



LIVE TRANSMISSIONS IN LEGISLATIVE TVS: FROM THE REQUIREMENTS OF TRANSPARENCY TO CURRENT CHALLENGES

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Abstract: The very existence of parliamentary channels is based on the principles of openness and transparency. Nevertheless, the relationship between the live broadcast of sessions and transparency is not direct or linear, but ambivalent. The article discusses this relationship through four axes: impacts of the presence of cameras in parliaments; legislative channels' programs and schedules; the language of live broadcasts; and the arcane and inscrutable quality of many parliamentary proceedings. In the last section, the article focuses on some recent technological innovations that achieve transparency without journalistic mediation and, thus, pose some challenges to parliamentary channels.

Key-words: Transparency; Parliament; Television; Journalism.

INTRODUCTION

The common denominator between the programs and schedules of the different legislative TVs is the regular coverage of Parliament's activities, especially the broadcasting – live or recorded, full or edited – of their meetings (SANTOS, 2008; FERNÁNDEZ, 2002; GONÇALVES, 2011). In well-established and well-resourced broadcasters, the programming profile is complex and eclectic (including journalistic, cultural, debate programs, etc.). However, this content is similar to what we can see on other public and private channels. The broadcasts of the meetings are almost exclusive to the legislative channels² and their distinctive feature.

Live broadcasts allow us to think about legislative transparency from a variety of perspectives. The relationship between both is not direct and linear, but ambivalent. The very existence of parliamentary channels is based on the principles of openness and transparency, and indeed such channels greatly increase the visibility and publicity of what is done in plenary and committees. But in this process the institution itself changes: the procedures shown are new

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² When other channels broadcast them, they often repeat the signal generated by legislative channels, just by entering new credits, comments, or narration. This was the case, for example, of the vote on Dilma Rousseff's impeachment request in the Chamber of Deputies on April 17, 2016. That Sunday afternoon, four broadcast TV channels (Globo, Record, Band and Rede TV!), cable TV channels (such as GloboNews and BandNews) and countless news sites broadcast the vote uninterruptedly. If the audience was divided between them, the origin of all the images was one: TV Câmara, responsible for framing the event, choosing their angles, determining the moments of cutting and editing.

versions of what existed before cameras, and the gradual widening of visibility leads to the creation of new zones of secrecy and opacity³. Transparency discourse can cover up attempts of managing and controlling projected images, and more sensitive or controversial information and actions can be overshadowed by the incessant promotion of other content.

Transparency is not just a matter of access, but involves several components related to the objects, subjects, and means that enable such access. Thus, the work of parliamentarians and journalists is crucial to understanding the relationship between legislative channels and transparency. Both groups mediate the events and senses transmitted during the coverage, setting the relationship between showing and making sense of what is displayed. The centrality of live broadcasts has profound impacts on the institution and on the legislative channel itself, from the standpoint of its programming schedule and language.

The article is organized into three sections: the first discusses the normative and legal demands for transparency and the effects of live broadcasts on parliaments; in the second, some consequences of the predominance of this type of transmission for the parliamentary channels are addressed, from the point of view of their programming, language, a possible arcane and inscrutable quality and the consequent need for mediation; the third and last section presents some recent technological innovations and new challenges for parliamentary channels.

1 – LEGISLATIVE TVS: TRANSPARENCY AND EFFECTS ON PARLIAMENTS

Plenary and committee meetings predominate in the ranks of legislative channels for legal, institutional and editorial reasons. The law known as the Cable Law (Law 8.977 / 1995) stipulates, in its article 23, that legislative channels should turn to “the documentation of parliamentary work, especially the live broadcast of sessions”. This centrality is echoed by researchers and also by broadcasting professionals:

The live broadcasts (...) can be considered the flagship of what is shown, because they represent the most interesting thing that is transmitted: the working meetings, in which parliamentarians debate and deliberate topics under the responsibility of the Legislature, showing what is genuine, natural and proper to this power (RENAULT, 2004, p. 48). The priority for transmission is plenary meetings. Why? Because it is considered the heart of the Minas Gerais State Parliament. This is where decisions are effectively made. So all plenary meetings are live all the time. Not being the plenary meetings, we go to the committees with guests (...), they are very important as well, because that is where the debate on the laws (...) and the issues that will

³ The existence of secret proceedings is not necessarily normatively questionable. Simone Chambers (2004) argues that the presumption in favor of advertising does not negate the need for secrecy. As Wolfgang Müller and Ulrich Sieberer (2014, p. 240) point out, certain committees working behind closed doors are more likely to reach consensus than publicly exposed arenas; therefore, parliamentarians have good reason to keep some activities isolated. Tony O'Donnell (1992, p. 267) reinforces the chorus of the need for privacy and secrecy, stating that much of Parliament's “real work” has moved away from the reach of television coverage. Mary Angela Bock (2009, p. 263) recognizes that many meetings are ceremonial, while decision-making takes place behind closed doors. In other words, even the full television coverage of meetings (gavel-to-gavel coverage) does not inform us about much of the backstage’ policy, negotiations in informal spaces, lobbying pressures and private agents (BOCK, 2009, p. 271).

