



# Civic Organizations and Internet Social Networks

## A Case Study in the Province of Buenos Aires

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*A neighborhood assembly in a medium-sized city in the province of Buenos Aires formed in connection with a petition for designation as a historical protection area uses the Internet to generate visibility spaces alternative to those of the traditional media and install its own agenda, to include in those new spaces the voices and perspectives of new social actors, and to organize and improve its own participatory management. Its use of Facebook has acquired some of the features of “community media.” At the same time, its use of the Internet for internal communication and coordination is clearly accessory to face-to-face interaction. There is a generational difference in access to and decision making about the content to be posted in the various media, and spokespersons have become authorized voices. Appealing to both the traditional and the new media is a crucial aspect of the assembly’s positioning strategy, but the strategy is in constant revision.*

*La asamblea vecinal de una ciudad mediana de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina, que se formó en torno a una petición para designarse área de protección histórica utiliza la Internet para la construcción de espacios de comunicación alternativos a los medios tradicionales e instalar así su propia agenda, incluir las voces y perspectivas de nuevos actores sociales en esos nuevos espacios, y organizar y mejorar su propia administración participativa. El uso que le dan a Facebook ha adquirido algunas características de los “medios comunitarios.” Al mismo tiempo, el uso de la Internet para la comunicación y coordinación internas es claramente un accesorio a la interacción cara a cara. Hay una diferencia generacional en el acceso a y decisiones en torno al contenido que se publica en diversos medios, y los voceros se han convertido en voces autorizadas. La estrategia de posicionamiento de la asamblea apela a medios tanto tradicionales como nuevos, pero dicha estrategia está sujeta a revisión constante.*

**Keywords:** *Urban social movements, Internet, Communication, Democratization, Participation*

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Reflecting on the use of the Internet by civic organizations to construct spaces for communication alternative to the traditional media, I attempt in this article to understand the meanings of emerging sociocultural practices and formulate questions and possible lines of action for deepening the democratization of com-

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munications in the light of the progress achieved in Argentina in recent years.<sup>1</sup> First of all, I examine the general characteristics of the Internet and the possibilities they offer as media strategies for the so-called new urban social movements (Castells, 1987; 2012; Gravano, 2013; Santos, 2001), taking into consideration the tensions between the democratizing trends and the various forms of corporate or government control of social networks on the Internet. I go on to focus, in the Latin American context, on movements based on territorial-identity demands such as civic organizations for safeguarding heritage, drawing on a case study in Tandil, a medium-sized city in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, from which I attempt to draw some conclusions that can be compared with those of similar cases in other contexts. I hope to contribute to the debate on the possibilities and limitations of the Internet as a means for civic organizations to promote autonomous and democratic communications in Latin America. To that end, I call attention to three aspects of the case: (1) the possibility of relatively autonomous management of visibility in the public and media space that constitutes the arena for struggle; (2) the inclusion or exclusion of the voices of other social actors in this proprietary space; and (3) the use of the Internet internally as a tool for coordination of the participation of its members.

This work is based on research carried out from a socio-anthropological perspective (Achilli, 2005) with an ethnographic methodology, according to classic fieldwork standards. It focuses on face-to-face interactions held over time, the meanings of the actors and their link to overarching historic-structural processes, and the new perspectives on digital and electronic media as contexts for so-called cyber-ethnography (see Boggi, 2009). The processes with which it deals cannot always be observed directly and in person, since they are based on multilocational interaction whose scope can be examined only in fragments. Despite their virtual nature, however, as Estela Grassi (2004) has pointed out they constitute concrete aspects of social life, in which the categories that classify groups and the resources for perceiving and interpreting the “social situation” circulate and are produced, reproduced, and questioned. In the case under study they constitute a crucial dimension of the negotiation and conflict around various urban problems and the ways of resolving them.

