



THE EXPERIENCE OF TV SENADO AND THE CHALLENGES OF BRAZILIAN LEGISLATIVE BROADCASTERS¹

Francisco Sant'Anna²

Abstract: Based on the experience of *TV Senado* and on his research about public communication, the author analyzes the challenges of television broadcasters of legislative institutions today. Among these challenges, the author points out the autonomy of the professionals of these broadcasters, the commitment to an effective project of public communication and the use of digital technologies.

Keywords: Media and parliament; Public communication; Legislative TVs; *TV Senado*.

Introduction

Hearing the mention of the Senate Video Center, I remembered our public selection process, the first that the Federal Senate undertook in 1989, when legislative media was not yet thought of. The public selection was traditional. Those selected would write press releases, not sent by fax, but delivered by someone by car or by mail, arriving 2 months later in the newspapers in small towns across the country.

This selection process came under heavy pressure from commercial media, from traditional media, so much pressure that, once held and validated, the Senate felt hostage and, for two years, did not hire any of the approved. Then the group of 34 or 36 approved began to meet to counteract this media pressure. The interpretation of the mainstream press was that these professionals would be distributed to the offices of the Senators and would be there defend the work of each Representative. They did not think in terms of public communication. So this group of 34 professionals drafted a communication project for the Senate (which is curious) before they were even hired. This project began to be “sold”, in a good way, to each of the Senators of the time: Nelson Carneiro, Jarbas Passarinho, Maurício Corrêa, a very old group. Convincing these members was necessary.

¹ Author's conference during the International Seminar on TV Câmara's 20th Anniversary, held in June 2018.

² Federal Senate retired servant, where he served as a journalist and conducted various research on public communication and Senate media from his source media concept. E-mail: chicosantanna@hotmail.com

With about six months to expire the validity of the selection process, after re-validation, after three and a half years, the Senate began to call some of the selected. For the sake of fate, Senator Humberto Lucena, who was the President who had approved the selection process, returned to be President of the Senate and called the candidates.

Revolution in Legislative Communication

I believe that there begins a revolution in legislative communication. The first major transformation was in the program *A Voz do Brasil (The Voice of Brazil)*, which until then was made exclusively from excerpts of speeches made in plenary, had no report, vignette, had absolutely nothing. And the Senate Video Center was created, dating from 1993, 1994.

In 1995, with the advent of cable TV, our *TV Assembleia de Minas Gerais (TV Assembly of Minas Gerais)* was the first to be broadcast with the legislative TV signal. And we managed to persuade Senator Humberto Lucena, who was leaving his position, to turn the video center into a real television. He simply made the political decision.

It was necessary to build a communication model, because the legislative channel does not seek fantastic audience rates. It seeks to build citizenship, inform, and give transparency.

I believe the title chosen for this seminar is very important: *Transparency and Communication*, because this work that was done back there was already imbued with the sentiment of the Constituent, in which, for the first time, the issue of the public television system was inserted in the Constitution, in the communication chapter. That was the sentiment behind an initiative called the Democratic Information Law. This bill unfortunately failed to advance in the National Congress and was later sliced — one of the slices is precisely the Cable TV Law —, but from it we managed to consolidate the public communication model, which is built every day.

In the beginning of this panel the issue of social importance was discussed. This leads us to the need to reflect on the issue of a rule, of social control. The legislative media, especially in the Chamber and in Senate, have the current format in function of an editorial view, a journalistic view, a view of citizenship of those professionals who passed through them, but there is no rule that, for example — you will find that nonsense —, forbids advertising on legislative channels. And we know that there are already municipal channels that think of selling spaces in programming to fund their legislative coverage work. There is no legislation stating that the channel has to be plural. All current values were created by the generations that formed the legislative channels. And from the example of *TV Senado* and *TV Câmara*, these values were taken to states and municipalities.

So I think it's important to have a regulation. There are legislative channels in the country that had their management outsourced to marketing companies, to advertising agencies. This already generates, culturally, a deviation from the purpose of the legislative channel.

Just yesterday I gave an interview to *TV Câmara*, and I was asked how important it is to have

a public servant responsible for this information work. In a way, this professional is protected from the partisan political pressures that may occur. I had the opportunity to do field research with Senate colleague Rogério Mozart Dy La Fuente to compare the standards of editorial criteria of the various municipal, state and federal broadcasters. The more fragile was the employment relationship of a worker, for example, with a commissioned position or an outsourced, the less independent was the attitude with which this professional himself faced the news. He feels fragile and already prefers not to face certain editorial quarrels that he would face if he felt safe at work.

There are legislative channels, for example, in which the team was divided among council members. Each councilor appointed a communication professional. Then you cannot work the concept of Parliament, because everyone who has been appointed by a politician wants to make positive coverage for that politician and forgets the rest, forgets the collective.

So we have this issue of professionalization, of creating the traditional values of legislative communication, which are not exactly the same as the values of the traditional press, much less the values of the reporters covering Parliament. We have another perspective, another approach, which is important to define. There are writing manuals, I know, but they are fragile in the face of the pressures we experience every day.

Regulation policy for communication in the Legislative

Another issue that I find very important is that we have a legislative framework. There was a project of former Senator Marinor Brito that dealt with the management of legislative channels and their purpose. It is very important that we define the purposes of legislative channels.