make a difference in the life of the citizen starts. (...)There is no possibility of a meeting being held and we are not live (Fernanda Avelar, gerente de Reportagem da TV Assembleia / MG⁴)

The main justification for the broadcast of meetings is the need for transparency and publicity of the activities. Transparency is valued both for its intrinsic value (part of the value system of liberal democracies and human rights, which guarantees citizens the right to know what is happening in public administration and establishes the government's duty to be open) and for its instrumental role (STIGLITZ, 1999; DROR, 1999). Transparency would be able to: discipline institutions and leaders; promote institutional efficiency and reduce management failures; increase confidence in governments and public institutions; reduce the information gap between rulers and ruled by allowing the public to make more informed policy decisions and to participate more actively in public deliberations; expand political responsibility and accountability; foster political participation and provide inputs for civil mobilization; expose injustices, corruption and other evils; stimulate the use of public reasons (CHAMBERS, 2004; ETZIONI, 2010; FILGUEIRAS, 2011; SILVA, 2016; STIGLITZ, 1999).

The last decades have seen a great growth in social demands and institutional mechanisms related to increased transparency. Such movement is closely related to the evolution of information and communication technologies, which reduce logistical obstacles and the costs of transparency (FILGUEIRAS, 2016; HEALD, 2006; MARQUES, 2016). An important point highlighted by John Keane (2013) is the fact that governments and institutions are encouraged to voluntarily submit their decisions to public control, to introduce their own scrutiny mechanisms or to support their creation. The institutions themselves are compelled to “redesign themselves as a more active agent in communication processes, being daily pressed and demanded in this sense, either by specific laws or by public demand” (SILVA, 2016, p. 27-28). By accepting to participate actively in this game, political institutions recognize and reinforce the legitimacy of monitoring activities, but also try to manage their visibility.

Parliament can be considered “the most transparent of powers” (NOLETO FILHO, 2014, p. 203). Several institutional norms, resources and mechanisms – some almost as old as the institution itself – aim to ensure transparency: the opening of galleries to the public and the press, the recording and publication of speeches and votes, the dissemination of agendas and other documents, radio and television broadcasts, data (especially open ones) present on websites, among others. The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness advocates that information should be provided quickly and preferably in real time (OPENING PARLIAMENT, 2012, p. 4). More

⁴ Interview granted to the author on 7/4/15. In this and all other references of interviews, positions, parties and other information refer to the status of the interviewee at the time of collecting her statement.

specifically, it recommends that parliaments should offer live and on-demand (via radio, TV or internet) broadcasting services⁵ (OPENING PARLIAMENT, 2012, p. 8).

Audiovisual broadcasts create a sense of “being there” by broadening the public's perception of events (it is possible to hear the voices of those involved, their prosody and idiosyncrasies, see politicians in action, their appearance, their gestures, their movements). Live broadcast gives the access to events as they unfold, not just a posteriori, like other technologies. It thus allows the public to speak out – through telephone contacts, via the internet or even by traveling to Parliament's seat – during the proceedings and discussion, before a decision has been made. But as they are “invaded” by cameras, political events change (JARDIM, 2008, p. 47).

The literature review highlights several effects produced by the introduction of cameras in parliaments⁶. Some identify “intense transformations in the daily life of Power, with direct reflexes on the form of parliamentary action” (ABREU, 2004, p. 6), including resorting to interviews and surveys with parliamentarians to corroborate this perception. Márcia Jardim (2008), for example, mentions that 98% of respondents noticed changes after the beginning of legislative TV, while Luiz Carlos Freitas (2004, p. 58) points out that all interviewed senators “noticed changes in the way of doing politics in the parliamentary environment”. Numerous authors and effects could be cited here, but it seems more productive to focus on just four topics:

- **Accountability and responsiveness** – Television broadcasts are opportunities to broaden accountability relationships (SANTOS, 2008; SILVA, 2012; RENAULT, 2004; GARDEN, 2008) and allow parliamentarians to become more “responsive, that is, more likely to fulfill the political mandate in line with the interest of their electorate” (RENAULT, 2004, p. 115).
- **Pace of work** – the legislative process adjusts to the presence of cameras in systematic and predictable ways, with impacts on pace and load of work (CRAIN and GOFF, 1998; FREITAS, 2004; SANTOS, 2008), the attendance of parliamentarians (MITCHELL, 1992; FREITAS, 2004) and the length of sessions (CRAIN and GOFF, 1998; MIXON JR. *et al.*, 2001).
- **Discussion** – the use of the tribune increases, with more pronouncements and registered speakers (SANTOS, 2008; KENNEDY and CULEY, 1992; FREITAS), broadening of the treated subjects (SANTOS, 2008) and improvement from the point of view of content (MITCHELL, 1992; GRUNDY, 2000). Parliamentarians

⁵ According to the World e-Parliament Report 2018 (IPU, 2018, p. 51), live broadcast of sessions is adopted by 80% of institutions, with digital and Internet streaming exceeding traditional TV in this process (IPU, 2018, p. 6). The report is produced by the Inter-Parliamentary Union from surveys with parliaments from around the world (the 2018 edition featured 114 respondents from 85 countries).