## HORIZONTALITY AND VERTICALITY IN INTERNET NETWORKS

The World Wide Web’s interactivity, network operations, ability to generate one’s own content, and relatively limited censorship offer social movements more advantages than other media and more traditional formats. Lev Manovich (2006) has pointed out that the distinctive feature of these new media is the translation of all content into numerical data that are accessed through computers,<sup>2</sup> which makes possible the historically unprecedented process of digital convergence (Dirección Nacional de Industrias Culturales, 2012). Manuel Castells (1999: 360) maintains that in this last phase “the potential for integration of text, images, and sound in the same system, interacting from multiple points at a chosen time (real or delayed) across a global network, with open and affordable access, creates a fundamental change in the nature of communication.” In contrast to twentieth-century communication systems,<sup>3</sup> in which unidirectional flows predominated, the Internet (especially since the emergence of

Web 2.0) allows for interoperability, interactivity, and the collaborative production of content, paving the way for new figures such as the “prosumer,” the producer-consumer of his or her own media content.

More recently, the Catalan researcher has called these new forms “mass self-communication,” indicating that they provide “the technological platform for the construction of the autonomy of the social actor, be it individual or collective, vis-à-vis the institutions of society” and that one of its advantages is its being based on “horizontal networks of interactive communication that, by and large, are difficult to control by governments or corporations” (Castells, 2012: 24). The difficulty, of course, does not mean that there have not been attempts to do so: Castells refers to cases such as Egypt’s “great disconnection” in 2011 and the restrictive measures implemented by the Chinese government. We also must not forget the powerful debates that arose around electronic monitoring of consumers on the basis of Edward Snowden’s revelations about the practices of the National Security Agency (NSA), which exposed the possible uses that an intrusive state may make of the data voluntarily provided by consumers on the Web.

Some countries in Latin America, such as Mexico and Brazil, have been the targets of especially intensive monitoring by the NSA, and spying by the governments of those countries on their own citizens has come to light (Greenwald, 2015). In recent years there have been charges of the monitoring of Latin American officials by corporations and foreign government agencies. We have recently learned that the United Kingdom has spied on Argentines to obtain information on possible actions aimed at recovering the Malvinas (*Diario Página 12*, April 3, 2015; *Diario La Nación*, April 3, 2015). The documents revealed by Snowden show not only the extent of electronic spying on governments and political leaders around the world but also the massive monitoring of entire populations. The growing role of the Internet in the daily lives of hundreds of millions of people not as a separate domain—such as the postal service or the telephone—in which some communications functions take place but as a place where the most personal information is created, circulated, and stored grants this monitoring unprecedented reach. Companies such as Google, Facebook, and Yahoo store information and place it at the disposal of both the government and commercial firms, operating in fact as extensions of the intelligence agencies (Greenwald, 2015).

In light of views such as those of Castells, which emphasize the interactive, networking, and potentially democratic nature of the Internet, it is very useful to enhance the analysis with approaches such as the one proposed by the Argentine researcher Mariano Zukerfeld (2010) from the perspective of a political economy of communications. The horizontal network also operates, dialectically, as a vertical stratification. What we call the Internet has levels with different degrees of concentration of ownership, economic interests, and regulatory requirements. Zukerfeld distinguishes five—infrastructure, hardware, software, content, and social network<sup>4</sup>—and notes that the infrastructure, which includes the underwater cables and satellites used to transmit digital information between continents and the fiber-optic lines that carry the information within continents, is the most basic and, at the same time, the most easily overlooked. Contrary to the attributions of dissimilarity and diversity commonly associated with the Internet, the infrastructure is in the hands of just a few companies, with government participation in some cases, which oligopolize the

circulation of digital information flows.<sup>5</sup> The current map of underwater cables is defined by the predominance of the North-South and North-North axes,<sup>6</sup> not very different from what it was at the end of the nineteenth century as a replication of the relationship of colonial domination (see Harris, 1984).

