Socio-environmental Educommunication: city and school¹

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Adilson Citelli¹

http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0838-9917

Sandra Pereira Falção¹

http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6037-3739

¹(Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências da Comunicação. São Paulo – SP, Brasil).

Abstract

This paper has the purpose of reflecting upon communication and urban social-environmental topics, considering, above all, some of the formal education current practices. Together with support from non-formal and informal education, and also from the media ecosystem, the mechanisms in evidence can influence the environmental neglect which is increasing in the urban areas. The data that support the reflection come from research carried out in public and private basic education schools in São Paulo (city), as well as in other spaces, using different types of virtual and face to face dialogs. The analytical course indicates that encouraging educommunicative procedures within projects related to discuss the problems which compromise quality of life, mainly in big cities, can increase the ecosystemic perspective that may bring benefit to the young students and to the society. **Keywords**: socio-environmental educommunication. ecosystem perspective. emancipation. city. school.

Introduction

"But where the danger is, also grows the saving power". Hölderlin

The prefix hyper seems well adjusted to the era of excess we have all been living in. Among income concentration, the increase of poverty and environmental devastation, the exasperation rises as common to all of us. So, it does not sound weird that nouns such as market, spectacle and consumerism are related to the semantic field of exaggeration. The city scenery, with its blocks devastated due to the real estate market, the scar in the

¹ This article is related to other ones that the authors have been writing on the socioenvironmental education area. A preliminary version of this work was presented on XXXVII Brazilian Congress of Communication Science. In this article, there are new research data and their analysis.

forests leading the way to cruel land occupation² just confirm the strategy of limitless that is not ashamed of being associated with concepts such as progress and even development. Family agriculture, small business, low consumption, environmental protection may happen far from the capital logic approach of 21st century, based on the maximization of profit, of production models, of deforestation and the creation of new techniques.

In this context, what does it mean to discuss environmental protection, sustainability, lowering levels of greenhouse effect gases or low carbon economy? Maybe a wish, a dream. However, it is possible to understand the fabrication of stuff and objects as the manifestation that allows the real to be projected as something which is available. That said, it is not about looking at the socio-environmental perspective as something impossible, bucolic and based on the *fugere urbem* (city runaway), because the radical nihilism is usually overcome by the neutralisation nihilism implemented by the system. Quoting Baudrillard: "the system is nihilist in itself, in the sense that it has the power to reverse everything, including what it denies, indifferently" (1991, p. 200).

Promoting the uninteresting as an affirmative strategy deserves treatment as the negativity view, translated here as effort and care. Notice that, embracing the environmental topics, specially within school programs, is a way of clarifying how some dynamics on the production relationships work between the indifference and predatory acts: the formal education can fulfil an important role as a critical-reflexive institution when denying the denial. In this context, there is a strong attraction force among the communicative processes, once they are a decisive factor to promote plenty of topics related to the social agenda, educational knowledge and actions, in which learning takes place.

From here, we can direct analytical view on the environmental issues in the urban scenery, using the connection between communication and education as reference, and we will call this movement socio-environmental educommunication. Yet, if we want to, in order to develop effective environmental education, it is needed to mobilize communicational components not related to marketing and self-promoting publicity, which enhance the ecopolitical consciousness of the being: the time-space in which it lives, the connection between nature and society, the governmental politics and the occupation of the land – in the city and in the countryside, etc. Although there are certain limits, this perspective is present among other concerns of researchers and professionals in the communication area, as one can see through documentaries, television and radio programs, or even in the materials designed to train journalists to better understand environmental topics and their public availability (GIRARDI et al, 2018).

² Data from the Exame magazine, launched by Abril publishing: "The last PRODES data, governmental system that monitors with satellites the deforestation in Amazonia, show that there was an increase of 30% on the deforestation pace from August 2015 to July 2016. There were almost 8,000 square kilometers eliminated in a year – it is the same as destroying 128 soccer fields per hour, or an equivalent space to the metropolitan area of São Paulo in this period". Available at: https://exame.abril.com.br/revista-exame/brasil-destroi-128-campos-de-futebol-de-floresta-por-hora/. Accessed on: Feb. 01, 2018.

