Rama Ataúro

Repercussions for empowerment and possibilities of social change arising from the production of a youth-led community newspaper in Ataúro, Timor-Leste

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Abstract

This research is aimed at discussing the impact of participatory communication on empowering, increasing agency, and mobilizing citizenship that fosters social change. I conducted my fieldwork with a group of 21 youth (seven women and 14 men), with ages ranging from 15 to 30 years, who reside in Ataúro, Timor-Leste. This group participates in a community wall-newspaper founded in 2008. The methodologies applied were participant observation and qualitative interviews. The text is divided into three chapters; the first explores the societal structure and the constructing of youth, and the process of resignification of youth roles and identities from the work of young people in the community newspaper. In the following chapter, the internal dynamic of the newspaper group is analysed through the participatory communication framework, elaborating on empowerment processes and showing how this promotes changes and continuities in traditional structures. Finally, the last chapter looks at interactions of the group with their community and the way the negotiation between new and traditional practices develops. Youth are more empowered and the changes occurring throughout the participatory process suggest that ruptures and continuities between conserving and changing traditional practices, and the perception of ‘youth’ in the community, are occurring.

Keywords: communication for development; communication; youth; community media; citizens’ media; participatory communication; social change; community newspaper; Timor-Leste; Ataúro.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Acknowledgements 3

1. Introduction 5

2. The Place of Youth – From Subordinates to Subjects 12
   2.1. Being Youth in Timor-Leste 12
   2.2. Youthful Voices Heard 24

3. Rama Ataúro – How Participatory? 31
   3.1. Participation and Empowerment – Dynamic Double 31
   3.2. The Making of Rama Ataúro 35
   3.3. A Closer Look at Empowerment 42

4. Of Words and Thoughts – Community, Communication, and Social Change 52
   4.1. Starting Point 53
   4.2. Communicational Practices 53
   4.3. Renegotiating Places 55

5. Conclusion 65

Appendices 69

References 74
1. Introduction

This research draws on my involvement as a volunteer in the production of a community newspaper, Rama Ataúro, with a group of youth from Ataúro island, Timor-Leste. Between April 2008 and September 2009, 14 editions of this monthly wall-newspaper, written in the official language most in use, Tetun¹, were produced and posted in over 70 public outlets across the island’s five villages. The project was reinitiated in February 2013, with the first edition released on 23 March.

The A-3 format wall-newspaper project aims at enhancing people’s access to communication and information but, more than that, it is aimed at being a participatory exercise that creates an entry point for youth to express their viewpoints. The use of ‘participatory’, here, takes inspiration from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s (2006) view, as a means to empower people so they are able to formulate their own demands for a better life, set their own agenda and find the solution to their problems.

Ataúro island is part of Timor-Leste, the youngest country in Southeast Asia, which achieved its independence in 2002 after 450 years of Portuguese colonial domination, 24 years of Indonesian occupation, and two years of transitional administration led by the United Nations. Despite having a population of only 1,066,409 people (National Directorate for Statistics, 2011); intense investment from the international community for the past 12 years; and a steady increase in government expenditures in the past five years, totaling US$ 4 billion, statistics indicate that 68.1 per cent of Timorese live in multidimensional poverty.

¹ Timor-Leste’s official languages defined on its Constitution (2002) are Portuguese and Tetun; English and Indonesian are working languages, and there are some 15 indigenous languages (Hull, undated).
while 18.2 per cent are vulnerable to multiple deprivations\(^2\), and 37.4 per cent are below the income poverty line (UNDP, 2013). Illiteracy rates are at 42 per cent, 58 per cent of the households don’t have access to clean sanitation, only 36.9 per cent of households have electricity – a number that falls to 18.9 per cent when considering rural areas only (National Directorate for Statistics, 2011) –, and 54 per cent of children are chronically malnourished (UNICEF, 2011).

Although only about 30 kilometers distant from the capital, Dili, the community of less than 10,000 people lacks access to communication and information, as it is not included in newspaper distribution schemes, internet connection is unreliable and expensive, the mobile phone network is poor, and there are obstacles hampering the use of radio and television (no or intermittent electricity supply, difficulty to afford sets and/or batteries, bad reception/signal). Statistics in Timor-Leste points that 70.4 per cent of the population lives in rural areas (National Statistics Directorate, 2011), such as the Atauroans. Among rural population, 43.2 per cent of households have mobile phones, 28.5 per cent have radio, and 10.9 per cent have TV sets (ibid), while internet has weekly reach of around 5.8 per cent nationwide (UNMIT, 2011). In this context, the community project initiated from the youths’ desire to address the lack of access to information in their community.

Thus, working with youth was not a choice, in a planned way, but rather an opportunity created by the Rama Ataúro young people. Its importance, however, is justified not only by the fact that youth represent a high percentage of the population in Timor-Leste: 26.98 have between 15 and 29 years, while another 41.43 per cent are less than 14 years old (National Statistics Directorate, 2011). As noted by Martín-Barbero (cited in Enghel and Tufte, 2011: 268), the constitution of youth as a ‘social group’, and their influence as ‘social actors’ and

\(^2\) The Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is calculated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as part of its’ Human Development Report. The MPI represents the percentage of people living in households where at least one person is deprived of education, health or standard of living.
'agents of change' is a rather new phenomenon. He also remarks that youth today are ‘experiencing societal change to a degree and of a depth unprecedented in our time’, brought about with the accelerated globalization process.

Ataúro, a small community where the majority lives from subsistence agriculture and artisanal fishing and has been largely isolated as a result of geography and lack of infrastructure, has a highly hierarchical and rigid organization, generally not receptive to ‘external’ influences. The tensions arising from the pace of change brought by dramatic transformations in their country, added and interacted to the accelerated pace of globalization, are exacerbated, and there seems to be strong resistance from community leaders to societal transformations that are taking place. The youth at the same as being community members, dedicating their traditional leaders and culture a high degree of respect, are more open to changes.

Thus, one of my research questions is *what role, if any, Rama Ataúro plays in resignifying the social construct of youth*. Furthermore, I aim at discussing the impact of participatory communication on empowering, increasing agency, and mobilizing citizenship that fosters social change.

Rama Ataúro has 21 members, seven young women and 14 young men, with ages ranging from 15 to 30. Thirteen have completed high school, five are high school students and three have not completed undergraduate. From 26 January until 1 May 2013, I conducted several field visits, totaling 24 days, and held eight interviews with project participants, as well as phone conversations,

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3 According to the Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2010 (National Statistics Directorate, 2011), 70.9 per cent of the Timorese are engaged in subsistence activities.

4 In the past 15 years, Timor-Leste has saw the end of the guerrilla, having the independence struggle from Indonesian occupation resulted in the realization a popular referendum backed by the United Nations in 1999, which gave the country the right to auto-determination. This opened the way for the arriving of literally thousands of international workers coming from various countries worldwide, and saw the returning of fellow Timorese expatriates and refugees coming mainly from Portugal, Australia and Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa. It became the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in 2002, after two years of UN transitional administration.
SMS exchanges and gatherings with some members in the capital, Dili. The following thesis, however, consciously draws as well on observations made during the first phase of the project, from 2008 to 2009. The reopening of Rama Ataúro was a consequence of my interest in studying the community newspaper, but served as well for me and the youth to operationalize our collective desire to, more than continue, re-make the community newspaper with more youth out of new experiences, and for the longer run.

This research mainly used participant observation and semi-structured qualitative interviews. These methodological approaches were selected as they more adequately fit the research aims and the characteristics of the community where the fieldwork was developed, which is highly hierarchical and is not amenable to perceived external influences. As participant observation puts the researcher along with the research subjects, embedded in the community, and gives space to an interaction that is gradual. It, then, can be perceived as less invasive and constitutes a better approach than structured interviews and questionnaires.