As for the Internet service providers, located in the telecommunications sector, the Latin American map shows a tendency toward duopoly: Telefónica de España and Telmex de México share the region's subscribers. These tensions, instead of being paradoxes, are an expression of the conflicts between the dominant interests at each of the levels of the Internet (Becerra, 2012: 80–81):

It is critical to establish that the sectors of convergent technologies often have a monopolistic or quasi-monopolistic ownership structure, although the breakup of the point-to-mass broadcasting model evokes deliberative expectations because of the proliferation of spaces for direct expression such as blogs, social networks, and peer-to-peer exchanges, which do not require the intervention of large business structures. In other words, the ownership relationships of the virtual networks are even more concentrated than those of the traditional media system of Latin America.

Different models of regulation operate differentially at each of the levels: physical private property, intellectual property, and what the author calls “inclusive appropriation.” This causes the different predominant interests at each level to pressure governments for laws that are more restrictive or more flexible according to the market segment in question (see Loreti and Lozano, 2012).

### ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: WHEN THE “CUSTOMERS” COME MARCHING IN

In contrast to the classical social movements (rooted in a class or party, typically found in the factory, the committee, or the union, and pursuing long-term structural efforts in the realm of production), as of the 1960s new movements began to become visible in the public arena in various countries that did not directly aim to take power and usually focused on replication and consumption in more limited time frames (Castells, 1987; Gravano, 2013; Santos, 2001). Many of these struggles occurred because of collective urban consumption, with the result that many of these movements have been called urban social movements (Castells, 1987). While this designation has been applied to a great diversity of collectives with very different interests and purposes, a trait common to many of them is placing identity questions on the table and opposing globalization.

In the Latin American context, the cycle of struggles against neoliberal reforms—whose best-known example is Zapatismo, in Chiapas—has as major milestones the water war in Cochabamba in 2000 and the conflicts in Argentina in 2001, Ecuador in 2005, and Bolivia in 2003 and 2006. Through their struggles and demands and even insurrectional acts, organizations and social movements managed to open up the public agenda and place new issues on the table (Svampa, 2008: 2–3):

In recent decades, social movements in Latin America have . . . greatly expanded their discursive and representative platform in society—indigenous and

campesino movements, urban territorial movements, socio-environmental movements, and LGBT collectives, in other words, cultural collectives—demonstrate the presence of a set of different demands and corresponding identities, forming a multiorganizational area that is extremely complex in its possibilities for articulation.

The social tensions and the visibility mechanisms of these conflicts have been redefined. The new movements are innovative in the way they present themselves, and in addition to adopting and making creative use of public space they often turn to the media and even establish themselves with them (Gravano, 2013). Some collectives (e.g., the antiglobalization movement, Zapatismo, and the Landless in Brazil) had already begun to use the Internet in the 1990s for disseminating information alternative to that of the traditional media, and according to Castells (2012: 27) we are now seeing the formation of “online social movements.” Where the mass media are largely controlled by governments and corporations, these movements exert a counterweight, establishing themselves primarily through autonomous communication on Internet networks and wireless communication platforms and seeking to create communities in urban public spaces.

In the Argentine case, a turning point in terms of these new modes of political action occurred in the context of the 2001 social protests<sup>7</sup> and resulted in the formation of an important assembly-style movement. The events of December 2001 and the mobilizations in early 2002 showed various levels of criticism of the dominant models of political representation, putting on the table demands for and instances of the “democratization” of social and political practices. In this framework, a broad movement was formed that organized more than 200 assemblies in Buenos Aires, its suburbs, and some of the provinces. Several studies have dealt with Internet use by these assemblies (Calello et al., 2004; Finquelievich, 2002; García, 2011). Calello and colleagues (2004: 614) emphasize that “it was not the result of a preplanned development but rather a response to the concealment or distortion by the multimedia conglomerates of the early pot-banging protests and assembly movements.”