⁶ Some scholars consider that the impacts were not so significant (LAMB, 1992, p. 226; WEATHERILL, 1992, p. Xiv-xv). Others highlight the fact that the cameras had little impact on parliamentary activities not covered by them, such as meetings with parties and coreligionists, cabinet workdays and personal contact with voters at the grassroots (SANTOS, 2008, p. 113).

start acting for the audience, trying to impress and / or convince television viewers (MIXON JR. *et al.*, 2003; MILLER, 2015; SCHATZ,).

- **Representation** – public scrutiny by television gives more visibility to representation (FENNO JR., 1977, p. 917), external “conflicts and interests” (SILVA, 2012), expands opportunities for public justification of the actions of parliamentarians and the presentation of representative allegations (BARRETO, 2018).

All these expressive changes in work dynamics after the start of television broadcasts make us question the very idea of transparency. From a physical point of view, something transparent allows one to clearly see what is behind it (OLIVER, 2004, p. 3) – nothing further, therefore, than the effects mentioned. Cameras definitely change the permeability, texture or porosity of parliament and, in the process, fundamentally change the institution. The parliament they show us is not the same as it was before they were created: the simple fact that parliament can be seen by us makes it different, the political reality we see on TV only exists that way because of the TV itself. Inside a glass house, people behave differently than they would in one with solid walls, thick curtains, and massive doors. We can see the deputies in their daily lives, they look at us through the cameras, they challenge us, and they call our action. However, when they do this, it is often this contact that becomes primordial to them, not their "original" or "true" activities.

2 – CONSEQUENCES FOR LEGISLATIVE TVS

Having as their flagship the broadcast of the legislative process, preferably live, also uniquely shapes the legislative TVs. I now propose to look more closely at what this represents in terms of programming schedules, the language of live broadcasts, the role of parliamentarians and journalists.

2.1) Malleable programming

Programming schedule is “the set of programs that defines the profile of the stations” (CIFUENTES, 2002). Each broadcaster builds its own identity based on the genres of programs and audiences it prioritizes (LIMA, 2010). Legislative TVs are not generalist but specialized channels (REY, 2002). As pointed out by the then director of TV Câmara, Adriana Marcondes:

Our programming schedule privileges parliamentary activity. Why? You have, in Brazil, (...) several other channels where you find film, culture, activity of all kinds. So, the TV Câmara dos Deputados (TV Chamber of Deputies), what does it have to show? Parliamentary activity. Because that is what is the basics here (MARCONDES, 2015, without pagination).

Priority given to meeting broadcasts impacts the rest of the schedule. Because the length of sessions varies greatly, the anticipated schedule grid is hardly respected: an extended meeting

overtakes scheduled programs, while a canceled meeting demands the display of unplanned content (LIMA, 2010; SANTOS). In addition, the broadcast time of live sessions depends on the routine of the legislature and does not meet typical programming criteria – based on viewer habits, directing the programs of greatest interest to “prime time”, “when more people are at home and with their TVs on” (SANTOS, 2008). This can have a direct impact on legislative TV audience levels as it makes it difficult for most audiences to watch live sessions.

Legislative channels also display other types of content, such as: journalistic programs (TV news, electronic magazines, interviews, etc.); debates and round tables; documentaries; educational, cultural and variety programs. The distribution of these programs in the programming schedule respects the institutions' working routine, generally focusing on early mornings, evenings and weekends (that is, when there are fewer plenary meetings and committees). The content, in general, prioritizes values such as “participation, education and popular awareness” (GONÇALVES, 2011) and critical formation for the exercise of citizenship, “with a view to knowledge and strengthening the exercise of their rights” (FORUM, 2007). Such programs often follow on their agenda the topics raised during plenary and committee meetings, having invited parliamentarians, and addressing content suggested by them. It is as if the legislative process “overflowed” from its usual locations to the rest of the schedule of legislative channels.

This reveals an interesting feature of legislative TVs: their programming is defined almost “shared” by politicians and communications officials. When parliamentarians hold a formal meeting, it has a good chance of being shown in full (live or recorded), spending several hours on the TV schedule. The way they explore the possibilities of visibility – scheduling meetings for strategic times, proposing themes, lengthening meetings – are also ways they directly interfere with the content of the legislative channel. This means that legislative TVs teams (largely made up of journalists and technicians) often have no control over the schedules or content that will be handled in much of their schedule. As shown, parliamentarians are not only *characters* of the contents displayed, but also *articulators* of the programming itself (although their degree of perception about this role is variable).