By participant observation we mean that method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study... observing things that happen, listening to what is said and questioning people, over some length of time. (Becker and Geer, 1972:102 quoted in Nightingale, 2008:105)

That is even more applicable given that the research subjects are generally more relaxed while they experience situations that are less artificial and closer to their reality. In addition, as the fieldwork consisted of the production of a community newspaper, along with the collection of data and information produced within it, the participant observation gave more space to the newspaper group members, and the community in general, to express their own perspectives and concerns. According to Nightingale (2008):

In observation-based research, ‘exchange’ between the
researcher and the research subjects is the medium that assists the transformation of ideas and thoughts into the words and activities recorded (Nightingale, 2008:105).

With this approach I do not mean to ignore my background as a Brazilian professional journalist experienced in reporting for a daily commercial newspaper, nor to disregard my influence on the youth, the community and the newspaper itself. By departing from this assumption, I’ve allowed myself to use a constant process of self-reflection while admitting that, as ‘objectivity’ is an unachievable ideal for journalism, the premise of neutrality in development, particularly in participatory communication processes, is even undesirable. According to Freire (2006: 41), the parties in a dialogue to be linked by ‘love’, ‘hope’ and ‘humility’, in a relationship that prescribes the ‘virtue of faith to have power and meaning: by faith in man and his possibilities, by faith that I can only become truly myself when other men also become themselves’.

Since my primary aim as a researcher was to evaluate the impacts of the production of a community newspaper on the empowerment of the youth participating in the project, the holding of in-depth individual interviews brought the subjects’ point of view to the research process while attempting to unfold the meaning of their experiences (Kvale, 2009). The choice of the qualitative interview as an additional method for the proposed research also served to contrast the participants’ individual views and opinions with the way they act within the group. Moreover, the holding of individual and focus group interviews with newspaper group members and community members served to clarify and focus specific aspects of interest that are relevant to the research topic that might be better understood, thus adding to the data collected through participant observation. The use of face-to-face in-depth interviews served as well to further examine the wider social processes connected to the hypothesis of youth.

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5 From July 2001 to March 2008, I worked at Zero Hora, the leading newspaper in circulation of the South of Brazil, based in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, which has a circulation of some 180,000 paid copies daily.
empowerment at the micro-social level.

Individual interviews provide the opportunity to examine how large-scale social transformations are experienced, interpreted and ultimately shaped by the responses of strategic social actors (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002:201).

I believe those tools were adequate as they complement one another and leave enough space for the participating youth to have an active voice in the research process. I wish to bring up what they do believe and what is important for them so as to better understand the impact of the community newspaper in the community and in their individual lives.

My findings and analysis are presented in the following three chapters. I start from the view that there is no single, universal definition for youth, and that it is not possible to picture the condition young people face in their everyday lives in a static frame. In the first chapter, the concept of ‘youth’ is discussed as contextualized within the social structure and hierarchical dynamics where Ataúro’s youth experience their condition, often times characterized as lack of voice and powerlessness. This set the stage and served as a basis from which to discuss the impact of the youth-led community newspaper within the community’s social structure, especially aspects concerning the place and the role attributed to the participants’ as well as to Ataúro’s young people in general.

In chapter three, the discussion shifts from the overall community dynamic to examine the internal group processes at play in the making of Rama Ataúro newspaper. Departing from discussions around participatory communication processes and their characteristics, I analyze how customary forms of social interaction, typically top-down and within a rigid hierarchical framework based on ancestral rules and practices influences and is influenced by new ways of structuring social relations and decision-making presented by the two-way, dialogic model proposed by Freire (1987). The chapter ends with an assessment around the empowering effects rising from the youths’ participation in the group.
The remaining chapter turns back to an examination of the community level. It looks at the relationships between Rama Ataúro members and their community, and examines their interaction and the potential influences on fostering social change the newspaper, characterized in Clemencia Rodríguez (2009; 2011) framework of citizens’ media, is producing.
2. The place of youth: from subordinates to subjects

2.1. Being youth in Timor-Leste

Timorese society is highly hierarchical. The title of *lia-nain* (story-teller, literally the “owner of the words”), as those of the *liurai* (traditional political leaders/rulers, kings)\(^6\) and the *matando’ok* (spiritual leaders/witchdoctors, literally “to see far”), are hereditary, transmitted from father to son. Thus, voice, influence and participation in decision-making processes within the community is traditionally held by senior men from specific family groups, who head the power structures and generally exhibit resistance to any possibility of interference in their roles. In addition, the *uma kain* (nuclear family or household) head concentrates the power to make all decisions over family members.

Such rigid social structures imply that virtually no space is left to the youth to voice their positions and participate in decision-making within the community's everyday life, including those concerning their own lives, those of their nuclear family or their *lisan* (family group)\(^7\), their hamlet or village. Using Bourdieu's (2006) concept of field\(^8\), one can say that the field of youth is usually relegated to the activities that involve youth themselves, traditionally those of entertainment, sports and informal security, always subjected to approval and direction from

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\(^6\) While recognizing there was considerable variation across different areas, according to Kammen (2003), in general, societies on pre-colonial Timor were divided into three categories: chiefs and nobles (*liurai* and *dato*), commoners (*ema*, later *reino*) and slaves (*atan*). Pointing towards the importance of this historical past in today’s Timorese society, (Kammen, 2003:75) observes that ‘East Timorese are acutely aware who is a descendant of a legitimate traditional ruler, who is a descendant of a Portuguese-appointed chief, and who obtained positions by collaborating with the Indonesian occupier. They also know who was a commoner and who was a slave’, while noting that such issue is not usually discussed openly to avoid the discomfort of bringing up the fact that Timorese enslaved other Timorese.

\(^7\) *Lisan* is the denomination in Tetun given to a group of families connected through a common ancestor and by relations of reciprocity.

\(^8\) According to Bourdieu (2006), field is a symbolic space of objective relations where its members can dispute strength and are submitted to a specific set of rules.
older leaders. Young people do not have legitimacy, neither dominate the techniques and codes, to exert influence and participate in decisions. Not even belonging to a specific nuclear family that has an influential position within the society grants the individual youth an enhanced power to act over her own life or community affairs. Powerlessness and lack of voice is a common feature for youth across social classes. Thus, although they certainly enjoy status from a privileged family position from their young peers, before the community they do not enjoy status for the position that they might occupy in the future and depend on aging to gain legitimacy. In this dynamic the social place of youth is invariably that of subordination and obedience.

Nevertheless, the youth are not outsiders; they belong and are an integral part of the societal structure, having their role and place within it, which are in turn integral parts of the social construct of 'youth'. Here, I take the definition of youth as being a social construct of age, thus being contextual, largely varying between societies and even within the specific situations in cause (Tufte and Enghel, 2009; Reguillo, 2009), in opposition to a lineal, biological definition restrained by age range.

Young people are not “outside” the social realm: their forms of identity adscription, their representations, their aspirations, their dreams, their bodies, are constructed and configured in the “zones of contact” with a society to which they belong. (Reguillo, 2009: 24)

Traditionally, the marital status is one of the main conditions for one to be classified as youth in Timor-Leste. Usually married men leave the 'youth' category to become the uma kain head, whereas relatively older men who were single were still classified as youth. This classification for 'youth' that considers being single as a defining element is still current, as reflected in the inclusion of the term klosan (single) as one of the denominations in use for youth in Timor-Leste’s National Youth Policy.

The Timor-Leste National Youth Policy defines youth as those aged from 16 to 30 years. Terms 'foinsa’e', 'otas nurak' and 'klosan' are used in Tétun language to describe young people. The term 'foinsa’e' can be translated literally as ‘grown recently and might, or might not, be married’
or is referred to as ‘still an adolescent’. ‘Otas nurak’ or ‘young age’ has a meaning similar to ‘foinsa’e’, referring particularly to adolescents and young people. The word ‘klosan’ refers to a young unmarried person (Secretary of State for Youth and Sport, 2007: 6).