This need to find alternative spaces for communication must therefore be situated in relation to the structure and nature of the production and distribution of and access to information in the national and regional context. Martín Becerra (2012: 71–72) summarizes certain continuities that marked the media and cultural industries landscape in Latin America and Argentina throughout the twentieth century: the prevalence of a commercial logic; the absence of non-governmental public services and the use of state-managed media as outlets for disseminating government discourse, with little effect; the concentration of media ownership in conglomerates led by a few media groups that are more prominent than those observed in the major Western countries; the centralization of content production in the main urban centers, relegating the rest of the inhabitants of the territory to the role of consumers of content produced by others; the limited regulation of media systems in comparison with that in Europe and the United States;; and the strict control by governments of their relations with the owners of journalistic enterprises. As of the 1980s, after constitutional governments returned in many countries of the region, this structure began to combine with an expansion of social capacities for expression and the impact of digital convergence to produce a crisis of the traditional media system.

## **PATRIMONIALIST MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND ARGENTINA: IDENTITY, APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACE, AND “NO POLITICS” POLITICS**

Recent decades have seen the emergence in the Latin America context of neighborhood associations resisting neoliberal reforms and capitalist globalization focused on reclaiming patrimonial identities threatened by those processes. In a number of Latin American countries, particularly since the 1990s, associations in defense of cultural heritage have begun to multiply.<sup>8</sup> Citizens “are increasingly becoming zealous guardians of revalued cultural heritage” (Hernández Ramírez, 2005: 2–3). Patrimony is a social construct that involves various degrees of conflict over the boundaries of the patrimonial repertory at stake (García Canclini, 2005). Its discursive articulation (Prats, 2005) involves selecting the elements that constitute it, ordering those elements, and interpreting or restricting the multiplicity of their meanings. Therefore, the special significance for patrimonialist organizations of media spaces in which they can establish this discursive coordination is easily understood.

In the Latin American context, appeals to “rescue” neighborhood and patrimonial identity in the 1970s and 1980s constituted a form of political action against repression by military dictatorships. This has been described by the theorists of the new social movements and in particular by Lucio Kowarick (1986) in the case of Brazil and the rise of the Workers’ Party as constituting a new form of politics when political activity was prohibited. In addition, in the 1990s and the early twenty-first century, with the crisis of representation and trust in the traditional parties, these neighborhood settings often constituted alternatives to partisan politics, a “no-politics politics.”

### **THE DIGITAL ASSEMBLY: DEMOCRATIZATION, COMMUNICATION, AND PARTICIPATION**

Tandil is a medium-sized city<sup>9</sup> located in the southwestern part of the Province of Buenos Aires, with a population of 123,000 inhabitants (INDEC, 2010; figure representing the entire district). Located in the Tandilia mountain system, it has soils and landscapes that lend themselves to the development of two of the district’s important economic activities: stone (especially granite) quarrying and tourism. In recent decades it has seen an appropriation of space aimed at a more effective reproduction of capital at the local level. As a result, tourist and real estate enterprises have proliferated in the mountains near the city because of their scenery (Lan and Migueltoarena, 2011). This type of appropriation of space clashes with the conceptions held by social actors who feel that, despite being private property, the mountains should be used by the entire community as part of a common heritage. Tensions around the various models of handling, occupation, and appropriation of the mountain system were the most striking antecedent of the patrimonial activity, with significant participation by social organizations, that ultimately led to the passage of Provincial Protected Landscape Act No. 14.126 in 2010 (Girado, 2012).

The Station neighborhood is presented by some members of the Tandil neighborhood assembly as the city's "first neighborhood."<sup>10</sup> The Tandil train station began operating in 1883, with the extension of a branch line of the Southern Railroad from the neighboring town of Ayacucho, and around it buildings, from sheds for the railroad services to homes and a variety of institutions, sprang up. In the course of the subsequent sustained growth, the railroad was recognized as the catalyst for the country's economic and social life, by the mid-twentieth century covering 50,000 kilometers across the nation. The region's flourishing economic activity during the first half of the twentieth century reflected the expansion of its productive forces and those that reproduced its space and its communication functions.<sup>11</sup> In 2006 passenger service to and from Tandil was terminated, and many of the station's buildings fell into disuse or and began to deteriorate because of lack of maintenance. In some cases their original purposes were replaced by the activities of community organizations in music, theater, literature, and the arts. Train service was reinstated six years later, on June 28, 2012, and continued two days a week to the Constitución station in the city of Buenos Aires until it was again suspended in June 2016.