Reflexivity is a central point of performance: acting is being aware that one is simultaneously acting and displaying the action (RAI and REINELT, 2015). During the meetings, we can identify the conscience of the parliamentarians that they are acting: they look at the cameras, they talk naturally to the external publics, they emphasize that they are there to show their actions and positions to the citizens, they assume different roles according to the objectives pursued at every moment (the conciliator, the accuser, the people's representative, the government squire, the eloquent debater, the technically trained professional, and so on). “For the most performing deputies, TV Câmara coverage is the possibility not only of being accountable to their electorate, but also of gaining public empathy [...] in live broadcasts, some turn out to be almost

TV presenters” (LEMOS *et al.*, 2011, p. 10). Members can even familiarize themselves with televisual style and exploit it (LEMOS *et al.*, 2011, p. 10).

[There is] an attempt by parliamentarians to not only adapt to the new environment but also to control the agenda and narrative schemes of the mass media. This is not a passive and peaceful surrender to the communication empire, but a selective appropriation of information industry techniques (MARTINS, 2016, p. 78).

In general, we can say that the interaction between politicians and the media is marked simultaneously by divergence of interests, interdependence and mutual benefits. Actors wishing to gain media visibility need to know the criteria used to select and format news if they want to increase their chances of success. In institutions with large numbers of members, such as parliaments, the degree of skill and training of politicians is expected to vary: some find it difficult to seize visibility opportunities, adjust to camera presence, express themselves clearly and attractively; others stand out for their dexterity in choosing days and times to ensure better coverage or more live time⁷, for their resourcefulness in conducting meetings with their eyes and minds focused simultaneously on the audience and viewers, on the fast pace they give to their work, on the colloquial and close tone with which they address their various audiences.

This mixing and overlapping of roles again confuses the issue of transparency: the subjects being observed also define the opportunities and conditions of their observation. They can, for example, choose when to take advantage of visibility or to retreat to more opaque spaces.

2.2) The language of live broadcasts

Live broadcast presents itself as a window to the world, a possibility to experience facts in distant places as they unfold (MARRIOTT, 2007). Clearly, this is the discourse that permeates the idea that television broadcasting of parliamentary activities is an opportunity to participate in the daily life of parliament, as if viewers were there. Images give a sense of likelihood and are thus strategies to garner legitimacy or credibility. As Mary Angela Bock (2009, p. 258) warns, the idea that images are objective representations presents an *illusion of transparency*. Parliament's live broadcasts feature highly constructed images created in a system that gives politicians advantages that control material access and determine coverage rules (BOCK, 2009). We must therefore be aware of what is shown and what is not.

The coverage of parliamentary activities is commonly done through full transmission, which brings the ideas of completeness and continuity. It is a continuous record, without deletions, stops or temporal ellipses (FECHINE, 2008). The live coverages are fully assembled at the

⁷ Committee chairmen, for example, may choose to use “dead” days and times to ensure that their meetings have less competition and are more likely to be broadcast live. “I always booked on days when I didn't have any meetings, Mondays and Fridays, (...) because with that I guaranteed the live broadcast. (...) So, I intentionally and ideologically used TV (...) I am a more experienced, tricky deputy, I did willy-nilly at the Human Rights Commission” (state deputy Durval Ângelo / PT – interview granted to the author on 12/11/14).

moment even when they are broadcast. As pointed out by Leticia Renault (2004, p. 49), in legislative TVs,

Debates, voting, speeches are displayed to the viewer without going through the traditional questions asked by reporters, without the previous selection of images and speeches made in the edition, without the text written to 'perfectly match' the images (...) The rules of production made in advance, which guarantee the well-finished television product, are set aside in favor of the exposure of Parliament's rules. (...) Live scenes in progress, such as legislative plenary debate or deliberation moments, produce raw material that, when recorded live, crosses the physical boundaries of legislative houses with unthinking freedom compared to the information that goes through the editing screen.

This type of transmission does not allow elaboration interval, indentation time to give meaning and finish to the material being produced. Thus, it is often not possible to exclude work marks, downtime, errors, disconnections, hasty solutions from products. “At the present time, filmmakers must give consistency to the material at the same time as the material is still being taken and unable to preview the results before the product reaches the recipient” (MACHADO, 2000, p. 130).

“Real-world” material necessarily undergoes various transformations and mediations – simultaneous and / or sequential – and the content viewers have access to depends on the choices of the various individuals involved (producers, editors, directors, etc.) in various locations and stages of production (MARRIOTT, 2007, p. 75). The live broadcast process depends on camera placement, framing, camera movement, cutting between images, duration of each shot, what audio will be captured, mixing when there is more than one audio channel, choosing the moments to be narrated (on or off), whether or not to place written information on the images (credits, descriptions, news bar, etc.) the connection between that coverage and the content preceding and succeeding it in the televisual stream.

