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Sustainability and its contradictory meanings in the digital media ecosystem: contributions from the Portuguese scenario

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is one of the buzzwords of contemporary societies (Lélé 1991; Sneddon 2000). The term was first used in the Brundtland report on the environment, published in 1987, defining the kind of “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (*apud* Redclift 2006, 67). Although it emerged within the frame of ecological debates (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; United Nations Conference on Environment and Development 1992), its ambiguity would promote a broadening into other domains, such as education, health, economy, and justice, as can be seen in the programme of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹ Its adoption by the business world is seen through terms such as “financial sustainability” or “sustainable management”, relative to the association between shareholder values, social responsibility, and environmental standards, and also through the institutionalization of such perspectives as perceived in the existence of the Network for Business Sustainability and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (Dyllick and Muff 2015).

In recent years, the use of expressions such as “media sustainability” and “sustainable journalism” seems to announce an extension of the concept of sustainability also to the media field. This expansion takes place in a period in which the convergence between the processes of digitalization, globalization, and liberalization brought about a thorough reconfiguration of the media universe and of the rationales underlying the production, dissemination, and consumption of information. In the current uses of sustainability in the context of the media field, one faces the confrontation between two fundamental aspects of journalism. On the one hand, there is the business aspect related with the media companies, its market positions, and stakeholders’ interests. The focus in this aspect resonates with the meanings of financial sustainability and sustainable management. On the other hand, there is the ethical and political aspect related with its informative function and counter-power role, aimed at inclusive, responsible, and responsive politics and at a more tolerant, plural, and vibrant civil society. Are these aspects complementary? Can the

1 The 2030 Agenda comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Goal 16 aims to “(...) provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. Among its specific objectives, Goal 16 proposes to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms (...)” (SDG 16.10).

new media, paved by the development of ICT, help to build an unclosed process of information and social and political dialogue? What are the challenges and risks brought by this new media tendency? To what extent are technological and managerial developments in the media sector safeguarding information and communication as public instead of commercial goods? As in its ecological and social dimensions (Swyngedouw 2010; Raco 2014), the use of this concept in the media and communication realm seems to present some limitations. One of the main objectives of this chapter is, precisely, to question the extent to which the broadening of this term may have produced contradictory meanings (Redclift 2006).

Our analysis moves within a theoretical framework of sociological enquiry into the new conditions of communicational mediation to question this new but already dominant idea of sustainability in the media field. This study promotes the discussion of this concept, mapping the concrete Portuguese journalistic scenarios against a background of new political-economic imperatives. As its empirical ground, it relies on a set of four case studies. The selection of such studies seeks to cover organizations with different kinds of trajectories, regarding business models, longevity, combination of online and printed formats, and integration with international networks. The study is based upon a qualitative methodology including in-depth interviews, document analysis, and website reviews (Garcia et al. 2018).² The entities selected were approached with the common goal of identifying four dimensions of journalism: the characteristics of the media company, the editing modalities, the information producers, and the relations with the audiences (Oliveira 1988; 1992).

In what follows, we will list, though in a necessarily concise way, the organizations included in the case studies under consideration. *Expresso* is a weekly newspaper founded in 1973, whose development is entirely connected with *Impresa*, one of Portugal's largest media corporate groups, which includes besides *Expresso*, a wide range of publications and platforms. The creation of a daily digital publication in 2014 translates a phased process of business development and investment in technological apparatuses, with expected returns from advertising and cost reductions, basing itself primarily

2 All the research data used in this work are part of a previous wider enquiry on the consequences of the process of digitalization of journalism in Portugal, which was funded by the *Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social*.