The Station neighborhood assembly, established in 2013, brings together neighbors who designed and presented a request to the city council for designation as a historical protection area<sup>12</sup> in view of what they considered the deterioration of the neighborhood and the loss of its identifying features to real estate speculation. The petition, with 2,500 signatures and institutional endorsements, contained other demands, such as the establishment of building protection measures within the historical protection area, the regulation of new construction, implementation of a thematic train ride around the station and the square across the street, and a change in the name of a section of Avenida de la Estación (currently Avenida Coronel Benito Machado) to "Avenida de los Trabajadores Ferroviarios" (Avenue of the Railroad Workers).

The initial assembly was made up of retired railroad workers, relatives (children, wives) of railroad workers, and professionals and intellectuals (a history professor specialized in railroad history, architects [one with a graduate degree in cultural heritage], an attorney, a journalist, a writer, and a person with a B.A. in tourism). The latter two served as "spokespersons," convening and running the meetings and speaking with the press and in the various public presentations of the project. On many occasions this produced the opposite of the expressly desired "horizontality" in the management of the collective (which had resulted in the decision to adopt an "assembly" rather than a "commission" format), a de facto hierarchy that operated in decision making and even in taking the floor. The largely elderly railroad workers and their relatives were made the "custodians" of the neighborhood's memory, its "living history." Later, other actors from the neighborhood social network, representatives of various institutions, businesspeople, and others, joined in. About 20 people, men and women ranging in age from 35 to 90, participated regularly in the monthly meetings at the office of a nongovernmental organization in the neighborhood.

Once the project was adopted by the city council, the members of the assembly followed the project through the various municipal legislative and executive settings, appealing to their "contacts" with the different political blocs to

move it forward. On numerous occasions they went to the local media as part of a strategy of highlighting and positioning their demands and pressuring those with political power, in addition to creating a profile and a fan's page on the social network Facebook<sup>13</sup> and most recently a blog. Because the Internet allows a relatively autonomous management of visibility (in contrast to the traditional media, in which the content of the "news" and the time and ways of presenting it must be negotiated directly with the social actors involved—journalists, announcers, camera persons, among others), it has become one of the privileged broadcasting spaces for the project and the assembly's activities. Although Facebook has an explicit content regulation policy (for example, eliminating notices considered offensive), the assembly's notices have not elicited that kind of intervention by the company. Perhaps this explains why the issue has not been a subject of debate among assembly members. In addition, the appeal of Facebook, Blogspot, and similar web sites, which are free and provide broad coverage, cannot be ignored.<sup>14</sup> When I began fieldwork, the profile had about 1,200 "friends," and notes were being posted several times a week. Facebook allows for the publication of "statuses" (usually brief texts), photographs (photos of "home page," "profile," "biography," and specific albums), videos, notes (usually used for more lengthy texts), and Web links. On the neighborhood's page most publications take the shape of photo albums on issues with brief accompanying texts. The page has some 30 albums with about 330 photographs in total.

In order to situate the social network resource in the context of the local media, we must keep in mind that these media include two television channels, three AM radio stations, some two dozen FM stations, three newspapers, and nine digital news portals.<sup>15</sup> The available data on home Internet connections in Tandil show a concentrated and selective geographic distribution that overlaps the pattern of fragmentation and socio-territorial disparities already existing in the city (Di Nucci, 2008). The poles of greatest demographic growth are North-Northeast and South, corresponding to the proportional indicators for households with unsatisfied basic needs and with Internet connections in the home (Lan and Velázquez, 2008). Although we do not have figures for the city, it is important to keep in mind that, according to August 2014 data, 18 of the 24 million Facebook customers in Argentina achieve access to the Web through mobile devices.<sup>16</sup>

A survey conducted in May 2014<sup>17</sup> concluded that the digital portals and social networks on the Internet together constituted the principal source of information among residents of Tandil over 16 years of age, ahead of the two newspapers, television, and radio.<sup>18</sup> Of those surveyed 56 percent said that they heard about local news through digital portals, 21.6 percent through Facebook, and 4.9 percent through Twitter. The digital portals had the greatest influence at the middle and high educational level (70.6 percent), Facebook (42.3 percent) in the 16–44 age range, and Twitter (10.9 percent) at the high and medium-high socioeconomic level.

