

From Brazil to Europe: case study of the Educommunication-based project Let's Take Care of the Planet

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Introduction

This paper is an excerpt of the master's thesis in Human Rights and Multi-Level Governance *"Educommunication for global citizenship. Promoting the transformative potential of adolescents in the Era of Information"* discussed in October 2018 at the University of Padua (Italy). It presents Let's Take Care of the Planet (LTCP), an Educommunication-based project organized in Europe since 2009 and inspired by three National Youth Conferences and one International Children and Youth Conference for the Environment promoted in Brazil by the Ministry of the Environment and of Education from the year 2003. The main purpose of the project is to mobilize students, teachers and the whole educational community to promote political actions in the field of human rights, global citizenship and socio-environmental education.

After having traced the history of LTCP, this paper briefly analyses the fundamental structure of the project by taking Educommunication as main methodological reference. Eventually, objective and operative recommendations are briefly outlined as a result of a wider and deeper research conducted during the 2017-2018 LTCP edition.

1. A historical note: from Brazil to Europe

The origins of the European project LTCP are placed in the Brazilian context. In 2003, the Lula government debated about the launching of a public environmental program to empower Brazilian citizens to take care of their natural resources. In that occasion, it is said that an adolescent, who was listening by chance to the discussion, asked statesmen the reason for neglecting youth participation in that political decision. The question was specifically addressed to the Minister of the Environment Marina Silva by her young daughter¹.

From that moment on, thousands of Brazilian children were mobilized to assume responsibilities and to carry out environmental actions at the personal and collective level. Several public schools and local communities received a handbook called *Passo a passo para Conferência do Meio Ambiente na Escola* from the Organization of the Youth Conference for the Environment as a didactic support to organize and manage school conferences and to deepen knowledge about social and scientific issues such as ethnic and racial diversity, climate change, biodiversity, food security, etc.²

In addition, three Youth National Conferences for the Environment *Vamos Cuidar do Brasil*, were organized respectively in 2003, 2006 and 2009 as part of the national education policy. Their objective was to gather together lots of Brazilian youngsters and give them the chance to share their responsibilities and actions for the environment, connect them locally and nationally, recognize and value diversity and achieve sustainability and peace. The whole project

1 Information gathered personally during the facilitators' training for the European Youth Conference Let's Take Care of the Planet in May 2018 (Oeiras, Portugal).

2 BRAZIL. *Passo a passo para a Conferência do Meio Ambiente na Escola. Vivendo a Diversidade na Escola*. Brasília, DF, 2005. 57 p.

was a great success, involving around 21.000 schools and 13,5 million people between 2003 and 2009.³

The enormous mobilization movement gradually aroused the interest of the international community to participate in a wider socio-environmental programme involving children and adolescents from the whole Planet. In this regard, in 2009, 62 countries organized school and national conferences by adapting the Brazilian experience to their national context.⁴ In Europe, a six-day e-forum for exchanges was created in May 2010 with the aim of strengthening young Europeans' knowledge on climate change and, more importantly, to enable first encounters, debates and collaborative activities among the European youngsters. The online seminar led to the drafting of the European Let's Take Care of the Planet Manifesto featuring the commitments and actions taken by the students at the European level.⁵

Successively, from 5th to 10th June 2010 the Children and Youth International Conference Let's Take Care of the Planet (Confint) was held in Luziânia and Brasília hosting 658 participants, of which 323 were children, coming from 47 different countries.⁶ Anchored to the UN Education for Sustainable Development Decade the event, supported by the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment and of Education, constituted a great mobilization action with a pedagogical angle rooted in Educommunication that brought the environmental policy dimension to education and communication and recognized young people as first social actors for change.

The mix of origins, cultures and languages gathered in a stimulating environment with the aim of agreeing on concrete socio-environmental strategies at-

3 TRAJBER, R. Let's Take Care of the Planet: Education for Sustainable Societies. Brazil: Ministério da Educação, 2010. p. 2.