Although marital status continues to be largely used for the social classification of youth, influence of international actors such as the United Nations, especially since the 1999 UN-backed referendum that determined Timor-Leste’s independence from Indonesia, has likely played a role in revisiting the concept in line with the mainstream, universalizing category defining youth as physical age. For example, the law on local leadership (República Democrática de Timor-Leste, 2009) defined eligible youth representatives at the village council by solely considering its age, ranging from 17 to 30\(^9\). Such identification elements for ‘youth’ – subordination, obedience, marital status, age range – end up mixing, and the categorization becomes even more relational and contextual. For example, heads of *uma kain* who are no longer regarded as ‘youth’ in their communities at times become youth representatives for the purposes of occupying the village council seat; while some single men who are over 30 are still considered youth in their everyday societal interactions.

The legislation that sets the composition of the villages or *suku councils*\(^{10}\) is, moreover, an interesting point from which to analyze the interaction among communities’ traditional values and the ‘modern’ ones, and the tensions arising from it, what Cummins and Leach (2012) called ‘the clash of paradigms between traditional and liberal democratic ideas of legitimacy’. While in Timorese *adat* (Malay word for tradition, ‘way of the ancestors’, custom, ‘customary law’, used widely in Timor-Leste), customary local governance structures are exclusively composed of senior males (the *liurai*, the *lia-nain*, the heads of *lisan*, among others), the rules adopted after independence determined that the *suku* council is

\(^9\) In the previous version of the same law, from 2004, the age limits for becoming a youth representative ranged from 17 to 35 years (República Democrática de Timor-Leste, 2004).

\(^{10}\) Timorese territorial administration is divided in 13 districts, which are in turn divided in sub-districts, formed by a group of villages that are constituted by hamlets. Those villages are called *suku*, being a state defined and sanctioned governing body for a defined geographic area.
democratically elected\textsuperscript{11}, furthermore adding new political categories to it including females representatives (two), one young male and one young female. As noted by Hicks (2007), while notions of ‘gender equality’ have been at least into some extent introduced during Indonesian occupation, the idea of ‘age equality’ is an unrecognized concept, with both being inconsistent with adat.

In practice, women and youth representatives generally haven’t been able to take active roles in decision-making (Hicks, 2007; Cummins, 2011). According to Hicks (2007:15), the ‘adat prescribes behavior between persons of socially defined categories so that villagers know what to expect from their relationship with the liurai’. Hicks (2007) goes further, stating that such inception of novel concepts has demonstrated a selective adoption that is sometimes restricted to the surface. Examples of communal interaction with elected suku chiefs and liurais, when those roles do not coincide, show that the elected chief’s authority and legitimacy largely depend on his interaction with, and acceptance by, traditional leaders (Cummins and Leach, 2012). Notwithstanding, liberal-democratic and adat institutions coexist in the political life of the suku, the interaction of both being part of villagers' everyday experiences where ‘contemporary Timorese village life is characterized by a hybridity of modern and traditional values, understandings, and laws’ (Cummins, 2013: 143). Such interaction needs to take into account as well a longer history of interactions between state-based and traditional authorities where, while the latter did change over time, it was never subsumed or displaced by the former, even becoming a symbol of resistance to external powers, namely the Portuguese and Indonesian colonial dominations (Cummins and Leach, 2012: 92).

Issues related to gender are also evident in the construct of ‘youth’, generally dominated by males, possibly connected to the social role of young people often linked to the activities of security provision, and as so of physical strength, and furthermore from the structural gender inequalities which are

\textsuperscript{11} The direct elections for suku chief seats were implemented first much before during the occupation period, in 1982, by the Indonesian government.
characteristic in a patriarchal society. The Democratic Party (in Portuguese Partido Democrático, acronym PD), which was formed in 2001 having its image built over its alleged identification with modern democratic values and the youthful electorate, had its’ women’s wing structure as a subdivision of the youth wing, first hierarchically subordinated, although the women’s wing was later separated and answered directly to the party’s executive leaders. The initial structure that was in place from 2002 until 2006 is illustrative of the primary identification of youth as a group of young males\textsuperscript{12}. Besides the identification with security provision, another possible explanatory factor is that the classification as ‘youth’ is a limiting factor for accessing leadership roles and participation in the discussions reserved to the local leaders. As women have less access to such positions of power within the community anyways due to strong cultural gender-based inequalities, the limitation imposed by belonging to the category of youth becomes less relevant. Thus, although the conception of youth in theory encompasses gender differences, in the relations and interaction amongst people in Timor-Leste it is usually more strongly connected to young males.

The identification of youth with security provision roles goes far back in Timorese history. Until a few decades ago communities were organized under several small kingdoms\textsuperscript{13} and tasked groups with security and protection duties, each faithful to their respective liurai (Robinson, 2001). During the Portuguese colonial rule, youth groups or gangs locally organized, known as Moradores (residents) were tasked with security activities in many neighborhoods, being in charge of protecting the areas’ residents while at the same time used by colonial rule as repression tools within the communities (Scambary, 2006 and 2009; Robinson, 2001; TLAVA, 2008; and Myrttinen, 2007). Another example was the Portuguese Youth Movement, a quasi-military organization formed in the final decades of Portugal’s presence with similar aims (Jolliffe, 1978 in Robinson,

\textsuperscript{12} Information collected during conversations with several PD members, including the first president of the youth wing (Juventude Democrática), Mateus de Carvalho, aka Lito Rambo, who occupied the seat for the period covering from 2001 to 2006.

\textsuperscript{13} According to Molnar (2009), the province of 'Bellum', which largely corresponds to what today is Timor-Leste’s territory, had 46 kingdoms in the middle of the eighteenth century.
2001). During the Indonesian occupation, the use of Timorese forces in maintaining security and order, usually local formations constituted largely of youth, continued.

The youth were mobilized during the campaign of fear against independence, promoted by pro-autonomy militia groups with Indonesian support before and after the 1999 referendum of 30 August, when 78.5% of the Timorese chose to become independent from Indonesia. Conversely, student groups such as the National Resistance of Timor-Leste’s Students (RENETIL) and the Timor-Leste’s Youth and Students Organizations (OJETIL), among others, played an important role in the liberation struggle especially through contributions given to the clandestine movement, stronger during the late 1980s and the 1990s (Molnar, 2009). Besides holding demonstrations overseas to keep Timor-Leste alive on the international agenda, they provided information and logistical support to the armed guerrilla group and held demonstrations in Timor-Leste such as the displaying of posters calling for independence during Pope John Paul II’s visit to Dili in 1989 and the march that resulted in the infamous Santa Cruz Massacre of 12 November 1991, which resulted in some 270 people dead. This last incident gave Timor-Leste renewed international attention.

Since 2002, and throughout the post-independence era, gangs and martial arts groups’ having youth as the bulk of their membership are considered one of the main security concerns in Timor-Leste. Although existing in small numbers since Portuguese times, during the Indonesian occupation martial arts groups and the alike grew quickly, mainly around repressive and rebellious actions.

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14 The violence surrounding the 30 August 1999 referendum left between 1,200 and 1,500 deaths, and estimates points that some 70% of the houses and buildings were razed, while about 250,000 were forcibly deported, mainly to West Timor, Indonesia (CAVR, 2005; Myrttinen, 2007).
15 The number of victims is imprecise, however the Amnesty International (1994) and Paz É Possível em Timor-Leste (1992) estimate that 300 people died and 250 went missing.
16 According to Scambary (2009), there are 12-20 martial arts groups in Timor-Leste, with registered members estimated at around 20,000 and unregistered members at around 90,000. A study commissioned by the World Bank, has estimated that as many as 70 per cent of East Timorese males are members of martial arts groups, including members of the police, army and political and economic elite (Ostergaard, 2005). There are ritual art groups, such as 7-7, 5-5 and 12-12, and local gangs.
aimed at the Indonesian regime, but also for informal security and extortion rackets (see, for example, Scambary, 2006 and 2009). The most serious conflict in the independence era, the political-military crisis of 2006\textsuperscript{17}, saw an outbreak of street fighting and arson attacks involving gangs, contributing to at least 100-150 deaths and over 100,000 people displaced (Myrttinen, 2007). However, even though the episode boosted the identification of youth with instability and conflict, reinforcing communities’ perception that youth and martial arts groups are the main sources of violence (Geneva Declaration, 2010), many commentators and scholars agree that the causes of the 2006 upheaval were a complex mix of political, social, historical and economic issues (Scambary, 2009; ICG, 2006; Myrttinen, 2007; Brady and Timberman, 2006). Many of those issues go back to a 1975 civil war that preceded the Indonesian invasion and in disputes within the resistance to the Indonesian occupation (ICG, 2006).