Meetings usually follow a defined structure (established by the Internal Rules, with destination and duration of each phase) and are covered in a planned way (it is known how many cameras will be used and where they will be positioned, what kind of framing and cutting should be privileged, etc.). In many cases, there are also coverage rules that direct what can and cannot be done by TV teams. As Jardim (2008, p. 84) notes, the discussion about camera control is “present in all parliaments that authorize TV coverage of their activities”. In some cases, such rules may be written and official, in others – as is more common in Brazil – they are tacit and depend on the discernment of the professionals involved, who usually follow the implicit guidelines (JARDIM, 2008, p. 71-72). This is what report professionals of the TV Assembleia de Minas interviewed by me:

[Must have this] sensitivity to realize that some images you cannot show. (...) [ALMG's Director of Institutional Communication] Rodrigo Lucena once told me that I was to be careful not to show the deputy reading a newspaper while another is speaking, deputies laughing in the Plenary, that group talking (...) in

the polls, also not showing empty seats, the Empty plenary and so on, because it has bad repercussions out there (MACIEL, 2015, without pagination).

We avoid images that testify against [the deputy's reputation] (...) if he is on the phone during a meeting, if he is drinking water, if he is chewing gum, if he has a little game on his cell phone (...) I never received any official guidance. (...) So, there is a rule that is not (...) declared, for us to avoid, because as a viewer I also find it uncomfortable (VIEIRA, 2015, without pagination).

It is predominant in legislative TVs what Renault (2004, p. 73) calls the “disciplined image”:

The camera in these [legislative] channels operates under the rule of the word, of political discourse. Only allowed to frame who has the word. Rules like this have created a plastered camera with little freedom of action. It is a camera that ignores or is delayed when it should display reactions, counterattacks and, especially, movement in the galleries. It directs the viewer's gaze to the actor. It works according to the politician who speaks and not according to the environment in which the discussion takes place. It opens the plenary doors to the viewer, but at the same time mediates this communication, as it indicates what should be seen (RENAULT, 2004, p. 77).

With more modern and agile equipment⁸, the tendency is to increase the dynamism of broadcasts (which are a little closer to the video style that viewers are used to seeing in other genres and channels). There is also a better contextualization of the meetings, contributing to arouse and maintain the interest of the viewers and broaden their understanding of what is happening: who addresses whom, where do possible questions come from (From other deputies? From the galleries?), what is the reception the pronouncement is having at that moment, what level of attention and involvement parliamentarians present and many other factors.

If there is a discussion, if there is a demonstration or if there is a fight, I prefer to show the images. (...) In my opinion, if we do not give a larger framing dimension for the viewer to understand what is happening, and where it is happening, what impact it has on the scenario, I think it impairs understanding. (...) I think [the viewer] has a right to know. (VIEIRA, 2015, without pagination).

During a Plenary meeting, a parliamentarian may be questioned and criticized by his peers and gallery audiences, and if this performance is broadcast live, a much wider audience has the ability to follow up on potential representatives and their responses. “Events that occurred within the Legislative could have been ignored or censored if they were not inserted in the context of a live broadcast”, highlights Queiroz (2007, p. 195).

This unpredictable character reduces politicians' control over the conditions of their advertising and reveals a constitutive tension of live broadcasts: they follow coverage rules and regimental rules, have a strong institutional bias, are prepared in advance, scripted and managed; however, the "live" is the realm of the unexpected, the unplanned, the random opening, or at least

⁸ Today, coverage is usually made with several remotely controlled cameras, allowing for a greater switching between images, angles and planes, with reaction shots, group images, camera' movements.

the possibility of its occurrence. This unpredictable and uncontrollable character exposes parliamentarians to political clashes, questions and reactions from galleries, which can undermine previous strategies and goals, the desire to control apparitions.

And how is transparency in the midst of this tension between control and unpredictability? If politicians determine how they should be shown (and especially how they do not want to be portrayed), can we say that there is indeed transparency? I believe that the undeniable gains in visibility, access, advertising and monitoring should not be viewed as achieving complete transparency, as they are always permeated by corporate, institutional, partisan and individual interests.

This does not mean that the disciplined image is manipulated or censored, because, as Renault (2004, p. 102) points out, "live broadcast makes it impossible for the Legislative Branch to have absolute control over the facts it plays". Even though most events are scheduled and scripted in advance, live television always offers the possibility of a meeting with the event in its development process, whose end point is not yet determined (MARRIOTT, 2007, p. 69- 70). It is "more difficult to make interference or allow a single version of the facts to prevail. [...] the possibility of selecting speeches, making biased broadcasts or avoiding the publication of discomforts among parliamentarians is much reduced. Everything is transmitted instantly" (QUEIROZ, 2007, p. 194).

Regular television broadcasting of legislative work can be viewed in different ways. On the one hand, it represents an achievement of society, a way to monitor the performance of representatives, expand the possibilities of accountability. On the other hand, they are spaces in which politicians can work personal, partisan and institutional images in more advantageous and strategic ways to achieve their goals. One use does not make the other unfeasible. Rather, they propel and mingle.