4 BRASIL, Ministério da Educação, Ministério do Meio Ambiente. Final Report of the Children and Youth International Conference Let's Take Care of the Planet. Brasília, DF, 2010. p. 6.

5 ASSOCIATION MONDE PLURIEL. Final Report of the 2nd European Youth Conference Let's Take Care of the Planet Europe. Brussels, 2015. p. 4

6 BRASIL, Ministério da Educação, Ministério do Meio Ambiente. *supra* note 5, p. 17-19.

tracted various countries to innovate their traditional education model confident that schools were not mere “reproducers” of knowledge, principles and responsibilities, but rather first “producers” of new knowledge and actions. In this sense, the European network of participating countries decided to replicate the international project at the European level by putting into practice the same Educommunication-based methodology used in Brazil. Simultaneously, the international dynamics of the project was abandoned despite the great success of the first edition.⁷

In May 2012 the First LTCP European Youth Conference was organized in Brussels at the Committee of the Regions bringing together 139 people, of which 60 were delegates aged between 13 and 16 and coming from 14 countries. In that occasion, youngsters co-wrote an open letter to decision makers and produced Educommunication products for spreading their engagement both at the national and at the European level. The collective outcomes were presented in June 2012 at the Rio+20 Summit by three young facilitators. Since then, the European project, which was adjusted in its structure to last every cycle for a period of three years, attracted new interested partners.

Consequently, a second edition of LTCP was organized between 2013 and 2015 at the local and national level in 14 countries and culminated at the European level in May 2015 with the Second LTCP Youth Conference held in Brussels. The event hosted 161 people, of which 69 were young delegates from coming 13 countries. In view of the XXI Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, adolescents drafted at the European Youth Conference the call for co-responsibility, a political document stating youth commitments for sustainable development.

LTCP was again a success in promoting youth participation and global citizenship and thus was replicated for the period 2016-2018 in 10 European countries whose young representatives met in Portugal in May 2018 at the Third LTCP Youth Conference entitled “Cross-cultural Dialogue to Take Care of the Planet”.

7 Probably, political reasons influenced the end of the project. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva served two terms as President and left office on 1st January 2011.

2. The LTCP impact in 2017-2018

The general objective of LTCP is to enable the youth of the world to participate at different levels in the identification, discussion and agreement of socio-environmental responsibilities and actions for the construction of sustainable societies. The project is therefore structured at different levels including the local, regional, national and European dimensions. The standard step by step LTCP process is schematized in Table 1.



Table 1: Step by step LTCP process 2017-2018

Source: Step by Step Guide Towards the 3rd European Youth Conference in Lisbon, May 2018, 2017/18 Edition

In the last school year, LTCP involved at the national level 452 schools of 9 European countries and impacted 33.669 students and 2.043 teachers.⁸ In Italy, the national process was coordinated by the Association Viração&Jangada in 17 schools of 14 different cities in 7 regions. The association worked directly with 1.269 students aged between 11 and 17, and with 86 teachers.

The European 2017-2018 process took place between 19st and 24th May 2018 in Oeiras, Lisbon and Cascais (Portugal). It gathered 82 youngsters of 10 European countries, namely 66 delegates between 13 and 16 years old and 16 facilitators between 18 and 30, representing thousands of young people who participated at the national level by debating socio-environmental issues and valorising their responsibilities through Educommunication-based tools.⁹

3. Educommunication principles

LTCP can be defined an Educommunication-based project since it is guided by fundamental principles that relate to the main characteristics of the Brazilian vision of Educommunication. To start with, the project recognizes the transformative potential of adolescents and, thus, considers them as social actors living, acting and intervening in the present. Consequently, LTCP supports a coordinated intergenerational action based on three essential pillars:

- *Youth chooses youth*

In many occurrences throughout the project youngsters are called to take decisions related to selection processes. For example, they are supposed to elect their representatives for the next project's phases according to collectively-formulated selection criteria such as linguistic skills, motivation, ability to speak in public, etc. The election of delegates follows a democratic and inclusive mechanism. The educommunicative dimension

8 These data refer to an approximation made with the European coordinating associations. Official data will be delivered by the European LTCP coordinators, Monde Pluriel and ASPEA - Associação Portuguesa Educação Ambiental, by the end of 2018.

