does not guarantee that the strategies adopted by individuals, their choices of a societal character, will be in communion with the communicative demands of the systems in the next moment (Dubar, 2005). In this way, there is no guarantee that the symbolic systems and identities recognized yesterday and today will be in tune with those of tomorrow. Thus, these transformations must be put into perspective by taking into account that identities are not made in the absence of each individual and also cannot be made without the participation of other individuals (Dubar, 2005, p. 143). In other words, taking as a reference now the Goffman’s terms also employed by Dubar (2005), when there is a conflict between the “virtual” identity and the “real” identity, the individual can adopt

identity strategies that help to reduce the distance between the two identities. This phenomenon can also be observed in what we call here the process of crystallization of social and personal identities in audiovisual materials. Establishing this relationship in a scientific way is one of the main goals of this project. Therefore, strategies can be “external” so that the individual can accommodate the identity “for himself” to the identity “for the other,”; or they can be “internal” so as to protect a part of his “previous” or “inherited” identifications allowing one to recover and mobilize them at another moment through “targeted” identities (Dubar, 2005). This process of “negotiation” of identities can occur in any social context - including in the laboratory activity of amateur film production as proposed in the project.

Characteristics and setting up of the audiovisual workshops

These workshops consist of three distinct stages: a first theoretical and conceptual stage in which techniques and practices of the different audiovisual functions are presented (scriptwriting, production, directing, cinematography, camera techniques, light and sound, editing, finalization, and film distribution); a second stage in which exercises and group dynamics are executed that aim to prepare the participants for the final group work - and it is at this point that they already begin to create materials such as texts, photographic and sound narratives in order to put into practice the content with which they had contact in the previous moment; and a third and final stage, which consists of the group production (3 to 5 participants) of a short film (an average of 10 minutes) in the language and genre preferred by the members of each of the groups formed, with a free thematic, limited only by the time needed to complete it, the size of the teams, and the final duration of the film. The materials generated by the groups of participants (the films) reveal aspects of social identities that are organized, classified, and typified using mixed methodology highlighted for the approach to the problem (Van de Velde, 2015). This process executed in an experimental character has been thoroughly documented, analyzed, and cataloged since the first edition of the workshops while being constantly refined and complemented.

Operationalization of the research - in progress

In the beginning, when they register to participate in the audiovisual workshops, the participants provide their fundamental biographical data, as well as social and personal data, in addition to answering questions regarding their perception of what identity is and with which they most and least identify. This approach allows the comparison of different axes such as geography, educational background, as well as considering social markers such as gender, ethnicity, generation, and different aspects of the identity dimension, both on the individual axis and for groups. Individually the participants evaluate a list of subjects and topics related to the issues popularly addressed by the perspective of identities and indicate how much they consider themselves more or less involved with each one of them. In the virtual meeting period, the participants participate in several group dynamics (in all, 5 group dynamics were performed in the July 2020 edition - supervised by a psychologist who is also a doctoral student at ICNOVA). After the period of presentation of the essential technical content, the groups are formed in an organic and voluntary way. The groups go on to perform practical exercises of creating audiovisual content that is sent to the organization of the workshop, and that is later seen, presented, and evaluated by the individuals that make up the other groups, also from the perspective of identities. In this case, each participant evaluates at least three audiovisual products created by their colleagues, and, besides describing them, they present elements that allow us to identify their opinions and perceptions of the materials as well as how much they identified or not with these materials. This whole process is presented and explained to the participants during the workshop. Throughout the workshop, observations are made on the way individuals and groups act, which allows for comparative analyses to be made of the identitarian strategies and forms expressed by individuals (which refers to the process of subjectivization), but also on the way they are expressed in the groups (which refers to the process of structuring), as well as how the transformations and persistence of identities are materialized for themselves and for the group before, during and after the exposure to and the execution of digital filmmaking techniques. This process also occurs through interviews, surveys, participant observation, and the analysis of the materials produced by the workshop participants.

Six to ten workshops were planned between 2020 and 2022 (goal of 8 workshops), with a number of participants ranging from a minimum of 64 to a maximum of 80, varying according to the edition and characteristics of each workshop. The workshops can occur

independently or simultaneously in a mixed way (face-to-face and virtual) or totally virtual. In this context, we intend to train from 400 to 800 participants in the workshops (target of 600) who will produce from 70 to 160 films (target of 120) with a total content of audiovisual material estimated at 1000 minutes edited and analyzed. These numbers are perfectly conditional on the first workshop edition done under the ICNOVA support and completed on July 23, 2020, which resulted in the production of 14 short films made by just over seventy participants that provided a total of 125 minutes of edited and finalized content. This material can be viewed on the ICNOVA, ICNOVA Conhecimento, and ImaRgens websites and YouTube channels.