2.3) Arcane and mediation

Live broadcasts of sessions have their own language, quite different from what viewers are used to watch on other channels. Renault (2004, p. 49) states that they show "what is genuine, natural and proper" of the Legislature, with the "strength of echoing, almost *in natura*, far from the plenary". Commercial media tends to reject the contents of politics in their traditional format, especially "those related to in-depth argumentative dispute, subtleties and discursive complexities, the regular administration of public affairs, and the everyday, bureaucratic and predictable political game" (GOMES, 2004, p. 302). The logic of legislative TV, on the other hand, is in line with the legislative routine and process, without concessions to the tastes and preferences of the public.

Even at the risk of sounding tedious, arcane, inscrutable, or archaic, legislative procedures have not yielded to demands for dynamism, entertainment, and conflict exploration. What can be

seen is the resistance and permanence of the rites, norms and rhythms of parliament, which do not fit the usual aesthetic standards and narratives of commercial television. It is as if, through a “making the parliamentary media”, the broadcasters were trying to introduce viewers to this universe, where political discussions and the processing of bills do not “fit” into two-minute stories, one side against the other in favor.

Barros and Bernardes (2009, p. 3-6) point out some specificities of the legislative media, compared to the commercial one: it is dedicated to the “systematic and continuous broadcasting of contents on the same theme, in a contextualized and detailed way”, rather than to provide only a ‘fragmented and episodic disclosure about the parliament’; it includes “topics related to institutional legislative matters”; conveys “information about the whole procedure process of a bill” and not just “the result of some votes judged to be of great social impact”; deepens “the public discussion on the topics discussed by the committees and the Plenary”. While the press generally focuses on party struggles, political disagreements, intrigues and denunciations, legislative media seek to reverse this logic and

[...] give special attention to events that were ignored by most of the commercial press – committee debates (where most bill modifications are made, including with the participation of civil society); the various stages of the processing of a proposal and the plenary discussions and votes [...] show the richness of the debates held in parliament; the legislative routine and not just the spectacular events (QUEIROZ, 2007, p. 84-85).

The intentions are noble and valid. However, the procedures are complex, full of expert jargon, governed by rules full of minutiae and exceptions that dictate an often lengthy procedure. For Jardim (2008, p. 68), this “intricate and time-consuming operation” contributes to a “process of invisibility” of the parliament.

It is largely up to the coverage of legislative channels – marked by the specialization of programs and professionals around the parliamentary theme (QUEIROZ, 2007, p. 140-141) – to operate the mediation between the universe of the initiates and the laity, translating to the public what happens during live broadcasts⁹. “Parliamentary channels do the work of translating complex issues that directly affect the community but are ignored by traditional media” (QUEIROZ, 2007, p. 164). The opinion is corroborated by Jean-Pierre Elkabbach, former president of the French channel *Public Sénat*. For him, the purpose of the legislative channel is to add journalistic value to the broadcast, to decode the procedures and to explain the political issues of the background, as this is what matters most to the public (IPU, 2007, p. 13).

⁹ Not all scholars agree with this perspective: “The journalist in charge of monitoring broadcasts is also not authorized to act as mediator. He can never speak by superimposing his voice on that of the president or speakers (...) he should simply 'fill in, with information, the audio intervals between speakers, especially in deliberative sessions, pending the outcome'. He is limited to merely descriptive speech, never interpretive or opinionated” (RENAULT, 2004, p. 78). I believe that in the 14 years that separate us from Renault's research, the landscape has changed: there are spaces in the schedule of legislative channels for opinion and interpretation, although the orientation of not overlapping the speakers who have the primacy of visibility is maintained.

Such mediation is important because, in many cases, internal political disputes are characterized by the complexity of language and an esoteric culture, “made up of problems completely foreign or inaccessible to the common, concepts and discourses without reference in the experience of the ordinary citizen” (BOURDIEU, 1989, p. 178). It is up to the information instance to select the facts that will be converted to news, to rank them, to describe them, to comment on them and to explain them, making them accessible to a “heterogeneous reception instance that consists of readers-listeners-viewers of different ages, different educational levels, social backgrounds and interests” (CHARAUDEAU, 2013, p. 283). Even when politicians address the public directly through the mass media, viewers often rely on journalists to provide meaningful frames and sift information (COOK, 2005), a work that transforms the frameworks promoted by political elites (DE VREESE, 2014, p. 137).

Thus, the role of journalism as an “expert system” is highlighted, “a system of technical excellence whose effectiveness rests on the trust placed by its consumers” (MIGUEL, 1999, p. 197). The press is central to political processes, because much specialized knowledge “only feeds the conscience of the agents after being processed (or diluted) through journalism” (MIGUEL, 1999, p. 204). In the case of the Legislature, “its own communication system allows the combination of the credibility of an expert system, the control of news and the proactive management of information for the image of the institution” (BERNARDES and BARROS, 2009, p. 304).

Legislative channels also offer a possibility for the formation of the public, by expanding their knowledge of the legislature. As Guillermo Gómez (2002, p. 244) suggests, “‘viewers’ are not born, they are made”. And public television faces first and foremost the challenge of its ‘making’. Legislative media can “contribute to the political education of the citizen by offering analytical tools to understand the political / legislative process in its complexity and to become a more participative and active citizen in society” (BARROS and BERNARDES, 2009, p. 6).