9 ASSOCIATION MONDE PLURIEL. Participant Guide of the 3rd European Youth Conference Let's Take Care of the Planet. Cascais, Oeiras, Lisbon, 2018.

of the principle lies in the possibility given to adolescents to experience in practice representative democracy.

- *Youth educates youth*

The project is constructed starting from youngsters' interests, experiences and priorities believing in their capacity to assume commitments to transformative actions. In all phases, young facilitators aged between 18 and 30 are trained to support youngsters during the activities through interactive facilitation techniques. This approach assigns to facilitators the responsibility to mediate human relations throughout the whole teaching and learning process. By encouraging exchanges and dialogue, adolescents can discover and enhance cultural diversities. The educommunicative power embedded in the principle leads to the promotion and realization of everyone's right to participation and freedom of expression.

- *One generation learns with another*

The transmission of knowledge throughout the different phases of the project is not only downwards, from adults to youngsters, but also upwards and horizontal. Mutual learning between generations characterizes the project by enabling students to take on both the role of learners and the role of teachers. Moreover, LTCP encourages exchanges between youngsters, environmental experts and representatives of political institutions in order to recognize the essential interrelation between human beings for achieving a systematic transformation. This educommunicative principle supports the integration of youngsters with the entire educational community.

In addition to these three aspects, LTCP is grounded on the principle of responsibility as necessary in an interconnected society for fostering youth commitment and independence and, consequently for practicing citizenship. In this regard, the project relies on the principle that everyone is called to assume responsibility both individually and collectively and according to his or her degree of knowledge and power. Moreover, responsibility means being attentive to the positive and negative impacts of everyone's own actions both

at the local and at the global level (concept of space) as well as in the present and in the future (concept of time). As a practical manifestation of the taken responsibilities, youngsters are then encouraged to act concretely for the benefit of the whole community.

During the 2017-2018 edition, participants organized seminars and raising awareness campaigns such as contests, exhibitions, flash mobs, laboratories and online surveys to inform their peers about the environmental impact of human action on the Planet. Informational campaigns were complemented by mobilization actions such as cleaning urban parks, collecting waste on the beaches and rivers banks, promoting a correct separate trash collection, replacing plastic with ceramic or glass, going to school by bicycle or by walking, organizing collections of used mobile phones and fundraising campaigns for planting trees in the school and in other public areas. The practical realization of the principle of responsibility in all phases of the project recognizes the aim of Educommunication, namely to empower youngsters by putting them in a condition to exercise their capacity to participate in the society as active and transformative subjects.

Eventually, although socio-environmental issues are the main project's themes, it has to be taken into account that LTCP is much more than an environmental project: it is an Educommunication-based project which seeks to involve people in a process of mutual learning and practice of respect for everyone's own dignity and rights, cross-cultural dialogue, human solidarity and planetary citizenship. Indeed, the whole program is based on the necessity to redefine a general interest for the whole of humanity, which requires both respect for human rights and the recognition of a universal responsibility to be shared by every individual.

4. Educommunication-based tools

Beyond guiding the whole process, it has to be remarked that the principles of Educommunication in LTCP take shape in specific Educommunication workshops that have the aim to create communication outputs disseminating and valuing the commitments made by the youngsters during the project.

During these practical workshops the power of communication is exploited to enable commitment to values that respect and preserve life and motivate youngsters to become true actors in the communication process. Indeed, as primarily responsible for the management of the whole communication flow, participants are encouraged to collaborate and agree with their peers on the type of media to produce, on its style and technique as well as on the work's subject matter. The decision process is done in an open, democratic and participatory way and is mediated by young facilitators. Educommunication workshops are included into LTCP as specific practical activities because they offer a new perspective with regards to communication languages and stimulate responsible youth participation.