Most recent activities and productions

Since the partnership was established with ICNOVA in late 2020, the workshops started to attend a wider audience of participants from Portugal and other countries of the global south. In 2020, in the context of the COVID19 pandemic, the first workshop was held in an entirely digital format: the 7th NUPEPA/ImaRgens Audiovisual Workshop - ICNOVA/LAPS that had 72 participants who completed 14 short films of different languages. In 2021 a special edition was held for students of the doctoral preparatory course in the fields of social sciences, sociology, architecture, and urbanism from the Technische Universität Berlin. In this special edition, twelve participants from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Botswana, India, Iran, Macedonia, Morocco, Mexico, Serbia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Also, in mid-2021, a special edition of the workshop was completed for female and male teachers attending post-graduate courses at the Faculty of Education of the State University of São Paulo (UNICAMP) - a total of 30 participants completed eight short films. By the beginning of the second semester of 2021, more than 300 participants have completed 65 films totaling approximately 650 minutes of material. Another two regular editions of the workshop are planned for 2021, with an estimated 80 participants in each, and another six editions for the next two years of research are planned for the project.

A brief demonstration of the use of the data collected based on the theoretical model presented

The map below allows us to see the location of the participants of the workshop that ended in July 2020, which counted with the enrollment of approximately 100 participants, of which 72 concluded the course by presenting a film made in groups of 4 to 7 people.

Figure 1. Map indicating the volume of participants in the audiovisual workshop promoted by ICNOVA and LAPS concluded in July 2020.



Source: Elaborated by the author

The participants of the seventh edition of the audiovisual workshop, which finished in July 2020, were invited at the time of registration to indicate how different relevant issues linked to the popular debate on identities appear to them. Topics related to race and ethnicity, nationality, generational aspects, gender, and sexuality were presented in

the form of a questionnaire, among others that will be detailed in later phases of the project. The participants were able to indicate elements that they could value in terms of a scale of importance or priority for themselves, configuring one of the axes of analysis of their real or “for themselves” identities. Of the respondents, approximately a quarter gave higher average scores (4 and 5 out of 5 on a Likert scale) to the combination of the themes “Feminism and women’s rights” and “Gender and sexuality.” From this sub-group of participants, a working team was formed consisting of three women and one man who produced a film whose theme (including the title of the work) referred to the question of the social role of women. The group performed different practical exercises, experienced joining and losing participants (who either stopped participating in the workshop or changed groups and themes) - and concluded the activity of filmmaking and publication of the film - a dynamic that helps to perceive elements related to the identity strategy put into action by the individuals in the group. This film was watched by the other participants of the workshop who, at the end of the course, were invited to analyze at least three films (out of 14) produced by their colleagues. From these analyses, it was possible to observe that the participants also attributed higher average grades to these two questioned topics: “Feminism and women’s rights” and “Gender and sexuality” - this analytical dimension allows us to observe that elements of subjective and objective negotiation processes of the formation of identities, of adhesions and crises that can occur during the process of group formation and elaboration of the audiovisual material. Participants in the same edition of the workshop in which this example film was made justified why they identified or not with the material. Among the participants who identified a lot (who assigned value 5 out of 5 on a Likert scale) in terms of the level of identification with the film, women formed the absolute majority and indicated that they identified for the following reasons: “Because I am in quarantine with my mother, the film made me reflect a lot about our relationship at that moment,” “In parts, it is about my reality as a mother and academic,” “I identify with that daily life in some aspects,” “Because I am a woman with overloads in the pandemic,” “Because as a woman I know that my experience has singularities that the experience of men, for example, does not have. For a simple gender issue”. And among those who indicated a lower level of identification with the film (who assigned a value of 3 out of 5), among the men, the comments were: “I found

it massive [brutal],” “I have no comments on the topic,” “I identify myself with the part of the proposal of social reflection that the film brings to the whole audience,” “I partially identify myself with the film because I imagine how women in their condition as mothers and daughters suffer in the pandemic. But I don’t know any cases of women in the conditions reported by them”, “I sympathize with the difficult situation of women in everyday life, especially in periods of exception like the pandemic, which seem to be permanent in Brazil.” And among the women participating in the workshop who also indicated a lower level of identification with the film, the justifications were the following: “I understand the particularity of the discussion and the social issues raised, but I don’t feel identified because it is not my reality, although it is a prevalent reality,” “Because I am a woman.” The comments allow us, from the outset, to observe that social and cultural aspects related to the life trajectories and biographies of the participants should be considered in the deeper stages of analysis because the living conditions, age range (generational aspect), level of education, relationship status or marital status, in addition to many other indicators collected such as nationality, religion, orientation in the political spectrum, among others, help to better understand how identity factors inherited or chosen by the participants help to understand how their strategies are expressed and crystallized in the audiovisual materials they produce

