

## Between the urban and the virtual: Cyclo activism and the relations of material and digital space



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### ABSTRACT

The relationship between physical spatiality and virtual media is affected and transformed by information technology. The Internet, the "backbone" of global communication (Castells, 2002, p. 431), is a transformative tool and also in constant transformation. And in the so-called "Information Age," not only do the transformations happen at a fast pace, but they also move the social gears responsible for the significant changes in society and the cities quickly. And it could not be different since this century was designated as the urban century by the United Nations – UN. Among the changes, according to Castells (2002), are the interactive computer networks that grow exponentially, creating new forms of communication to articulate socially. Mobile

devices, such as laptops, cell phones, tablets, and social networks, are instruments that facilitate communication and the action of activism by reaching instantly and simultaneously a large number of Internet users. With these facilities, many activist groups have appropriated these new media to disseminate information, organize and mobilize the population (CASSIANO, 2011). Among the groups of activists who use digital media is the Ciclo activism, an organized movement of cyclists with records of demonstrations since the 1990s, according to the Union of Cyclists of Brazil - UCB. This group, organized horizontally that is, without leaders, defends the use of the bicycle to the detriment of the use of private motorized transport and acts in the field of clashes over the meanings of urban mobility, issues related to urban planning, and socio-environmental problems in cities. With multiple approaches, they are attentive to urban planning, sustainability, and the use of the bicycle as a means of transportation. Thus, with the increasing use of social networks by various groups of society, the problem arises about the political participation of cyclo activism in the informational territory.

**Keywords:** Urban mobility, Bicycle, Urban activism, Digital activism, Cycle activism, Politics, Cyberculture, Networked society.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OBJECTIVES

Given this scenario, this work has a general objective to understand the forms of action of the cyclo activist movements through interactive action in virtual media. The specific objectives are to identify movements and collective cyclo activists that use networks to communicate, organize and articulate with their peers and society; identify possible patterns of posts and discourses of these movements and cyclo activist collectives and, finally, discuss cyclo activism and its relations with concepts that involve physical spatiality, politics and the virtual.



## 2 METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of the research, it was necessary, first, to understand the concepts that permeate the theme. To this end, readings were carried out that encompass books and academic research in the field of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, architecture, and urbanism. The first readings were fundamental to selecting works that support the discussions of the research. Works dealing with digital culture, communication, and information technologies, about the urban political field and its tensions were studied (Montaner; 2015), and the authors Pierre Lévy, Manuel Castells, Hannah Arendt, and Aristotle stood out. To understand the forms of action of the cyclo activist movements through the interactive action in the virtual media, it was necessary to seek first to understand the process of private appropriation of the urban space and, later, the appropriation of these movements in the digital media. To this end, Google Scholar searches were conducted in the second half of 2020, which resulted in eight articles, of which Do Couto Soares stand out; Lamb (2014); Rosin; Milk (2019); Simoes (2019).

## 3 RESULTS

Given the study carried out, it was possible to perceive that physical spatiality remains relevant as a scenario of the most diverse activist agendas that make up society, even with the advancement of digital technology and organization in social networks. The political and social actors who participate in the process of building public policies create links in communities, networks, and thematic subsystems (Massardier, 2006) apud (Rosin; Milk, 2019). According to the authors, these "interactional arrangements" are drivers of the diffusion of ideas and the search for consensus building on policies, but they are also structured around them. In this context, Dos Santos (2020) points out new patterns of political participation in the twenty-first century from the emancipatory processes constituted by young people themselves, resulting from the emergence of youth expressions in the public space. It is also relevant to point out that in the years 2020 and 2021, interactions through social networks became more evident and frequent with the Covid-19 pandemic, and, in this context, many activities and face-to-face meetings were held virtually. In this environment, the cyclo activists discuss emerging agendas, participate in groups on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, and Youtube) and contribute to the creation and development of content on websites, videos, and podcasts. The discussions and posts focus especially on the occupation of public spaces as a form of resistance and actions of movements linked to bicycle mobility in cities, in addition to the recognition of the modal as a means of sustainable transport in urban mobility and safety in the face of the dominant culture of the car. Collectives and social movements were identified, such as the Bici Collective In the Campo Grande Plans, Campo Grande Critical Mass Movement and Bike Anjo Campão, which use digital media to carry out actions, post news, organize demonstrations, demand public policies, encourage the use of