Recently, however, new technological possibilities do not require journalistic mediation to guarantee the transparency of parliaments. This is the theme of the last section.

3 – TODAY: TECHNOLOGY AND CHALLENGES

Since their inception, legislative channels have faced questions about the high costs involved. A dedicated channel expects to completely fill the schedule grid seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Although there is extensive content of fully broadcast meetings - live, recorded and replayed - there is a significant demand for professionals and equipment. When costs are borne by public coffers¹⁰, additional questions arise. For politicians, legislative TV represents an

¹⁰ The model disseminated in Brazil is that of legislative channels located within the internal structure of parliaments, with funding through public resources and administration controlled by politicians themselves. This makes broadcasters more dependent on “Bureau members’ willingness and budget availability” (FÓRUM, 2006, p. 94). Cifuentes (2002)

investment option that necessarily removes budget allocations from other activities and areas (such as cabinets, travel and event funds, etc.). For society, there is always the possibility of questioning whether this is the best way to apply public resources. “Almost always the first reaction is negative criticism for the use of public money, which many mistakenly see as waste” (MONTEIRO, 2011, p. 174). As Maria de Lourdes dos Santos (2008, p. 63) points out, the costs of legislative channels “are subject to criticism and controversy”: opponents consider the investment to be high – especially in view of the low audience – and warn against the possibility of propaganda use of TVs; advocates highlight the important informational role of legislative channels, “indispensable for accountability of political representation”. Austin Mitchell (1992, p. 97) offers two arguments to justify public spending on legislative TV: ensuring that parliament has control over broadcasts (rather than commercial broadcasters) and the principle that it is parliament's responsibility to provide access to information about its work.

But if the principles of transparency, publicity, and openness remain constant, the mechanisms through which they are realized change along with historical and technological developments over time (OPPD, 2010, p. 15). The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness (OPENING PARLIAMENT, 2012) recognizes that the digital age has fundamentally changed the context of public use of parliamentary information and citizens' expectations of good governance. In its Article 27, it states that parliament must offer multiple channels of access to information, including on-site observation, print media, radio and TV broadcasts, the internet and mobile phone technologies (OPENING PARLIAMENT, 2012, p. 6).

Legislative channels then rely on the partnership – or, in some cases, some competition – of digital media. For the Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD, 2010, p. 16), websites have become the primary means by which parliaments disclose their work to civil society and the media, introducing new functionality and integrating content that was already customary produced by the legislatures. Many parliamentary portals today have webcasting features, which allow citizens to follow the audiovisual coverage of their work in real time or consult the archives later. Web transmission is a trend in many countries, mainly because it allows more economy, agility and ease of implementation (GARDIM, 2008). According to the World e-Parliament Report 2016, this trend is spreading rapidly: 61% of survey respondents integrate video recordings of their sessions with live broadcast and semi-automatic internet upload. Even

points out that public funding, by itself, is not a problem, as long as it is stable, to guarantee autonomy. Other countries, however, opt for different forms of financing, such as: public funds with their own budget, separate budget line and application, resources from the pay-TV operators fees (SANTOS, 2008), possibility of private sponsorship through cultural support (FÓRUM, 2006). As National Forum for Democratization of Communication (Portuguese acronym: FNDC), points out, “World experiences show that revenue diversification minimizes the predominance of the same actor (whether the state or an entity) in the control and management of the public network” (FORUM, 2007, p. 85). As part of the public field, legislative channels should not be commercial or for financial gain, but their funding can come from a variety of sources simultaneously (such as state resources, corporate cultural support, tax-deductible donations from individuals and legal entities, services, fees on services, rent collection from commercial broadcasters for the use of the public magnetic spectrum) (FÓRUM, 2007).

parliaments have made this content available so that members themselves or the public can download it, extract parts of speeches and debates, disseminate it on other platforms and social media (IPU, 2016).

In Brazil, many parliaments with consolidated and active legislative TVs also rely on the transmission of activities over the Internet. Often, in addition to replicating the TV signal itself, portals offer multiple screens with different, simultaneous programming¹¹: simpler audio and video capture systems are installed in all meeting environments, allowing citizens to choose which activity they want to track (e and sometimes even from what angle when there is more than one camera in the same space). The possibility of multiple screens brings a welcome magnification and is needed especially for the busiest parliaments, with many attendant meetings.

Other parliaments, especially those with lower budget availability, opted exclusively for webtv's (such as Assembleia Legislativa do Acre and various municipal channels). There are several private companies that offer streaming service for city councils¹² at a reasonable price (starting at R\$ 59.90 per month, which varies according to the amount of concurrent accesses supported and the quality of the transmission). In addition to the more affordable cost compared to a traditional TV, such broadcasts can be viewed through various devices such as computers, mobile phones and tablets, which aligns with viewers' current habits.