on the guideline that all the journalists and editorial staff get involved in the production processes of such a publication. *Observador*, launched in May 2014, is an online daily newspaper that explicitly presents itself as geared toward exploring the potential of digital media: interactivity, multimedia, continual updating of content, interaction with readers, and a noticeable presence in social networks. Its business model, based upon advertising revenues, includes branded content produced by the newspaper but defined according to the approach and strategy presented by sponsors. *Blasting News*, an online publication created in Italy in 2013 and available in Portugal since 2014, is guided by the principles of the so-called “citizen journalism” (which *Blasting News* refers to as “social journalism”). It functions, essentially, as a news platform, managed by a small number of employees, but sustained by the content produced by millions of registered participants (around 30,000 from Portugal), whose revenues depend on the number of views of their articles. Finally, *Artecapital*, founded in 2006, is a digital magazine that covers the visual arts to disseminate information and reflection on exhibitions and topics relating to the art world. It is produced by a small collective and an array of volunteers, who share an interest in the area and search for a capital of visibility, hardly obtained in mainstream media.

The first part of this chapter offers a wide-angle view on the topic of media sustainability, pointing out the key features of the complex process of the emergence of new conditions for communicational mediation, from the end of the twentieth century to the present day. The second part addresses the profound changes this new communicational environment produced in the press, as new agents and players came to occupy the field: portal and content aggregators that also function as search engines, independent information websites and “born-digital media”. The third part deals with the new modes of production that underlie media digitalization and content development – a term that has gradually replaced the production of news, articles, and reports – in a process in which the web data of content views and shares has become the yardstick for the organization of work in digital media newsrooms. The fourth part focuses on the redefinition of the journalist profile and on the reorganization of the professional relations in the media and communication sector.

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY IN A NEW ECOLOGICAL-COMMUNICATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

From the end of the twentieth century complex social processes have emerged to create new conditions of communicational mediation. Over this period, the internet and other technological systems that placed information on a global marketplace arose, propelled by innovation projects. In the wake of new information and communication technologies, the idea of an information society, or a global information society, imposed itself, bringing about profound cultural shifts. The autonomization of the media field and the institutionalization of research on communication, media, and journalism was bound to the model of a mass society, to the mode of production and relations of production of industrial capitalism, and of the commonly named “mass media”. However, against this new backdrop, marked by the reorganization of societies through the stimulus of IT networks, in the context of immaterial, digital, and informational capitalism, and by the multiplication of “new media” and “new new media”, research should focus on the site of mediation of communicational processes that drags us beyond co-presence. The overall media universe and, more specifically, that of journalism, is today overdetermined by the digital, global, and pro-market turn of industrialized societies. This brings about a specific set of socio-technical codifications, the most conspicuous manifestation of which is the development of digital industries and the expansion of the internet, alongside new practices and concentrations of power (Wu 2010).

The socio-scientific understanding of the technological transformations at stake requires unpacking and with it the dismantling of the naturalization of these technologies in everyday life and in common knowledge. This naturalization tends to crystallize into two rationales: the existence of a technological object or of its consequences are attributed to a natural order of things, grounded on the teleological premise that all innovation is part and parcel of a road to a better or worse version of the world; alternatively, it is explained through an individual decision, in which it is assumed that events unfold as an outcome of individuals’ rational calculations. Denaturalizing knowledge grounded on these perceptions involves a critical gaze on the linear notion of technological evolution and of its potential uses, opened up by the configuration of the technologies themselves. Instead, the argument here is that technologies are not mere instruments, but rather apparatuses that

codify meanings (Alexander 2015), which embody these meanings within complex socio-semiotic processes (Carey 1990). The technical consequences in these recent transformations appear, therefore, as products that, as a result of their autonomization, and given that they are embedded with human values and are part of more or less widespread discourses, operate as vehicles for cultural, economic, and political forces. Digital technologies and new media, when turned into industries and commodities, articulate knowledge from various fields, namely the scientific, aesthetic, and design fields, in the shape of economic and commercial projects and innovation policies. They become ventures that are simultaneously scientific, technological, economic, and cultural.

The recognition of this cultural dimension of technologies has a bearing on the way in which technological transformations are studied, and how the limits – particularly economic and technological in nature – of the crisis of digital industries and journalism are thought of. On the one hand, certain points of view contaminate research agendas, especially socio-metric research projects, with the premise that the new communicational context will open the door to a participation of the whole of society in decision processes. On the other hand, there are those who convey the idea that public space ceases to exist altogether on the internet.