Conceptual surroundings

The economic development model, which is unlikely to be sustainable, have repercussions in different aspects of the contemporary life, for instance, making the consciousness of citizenship regarding environmental issues more fragile. Some authors believe that the concern with the *oikos*, our home, our land, may not have even reached the classrooms consistently yet. Loureiro, Layrargues e Castro (2008) list some reasons why they believe that the common methodologies in traditional schooling generate only weak ecocitizenship practices, and that usually happens in the wealthier regions of Brazil. It shows that, if you look closely, the problems outside school are not really connected to what happens inside the schools.

At schools, not always the extension of daily life and the acknowledgement of the reality changes, especially when it comes to technological advances, are properly treated. Even though it may seem generic, it might allow us to have a glimpse of the presence, in our formal education, of a component which is responsible to block some procedures or compel it to work in the opposite way of what is more obvious regarding the educational parameters adjusted to the contemporaneity. The negligence with the environment represents one of the aspects of the reverse engine we mentioned beforehand. Here is one of the reasons why the education work is usually transformed into something simple, because it focuses on achieving individual attitudes and weakens the social values and the mobilization of collective behaviours. The different roles of all institutions involved – State, market, society, community, individuals – are not explained due to a non-critical and anachronistic approach, to which only the last of these elements is responsible for the environmental degradation (NOVICKI, 2007). According to this illogical logic, the education provided to our youth hasn't been able to engage them into actions that value their territory.

Our formal teaching, on its present conditions, allows us to think of the existence of a gap between the environmental communication in the classroom and the practice of people out of school, such as the school surroundings, the neighborhood, the district, the town, etc. Such understanding allows us to embrace critically the approach of schools towards the study, reflection and perception of the urban scenery and its connections to the broad reality (CITELLI, 2004).

By analysing, even in a superficial way, these multiple sources of information, data and facts which are present in the youth's universe (and even in the teachers' universe), one can notice that the economic strength motivated by interest groups (which are highly supported by mainstream media) has still an important role in the attempt of building hegemonic patterns of symbols, values, cultural manifestations, etc. This process tends to assign to the school an instrumental role, not always welcoming to the empowerment knowledge, the reason why it is not strange that an expression full of glamour as 'economic sustainability' is usually associated with hope and the possibility of developing the 'green capitalism' or 'the best quality of life', in evidence, for instance, in publicity campaigns

that sell gated communities built in the city surroundings, even in the ones which are little populated.

The approach hasn't been any different when it comes to the environmental urban issues and we can also associate the reductionist approach to the institutions and individuals that are bound to the discourse of the efficiency of the market, whose rhetoric operation of appropriation of concept (CITELLI; FALCÃO, 2015) activates the idea of sustainable development. On this path, ecoefficiency becomes an expression related to technicist/ economic solutions, as remind us Kishiname et al (2002) and Novicki (2007). These orientations deviate from the principles of the National Program of Environmental Education (PRONEA, 2008)³.

So, we insist on our research on environmental communication, believing on the transforming effects of a formative process that considers education beyond the capital (MÉSZÁROS, 2008, LAVAL, 2004). On this perspective, the formal education, if it targets the common good and citizenship practices, needs to ensure critical and reflexive attention about what is being published by the media. Educommunication arises as a theoretical and practical possibility to promote the adjustment of path, contributing to reach the desired urban environmental citizenship. So, it's essential to encourage the teachers to engage on educational proposals that allow them to better understand the communication processes and, consequently, exercise their "rights to produce information and communication" (TASSARA, 2008, p. 80). Soares (2011, p.49) complements: "the areas of intervention from the educommunication area are bridges created between the society and the media, the third sector and the school, by offering a dialog about determined aspects of educommunicative action".