The assembly's use of the Internet can be analyzed in terms of the following dimensions: (1) generating visibility spaces alternative to those of the traditional media and installing its own agenda, (2) including, in those new spaces, the voices and perspectives of new social actors, and (3) organizing and improving its own participatory management:<sup>19</sup>



1. There is active debate on the use of various media (interviews on the local channel, in newspapers, on the radio) for making visible and positioning demands—evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of each and the restrictions and mediation of speech by other social actors that takes place in those contexts.<sup>20</sup>

In this framework Facebook affords visibility with relatively autonomous management and no need to pay for it while allowing for extensive broadcasting. According to one of its administrators who is a member of the assembly, the page was created to “raise awareness” about the need to protect the neighborhood’s cultural heritage with “very good results and a multiplier effect.” The behavior of those who visit and comment on the page’s content also sparks analysis (“If they are very long texts, they are not read”; “The first photo has many ‘likes’ and the last one has none”; “There is a section that is doing very well”) Through discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each format, the decision was made to design a blog with the goal of complementing the transmission through Facebook, taking advantage of the potential of each (Facebook’s broader coverage and the blog’s orderly and accessible format). What has not been discussed, at least in meetings I attended, is the commercial use made of data that Facebook collects, the possible monitoring of users of social networks by various organizations, and censorship by the company.

Consistent with the aforementioned characteristics of urban social movements, which tend to locate their demands in the area of replication and consumption rather than production, the principal concerns of assembly members were content and the scope of transmission rather than the ownership structure of the medium. In the realm of creative use of the networks by organizations to build their own agendas, one of the main tensions of a social movement’s relationship with the Internet is generating visibility for its demands in a relatively autonomous fashion in the context of a highly concentrated ownership structure that is subject to corporate or even repressive interests.

2. With the necessary caveats, one could say that the assembly’s use of Facebook has acquired some of the features of “community media.”<sup>21</sup> Although, as I have pointed out, the ownership of the medium is not challenged—a central aspect of community communication—the focus is on access, content, and coverage. The page is used to disseminate and create consensus on demands, share photos, written texts, anecdotes and data about the way a memory of the neighborhood is constructed, and feelings regarding actions and demands.

With regard to the criteria for posting on Facebook, one member said that they attempt to

maintain a style, an aesthetic quality. People share all kinds of things. . . . We leave them there for a few days, because sometimes they are emotionally charged, and then we remove them, so that it is not just any old thing. . . . I have also removed some of our postings because they are distracting; for example, the other day I posted the talk we were going to give, but then I deleted it because that day we were going to go to the station, and what was important was the station. Later [after the talk] we can put it back.

Far from a minor problem, this is one of the main challenges of Web sites that allow, with a greater or lesser degree of participation, the collaborative

management of content. A key issue in this regard is establishing criteria for prioritizing information and establishing relevant domains.

3. Internet use for internal communication and coordination is clearly accessory to face-to-face interaction. E-mails are sent for meeting day and time reminders, but tools such as groups, list-serves, and forums that have been crucial to other civic organization experiences are not used (Finquelievich, 2002; García, 2011).

Although it is in on-site meetings that the assembly's public activities are discussed and agreed upon, there is a certain generational difference with regard to access to and decisions about the content to be published in the various media, especially the Internet. Several of the older members of the assembly do not have Facebook accounts and occasionally achieve access to content—in which they may be directly involved—through their children or grandchildren. Thus, as we have seen, spokespersons have become authorized voices. Knowledge and practices come into play that point to inequalities, albeit inadvertent, within the organization. This merits further study of the potential of the Internet to strengthen participatory and democratic handling of communication within the assembly and is probably one of the most interesting contributions of the socio-anthropological perspective on communications to deconstructing the naturalization of certain contradictions in social practices.