This chapter asserts the need to build an alternative perspective from which to consider the current situation of the media universe, the place that journalism and journalists occupy within it. The point, ultimately, is to argue for a reconfiguration of the question of sustainability. In its original sense this question emerges within the frame of an ecological conception of the media, and of the reorganizing impact of the internet. The concentration of ownership of media companies, the erosion of the practices traditionally understood as journalistic gatekeeping, the appearance of new forms of information control and censorship, and the creation of new modes of public participation came to question the viability of a democratic public sphere. In this context, international analysis and monitoring projects such as the Media Sustainability Index of the International Research and Exchanges Board, the Community Media Sustainability Policy Series of UNESCO, and the Monitoring Media Pluralism in Europe of the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom employ the concept of sustainability connecting pluralism with financial viability. In a section entitled “Economic, financial, and managerial requirements to ensure sustainable independent and pluralistic media” in a paper for UNESCO,

Robert Picard wrote that “the viability of news media organisations requires conditions that make it possible for such media to obtain and manage resources and capabilities necessary to maintain themselves and be sustainable” (Picard 2015, 3). “The focus here is on financial, structural, market and managerial factors”, he added (*ibid.*). Some authors state that politics for a “sustainable journalism” relies on the development of “high-quality, in depth coverage as well as robust business models, technology, education and organisations that take these challenges into account” (Benglez, Olausson and Ots 2017, xv).

Given that it is at the centre of the technological and industrial fields, the internet has become a defining and reorganizing element of societies. This idea implies a conception of media as environments conditioning and structuring people’s perceptions, feelings, and values. The notion of “technological development”, concomitant with such a viewpoint, runs counter to cumulative perspectives, which see a change of medium as an additive evolution. Instead, this change should rather be thought of as an ecological reconfiguration (Mosco 1999). Therefore, as a medium or as a cluster of media, the internet enables a reorganization of the previously settled communicational ecology, opening the way for a new communicational ecology within which new social worlds take shape. This reorganizing force (sometimes seen as revolutionary, especially in terms of means of production) has led some authors to abandon the old notion of the “media landscape”, replacing this last term with “ecosystem”. Jean-Marie Charon (2015) considers the latter to be a more accurate term to describe the relations between a set of agents within media that is seen as creative, fluid, and horizontally organized, and at the same time more uncertain. It is against this backdrop that we can see the main challenges to the creation of a contemporary deliberative public sphere.

NEW AGENTS AND PLAYERS: AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF AN “EDITORIAL EFFERVESCENCE”

In this new communicational context, fostered by the digital industry and by its technological innovations, it seemed, since producing, distributing, and receiving digital content online became so prevalent, that the mediation role of journalism has been, as suggested above, weakened. This new communicational ecology places greater emphasis on the process of distributing information whilst it also means change in modes of production and consumption. We

thus encounter in the vast information field, and particularly in the journalistic field, a situation of turmoil and reorganization, where new agents and new entrepreneurial logics emerge, alongside new media products and professional roles that displace the very notion of “journalism”, as well as the professional status of journalists, to undermine their role and attributions.

In Portugal, as in other countries and societies, one sees a press universe undergoing sweeping changes that have increasingly been the object of research.³ The various studies converge on the recognition that the landscape of information production and the role of journalism are going through a period of permanent adjustment and reconfiguration, somewhat akin to what Joseph Schumpeter described with the notion of “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 1942). Phrases such as “editorial effervescence” (Charon 2015) aim to register the reorganization of the field of the general press, between the “pure players” of information and content and the start-ups investing in the production of information. In this context, one should clarify the term “pure player”, given its increasingly common and undifferentiated use. It refers, generally speaking, to a company that specializes in a product or activity, with no vertical integration, and whose means and ends of production are wholly grounded on digital media. Examples in the media world would be news portals and platforms or content aggregators that also work as search engines, as well as independent information websites and born-digital media. Staying within the range of the cases addressed in this chapter, the electronic magazine *Artcapital*, the online platform *Blasting News*, and the born-digital newspaper *Observador* fit into this category of “pure players”.