The group in the mentioned example chose to submit the film to the annual festival that the laboratory promotes and that this year was supported by ICNOVA (and that is open to submissions from any group or individual and not only from workshop participants), and it was submitted to the analysis of a special jury composed of researchers and filmmakers who were also able to evaluate the material and present their perceptions about the film, thus presenting a new analytical dimension to the material - that will allow the analysis of how virtual identities or “for the other” can eventually affect the project participants. The special jury that evaluated the cited film was composed of two men and two women who presented their comments on the material. The male jury members made the following comments: “Not a very elaborate collection of testimonies. Valid as a sociological document confined to these days”; “I loved the collaborative approach, but unfortunately the characters are not that interesting or engaging. The way the film represents motherhood in our times is interesting.” The female jury members had the following comments: “The issue focused

on by the film, which is already announced in the title, is very pertinent and current, however, the women interviewed are not properly contextualized, and the unequal framing and language that is poorly worked from the aesthetic point of view do not contribute to properly follow the proposed debate”; “The material has high thematic relevance. The audiovisual resource / the cinematographic language and narrative, however, are little explored. It is good prior research material for the construction of a film.” Although at this point it is not a question of in-depth analysis of the comments on the film selected as an example for analysis, it is possible to observe beforehand that the members of the jury, in general, considered the theme of the film to be relevant while also noting the amateur character of the production of the film that competed in the festival with other material, which, unlike this one had financial resources, which were made before the pandemic situation or in a much more extended period of time than the participants of this edition of the workshop had to execute the project after being exposed to the technical content (one week to develop the script, capture images, edit and finalize the material).

Although the idea that the social and personal identities of individuals may be expressed and crystallized in the works they perform (as in the case of amateur films) may seem obvious in a more superficial analysis here, nevertheless, and in an approach that aims to employ a methodology based on scientific criteria, this could be quantified and measured both for this theme that appears early on in a more visible way in the data set, but also in other themes that will be presented in the course of the research such as those dealing with nationalism, work, family relations, violence, cultural aspects, consumption, political participation, among other themes that can be chosen and developed freely by the participants of future editions of the audiovisual workshop of NUPEPA/ImaRgens - ICNOVA/LAPS. We present in this example a few variables of the universe that contains approximately two hundred questions to be answered by a universe that is expected to reach 600 to 800 participants by the end of the project and the making of 120 to 160 films. The variables and questions presented here as an illustration are being worked on, analyzed, in-depth and in detail at the level of individual identity aspects, group relations, their performances, and the way their products are perceived by peers, the public (who will evaluate the material at the festival

on November 17, 2020) and the critics (made up of the special jury participating in the event).

Final Considerations

The presentation of this ongoing research at Table 5 of the XI Portuguese Congress of Sociology that dealt with topics on knowledge, science, and technology - digitalization, literacy, and inclusion made possible both the dissemination of the ongoing project to professors, researchers, and graduate students of sociology and other social sciences, but also provided a specific debate on the project that collaborated to the theoretical and practical reflection on ways to improve it and to cover other analytical fronts that can benefit from this research. The mobilization of different methods and approaches proposed in this study aims to comprehensively achieve the goal of presenting an analytical model that allows the identification of elements of elective affinity related to the identities of amateur audiovisual producers and the products they create in audiovisual format. The results to be obtained not only reach the theoretical dimension built by means of the proposed model but also directly reach individuals and the communities to which they belong by providing a set of tools and techniques, or as it can be summarized here as “digital literacy” in the audiovisual language that generates effects beyond the laboratory activities of the audiovisual workshops offered. From a methodological point of view, this study departs from established models but also presents innovative qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques that have already been preliminarily developed by the author since previous studies (Ferreira, 2018) and that collaborate so that new dimensions and analytical levels are better perceived. The project aims, therefore, to generate a legacy, albeit modest, not only for the academic community but for society more generally through the combination of teaching, research, extension, and innovation activities.

Notes

ⁱ Original text produced specially for the APS, for the XI Congresso Português de Sociologia, and for the journal SOCIOLOGIA ON LINE.

- ⁱⁱ These institution references are in the specific section dealing with the websites of the projects consulted.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The feeling of belonging to the group was one of the elements measured in a questionnaire during and after the filmmaking by the workshop participants, which allows us to measure how each participant felt towards the group in terms of belonging and/or willingness to carry out new actions and projects with the other members.

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