For example, on *TV Senado*, party activities and individual Representative activities are not the subject of news, but we know that in other legislative channels this is the focus. We do not report on TV Senado a meeting of party A, B or C, because this is not an activity of Parliament. We do not report an individual activity of the representative. We will report Parliament's activity as an institution, as a whole. But that's a norm, a tradition, an urban legend, it's there. We have even come under pressure from representatives who wanted to broadcast a rock show or a religious ceremony on *TV Senado*. This has all been avoided because of a professional culture, but this professional culture is changing and tomorrow may not have the same perspective as yesterday. And if there is weakness in the protection of that professional body, it will not challenge the rock senator or the religious senator. On the contrary, it will allow each of them to broadcast their own program.

I think it is important today to think about the question of a model for a legal framework for legislative channels. When I did the research, about four or five years ago, among public servants, commissioned and outsourced, the number of professionals working in these vehicles was close to three thousand in the country. Too many people work on the basis of trial and error. It is important to have these demarcations. The research everyone here has carried can help with that.

Transparency is important. I took my doctorate degree program in France and found out that the direction model of the equivalent of *TV Câmara* in that country is very interesting. First, a public notice is published, and any French citizen who meets the requirements of the notice may apply for the vacancy to run the parliamentary TV channel. There is a technical committee that selects the best candidates, and these candidates are submitted to a live public interview, with the population questioning the editorial project brought by them — in addition to presenting their personal qualities, they have to bring an editorial project and its cost.

During the management of the chosen director, he has autonomy, as they want to give to the Central Bank. In France, there is the so-called midterm election. It may happen that Parliament has a certain majority at the beginning of a government, and in the midterm election, the situation is reversed. So this professional, this communication director has assured the autonomy of his editorial project.

I say this because, for example, we once witnessed the Senate having, in a single year, five communications directors. A communications director came and said: *“Let us invest in documentaries”*. Two months later another came and took the teams off the field. And I am not speaking figuratively.

We had an agreement with the Armed Forces to make a documentary about Brazil's historical fortifications at the frontier. There was a team in Mato Grosso with everything paid by the Armed Forces, and a director sent the team back. How are you going to deal with that partner? How will you deal with your audience, which has been following a series of content?

In a year, there were five types of *TV Senado*, none similar to the other. What kind of commitment to the public is this? Why is there an enlightened person who suddenly decides, for himself, that the broadcaster will stop doing this to do that? This is not good for any communication model, because they need continuity to build customer loyalty, and it is not good for the information process.

That year, one of the directors had decided: *“We'll have a program for each Committee”*, at the time, the Senate had only five or eight committees. Programs were created on environment, international politics, social inclusion, education, etc. All products began to be developed, with prototype, project, and scenery. Two, three programs were made. As for the fourth program, there was another director who said: *“No, I don't want any shows, just live broadcasting, and no interruptions. Here the information is the representative”*. He did not realize that a Commission-themed program is an opportunity to translate, unraveling parliamentary thinking for an audience that may not be so close to live broadcasting, it is a way of making a salty theme something sweeter.

Conclusion: Communication Challenges in the Legislative

Therefore, I think we have big challenges ahead in management. In addition, I think we have another very big challenge.

In the previous roundtable, someone said that when you arrive in a small town in the countryside, you see the citizen with a satellite dish watching *TV Câmara* and *TV Senado*. That's true. There are between 30 million and 40 million satellite dishes in this country. There are people who do not have access to the open TV signal. Traditionally, this signal is not enough. And I'm not just talking about the corners of the Amazon, no. I will give a concrete example: the signal from the city of Belo Horizonte does not reach the city of Ouro Preto, whose population watches television through pay-TV or satellite dish. Until a few years ago, I don't know if this happens today, Maringá, in Paraná, another big city, was in the same situation, as the city of Barreiras, in Bahia.

The point is that migration to the digital signal will create the so-called digital blackout. This has already happened in the United States, where five million people were left without television signals. In mainland France, 300,000 homes were affected. Why? Because they are in more remote regions, and we know that the digital signal is similar to the FM signal, it is shorter. If there are any obstacles ahead, it comes back, it does not go over like the analog signal. The municipalities of the interior have made every effort to create their repeaters in analog signal, and this will have to be converted to give way to digital signal. It takes a lot of money. It is worth the Parliament to wonder if the Telecommunications Universalization Fund — FUST should not be used in this case.

Added to this is the migration from analogue to digital radio and the transformation of AMs into FMs. The Amazonian *caboclo* (individual who was raised from the miscegenation of a native Indian with a white people) will no longer hear The Voice of Brazil at 7 pm. The signal won't get there, neither to the *Sertão*, nor to the *Pantanal*. There is a data that 40% of people who listen to the radio at 7 pm are in these regions of the country.

So, considering technology, managers' projects and Parliament, our great challenge is to define how to ensure the continuity of this principle of citizenship, which is to give information to the citizen. How to make the technological advance, which will favor millions, not isolate a large portion of the Brazilian population? One solution envisaged in the past was to create a national operator, a public or parapublic institution that would do the signal repetition for public channels. Unfortunately, the project did not go forward.

Today, the following is established: in large population centers, the market will enable the transition from analog to digital signal. In less densely populated areas, there is a tendency for the citizen to be isolated, uninformed, perhaps informed from abroad, as was the case in the early 20th century. This is how *reggae* arrived in the state of Maranhão. People from the city of São Luís listened to Jamaican radio more than radios from the states of Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo.

I think the challenge for those in charge of this management is to define how to ensure that the principles of citizenship and transparency of public deeds, which guided the construction of legislative channels, remain and benefit the entire population, even with the advent of new technologies.

Article Submitted: 2019-13-02

Accepted on: 2019-16-04