The environmental communication is related to opening the dialog between the citizen and the city, towards urban care that generates wellbeing to the city residents. In this process, it is essential to include a transdisciplinary perspective, which considers an approach that intends to reunite scientific and non-scientific knowledge. From that perspective, the research / intervention is seen as a way of opening towards the others and their knowledge with empathy, the same way that it encourages the understanding of reality by using strategies to go beyond the subjects. "The emergency of transdisciplinarity in this historical moment is a sign of the human destiny, once the ecological issues need this tool to find solutions" (ROCHA FILHO et al, 2009, p. 100-101).

Take as an example Paulo Saldiva, professor at the Faculty of Medicine of USP, who has a recent research work on lungs physiopathology and atmospheric pollution, by studying how the air quality interferes in the population's health. He sees the city of São Paulo (his recurrent example) as an alive organism, unfortunately, in poor health condition (SALDIVA, 2018). By integrating scientific knowledge of different areas and using easily understandable language, he connects his work to the educommunicative approach. It includes a inter and

³ For further details on the application of educommunicative principles to the environmental socioeducational action by ProNEA, refer to Soares (2011).

transdisciplinary perspective, that is required by the complexity of modern times and to which the environment is essential.

We can find the same idea into other researchers' works, such as Morin (2006). He calls the attention to the necessity of improving the quality of life of different social classes, but he reminds that it is crucial to think critically and change the idea that the environment is an amount of landscapes waiting for predatory actions that will damage the future of the planet and its inhabitants. With that in mind, the Socio-environmental Communication has an important role to fulfil, referring to the following views:

[...] the set of actions and values that correspond to the pedagogical dimensions of communicative environmental processes, focused on dialogism, participation and collective work. The inseparability between social and environmental questions in the doing-thinking of educational actions is reinforced by the social-environmental word. The pedagogical dimension, in this particular case, has focused on "how" the knowledge is generated and "what" is learned in the cultural production, social interaction and nature (PRONEA, 2008, p. 10).

It suggests that environmental communication, as an inter and transdisciplinary work of Socio-environmental Educommunication area, encourages the movement towards 'environment with people' - referring to the work of Novicki (2007, p. 142). He says that there is a "false consciousness" once everyone is in favor of environmental preservation, but that people think of the "environment with no people, that does not relate to the men, the social inequality/exclusion, the cultural diversity (…)". It goes hand in hand with the fact that schools seem to be disconnected from their surroundings, and that is the reason why there's little or no involvement, for instance, from students to the environmental issues of their neighborhood. It is comprehensible that streets and squares in which people pass by are some kind of strange incident that is not their concern.

Methodological aspects of field research

The data used for this research was collected into two theoretical-practical research works, from the Post Graduate Program in Communication at the School of Communication and Arts at Universidade de São Paulo. The most recent one was carried out from 2014 to 2018 and supported by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CNPq). The study was conducted with 514 people from different Brazilian cities and a varied age range (from 12 to 70 years old). They were distributed into 12 heterogeneous groups — internally homogeneous according to the reasons why they were grouped when data was gathered⁴.

⁴ The twelve groups were formed by: middle school/junior high-school students and Youth and Adult Education; people from local religious community; internet users living in Brazil (various cities, but predominantly São Paulo residents), teachers from basic

To collect information, we used multimethodological expedients (GÜNTHER; ELALI; PINHEIRO, 2017, PONTUSCHKA, 2011, LOPES, 2005), creating virtual and face to face dialogs through a) informal conversation face to face and via web in different interaction spaces (formal and informal); b) application of virtual and face to face questionnaires; c) offering courses and lectures; d) doing interviews and interactional activities; e) recording and taking pictures of the interactions, whenever possible; f) observation and analysis of socio-environmental material from the media.