A conflict vulnerability assessment commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) held in the aftermath of the 2006 crisis indicated that, along with disagreements and rivalries among political leaders, weak and politicized governance, and severe inadequacies in the justice system; the widespread absence of reliable information and severely limited formal channels for communication, and a – at least partly consequential – disaffected, disillusioned and largely disempowered population were the key underlying causes of the conflict (Brady and Timberman, 2006). According to Scambary (2009:177), ‘The violence of 2006 was by no means confined to gangs of disenfranchised male youth. It was a much wider social phenomenon’. Scambary analysis goes on noting that martial arts group and gang membership is not exclusive to unemployed, disenfranchised youth: those are formed from

\textsuperscript{17} The crisis was triggered by the dismissal in March 2006 of 594 soldiers from the Timorese military, the FALINTIL – Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste (F-FDTL). This group, which became known as the ‘petitioners’, constituted approximately 40 percent of the F-FDTL, mainly originated from the western districts in the country, and claimed discrimination and mismanagement by senior officers, who were primarily from the east. Conflicts continued through 2007 as an outbreak of street fighting and arson attacks involving gangs.
people of all sectors of society including police, civil service and the political and economic elite.

Notwithstanding, vocational training and job creation feature in most conflict prevention, and especially youth-related, national and international programming, while less or none attention is given to structural social issues and the mechanisms to solve them. A recent ICG report released in May 2013 analyses the ‘stability’ now experienced in Timor-Leste as the result of a conscious policy of ‘buying peace’ (ICG, 2013), which is for several reasons unsustainable. Worryingly, there is anecdotal evidence that the jobs being created through a substantial advancement of state expenditure in recent years, and the subsequent granting of government contracts to local companies, has largely benefited local power brokers and gang leaders, who in turn distribute posts within their networks, reinforcing a culture of paternalism and patronage, and boosting their own influence.

Robinson (2001: 313), in a detailed analysis of the formation of pro-Indonesia militias in Timor-Leste in 1999, that ‘seemed to sprout like mushrooms’, looks at the liurai-formed armies headed by local power holders and a historically shared ‘repertoire of violence’ dating from pre-colonial times to find the historical origins of the militias and the political conditions that facilitated their existence. Tambiah’s (1996) observations while studying ethno-nationalist conflicts in Southeast Asia, noted that the sparks of violence were not spontaneous, where the acts of a primary source would result in collective contagion. Instead, Tambiah identified what he called ‘routinization’ and ‘ritualization’, as the violent actions were organized in distinct phases, planned and controlled by the leaders of the involved groups. Thus, for Timorese youth in 2006, participation in communal violence was perhaps a continuity, not a rebellious act. About the composition and organization of youth gangs, Myrnttinen (2007) wrote:

For the overwhelming part, the gang members are men, with a wide age span within the groups, ranging from boys in their early teens to leaders
in their 50s or even 60s. In general, the hierarchy in the gangs tends to be based on age, with the majority of the ‘foot soldiers’ being in their early-mid teens (Myrttinen, 2007: 14).

While largely linked with ‘instability’ and conflict, paradoxically, the image of such gangs as positive forces playing the role of protecting neighborhoods and as being the main actors of violence in Timor-Leste, coexist. A conversation I had with a senior man residing in Colmera, an important commercial area in Dili, after gang clashes erupted in December 2011\textsuperscript{18}, illustrates this complicated relation. On the one hand, he commented that gangs and martial arts groups are sources of violence and conflict, referring to the youth generally as trouble-makers. On the other, he added that his area is safe because ‘our youth are strong and well organized’, explaining the group receives guidance and is directed by a senior man within the community. This pattern, and the use of youth for informal security, is widespread not only in villages or neighborhoods, but under an array of different names by formal institutions. This includes even the Catholic Church, which uses youth groups to provide ‘security’ at festivities and functions.

All of the elements discussed, in varying degrees and depending on the specific scenario, are combined and form the social construct of ‘youth’. Although the traditional societal structure remains markedly strong, even in isolated villages several factors (the introduction of elected suku council members, the growing presence of public servants and state officials, among others) inserted new categories into the society dynamics that interact with the customary leadership, usually through a complex negotiation process determining new boundaries for intervention and limitation of fields and roles that navigate customary and liberal-democratic values. While these pose changes in the social structure and division of power, internally these relatively new institutions often reproduce the typical hierarchical structure, where an individual occupies higher

\textsuperscript{18} The narrated conversation occurred after a series of gang-related incidents resulting in one death and an unknown number of cars and houses damaged which occurred in Comoro suku of Dili in December 2011.
levels of legitimacy, and thus of power and prominence, according to his age, gender, hierarchical level within his *lisan*, and so on.

In this sense, a director working at a government ministry, in a private conversation, associated his age (at the time, 37 years old) with being timid in taking decisions inside his direct sphere of responsibility, even though holding an overseas master's degree in the subject, as he felt himself being ‘too young’. On the other hand, the current chief in Makili, one of Ataúro’s five *suku*, was 28 years old when elected in 2009. Although having someone of that age as a *suku* chief can suggest that big changes are occurring that are giving young people a place in community-level political life, one cannot dismiss the fact that his candidacy was backed by the most important traditional leader in the community, coupled with the fact that he comes from a prominent family, his father being the head of the biggest *lisan* in Makili. In addition, that his candidacy was opportunistic as group’s preferred candidate, then 47 years old, could not present documents required to become a candidate by the deadline. The winning *suku* chief’s attitude during the campaign, moreover, was of subordination to the senior leadership, while at the same time reproducing the community’s customs and traditions in his speech. Such occurrence is related to the continuing hybridization process between traditional and liberal-democratic values and norms, explained in more detail above.

That change is occurring is undeniable. In the same village of Makili, for example, complaints regarding the unwillingness of youth to participate in the vegetable garden works are now common. They are generally coupled with allegations that the youth no longer respect their *adat*, influenced by ‘modernity’. An example that illustrates this continuous relationship of exchange and interaction amongst the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, came from a 29 year-old man, married and with two children. He refers to the societal transformations he experiences in the community life, and the tensions

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19 For a more detailed analysis of the 2009 *suku* elections in Makili and the participation of multiple actors in this process, see Boarccaech (2013).
arising from it, as effects of ‘climate change’, an inevitable phenomenon produced and felt universally, with varying effects. Perceived changes aside, the young people from Makili largely continue to carry out the exhaustive and repetitive agricultural work they are assigned, following the subsistence farming models of their ancestors. Although with varying degrees of acceptance, such tasks are generally completed with little open complaints.

Besides the respect for community hierarchy, which determines subordination to older people as dictated by the adat, the subordination and obedience in the aforementioned case is also connected to the fear of being punished, or even excluded from the community\textsuperscript{20}. That is because the outputs of agricultural activities will not only serve for food but, as the community relations are based on reciprocity ties, will become exchange products for acquiring land and boats, for example, or offerings for the holding of ceremonies such as marriages and funerals (Boarcccaech, 2013). As defined by Levi-Strauss (2003), reciprocity is a structuring factor of social organizations where the exchange is not just material, but encompasses subjectivities, commitments and mutual recognition. To disobey senior leaders’ orders endangers the reciprocal relationships between the families.