The overall process, sometimes described as a “reinvention” of the print media, refers to the multiplicity and heterogeneity of initiatives of this kind, which attempt to mobilize all the potentialities of the digital world that delineate and experiment with a new arrangement of media ecology. In Portugal, as elsewhere, one can indeed speak of an editorial effervescence.

3 In various disciplines there is a growing interest in framing these changes within the context of larger shifts in communication, media, public space, and journalism. On international cases, see, for example: McManus (1994); Bardoel (1996); Pavlik (2001); Boczkowski (2004); Scott (2005); Downie and Schudson (2009); Levy and Nielsen (2010); Grueskin et al. (2011); McChesney and Pickard (2011); Anderson et al. (2012); Alexander (2015); Charon (2015); Mabweazara (2015); Deuze and Witschge (2017). On the Portuguese case, the following works are particularly relevant: Traquina (2000); Canavilhas (2006); Cardoso et al. (2006); Garcia (2009); Bastos (2010); Rebelo (2014); Camponez et al. (2015); Cardoso et al. (2015); Granado and Zamith (2015); Cardoso et al. (2016); Gomes (2016); Matos et al. (2017).

In a preliminary early stage there is a generation of new players from within the general information field, generating a steady change in content and presentation models. In this group falls the online edition of the weekly *Expresso*, whose first steps in this field can be traced back to the end of the 1990s. These examples are forever geared toward finding an economically viable business model, framed in these contexts as “sustainable” (in an abusive use of the term). A second stage comes with the creation of other news organizations such as websites and blogs. Although these platforms are located outside of conventional editorial contexts and though they are subject to little or no commercial pressure, they nevertheless need to find ways to survive through the generation of revenue that will allow them to pay their contributors and content producers. In this radically changed scenario, one should highlight the publicizing of journalistic content in portals and content aggregators showcasing content from a variety of publications.

Phenomena such as the clustering of content means that newspaper directors and managers now unceasingly worry over the conquest of online spaces. *Expresso* is a particularly eloquent example of such a case. Empirical research revealed that the relation between this publication and the portal *Sapo*⁴, the key content aggregator and provider of online advertising space in Portugal, has led to the steady favouring of *Expresso* content on that platform (Silva 2015). In a study on the convergences of Portuguese newsrooms, it is possible to discern that this portal hosts various websites and functions as an aggregator of news from a variety of publications. These platforms then compete amongst themselves for headline visibility, providing their clients with advertising spaces on newspaper websites, the sale of advertising space being indexed to the number of views of that website (*ibid.*). A newspaper like *Expresso* adopted a business model, despite its structural specificities, that came close to that of online journalism as described by Des Freedman in the following terms: “audiences largely refuse to pay for content, advertising revenue is dominated by search engines and pure-play companies, cannibalisation remains a concern [...] and traffic goes more and more to internet portals and aggregators who invest virtually nothing in original news content and simultaneously fail to expand significantly the range of source material” (Des Freedman 2010, 47).

4 Founded in 1995, *Sapo* presents itself as “an online publication” which is “permanently updated, containing news and other useful information for all Portuguese-speaking internet users” (<http://www.sapo.pt/estatuto-editorial>).