The previous investigation started in 2011, lasted approximately 2 years, and it was also guided by the multimethod research approach. 179 people took part on the research, being 57 adults, 62 high-school students and 60 secondary-school students. The data were collected in Vila Medeiros⁵, São Paulo, through a) direct observation and photographic register; b) interviews with public employees who worked in the health and environmental areas; c) application of questionnaires to the students and other neighborhood residents. In both researches works, we used non-probability and stratified sampling.

Results discussion

The former research work (2011 to 2013) has shown inexistence of participation in any kind of project that connects the school to the surroundings (streets, neighborhood and the city) from the 122 high-school and elementary-school students. Not even the traditional Environment Studies (PONTUSCHKA, 2011) were implemented, according to the investigation phase. The connection between the school and the surroundings is quite weak, if we consider the schools in which the research was conducted.

education, environmental counsellors, residents from a public audience, lecture participants, prep course students, undergraduate students, professionals from building area and readers of neighborhood newspaper.

⁵ It is a geographical space in the northeast region of São Paulo, with 10 neighborhoods (Vila Medeiros, Vila Sabrina, Vila Ede, Vila Gustavo, Vila Munhoz, Vila Nivi, Jardim Brasil, Jardim Julieta, Parque Rodrigues Alves, Conjunto Promorar Fernão Dias) and other close neighborhoods, such as Parque Edu Chaves that, at this moment, also suffer from Urban Heat Island and other environmental issues. More details in Falcão (2013).

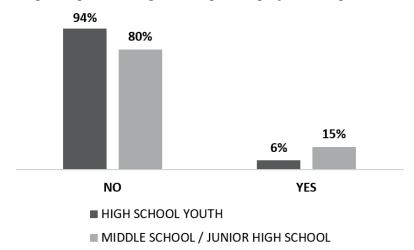


Figure 1- Student participation in a public or private project to improve local environment

Source: the authors.

It is important to mention that, if we consider the whole sampling, only 22 people mentioned any kind of participation in socio-environmental projects. Picture 1 shows a significantly low participation of students, and only 6 among those actually mentioned taking part on environmental projects developed in their schools, but these were created only inside the institutions, not related to their surroundings.

Some of the young and adult respondents mentioned receiving content and invitation to take part on environmental actions through the internet. Although they accessed information about it, they do not believe that those messages can generate actual engagement of the neighborhood into environmental issues (FALCÃO, 2013). We found that the young respondents of the latter research work (2014-2018) also had the same impression of reduced efficacy of internet socio-environmental contents. There was a thorough discussion of this subject among the undergraduate students, in face-to-face meetings⁶. They gathered and analysed some reasons why people tend to easily forget the socio-environmental content they see online⁷. Data has shown that there is a possibility of insufficiency in the socio-environmental communication online and in the school.

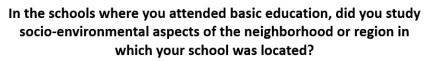
In the second investigation phase, expanded to other districts and cities, we focused on verifying deeply the connection between basic schooling and socio-environmental views of their living space. In this stage, there were 514 respondents, ranging from 12 to 70 years old. We concluded that the lack of content on views related to the school territory for students can lead to significant shrinking of socio-environmental perspective during and after the

⁶ For further details on the discussion refer to Falcão (2018).

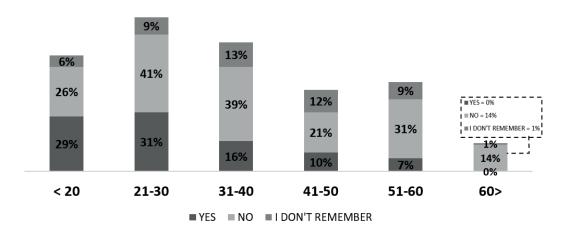
⁷ A special thanks to professor Lucilene Cury, PhD, from ECA/USP, which allowed us to develop an integrative work with our research and the intersections with the contents of her subject, Theory and Research Methods in Communication, on the first term of 2017.

school period. The connection between these factors also varies with the respondents' age range, as follows:

Figure 2 - Relationship between age group, basic education and socio-environmental views of the territory



(age groups - yrs)



Source: the authors.