Nevertheless, the same young man who participates in agricultural activities in his home village in obedience to his father orders might, along with fellow university students, voice criticism towards some national-level Education Ministry policy while studying in Dili. The presence of youth groups in national news coverage is not unusual, providing statements about issues connected to the students’ reality, national policy or foreign affairs. That is because the norms coming from the adat are operative in the local sphere and within its structures, national-level politics being more distanced of it. Furthermore in the capital,

\textsuperscript{20} As observed by Cummins and Leach (2012: 13), adat is at the core of communities’ political, ecological and spiritual life, and the maintenance of communal balance through exchange is central for adat. According to them, ‘the material world inhabited by living things, and the cosmos inhabited by the spirit and ancestors, must be kept in balance through rituals of exchange. Failure to observe these rituals leads to imbalance, which can have serious consequences such as the spread of disease, harvest failure, or natural disasters such as earthquakes’.
composed of a mix of people who come many different areas of the country, the sense of reciprocity is weakening, and the pressures and limitations of adat are more dispersed. It is worth noting, however, that the forms of social structuring in this new ‘place’ many times continue to be framed within the logics prescribed by customary practices.

Timor-Leste’s Constitution (2002), under its Section 19 (Youth), number 1, states ‘the State shall promote and encourage youth initiatives towards the consolidation of national unity, reconstruction, defence and development of the country’. The dynamics of national politics, however, often suggests that the politicians relinquish space to young people for civic participation that goes beyond the act of participating in elections. In August 2010, the elite of Timorese senior politicians held a closed meeting focused on the ‘national interest’ and directed at discussing strategic directions for the country and the passing of power to the young generations (Tempo Semanal, 2010). At a follow-up meeting, which had younger members of the national political landscape in attendance, the discussion on the country's strategic direction was put on hold, focusing instead on appeals for peace and stability at the upcoming 2012 elections (CJITL, 2012).

Young people are in some ways the depositary of huge expectations, mainly through the mainstream international discourse that equals them with the nations’ future and presented as living an intermediate phase towards becoming ‘productive adults’ (Reguillo, 2009: 24). However, Timorese young people’s lived realities are of powerlessness, subordination, lack of voice and agency, and very limited choices. They are compelled by extremely negative material and

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21 A news story published on 22/08/2010 at the Tempo Semanal online version, under the title Timorese Historical Leaders Hold Closed Meeting in Maubisse informed that the then President Ramos-Horta, Prime-Minister Xanana Gusmao, former Prime Minister and Fretlin Secretary General Mari Alkatiri attended the meeting, mediated by the Catholic Bishop from Baucau.

22 Most of the younger generation of politics in the national level are members of the gerasaun foun, or new generation, used to identify those who had their schooling and grew to maturity during the Indonesian occupation period are called, many of whom were members of the clandestine student front during the independence struggle. The majority of them are now around the 40s.
subjective conditions, and subjected to structural obstructions that hamper any move towards changing them. In the following section, I try to demonstrate how Rama Ataúro, a community newspaper produced by young people from Ataúro island, opens space for the renegotiation of the youth’s social role by offering new ways of insertion and creating an alternative mediated public sphere where the youth can have their voices heard.

2.2. Youthful Voices Heard

‘Rama Ataúro is like a bridge between the community and its’ leaders, and from both to us’ – Aniceto Araújo, 28, Rama Ataúro team member.

Inasmuch as we understand youth’s everyday experience in Ataúro being typically one of powerlessness and lack of voice, Rama Ataúro seems to have brought distinct elements that can potentially transform category-determined limitations young people face and open possibilities for their social interactions. I contend that the advent of the youth-led community newspaper into the local public sphere, while not fully disrupting the social structure, imposes some changes to it by challenging the established roles of young people, giving the project participants’ a new social place from where they can get involved in community social and political affairs that are normally not within their reach.

Contrasting with their condition as ‘youth’, the young journalists are granted access to the political field quite readily as the community as a whole, especially through the contact with national media and the extensive insertion of modern concepts advancing the centrality of media for democratic societies in independent Timor-Leste. Here, it is worth noting that inflections of the role of the media as a vehicle to transmit information from the leaders to the people and vice versa, as well as its responsibility as society’s watchdog, were cited by several prominent figures in the community such as the sub-district administrator,
a member of the National Police Maritime Unit, a businessman, an NGO director, and village council members from both Makili and Bikeli sukus. Furthermore, there is a sense of self-valorization for the community as it has, as the capital Dili, the presence of its own journalists and media.

When articulating the reasons for taking part in the project, participants from the 2008-2009 group promptly declared that it was to bring information on issues of local concern to their community, coupled with the vision of it as an opportunity to acquire journalistic skills. Besides the interest in having better qualifications in the search for a job, for example, the high value given to those recognized as holders of specific knowledge and skills in the community possibly played a role as well. The participants’ new positioning in the social structure was accompanied by the perception of those youth as being holders of specific knowledge and skills, in a community where to hold a specific position, to possess specific knowledge, have been important identification and differentiation factors, notable, for example, in the division by lisan – where the Hnua Le’en and Maule’ek were responsible for carving statues depicting deities and ancestors in suku Makili.

All in all, Rama Ataúro’s success in mobilizing local youth in producing the community newspaper for a considerable length of time, especially taking into account that no financial reward was ever provided, can as well be thought of as a quest for building social capital and status. Participants were granted a new social place by moving away from the condition of lacking knowledge and experience assigned indiscriminately to youth23, which is central to the logics of the generational hierarchy, and the basis of their lack of voice. Sometimes, the youth themselves reproduce the logics and stereotypes that trapped them into

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23 The lacking of knowledge is a social marker as well to disempower and exclude the bulk of community members from social spheres of power and decision-making, reinforcing the power and authority of the leaders, who those without knowledge should follow. In the independence era, this is increasingly associated with those without formal education. That is one of the intergenerational tensions arising contemporaneously, and more strongly since the independence, is that the policy of universal education and the greater number of youth going to the university perturb this order, giving youth access to knowledge many times new to the traditional leaders.
being voiceless, and that’s not surprising given that they were born and raised immersed in this set of social values. That can be illustrated by the reaction of youth and children I’ve met when walking the some two kilometers of the rocky way from *suku* Vila Maumeta to *suku* Makili, where I was going to assist the three new Rama Ataúro participants to hold their first interviews with local leaders. At meeting them, many saluted me with ‘good morning’ and, sometimes, I would do it first. After receiving no answer for a list a handful of times, Ricardo Araújo, 20, who is from Makili and was walking along with me, explained: ‘in Makili, those who are older can not be the ones greeting the youngsters, it’s a rule, it’s the way it is for us.’

The dynamic of dislocating identities through the re-insertion at the ‘journalist’ category, at the same time bringing ruptures to the current role and identifying elements that makes the socially constructed category of ‘youth’ as subordinated and powerlessness, implies, on the other hand, a continuity of the existing social structure. Thus, whilst the rigidity of the established social roles, positions and obligations that mark a highly hierarchical and compartmentalized organization are not directly breakthroughs, the re-insertion of young people via a novel category creates a place from which they can access and navigate within the various existing social levels. In this sense, the advent of and constant dedication to Rama Ataúro can be interpreted as a genuine effort from participants to bypass structures of power and institutions to which they are subject, creating spaces for themselves – as de Certeau’s ‘tactics’ (de Certeau’s, 1984, cited by Tufte, 2009: 180). This is illustrated in the talk of Aniceto Magno, a young man 28 year-old from Vila Maumeta who participated in the project since its start, in May 2008, to whom Rama Ataúro gives youth a space, nonexistent before, in which to open up their ideas.