As for the newspaper *Observador*, the study also allowed noticing a trend toward the “hybridisation” of messages, anchored on a specific intertwinement between journalism, advertising, and marketing, which blurs the lines between different content. One of the results of this trend is that the messages aimed at serving commercial interests appear in the eyes of the public with a seal of credibility and disinterest that are the defining traits of journalistic messages (Fidalgo 2016). In *Observador* one can identify an emphatic turn to “branded content”. Since access to this publication is free, advertising is inevitably its main source of revenue. Even though traditional advertising, externally developed, remains one of the forms of relation with sponsors, branded content is an increasingly recurring practice. It remains the most expensive advertising segment in the publication, and also the section with the highest investment (Garcia et al. 2018). When the advertiser pays for branded content, the client determines the topic and leaves the newspaper to produce content around it. Even though this content – labelled as the OBS Lab – appears alongside common news articles, their authors are not staff journalists, but rather freelancers hired by the newspaper’s commercial department. An advertiser thus enjoys the possibility of obtaining a tailor-made campaign, often devised by journalists, and using various means and tools that take full advantage of the potential of new technologies.

In *Blasting News*, whose revenues come exclusively from advertising, there is an analogous phenomenon. In this publication, alongside other informative pieces, there are advertisements, in the form of advertorials, which are not only presented as “sponsored content” but also rely on access to the user’s profiles, so that, it is claimed, users receive information that is of greater and more particular interest to them.

NEW MODES OF PRODUCTION: THE GROWING DEPENDENCE ON “CONTENT PROFITABILITY”

One of the underlying trends within the journalistic field, established by the digitalization of the media, is the replacement of the production of news, articles, and news reports by the expansion of the production of content. The dependency on “content profitability” in terms of its capacity to generate clicks, alongside its incessant quantification, has become the main driving force in the organization of the production of information in online newsrooms.

There is, however, another crucial change: the investment in staff specialized in the production of branded content. One should note that this content may go beyond traditional text infomercials, and may appear as videos, podcasts, photo galleries, or infographics, along with other formats, such as online seminars (webinars) or conferences. Such a fast-paced departure from the field of news production toward content production has nonetheless gone hand in hand with the appropriation and permanence of vocabulary, terminology, apparatuses, and hierarchical principles from journalistic practice. Editorial statuses continue to exist, pledging to uncover the “truth” and vouching for the “primacy of facts”. Information continues to be arranged into thematic sections. The publications hold on to the daily or weekly periodicity as a standard, with differentiated editorial lines, extensions, and articulations between various platforms. The figure of the editor is still present as a mediator between journalists and directors.

Even in the case of *Blasting News*, which defines itself as a publication of “citizen journalism” and places emphasis on notions such as the “blurring of hierarchies” and the participation of all those who may wish to contribute to the production of news, some of the conventional protocols associated with the journalistic profession remain in place as the structure around which content is organized. In fact, the digital turn broke the monopoly of the production and dissemination of information held by the traditional media sector, stimulating the appearance of other modalities of information, products, and possibilities of receiving and sharing news. This fostered new “para-journalistic” practices within the frame of new niches and business models in the field of information. In the present context, not only have conventional journalistic organizations begun to include, in an increasingly systematic and conspicuous way, content produced by people other than journalists, such as integrating images, sounds, and texts that emerge from a context of citizen journalism, but, in addition, it has also become increasingly common for online platforms to disseminate output that comes from non-professionals, platforms that still identify as editorially credible. Claiming to follow journalistic criteria and to abide by the profession’s ethical and deontological rules – somewhat counter-intuitively, inasmuch as they take pride in and praise amateurism and the freedom afforded by the absence of the constraints and restrictions linked with traditional journalism – they propose to create more open, democratic, and non-hierarchical information, in tune with the user’s actual interests. It should be noted that these modalities

of content production allow the companies that use them to significantly reduce their costs. In most cases, the contributors are not paid (or will only be paid if their contribution reaches a very high volume of users) and they work with their own resources, with no assistance, financial or otherwise, from the company. This strategy, therefore, regardless of the benevolent rhetoric that envelops it – as previously mentioned, it is credited with expanding and enhancing the public sphere – ultimately comes down to the creation of an alternative business model for media companies.