Figure 2 shows a significant decrease (from 31 years old onwards) in the study of socioenvironmental questions related to their school territory. These are important indicators to follow and access the implementation and development of programs that integrate the urban socio-environmental perspective to the school system. The people who studied before the implementation of these programs had a vastly different experience at school, especially when it comes to structure, curricular content, teacher education, etc, which greatly influence the results. The most positive indicators up to the age of 30 are stimulating, but still produce no result when it comes to the citizens proactivity in the urban areas.

Even though it is positive to notice that the highest percentage of people who had access to environmental education are young, it is also relevant to mention the increasing degradation of the urban system, which will require from the teachers and schools' projects that target on the complex situation we have been facing nowadays.

Here we can see the role of multipliers of practices and reflection among people from various social areas (in the formal and informal education), especially when it comes to the reorganization of the daily practices aiming at the positive changes in the reflection aspects. Within this context, Citelli (2011) understands there is certainly a place for the educommunicator, the one – be it a teacher or an NGO member – that is able to connect the communication and education areas, turning into an element that can promote new perspectives of learners regarding the urban socio-environmental issues. In this point of view, the educommunicator becomes important when fighting what Morin (2006, p. 18) calls "weakening of the sense of responsibility and solidarity", which comes from the fact that people tend not to respect their "organic bonding with the city and their citizens".

When it comes to the specific Environmental Education field, Loureiro (2004, p. 118), inspired by Zygmunt Bauman, stated that we should show the educators a different perspective on the environmental discussion which is not connected to "proliferation of individual complaints related to the environmental misery degradation, with no public effects". In this case, we avoid the traditional view of schools that consider learners as receptors or transmitters of knowledge – a situation in which the content designed for the ecologically correct ones does not usually consider the fact that it should include economic, social and cultural aspects to be persuasive. The author criticizes the decision of "educating without certainty of the educator role on the society and of its social responsibility, without the needed problematization of reality" (LOUREIRO, 2004, p. 23). He also introduces the idea that the best way to invest against the predatory practices of the world is to encourage an Emancipatory Environmental Education, a necessary movement to "break with the barbarism of the current pattern of society and civilization" (LOUREIRO, 2004, p. 32).

The Emancipatory Environmental Education is based on understanding education as a social change element inspired by the dialog, on the strengthening of people, the citizenship practice, the creation of collective spaces that reorganise the social rules, on overcoming the capital logic and, finally, on understanding the world in its complexity and the life as a whole.

So, we understand that, by walking towards a Socio-environmental Education we move far from "banking approach", as stated by Freire (1983), once the focus is not "to make that social and economically excluded people live better without problematize the reality" (LOUREIRO, 2004, p. 26). On the opposite, improving the quality of life of the excluded people implies, at the same time, to interrogate the reality and promote social participation. By reviewing studies of Jesús Martín-Barbero, Dahlgren (2009) noticed that even if the interaction among citizenships is deficient regarding knowledge or deepening of a topic, it is essential to form a shared civil identity and to increase collective bonding (for instance, in order to reverse the damage to the environment). Therefore, this exchange can provide people with better argumentative resources to deepen the discussions around urban problems.