From someone who is waiting what she/he is yet to become through aging, young people become ‘journalists’ – with new roles, that grant them more mobility within the community and associated prestige. They become society’s representatives, being allowed to publicly speak about issues that are off-limits.
for the bulk of community members and to voice those members’ concerns; as they amplify the voice, influence and representativeness of the leaders by the portrayal of their initiatives and opinions in the newspaper. For the latter, the fact that the newspaper reaches Ataúro’s five sukus makes it a vehicle for broadening the reach of their authority and prestige. This relationship with both the community in general, and its leaders, was expressed by the project participants, who declared that to inform people about leaders’ programs, as well as inform the leaders about the issues faced by people, was amongst the main roles of Rama Ataúro. That is to say, Rama Ataúro team members become interlocutors in societal dialogue and debates, in what some participants have called a ‘bridging’ function.

Main examples of this come through Rama Ataúro members’ societal interactions. While working on his first ever news story, in March 2013, about a newly built water supply system in his suku of Makili, 20 year-old Ricardo Araújo, interviewed community members about the changes in their everyday lives brought about with the availability of tap water in their houses. One of the interviewees, Lourença Pereira, 35, gave a vague answer and preferred, instead, to voice her concern about the project’s sustainability, calling local leaders attention to the urgent need for a maintenance program and of organizing ways of improving vegetable gardens departing from the facilitated possibilities of irrigation. In a sense, she could have raised those issues directly in community meetings of local council members, even more so as her house lies some 200 meters, a short walk, from the suku council office. But, being a woman without any leadership position, she found through the newspaper a way of having her voice heard, as the journalist is held as a neutral interlocutor between the people and its leaders. On another occasion, a few days after the announcement of the re-launching of Rama Ataúro during the local leadership weekly meeting, headed by the sub-district administrator, Rama Ataúro’s representative in the meeting Leopoldo Fernandes, 30, who is a member of the newspaper team since its first edition, in 2008, told me that both the sub-district administrator and the head of
the Agriculture office approached him asking for coverage of stories within their areas of work.

There are no better ways of illustrating the prestige enjoyed by the young journalists than looking at it through the usual cultural elements forming what is largely recognized within the community as a public display of respect, dedicated to important people. Back in August 2009, Rama Ataúro received an invitation, addressed to the ‘Rama Ataúro journalists’, for the annual meeting of the protestant church, at suku Beloi. In addition to having been included in the restricted list of official guests through a written invitation, during the ceremony the attending representatives from Rama Ataúro, Obed Lopes and Zeca Soares, then aged 25, were granted reserved seats at the front, side by side with community leaders such as the heads of the Protestant Church and the attending suku chiefs, and along with those were offered a tais – traditional handmade material used in ceremonies –, which is placed over the neck of VIP guests by the event’s hosts as a sign of consideration. Here, it is worth noting that both of them are Catholics, and that the community newspaper, at that time, didn’t even have participants from the Protestant Church amongst its members.

Although looking towards forging spaces for having their voices heard and enjoying meaningful participation in community life, participants also carefully operate within the system’s existing rules and values. The need to formally inform and obtain authorization from suku chiefs before starting news coverage and story production emerged as a major concern, especially from newcomers, during the first group meeting about re-launching the newspaper. Thus, one can say that Rama Ataúro constitutes a rupture by giving young people voice and opening up a space for meaningful participation in community life, but it does so without direct confrontation of current values and norms. Through a complex process of co-relation, participants are dislocated from their condition of ‘youth’ through articulating their social space with the category of ‘journalist’ – which at the same time is recognized as a prestigious position by the community and new within their social structure, thus rendering them a prominent role without
necessarily competing or challenging the status quo directly. This sort of, say, soft rupture in social structuring (in opposition to a radical breach) is not accidental, as the continuous respectful stance of Rama Ataúro youth to adat, or kultura reinforces. The newspaper name itself is a reference to the legend around the origin of the Atauroan people. A section of the paper called Ita Nia Kultura, portraying local myths and traditions, is possibly the main example of this constant move of putting important issues into discussion while, at the same time, keeping a sense of cohesiveness and fostering community identification. The decisions about which stories to cover and the approaches are considered carefully so as not to have an excessive confrontational tone. This attitude, it seems, is a result of both a calculation of forces – as the re-positioning of Rama Ataúro participants as voiceless youth, or the closing of the newspaper, might be promoted by leaders in case they feel the Rama Ataúro is anyhow inadequate or defies their power –, and of a truthful sense of respect to the community’s tradition and leadership.24

The society’s dynamics, of constant change, is accelerated in the context of globalization, every minute being a transition of what was to what is going to be. The new and the old, the modern and the traditional, the local and the global modify each other to the extent they are, yet, one. The community newspaper opens up a space where youth, and the community as a whole, can engage in reflecting on their lives and participate more effectively in this ongoing process of constant rebuilding of identities and reconfiguring of places – collective and individual. Rama Ataúro’s participants, by being acknowledged by their community as holders of journalistic skills, forge a unique place in the society without directly challenging the power of others but instead by fostering a sense of cooperation towards tackling local issues.

Bearing this in mind, and although any conclusion around the effect the

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24 The issues regarding the published content, and the concerns regarding community’s sensitivities which emerge when defining stories and approaches, are analyzed in more detail at chapter four. The internal dynamics of the group and its mechanisms for decision-making, including for defining content, are explored in chapter three.
presence of the young journalists in the social construct of youth is likely premature at this point, it is possible to speculate that the presence of Rama Ataúro and its members' interaction with the community, if sustained in the medium to long term, can subtly and systematically infer changes that, differently from a re-placing of the individual youth who participates in Rama Ataúro, can become extensive to the categorizing elements of youth and its roles, perhaps towards the image of energetic social actors who actively contribute towards development and social change. The mission of taking the lead in building a better future, then, can be a successful one.
3. Rama Ataúro – How Participatory?

3.1. Participation and Empowerment – Dynamic Double

As opportunely reminded by Gumucio-Dagron (2001: 25), ‘communication and participation are actually two words sharing the same concept’. With its origins in the Latin *communio*, both address exchange and sharing. Currently, the understanding of communication as a two-way, dialogic process where meaning is exchanged and created is widely accepted. Furthermore, there is growing consensus in the field of development pointing towards the centrality of empowering communities to gain more control over their lives (WAISBORD, 2005) and this outcome can not be reached without participation. According to Servaes:

*Communication for Development and Social Change* is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and participatory process through which people are empowered to control their own destinies (Servaes, 2008: 390).

Rama Ataúro, a grassroots experiment in communication for development in Ataúro island, Timor-Leste, started from the wish of a group of youth to have a medium within which to feature their community’s issues. From an initial group of five, it quickly developed to a core group with 14 members, all volunteers, in charge of decision-making and implementation of the community wall newspaper, the only ever-existing local media in Ataúro. I’ve been involved in facilitating this initiative from the beginning, in April 2008, as well at the re-start of the project, from January 2013. Into some extent, my presence in Timor-Leste and the youth desire to produce a newspaper was a happy coincidence that gave origin to Rama Ataúro in the first place, while our shared wish to make the newspaper an established space for fostering information sharing and community
debate has made the reopening of Rama Ataúro possible. By that time, my position has changed. In the first phase my activities were of directly organizing the group on how to define content, covering stories, and designing layout – by helping them to speak out their views, fostering discussions around local issues, providing guidance on journalistic techniques and coaching. With the re-start, participants from the first phase became my partners in those activities, thus my facilitation role being shared with them, and added to my role as a researcher.

In this chapter, I aim at analyzing the reality of starting and the everyday operation of Rama Ataúro within a participatory approach. The task is challenging, as there is no single definition or blueprint models of participatory communication. As noted by Gumucio-Dagron (2007: 71), participation is ‘a wide-open window towards a collective goal that we can only imagine over the horizon’, and its analysis must consider the context and preferentially be held in the place where the communication process is actually taking place. Likewise, the perceived and potential empowering effects of the participatory approach applied to the case of Rama Ataúro are discussed from a similar perspective that takes empowerment as a complex process that needs to be thought of as ongoing and multiple, varying within individuals and being reassessed and resignified as the group progresses.