The main communication outcomes realized during the 2017-2018 process were:

- *Advertising posters*

The workshop aims at involving youngsters in practical and funny activities combining the power of advertising with environmental education. By following a standardized graphic scheme, adolescents generate creative posters including captivating slogans and visual productions portraying themselves as subjects, in order to communicate their responsibilities and actions for the environment.

- *Letter of commitments "Let's be the change!"*

One of the most expected LTCP outcomes is the letter of commitments, namely a political document written collectively by youngsters and summarizing their common responsibilities and actions for the Planet, to be disseminated at the local, regional, national and European level. The drafting is supported by facilitators through Educommunication-based methodologies

- *Youth Press Agency*

The Youth Press Agency is an international initiative created by the Brazilian NGO Viração Educomunicação during the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre in 2005 that encourages youth participation through the creati-

ve use of traditional and modern communication and information tools¹⁰. Its main objective is to provide a space for free and independent sharing and dissemination of multimedia products whose contents, focused on issues related to human rights and socio-environmental sustainability, are told and analyzed on the basis of youngsters' interests and perceptions. The Agency works on the principles and techniques of Educomunicação as well as of social and participatory journalism.

For the purpose of the Third LTCP Youth Conference 9 youngsters, elected within their delegations to become reporters of the Youth Press Agency, followed the activities as the other delegates and at the same time produced different types of communication products. The reporters were left free to choose what to produce and in which format. During the Conference, the group produced creative videos, photo-reportages articles, interviews and creative photo-performances.

- *Other Educommunication products*

Throughout the different phases of the project youngsters realized videos, leaflets, school-radio programs, poems, performances and flash mobs with the aim of sensitizing the public opinion about the major socio-environmental problems within their communities.

5. Final recommendations

Based on the author's impressions as coordinator and participant in the project as well as on other contributions coming from the Association Viração&Jangada, the European coordinator Monde Pluriel and from the teachers' representatives at the European LTCP meeting in May 2018, this paper presents three recommendations for strengthening Educomunicação in LTCP. These short considerations are outlined in general terms with the hope that they can stimulate a deeper discussion within the European LTCP network.

10 Viração Educomunicação is located in San Paolo (Brazil), founded in 2003 by the journalist and educommunicator Paulo Lima and recognized by UNICEF, UNESCO, USP, ANDI Comunicação e Direitos, Ashoka Empreendedores Sociais, the University of San Paulo NCE-USP, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Pontos de Mídia Livre and Ponto de Leitura.

5.1. Training

LTCP is conceived as a process that starts locally, develops at the regional and national level and ends with a European meeting involving all participating countries. The whole dynamics is supported by a specific methodology based especially on educommunicative principles and on the notion of responsibility and action. Moreover, going beyond the methodology per se, Educommunication as a paradigm permeates the entire project.

However, it has been noted that the LTCP dynamics might vary a lot from one partner to the other due to the flexibility left to each partner to use Educommunication at the national level. Variations in the implementation of the project at the local, regional and national level depend on many reasons such as time, teachers' commitment, availability of the national coordinating association to be present in the participating schools, number of involved students, funding, etc. On this matter, it should be recognized that it is impossible to maintain exactly the same structure in every country and probably, there are advantages in the flexibility left to the national organizers. Indeed, the degree of flexibility seems to strengthen project's durability over time.¹¹

On the other side though, care must be taken to maintain the essence of LTCP which, more than the contents of the project activities, is the way in which these activities are conducted. In other words, Educommunication as a paradigm supporting democracy and youth participation needs to be the guiding philosophy in the whole process. Thus, an effective implementation of Educommunication would be realized with a greater investment of time and resources on the training of the subjects involved in LTCP and, in particular those belonging to the organizing associations at the local, regional, national and European level. Conducted in preparation for the project, training sessions should mainly focus on the core principles of Educommunication to provide coordinators and facilitators with more tools and competences to manage communication and education processes in a more open, democratic and participatory way.

11 Interview with Delphine Astier in Grenoble (France), Interview in English (June 2018).

Supporting this suggestion, the Association Viração&Jangada has decided to offer between January and February 2019 in all participating Italian regions a four-hour training for the teachers coordinating LTCP within the schools. The programme of the training will include an in-depth analysis of Educomunicação and of the role of the teacher as mediator of processes.