According to Lévy (1997, p. 7 – Emphasis added), we are forced to realize that there is a "bridge between the origin of the problems faced by the human collective due to the global situation of the technical evolution and the state of the collective debate about the topic, or even the media debate". The cyberculture philosopher invites us to think about a historical reason for this occurrence: at the times in which the politics philosophy and the

reflection about knowledge solidified, it happened because "the technology of transformation and communication were relatively stable or seemed to evolve in a predictable dimension" (LÉVY, 1997, p.7). When facing this acceleration and the sociotechnical changes that are relevant to our time, this situation became more dynamic. A new organization of the space has become a characteristic of the social practices that dominate and model the network society, says Castells (1999, p. 501 – Emphasis added):

The space of flow is the material organization of the social practices of shared timing that work through flows. By flows, we mean the intentional sequences, repetitive and programmable of interchange and interaction between physically non-articulated positions, kept by social agents in the economic, political and symbolic society structures.

The dominant social structures consist of "procedures of organizations and institutions whose internal logic plays a strategic role in the creation of the social practices and social consciousness to the society as a whole" (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 501). The school is part of these institutions and it has been facing problems to balance the normative structures and views about knowledge and information production and the requirements of life outside school.

In this gap between the dominant social practices and the creation of effective social practices to transform the way of living (mainly in the big cities), there's room for research, especially in the Educommunication Socio-environmental area. It is important to mention, however, that the positioning of Educommunication face to the implemented actions by public power and citizens regarding urban care is not easy:

the knowledge, apparently simple, of a significant relationship between Society and space hides a fundamental complexity, once the space is not a reflection of society, it is its expression. In other words; the space is not a photocopy of society, it is the society (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 500).

Consequently, the way people treat the urban spaces is even more dependent on the kinds of handling according to the anti-environmental interests at hand. It makes even more difficult to critically verify the elements that integrate the daily routine of the cities. Contradictory tendencies which derive from conflict and strategies between people who represent opposite values are included in this topic.

The analysis of constructs related to procedures and ways to rethink the socio-spatial structures from the urban scenery – assuming healthy conditions to men's and women's lives as reminded by Saldiva (2010, p. 20), "the human being is the forgotten aspect of the environmental issues" – depends a lot on the research on the bridge between techno scientific

knowledge and the users of information, as well as the various mediating events involved. Nowadays, it is expected that the school be able to work together with other institutions to conceive a desirable socio-environmental interaction from the inside to the outside of a pedagogical space.

In Environmental Education, much has been said about the positive bonding the classroom can stablish with the collective construction of interactions. Loureiro (2004) says, however, that education is commonly used to impose behaviors which are considered correct by the governmental environmental institutions to their strategies of scientific promotion. When it comes to the procedures of these institutions, the main criticism is the usage of language which is inadequate to engage the dialog and participation. For instance, it is quite common to distribute brochures and posters in places where people have little access to reading and with high illiteracy rates. It shows that the official institutions in charge of the environmental policies have "a technical view of the environmental issues and little understanding of what education is" (LOUREIRO, 2004, p. 27).

Consequently, many institutions throughout the country still create campaigns using communication materials that lack efficiency. Although they are seen as a synonym of education, they integrate activities that can or cannot be part of the teaching-learning process, depending on their connection with the political-pedagogical project and a broader perspective of the educational doing. When it comes to the communication about the environment, this is an area that demands more care and research:

The awareness-raising actions [in the Environmental Education] are mutual, it involves critical capacity, dialog, assimilation of different knowledge, and the active transformation of reality and life conditions (LOUREIRO, 2004, p. 29).

The educommunication approach resurges as a set of strategies which may be able to stimulate the practice as proposed either by Loureiro (2004) or by the ProNEA (2008), as mentioned beforehand. However, one cannot forget that the process to build these practices needs to use language accordingly on the multiple discourses from the social environment.

It is known that the complex dialogic game from which topics, concepts, preconceptions, values, knowledge and clichés arise also derives from the social view of the language. It allows the circulation of "communicative flows that integrate different types of voices and places where the discourses are produced"— whether they come from big institutions, different professional fields, the daily routine, urban tribes, etc (CITELLI, 2007). The educommunicator is the one that studies, researches, chooses the most appropriate language to reach the best level of efficiency in the communicational practices created by him.