In many cases, the transmissions are made by fixed cameras installed in plenary and auditoriums, without the intermediation of TV professionals. This gives them some characteristics of their own: there is no camera movement; there is no editing between cameras to show cut or reaction scenes; there is no alternation of informative characters about the theme of the meeting or who has the word (name, position, institution, etc.); there are no anchor or journalist comments on the development of the work.

These broadcasts are poorer, journalistically speaking, than those made by the legislative channels themselves. But they are also much cheaper. Which brings us back to the question of transparency. If the principle of advertising can be met more economically, what justifies maintaining investments in legislative channels? What is the relevance of these channels, constantly questioned by their low audience ratings? These are questions that cross the deeper identity of legislative channels and the daily practice of their employees.

There is a tendency among researchers, practitioners, and politicians to minimize the relevance of audience ratings for legislative TVs (ROWLEY and KURPIUS, 2005, p. 175; GRUNDY, 2000, p. 34; LAMB, 1992, p. 229). The important thing would not be the number of viewers, but the "principle of access": the fact that the mere existence of these channels allows citizens to follow legislative work

¹¹ This is the case of TV Câmara, which has been doing so since 2009, and others that have only recently embraced this possibility, such as TV Assembleia de Minas Gerais, which began these broadcasts in October 2017.

¹² By way of example, you can refer to the following websites: <<https://www.sitehosting.com.br/streaming-para-tv-camara-como-criar-uma-tv-camara/>> and <<https://www.rgsites.com.br/tv-camara/>> (accessed 30/05/2018).

without relying on editorial decisions by commercial broadcasters (MITCHELL, 1992; WEATHERILL, 1992; GARDEN, 2008). The possibility that the electorate is aware of the debates and negotiations that take place in parliament would be sufficient to impact the performance of legislators (MITCHELL, 1992). In addition, monitoring through the commercial press would ensure an indirect expansion of the reach of legislative TVs (CRAIN; GOFF, 1998; GONÇALVES, 2011).

Another aspect that relativizes the importance of audience ratings is its segmentation, a reality in the current media landscape. As Jesús Martín-Barbero (2002, p. 48) points out, segmented culture is marked by the “diversity of tastes and modes of consumption” and the “fragmentation and specialization of consumer offerings”. Therefore, public TVs can contemplate minority interests and build their own identities (REY, 2002, p. 94-95). It is up to public broadcasting to produce types of programs that commercial channels are not interested in doing (GONÇALVES, 2011) and to give visibility to different expressions of culture and public debate (FÓRUM, 2006). Legislative TVs need not aim to gain massive audiences - which would be illusory - but to ensure the consistency of their information offer (fulfilling their role as a vehicle of transparency and accountability), focused on specific market niches. If transparency is a right of the population, institutions are expected to voluntarily submit to public control; and that obviously carries costs. I therefore consider that the principle of transparency justifies the existence of legislative channels and the investments they receive, regardless of their audience ratings.

It is important to note that presenting live broadcasts within a complete programming schedule, focused on values of public communication and citizenship, on a channel with its own clear and well-defined identity, modifies these contents. Debates have more repercussions: they can be talk shows and news programs, and they can become special stories and be deepened in documentaries. Arcane and inscrutable procedures gain intelligibility: they are explained and unraveled by expert professionals concerned with ensuring that they become accessible to viewers. The facts are not only seen as isolated moments: they are analyzed for other meanings, possible repercussions, impacts on citizens' lives. Or at least that's what we see in the best moments of these channels.

We thus return to the principle of transparency. Scholars on the subject point out that a direct and unambiguous relationship between more transparency and democratic advances cannot be postulated, as the beneficial effects also depend on political, institutional and structural variables (FILGUEIRAS, 2016). From a demand standpoint, the main obstacles to transparency are: lack of interest and time for citizens; their apathy and political indisposition; their cognitive capacity (or lack thereof) to collect and analyze the large volume of information and data and transform it into actions (ETZIONI, 2010; SILVA, 2016). In this context, we highlight the role of intermediaries - such as the press, civil society organizations, experts and leaders, for example - to process the information and deliver it to the public (ETZIONI, 2010). However, not all intermediaries are equivalent: there are differences in access to primary sources, the resources available to analysts, their skills and training (ETZIONI, 2010).

I believe that legislative channels can and should aim to be the best intermediaries between their institutions and citizens. They must be able to offer “adequate and correct information to Brazilian citizens” and an “accurate and faithful report of the facts”, with autonomy before the parliament itself (BERNARDES; BARROS, 2009, p. 327-328). Transparency is not limited to the mere display of a content: it is necessary to make it intelligible, to enable the viewer to understand and form an opinion about what has been seen.

As for new technologies, they should not be viewed solely as competition with legislative channels. In fact, it is precisely technological advances that can enable TVs to surpass some of their current range and coverage limits. Digital TV suggests the possibility of universal coverage (BRASIL, 2015, p. 6), while webcasting features allow citizens to watch legislative work at the most convenient time for them, amplifying their potential audience (OPENING PARLIAMENT, 2012, p. 37). These and other innovations can thus contribute to the democratization of information, increased transparency and broadening the audience of Legislative TVs.

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