The encounter between the journalistic universe and that of content production, in a context in which, as it is nowadays, the first is subsumed by the latter, blurs the distinction between journalism's social role and its commercial logic. There is a blurring of the lines between territories and activities that grounds a sense of indistinctness, generated by the sheer quantity of by-products. Often, in the name of synthesis and overview, we see a proliferation of podcasts, videos, blogs, a profusion of hyperlinks. Hybridity also exists in this industry as a means to cater to the so-called personal taste of the individual consumer. One such case is, as the collected data show, the multiplication of newsletters that various newspapers publish – daily, weekly, or monthly, varying from the generic to the more specific or topic-oriented. Presented as a “synthesis” of the news whilst simultaneously catering to the specific interests of each reader, these newsletters offer a kind of personalized “media diet” that has proved particularly attractive to advertisers (Garcia et al. 2018).

The need to attract advertisers also pushes the prominence of figures such as social media managers and digital analysts, increasingly more present in the production of content. The imposition of web analytics as a guiding principle for the production of information does not mean that the concern with the reception of content, and the level of attention they were able to capture, were absent from earlier stages of journalism. Yet, in digital media newsrooms, the number of page views and shares seems to play a central and determining role in terms of editorial decision-making (Canavilhas et al. 2016).

In the research we verified that in the newsrooms of *Observador* and *Expresso* there are screens where statistics on the most read articles at each particular moment are projected, allowing real-time monitoring (certain aspects of) the readers' behaviour. Besides this constant presence of the monitoring screen, journalists have access to computer software that gauges the “performance” of their articles, and digital analysts make daily and weekly

reports that generate a kind of permanent “sentinel effect” over the readers and followers, as well as a simultaneous and continuous “surveillance” of the journalists and their capacity to “maintain a steady and expressive presence on the internet” (Granado 2016).

The extreme concern with, and attention to, web data enables the assessment of content produced in newsrooms as a more and more tightly fastened piece of a tripartite chain of interdependencies: content, page views/reading times, and advertising revenue. Or, to phrase it differently: better technology attracts more readers and more readers lead to an increase in circulation and advertising revenue. Within this ecology, in which the media companies’ commercial dimension makes itself increasingly felt on the daily routines of journalism, it falls on journalists to cultivate the new skills required in relation to social media and their readers/clients.

In the context of this gradual transition from a focus on the production of news to content production, it follows that journalists turn more and more into content producers. The gap widens between journalist professionals and the rules and standards that defined the trade, with significant shifts in its established *ethos*. Professional practices have absorbed new rationales and values, as the presiding culture of innovation has encouraged news products and contents that place the journalists’ work in a border zone (of the so-called “boundary work”), within an information management framework that is guided by the “digital first” motto.

New types of professionals are demanded to form a new habitat, in which they interact with engineers, designers, digital analysts, and social media managers – those who often climb the company ladder and come to occupy the higher posts within the company’s organigram, in roles previously occupied by journalists themselves. Digital technologies enter into the newsroom and the journalists’ work, pushed by their perceived potential as well as, on an everyday basis, through regular contact with professionals in this field, and through the technical adaptation of journalists themselves. To start with, the profile of the journalist required to work online includes the ability to perform tasks that go beyond the established journalistic *ethos*, such as content production, social media management, and often the skills needed to use the internet for research, selection, and treatment of information. Journalists have ceased to perform mere journalistic tasks as such. To put it another way, the tasks that fell outside of the journalistic role have been folded within the skill set that make up the emergent journalistic *ethos*.

REORGANIZATION OF PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS: THE EVER-GREATER DEMAND FOR MULTI-SKILLED JOURNALISTS

The development of new business models in the media field and in communication domains brought about significant changes in work relations. The context in which these changes took place can be seen, to a certain extent, as a foreshadowing of the current state of journalism. This result, however complementary to those previously presented, emphatically shows the contradiction pointed out in this chapter regarding the meanings of the concept of sustainability applied to the media field. The example cited of the newspaper *Expresso* is, in this sense, paradigmatic, since the wager it laid on the digital coincided, in time, with “the corporation’s financial deleveraging” (Garcia et al. 2018). This led to the reduction and control of costs (including staff costs), alongside its restructuration and reorganization, toward a more integrated or convergent model, which in turn translated into, among other measures, the alienation of publications that had shown little financial return.⁵

These measures are not purely technical responses, and they shape the type of journalism practiced. The research indicates that the greater ease in contacting sources or the greater oversight over the publishing of an article, made simpler by the internet, are balanced out by an accumulation of responsibilities on the part of the worker. The higher precarity in the sector, in parallel with the greater number of professionals in this specific labour market, means that these knowledge-sets become prerequisites and, to this extent, potential exclusionary forces for journalists who do not have them.