The mediation mentioned before is simultaneously delicate and strategic in a crucial moment, settled by, according to Carvalho (2008), intensity and instability of progress, retreat, and reorganization of social and environmental projects. Not only is the environmental

educator facing the urgency of transformations and the public and private demand for solutions, but also all the educators – especially the ones related to educommunication – are experiencing this moment.

Even though researchers show that individual actions are not enough to fight the destructive effects in our ecosystem, it is essential to remember that a transformed global view of our relationship with the environment is related to local actions (CASTELLS, 2003, LOUREIRO, 2004, BERNA, 2010). These initiatives, together, can generate new ways of social-environmental living.

Conclusion

The organization of new society-environment interactions created by the national basic schooling - extended by the non-formal and informal education (because it is a quite expressive force) — requires us to consider research works that point out aspects in which education and communication are intertwined to reach that goal. It becomes fundamental, in this reorganization, make use of "a qualified media as part of the social transformation process suggested by the Environmental Education, either on what is so called alternative media or in the hegemonic ones" (EVENTO INTEGRADO, 2005).

However, to include the qualified productions in proactive discussions in the school environment and out of it, one needs to be able to "potentialize information related to environmental education, mainly when it comes to the non-schooled axis", according to Medeiros (2009). To do so, it is determinant that we engage people on educommunicative strategies. The Ecology and Natural Resources specialist considers that this kind of communication inside schools is certainly valid - even though, as our research shows, it is still far away from reaching its goals in large scale, to be noticed beyond school walls. A great challenge is the informality, which is not the specific area of work of teachers and students, but derives from it, as mentioned beforehand. It might be the call to develop the "capability of learning how to effectively use communication tools in various ways", taking into account that nowadays, there is "in Brazil, a huge effort from the Environmental Education area to work with the Educommunication concept" (MEDEIROS, 2009).

So, we return to the formal teaching and the problem of the lack of connection between what one learns at school and what actually is applicable beyond its walls when it comes to urban environmental care. It is urgent to improve ideas such as dialog, polemicizing and opening to the different educommunicative discourse voices. These characteristics refer to the idea of communicational ecosystem, which relates to environment organization, availability of resources, the *modus faciendi* of people and the set of activities characteristic from communicational acts.

What happens is that, from the environmental communication viewpoint, there are excellent media productions nowadays together with a collective imaginary full of models on how to preserve the nature, about the responsibility of each being to reverse the socio-

environmental damage. We lack multiplying agents on schools and public administration – according to testimonials where the research was conducted (Vila Medeiros, São Paulo, capital) — that can encourage changes in the predominant ideas and engage the population to participate in concrete actions to save the environment individually and collectively.

From this perspective, we suggest the engagement of academic studies related to urban communication strategies to make projects which are able to create urgent changes in the macro area of metropolitan existence and the micro area of the individual and community lives. To study the socio-environmental discourses related to those situations, we imagine a horizon in which the Educommunication Socio-environmental will increase its contributions, especially in the classroom – in which it is still not much common, according to this research. We wish it will stablish important parameters to research and intervention when it comes to the permeability of communication on the many questions related to the urban ecosystems.

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ADILSON CITELLI | SANDRA PEREIRA FALCÃO

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Adilson Citelli

Tenured Professor at the Department of Communications and Arts of ECA-USP. He supervises master's and doctorate students at PPGCOM-USP. He is the author of numerous books and articles. CNPq Researcher 1B. Leader of the Educommunicative Mediations Research Group (MECOM), certified by CNPq. E-mail: citelli@uol.com.br.

Sandra Pereira Falcão

PhD and Master in Communication Sciences from ECA-USP; specialist in Youth and Adult Education by the Federal Institute of São Paulo (IFSP); graduated in Languages from USP; teacher of private school's system in São Paulo. Member of the Educommunicative Mediations Research Group (MECOM). E-mail: sandrapfalcao@hotmail.com.

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