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

Reviewing various aspects of the relationships of social movements with the Internet, I have highlighted the creative uses of the Web that show its potential to democratize communications: interactivity, the possibility of creating one's own content, and broad coverage. I have also underlined the importance of recognizing the structure of the Internet as hierarchical. Access to and ownership of the media continue to be in the hands of a few. Democratization of content and social networks contrasts with the concentration of hardware and infrastructure. The dominant regulations at each level demonstrate the need to free up the circulation of content, while at the other extreme the traditional model of private ownership of physical or material assets still predominates. In addition, we have seen that the new social movements use the Internet to transmit and make their demands visible. The Internet and mobile devices have been crucial to visibility and organization of these movements. A large part of the struggle lies in the possibility of creating alternative spaces for communication and achieving the most autonomous management of the visibility possible in the face of the commercial uses and monitoring of the information circulating on the Internet.

I have focused on some of these problems in terms of a case study carried out in a medium-sized Argentine city in which a neighborhood assembly petitioned for designation as a historical protection area. Appealing to the traditional media and to new ones such as the social networks or blogs on the Internet is a crucial aspect of the organization's positioning strategy. However, it is a strategy in constant revision, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each of the various media and formats for short- and medium-term goals.

The Internet emerged from the convergence and conflict between military purposes and countercultural initiatives (Castells, 1999), and that tension is certainly still present. Study of such dynamic processes is extremely challenging and requires relational and historically situated approaches that help to avoid the reification of content and the acritical replication of technophile or technophobic positions that flatten complex realities. Organizations are spaces in which political action and communication are coordinated and what is held in common is given meaning as a perspective for the formation of a collective memory and the creation of shared demands—for the imagining and enabling of new forms of being and acting in the world, including critical reflection on the means of communication themselves.

## NOTES

1. With initiatives such as the Audiovisual Communications Services Law, the adoption of the Integrated Services Digital Broadcasting standard for digital television, and the launch of the turntable divisible auditorium platform, along with the Conectar Igualdad, Mi PC, and Argentina Conectada programs (see Dirección Nacional de Industrias Culturales, 2012). Since 2015, with the change in government, some of these initiatives have been interrupted or substantially modified.

2. Manovich (2006: 65) identifies five: numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and cultural transcoding.

3. Castells (1999) differentiates three major moments: the predominance of the “mass” communication media themselves (especially radio and TV), based on the broadcasting principle (one transmitter, many receivers), the gradual segmentation of audiences with the diversified media that flourished in the 1980s (thematic radio stations, cable television, video), and the configuration of a multimedia system based on computer networks during the 1990s.

4. The hardware level includes the necessary digital technologies to join each one of the Internet nodes and to store the circulating information, from computers that act as servers for the provider companies to personal computers, laptops, and mobile telephone devices. The software includes TCP/IP protocols, e-mail, and the World Wide Web, browsers and search engines, and the various programs necessary for web pages to function. The content level includes all the digital information that can be found online or downloaded. The social network level is the people who use the Internet to browse, produce content, and form “virtual communities” (Zuckerfeld, 2010: 79).

5. Companies that operate at this level are Global Crossing, Verizon, Loral Skynet/TelStar, and AT&T (Zuckerfeld, 2010: 13–17).

6. <http://www.submarinecablemap.com/> (accessed February 26, 2018).

7. The “2001 crisis” in Argentina must be understood not only in relation to the earlier consolidation of the neoliberal policies and their consequences—deregulation by the government, job insecurity, decline in living conditions for the majority—but also linked to a process of establishment of political action methods some novel, others updates of various long-standing traditions of social protest—training and visibility of identity actors and collectives, expression of collective demands, and struggle to occupy and give meaning to public space.