5.2. Networking

LTCP is developed through different levels both within and among countries to confer a broad collective dimension that exceeds territorial boundaries. Despite this multi-level structure, it has been observed that one of the greatest risks of the project is that each country organizes its socio-environmental activities independently from the other countries ignoring the meaning and importance of being part in a European network.¹² In this regard, it should be noted that from 2009 until the last edition, the project used to have only one coordinator for the European dynamics, namely the French non-profit organization Monde Pluriel. Monde Pluriel has been responsible for supporting the participating countries in the implementation of their national process and in the definition of the scope and methodology of their projects.

The great amount of work assigned to a single European coordinator could however be shared among the partners to favour networking and improve the quality and richness of the project. If organized with the support of experts in the creation of networks, a shared leadership would stimulate more transparent relations and strengthen collaboration and trust between the parties.¹³ Working together in the management of the project would also satisfy the need raised by the teachers' representatives at the European Youth Conference in May 2018 to improve the sharing of expertise, experiences and methodologies. In addition, a united network would be more effective in the dissemination of the project outcomes, in the research of new partners and sponsors as well as in the implementation of the educommunicative aspects of LTCP.

12 Delphine Astier, *supra* note 12.

13 Interview with Paulo Lima in Trento (Italy), interview In Italian (August 2018).

Networking has already started to produce good results with the first partnership between Monde Pluriel and ASPEA for the organization of the Third LTCP Youth Conference in Oeiras, Lisbon and Cascais (Portugal).¹⁴

5.3. Monitoring and evaluation

In general terms, the monitoring and evaluation process in LTCP is carried out through questionnaires and direct observations and systematized by the European coordinator in a comprehensive final report. Until now, the assessment phase has focused especially on quantitative data such as the number of schools, students and teachers involved directly and indirectly as well as on general information about the type of coordination (NGOs, university, network of schools, local authorities), type of conferences realized in every adherent country (local, regional, national) and main activities organized within the LTCP framework and after the European dynamics.

From an Educommunication-based perspective, it should be noted that the current evaluation of LTCP tends however to underreport the qualitative side of the project. Indeed, it seems that issues such as implementation of educommunicative methodologies, level of students' participation, self-esteem and empowerment, behavioural and attitudinal changes, degree of mobilization of the whole educational community (parents, friends, local administrators, associations, media, etcetera) are insufficiently investigated, and particularly as regards the national level.¹⁵

This paper argues that a better qualitative evaluation would need more collaboration and exchanges of information among the adherent countries, as suggested in the two previous sections, but also more specific assessment tools. In this sense, it would be interesting to involve research centres in the creation of innovative instruments for analyzing the tangible effectiveness of Educommunication in LTCP in terms of youth participation and empowerment. An adequa-

14 Delphine Astier, *supra* note 12.

15 Paulo Lima, *supra* note 14.

te qualitative evaluation of the project at all levels would further highlight the power of Educommunication to change people and the environment in which they live.

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Sobre a autora

Giulia De Paoli nasceu em Borgo Valsugana (Italia) em 1993. Formada em Ciências Econômicas e Sociais pela Universidade Livre de Bolzano, é mestranda em Human Rights and Multi-Level Governance pela Universidade de Pádua com a tese de mestrado sobre Educomunicação apresentada em 16/10/2018. Desde janeiro de 2018 trabalha como coordenadora de projetos na Associação Viração&Jangada, braço internacional de Viração Educomunicação no Brasil que atua para a divulgação de processos, projetos e práticas educacionais na Europa e na África relacionados à educação aos direitos humanos, educação à cidadania planetária e às mudanças climáticas. Ao longo de sua carreira universitária, estudou e participou de intercâmbios na Tailândia e Alemanha e realizou trabalhos, estágios e ações de voluntariado no âmbito dos direitos humanos na Itália, Nepal e Ghana junto a organizações sociais.