Cadiz (2005) has named participatory communication after the intended goal of interventions, referring to it as ‘communication for empowerment’, noting that the term refers to a process rather than a technique. Departing from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's dialogic model, originating from adult education practice with poor peasants in North-Eastern Brazil during the 1950s, she outlined its five interrelated main attributes, which are to be in place in participatory approaches for development: i) ‘communication between equals’, which refers to a two-way interaction where there are no subordinate and superior roles; ii) learning through ‘problem-posing’; iii) ‘praxis’, or a cycle of action and reflection; iv) ‘conscientizing’, a process of raising awareness and advancing critical consciousness oriented to action; and v) ‘five overriding
values': love, humility, hope, faith in partners’ capability, and critical thinking (Cadiz, 2005: 147-149). For Freire (1987), through this process of action and reflection, people become empowered, aware of their condition and capable of changing it. Waisbord provides a view on empowerment processes:

Individuals and communities become empowered by gaining knowledge about specific issues, communicating about issues of common concern, making decisions for themselves, and negotiating power relations (Waisbord, 2005).

Although ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ became mainstreamed in international development discourse starting from the 1970s, pushed by failures of traditional development models, there is no agreement around its definitions, and even less fixed strategies for implementation. As for the broadness or richness of the concept, participation is at the same time highly flexible and imperfect (Servaes, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001 and 2007), allowing a wide range of understandings and uses, in greatly varying degrees. While several scholars have pointed out that often its use is restricted to a 'lip-service with little real content' (Gumucio-Dagron, 2007), Servaes went further on adding that what is called ‘participation’ frequently is confused with ‘access’ (Servaes, 2007). According to Huesca (2000: 75, cited in Mefalopulos, 2008: 52), development scholars have incorporated the notion of participation into modernization practices so that ‘the pluralistic spirit of the participatory turn in development communication has had the ironic effect of redeeming the dominant paradigm from its critics.’

Despite the wealth of experiences and studies on participation, many development experts still fail to understand what genuine participation is. When looked into closely, studies presenting the pitfalls of participatory programs reveal that they are actually discussing, unknowingly, the pitfalls of applying participatory approaches in a partial and often insufficient manner. Assessing the value of participation conceived as people reacting to certain information or as their involvement in activities designated by the experts, without recognizing the limited participatory degree of such applications, is not methodologically valid—or relevant. And yet often this is what is being done (Mefalopulos, 2008: 53).
In a publication on participatory communication commissioned by the World Bank, Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009:6-7) illustrate this trend as they draw a typology of participation, departing from different understandings of the concept described in ascending degrees: in ‘passive participation’, stakeholders are informed on projects and feedback is minimum or nonexistent; in ‘participation by consultation’, inputs from stakeholders are collected but decision-making power is kept in external professionals’ hands; in ‘participation by collaboration’, stakeholders participate in the analysis of the given project’s objectives; and, finally, in ‘empowerment participation’, outsiders are equal partners and the stakeholders own and control the process.

Similarly, Pretty’s typology identifies different types of participation ranging from ‘passive participation’, where stakeholders are just informed on what is happening has already happened, to self-mobilization, that refers to initiatives started by people themselves, who seek resources and technical advice in external institutions but retain control over how resources are used. In the same direction, Servaes (2007: 21) defines self-management, which ‘implies the right to participation in the planning and production of media content’, as the most developed form of participation. Conversely, Gumucio-Dagron (2001) offers a view on ‘ownership’ as the main marker of participatory projects, and makes the case for participatory communication as the main ingredient for any successful intervention while contending that ‘sustainability’ emanates from it.

In reality, the two main paradigms, diffusion and participation, still coexist within communication approaches in development. While in diffusion, a top-down and media-centered approach, communication is ‘generally used to support development initiatives by the dissemination of messages that encourage the public to support development-oriented projects’ (Servaes and Malikhao, 2005: 94); the multiple, horizontal, people-centered participatory model based on Freire’s dialogic approach ‘stresses reciprocal collaboration throughout all levels of participation’ and implies empowering the traditional receivers as the planners, producers and performers of community media (Servaes and Malikhao, 2007:
As argued by Pieterse (2010), the accelerated globalization process experienced today determines that one cannot think isolated nations, societies or communities, nor the development process can be described as being determined by external factors. They are growing interdependent, so that the top-down strategy versus the bottom-up self-development of the local community is a false dichotomy, and development communication, as ‘development’ itself, needs to consider this dynamics. Nonetheless, and in accordance with Servaes multiplicity framework (2005; 2007), there is a case for the importance of multiple cultural and social perspectives in development.

That is not to say that the participatory approach offers an absolute answer, and that wouldn’t be even feasible as, in the field, pragmatic concerns are more relevant than the binary diffusionist/top-down and participatory/bottom-up discussions (Morris, 2005; Waisborn, 2005). While bottom-up initiatives are widely assumed as essential, a tool-kit approach allowing for a combination of models within development communication is in order if the complexity of the field is to be grasped. Waisborn (2005) indicates that there is increasing agreement in the field of communication for development that ‘top-down and bottom-up communication strategies might be necessary to tackle a host of problems successfully’. In a world ‘in transition’ (Hemer and Tufte, 2005), rapidly changing through an accelerated globalization process, a good answer to this increasing complexity might be the multi-track model, which prescribes a hybrid framework to communication that, although departing from the participatory approach on defining development priorities and deciding objectives, favors flexibility and adaptability to various situations by adopting ‘monologic’ or ‘dialogic’ approaches, or a combination of the two, depending on the objectives set (Mefalopulos and Tufte, 2009: 13).

3.2. The Making of Rama Ataúro

It was a sunny morning of February, and there were 21 young people with
a mission: restart Rama Ataúro wall newspaper. Among the participants, ages ranging from 15 to 30, the excitement of smiling faces and whispering side talks contrasts with a growing silence that invades the room every time a question is asked. ‘What is a journalist? What are journalists’ roles?’ asks the facilitator of the two-days meeting, Rama Ataúro’s team member Aniceto de Araújo, 29. Again, silence, broke only by the voice of veterans, who try to encourage new members to talk by opening the way: ‘Journalists are people who give information’, says Zeca Soares, 28. Zeca was the quietest member of the original group and, although having a consistent and attentive attendance, would be extremely reluctant to speak out for months. Later that day he would give his own presentation on Rama Ataúro’s experience making the Ita Nia Kultura section of the newspaper, dedicated to local stories and adat, or culture.

Aniceto then starts a dynamics to open up the group. He draws a circle in the whiteboard and asks how, with one line, it was possible to make it small. Some 15 minutes later, much laughter and the whiteboard all scratched with different ideas, the answer came in the form of an invitation: ‘Everyone has knowledge and experience to share. None of us come here empty. Let’s improve our knowledge together.’ The kind of cliché sentence had a huge effect on me, watching that mix of newcomers and veterans interact for the re-starting of their newspaper. It put me thinking on how that simple sentence defined where Rama Ataúro started, and from where I, more or less intuitively, have come as to work with the first four youth who showed up to help produce a community newspaper in Ataúro. It was in April 2008, when a Catholic priest responsible for the quasi-parish called me to help transform a sporadic information outlet in Ataúro, basically a collage of stories from out-of-date national newspapers posted by some youth on a wall in the island administrative center, Vila Maumeta, into a locally produced newspaper. In a month time, the first ever community medium of the island was born. The medium in use, the posting of stories in a wall, gave birth to the wall newspaper format.

The making of Rama Ataúro was not a straightforward process, though. At
that time, I transitioned between being *senhora* (misses) and *professora* (teacher) – to become simply *mana* (a commonly used, less formal form of treatment that means ‘sister’). These forms of treatment were markers of the different position of power I occupied within the group, being a *malae* (foreigner, in Tetun), older, and a professional journalist that they saw as in charge of transmitting knowledge. We would sit together and talk, tell each other stories about our lives, make a lot of small talk, before it would be possible to make even general comments on the developments concerning Timor-Leste’s situation – at that time, a curfew was in place and a strong security operation was ongoing due to the 11 February 2008 assassination attempt of President Ramos-Horta\(^{25}\) –, until finally reaching a point where starting to discuss their stories’ ideas was possible.