At the same time, as verified in the launch of *Expresso*’s online publication and the consequent standby model, the lines between different roles in the newsroom become blurred, especially between journalists who are mostly directed to writing for the print format and those who work for other platforms. In interviews, journalists of *Expresso* employ the term “Swiss army knife”, a term that has in the meantime entered everyday journalistic jargon, to refer to multi-skilled journalists, competent in handling a wide range of tools, techniques, and media (Gradim 2002). *Observador* shares a similar strategy in terms of the division of labour among its staff. In an interview, one of the workers stated that “the workload is different” when compared to “modern

5 In August 2017, *Impresa* admitted it was considering a reduction in its magazine segment, as well as the sale of some of its assets, even though it did not specify any particular publication.

newsrooms”, given the absence of a “division of labour”. All of them are given equipment so that, beyond whatever their habitual tasks are, they can take photographs or shoot videos.

The study therefore indicates that journalists have to guarantee a wide range of tasks such as the gathering, filtering, and sharing of events, as well as the registration and publishing of image and sound. They are no longer simply concerned with writing a newspiece, but with all the possible ways in which it can be presented and disseminated, such as Mark Deuze (2004) pointed out. He or she must integrate the news into multimedia content, complement the content production with functions such as layout, formatting, and publishing, as well as (as mentioned above) attend to the interaction with readers.

These tasks tend to be performed, as mentioned, under precarious work conditions. Although they follow very distinct lines, the online culture magazine *Artecapital* and the digital news platform *Blasting News* share some traits as far as labour conditions go. Firstly, there are no standing contractual relationships, as freelance or even unpaid work is dominant. In the case of *Blasting News*, remuneration for the author who shares his text on the website depends on the number of page views, and does not occur in every case.⁶ *Artecapital* also resorts to occasional low-paid collaborations, which often are justified by the authors’ affinity with the project or, as is the case in *Blasting News*, by their search for a “visibility capital”, which the magazine provides (Bourdieu 1980; Heinich 2012).

Against a background of the atomization of social relations in the world of labour, escaping precarious conditions is the result of specific individual or personal strategies. The existing conditions are thus made tolerable against the promise of a more promising future, and the exercise of an occupation one believes in, or the simple immediate need of an income (Young and Carson 2016; Corrigan 2015; Gill 2011).

6 With a thousand views in each segment, a “Blaster” (the term used to describe the authors of texts published on the platform) receives 3.5 euros. Only with a minimum of 10,000 organic views and 11,700 social media views, assuming they are writing about one of the highest-paid topics, can an author expect to receive 50 euros. This plateau is crucial as only when it is reached can the contributor ask for financial compensation, as specified in their contract with *Blasting News*. Furthermore, this payment will only take place if the “Blaster” requests it, on specific dates of each month, and the actual payment may take over 60 days to come through. The company established a revenue cap, which means that 150 euros is the highest amount a “Blaster” may receive for a published article.

CONCLUSIONS

In the confluence between the processes of digitalization, globalization, and liberalization, the media universe and the logics underlying the production, dissemination, and consumption of information have been profoundly reorganized. Shifts in form and format, pushed on by new digital technologies, did not however bring about any change in terms of the ownership structure. On the contrary, the crisis scenario, which made itself felt, for instance, in the decrease in sales numbers for the printed press and/or in the increase of the number of competitors in the sector, namely by open access digital media, has not attenuated the trend toward the concentration of media in large business conglomerates. It is within this economic framework, then, that new business and organizational models, as well as new products, routines, and production relations emerge.