8. Recent evidence of this significance was the meeting held in Chile in May 2014, in which some 100 cultural heritage organizations from around the country participated. <http://www.comunidadesdel patrimonio.cl/> (accessed February 26, 2018).

9. The category of “medium-sized” is usually defined by size and functionality indicators in a broad population range from 50,000 to 500,000 inhabitants. From the academic and methodological perspective that we hold, it is considered necessary to first situate each case in its historical-structural context, including the symbolic dimension of replication of the urban space, in which “intermediate” takes on an important identity value (see Boggi and Galván, 2008; Gravano, 2005). We focused on cities in this range because of the relative scarcity of anthropological studies of them in contrast to their frequency in Argentine urban reality.

10. The notion of the “neighborhood” is a central referent (Rockwell, 2009) in the organization of the patrimonialization project and the formulation of the expectations of action with regard to state agents by members of the assembly. My approach to the neighborhood goes beyond the idea of a setting or spatial cutout to treat it as an object of meaning and set of values historically reflected in the urban setting (Gravano, 2011).

11. This phase of capital expansion reached its peak during the 1950s and then declined with the crisis of industrial activity and Argentina’s role in supplying manufactured goods to the world market. The capitalist restructuring of Argentina since the last military dictatorship (1976–1983), consolidated by the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, meant the shrinking of the state and the dismantling of public services, including the railroad system. Divestment, deterioration, privatization, and hollowing out led to the deactivation of the enormous national railway network, with varying levels of impact on the towns and housing developments that had grown up around it as a driving economic and social element.

12. Although there are differences in local regulations, historical protection areas are sectors of the urban fabric that have buildings considered to have historical and/or architectural value or particular conditions that warrant protection and/or eventual replacement.

13. “Barrio de la Estación” and “Barrio de la Estación Tandil,” respectively. The profiles allow them to have up to 5,000 “friends” who can see and share the content posted and, depending on the privacy settings, to comment on that content and post other materials. Likewise, the fan’s pages are aimed at organizations or people who wish to use the information they post for professional and/or commercial purposes. Instead of “friends” they have “fans” (people who “like” the page); sharing content is possible but not commenting on it.

14. In August 2014 Facebook had 24 million users in Argentina (almost 60 percent of the population) and some 1.3 billion users around the world. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1720530-hay-24-millones-de-usuarios-de-facebook-en-la-argentina> (accessed February 26, 2018).

15. Multimedios El Eco owns Channel 2 Eco TV, FM 104.1, *El Eco*, and a digital news portal. *La Voz de Tandil* is owned by Multimedios La Capital of Mar del Plata, along with AM Radio 1560 and a digital portal. Radio Tandil has AM 1140 and FM Galáctica, and *Nueva Era*, which has a digital portal. In addition there are Channel 4, AM 1180 Radio de la Sierra, some 20 FM radio stations, and 6 digital news portals.

16. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1720530-hay-24-millones-de-usuarios-de-facebook-en-la-argentina> (accessed February 26, 2018).

17. Figures provided by the Consultora Survey.

18. That proportion changes in the over-60 segment, who place AM radio first, newspapers and television second, digital portals third, and FM radio last. In the socioeconomic level considered “low,” AM radio and television are first, newspapers second, and digital media third.

19. “Participation” is distinguished from management forms considered vertical and authoritarian. I take the anthropological concept of participation from Menéndez (2006).

20. Some comments collected in the field records: “There are issues that [the reporter] doesn’t let me talk about.” “On TV they don’t let you talk. . . . I wanted to talk about the project and they ended up asking me about the book.” “They got into talking about the change in the street name, and what’s important is the declaration of a historical protection area.”

21. The Audiovisual Communications Services Law (Chapter 2, Article 4) defines “community radio” as “private actors that have a social purpose and are characterized by being managed by various types of nonprofit social organizations. Their basic characteristic is community participation in the ownership of the outlet as well as in programming, administration, operation, financing, and evaluation. These are independent and nongovernmental media.”

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