bicycles, disseminate traffic education, teach cycling, organize campaigns, among other actions. An example of an action of the collective Bici Nos Planos was the intermodal challenge, which promoted the evaluation and efficiency of various means of transport over a given distance. On Facebook and Instagram, the collective invited the community to participate in discussions on the efficiency, sustainability and performance of the different forms of displacement, being evaluated the time spent to reach the final destination, the cost generated and the emission of carbon dioxide.

#### 4 DISCUSSIONS

From the reading of the theorists and the findings of the research, it was possible to perceive that there are at least two clear possibilities about the advancement of the Internet and digital culture: the first, studied by Castells (2002), indicates from a sociological analysis that capitalism uses digital information and communication technology as a process of global domination. In this process, the complexity of virtualization contemplates several areas of socio-political organization, entering companies, communities, democracy, and social networks, among others, acting directly in the aspect of being together with human relations (LÉVY, 2014). Another point is the socio-political issue necessary to understand the contemporary mutations of urban activism and thus be able to act in these relations in the virtual environment.

The informational expression encompasses the creation, treatment and transfer of information, which are configured as bases of power and productivity, anchored in the new technological forms within a social organization. This new communication system can encompass various forms of values, interests, expressions, imaginations and even the manifestation of social conflicts due to the diverse and versatile dynamics of its technological configurations in the network (CASTELLS, 2008). Faced with the context of the network, Castells (2003) indicates the Internet as a conception of a democratic place in the conditions of communication, while the space is free to plurality and vast connection, even with the factors of inequality present in the network. The virtual community culture (Castells, 2003) is the basis of this work since, in it, the social movements and activists are in the network society or cyberculture, assimilating the possibilities of communication through the language and mastery of the technological management of the programs. Having this relationship as a tool for political action, it is necessary to understand the concept of it.

According to Hannah Arendt (2002), from plurality, political relations are anchored in the diversity of men. "Politics organizes, in advance, absolute diversities according to relative equality and in counterpart to relative differences." ARENDT (2002, p. 58). In this way, it can be observed that politics manages the different interests of the plurality of society in the search for transparency for the truth. In a society anchored in power, control, individualism and consumerism, the mass domination of ideas and practices guided by the ruling class dominates politics, where freedom is centered.



Therefore, transparent freedom is hostage to the dichotomy between us/them, which touches on the conflict between the dominator and the dominated in social conflicts. Aristotle, in his book *Politics* (1985), considers politics a continuation of ethics, man being a "social animal" in itself by nature. This is political because it exists and acts in conjunction with its fellows in the polis. This condition of the human being develops in the city as a form of organization and basis for the distribution of political power. Within the political instance, activism emerges as the practical action of claiming what seems like a good for certain social groups, composed of values, worldviews, and organizations different from each other.

Berman (2007) describes that "Jacobs' action and thought heralded a great wave of community activism and a great irruption of activists in all dimensions of political life" (BERMAN, 2007, p. 379). By reflecting on digital technologies as a tool for political organization, the material physical space remains important as a stage for urban activism, as well as for cycle activism, and meets the daily anxieties and struggles of these groups in the political field in society.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The variety of spaces and occasions in which the cyclo activists get involved allows multiple perspectives on this field of studies in an interface between several areas of knowledge, such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, architecture, and urbanism. In the plurality of themes discussed by these activists, the theme of efficiency, sustainability and resourcefulness in displacement is recurrent. Therefore, in the various media, the physical spatiality, that is, the public space, remains relevant in the face of the advancement of technology and the virtual. However, it is undeniable in the case of cyclo activism that technology, the Internet and social networks can function as promising tools to promote inclusion and democratic access in the struggle for the insertion of the bicycle in public policies. On the other hand, it is necessary to always be vigilant about the dangers of the Internet, analyzing the political articulations in social networks and the way corporations benefit from these means that, according to Matos (2017), serve as the prolongation of social groups and the maintenance of dominant institutions and hierarchies in the physical world.



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