In this process, journalism's communicational complexity has been reduced to a sum of sellable technical products, which has had a substantial impact on the Portuguese situation. One of the underlying trends is that the production of news, articles, and reports has increasingly given way to content production, which often goes well beyond the bounds of journalism. The instances of branded content, or even the organization of events in partnership with commercial companies promote a confluence between journalism and advertising, which nowadays takes places under the vector of the subsumption of the first by the latter, which leads to a permeability between the social role of journalism and commercial interests and logics. The unevenness of this relationship is equally clear in the importance attributed to page views data, taken as an index of consumer interest (and, therefore, of the interest of the advertiser). Their centrality is such that it brings about changes in the very organization and equipment of the workspace, which now includes, as we have mentioned, screens with real time statistics on content consumption.

The attempt to capture the reader's attention has led to an added sophistication of the journalistic piece, in terms of both production and distribution. This means new professional posts, such as digital analysts, social media managers, designers, and infographic designers, given their respective expertise in measuring and reading data on the circulation and reception of content, alongside the production of aesthetically-appealing information.

It falls on journalists themselves to cultivate these new competencies, lest they become incapable of performing an activity that, for the majority of them,

did not involve much in the way of technical skills. With the communicational context fostered by the digital industry and its technological innovations, driven by a reorientation of the logics of production, dissemination, and consumption for digital supports, and by the fact that the internet allows virtually anyone to produce, distribute, and access digital content, we witness a destabilization and dislocation of the concept of “journalism” and of the profession of “journalist”, alongside an overall dispute over its frontiers and fields of application (Garcia 2009; Fidalgo 2016). In other words, tasks that were initially deemed non-journalistic have now been folded into the set of functions that make up a more versatile, multi-skilled definition of journalism. It is no longer a matter of simply writing the copy for a news piece, conducting an interview, or doing a report, but rather a case of becoming part and parcel of an advertising campaign, of integrating other content into the news (such as photographs, multimedia content, hyperlinks), of performing tasks such as layout, formatting, and editing or even handling interaction with the readers. The diffuse notion of a crisis of journalism can be reframed, therefore, beyond the strictly economic or purely technological spheres, against the wider cultural backdrop of a far-reaching crisis of meaning in journalism.

We could verify that the nonstop follow-ups and updates on an event delineated by the internet means that there is no longer a “temporal break”. This fosters a kind of “on-the-spot” journalism that often ends up resorting to other media as sources. One is therefore forced to do more in less time, and often for a lower or even nonexistent salary and precarious work bonds, such as internships or freelance work. The two phenomena are closely interlinked, since precarity tends to operate as a guarantee that these norms will be followed, in the name of a more promising future: to do volunteer work on a cultural magazine may help in making the necessary professional contacts; the article published on the news platform operates as a means of advertising for its author.

As far as the analysis of the four case studies allows us to see, the polysemy and comprehensiveness of the concept of sustainability applied to media and journalism, confronts, rather than harmonizes, different understandings on how to solve or face the challenges posed today by digitalization in this area. On the one hand, proposals stemming from concerns about the economic and financial sustainability of news media companies determine their migration to the digital sphere in order to reduce costs with their material and human resources or to encourage the creation of new types of content, in which the

difference between news and advertising becomes blurred. On the other hand, these results call into question the sustainability of a democratic public sphere, as this is founded, among other features, on the autonomy of both news genres and news producers. Although we can point out some attempts at complementarity between the two aforementioned aspects implied in the ideas of media sustainability and sustainable journalism, the business aspect, the ethical aspect, and political aspect, the empirical analysis presented on the media field in Portugal points to a clear primacy of commercial interests, especially visible in the market orientation of technological products. In the light of our understanding of the problem and the evidence from the case studies, the concept of sustainability is inconsistent in the context of the media field, because it absorbs opposite meanings without synthesizing them, without offering a complementary solution.

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