Often times, attempts on having the participants express their views on community issues, on what they wanted to write about, to state what was important for them, would end frustrated. If inhibition is not uncommon in social interactions between people who do not know each other well, especially for youth, this difficulty to speak out also signaled a resistance to a more participatory dynamic, as they tended to reproduce their usual behaviors based on the known structure of such formal social interactions, where the leader transmits information, and speaking is not spontaneous but conceded as a formality, when deemed necessary and within the established norms. According to Sahlins (2003), the reception of new circumstances is contingent to existing specific patterns, which need to be made culturally relevant if to be adopted, and are in turn modified.

This need for shifting ‘mindsets’ and ‘paradigms’ before embarking on action for empowerment is pointed out by Cadiz (2005) as one of the lessons identified by practitioners’ experiences in participatory development

\(^{25}\) On 11 February 2008, the Nobel Prize laureate and then Timor-Leste’s President Jose Ramos-Horta was attacked by a group of rebels at his home in Metiaut, Dili. He was shot and seriously wounded.
communication projects. Years of international presence and a great number of development programs, starting from the referendum that determined Timor-Leste’s independence in 1999, mostly in line with the model based on delivery and diffusion of services, information and other benefits, probably also reinforced this framework. Thus, Rama Ataúro youth departed from a conjuncture where the social roles of the ‘leader’ and the ‘follower’, the ‘student’ and the ‘teacher’, of the ‘expert’ and the ‘beneficiary’, are rigid and clearly fixed, with the latter being the holder of knowledge who transmits it to a group of passive recipients – on what Freire (2006) called ‘banking type’ of education. In his model, that is to be countered using dialogue, from which ‘liberating pedagogy’ is made of. Nevertheless, this attitude does not mean the youth participants at Rama Ataúro are either passive or lacking ideas themselves. As stated by Servaes & Malikhao (2005: 91), ‘people are voiceless not because they have nothing to say, but because nobody cares to listen to them.’

To listen, in this case, meant to set the stage for dialogic communication to happen and foster a change in power relations towards a communication process between equals. To give voice internally in the group was the first step towards giving the youth ‘voice’, a concept broadly defined by Lister (2004, cited in Tacchi, Watkins and Keerthirathne, 2008), as the right to participate in decision-making – in social, economic, cultural, and political life – and as a crucial human and citizenship right. In a couple of weeks, and incrementally as time progressed, the meetings became more fluid and participants would speak more freely, even though for this to begin, in my facilitator role I would often have to give the floor to them by specifically asking their individual inputs and opinions in the course of conversations. More often than not, those would bring new elements and perspectives that I was unaware of before, illustrating what Chambers (1983) named the ‘reversal of learning’, about which he would elaborate on by stating that ‘we are all ignorant, only in different fields’ (Chambers, quoted in Mefalopulos, 2008). Discussions regarding event-related topics, through participation, became moments for reflection, as a story published
in November 2008 on the opening of the new building for Ataúro sub-district single secondary school illustrates: while noting the inauguration, the lack of facilities such as a library and the persistent reality of the students that have to walk long distances every day before arriving at school were featured. Possibly also at the core of such change in the young participants' disposition to talk was my rudimentary language skill in Tetun which, if on the one hand made communication more difficult as at times we would struggle to explain words to each other, on the other created a situation where I was the ‘student’ and they were the ‘teachers’, giving a sense of proximity and empathy that helped make our encounters more lively, and maybe constituting symbolically the clearest sign that the learning process was shared by all in the group.

The dynamic discussed above indicates that, although Rama Ataúro was centered in the young participants initiative and will to make a newspaper, shown by their continuous attendance and participation in group’s meetings, there were significant barriers to overcome. The task to publish a newspaper aimed at Ataúro’s community was not the main challenge. Being a professional journalist experienced in print media, producing the newspaper wouldn’t be an issue itself. However, Rama Ataúro did not have the status of a ‘project’ on it’s own term – as a pre-designed plan encompassing phases and expected results – being more like, to use Gumucio-Dagron (2008) term, a ‘participatory process’ where the level of importance of the participatory aspects was at least correspondent to that of the product. From this perspective, the process was an end in itself.

Thus, if there weren’t many certainties as to where the newspaper was heading to, or a formal project or pre-established plan, the centrality of having the young Atauroans themselves producing the newspaper was a shared objective from the start. It is worth noting that such openness on goals, guidelines and timeframes, which characterized the process of making Rama Ataúro, was

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20 The priests working in Ataúro since 2005, two Italian at their 70s who were based in Brazil for some 40 years working with poor communities in urban sites of São Paulo and Fortaleza, several times attempted to engage youth in activities designed for the medium and long term such as the Pastoral do Menor, without success.
enabled by its relative independence from institutions, which allowed the flexibility needed for the group to identify objectives and build the newspaper identity. Initially counting on support for printing costs and minimal transportation expenses to come from the Quasi-Parish, the group later found four different partners which paid for printing costs, keeping the budget for other costs virtually nonexistent. Limited equipment for reporting was also obtained through partnerships.\footnote{Support for the printing costs were provided by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), which also donated a bicycle, two tape recorders, two photographic cameras and a second-hand laptop; the Instituto Camões Portuguese Language Center, which was in turn given a space to publish poems in Portuguese; and the then single telecommunication company in the country Timor Telecom, in exchange for the publication of a five centimeters high footer ad. Rama Ataúro also received US$ 600 from the catholic Centro Juvenil Padre Antonio Viera, initially planned to fund transportation and other costs, which ended covered for the printing costs as Timor Telecom cut off the financial support changing it to the donation of mobile phone sets.}

Informal conversations and individual interviews involving seven participants from the first phase point out their motivations to work as volunteers were: to provide their community with access to information and communication, and to acquire skills and gain experience in journalism and media. Along these lines, the idea goes beyond vertically disseminating externally produced information, in a top-down transmission characteristic of the diffusion paradigm in communication. Instead, it was centered on providing the community with information necessary for exercising a range of human rights while also opening space for societal discussion tackling local issues such as equity and justice (Thomas, 2007), which, the youth expected, would encourage broader participation in community development. Such commitments, taken into practice, make Rama Ataúro a participatory grassroots experience that has communication as both a ‘means’ and an ‘end’ to itself (Huesca, 2007).

The new phase, inaugurated with the meeting described at the beginning of this section, also had the newspaper’s content brought from group discussions and defined collectively. From talks around what is happening in Ataúro, events recently held or planned, and concerns raised from the participants’ own experience as community members’, each topic/story was considered for
inclusion in the first edition since the re-start, subsequently published in March 2013. This collective decision-making on content still proves to be an exercise of reflection with the inception of the new group. In the second two-day meeting with the new group, a story idea on the collection of a fee by the regional education office and the parents and teachers association, to be paid by every child and applied to the rehabilitation of public education facilities, was presented by the three members from suku Makadade. I asked for more details, trying to understand whether the payment was mandatory, and to provoke them into thinking on the possible impact of this on the poorest families. This started a discussion, as the group identified the issue of insufficient classrooms, and poor condition of school buildings, a serious one, but questioned whether to provide public education facilities was an obligation of the parents, or of the state –, where they observed that to transfer such responsibility was worrisome when it was clear that there were several families that wouldn’t have the means to effect the payments. From this debate, the idea of making a special story encompassing education issues was born.

Besides the group meetings, which in the new phase are two-days gatherings that include making an evaluation of the previous edition and planning the next one, participants meet in smaller groups according to the tasked news to cover for a more detailed planning, assessment of the developments during the production process and peer-support, provided by the veterans and I. This process goes on during gathering information and covering news, writing, editing, layout, and so forth. The practice is in turn informed by journalism technique and theory, which they apply in producing their news stories. Such practice of providing participants with ‘hands-on experience’ is in line with Cadiz’s (2005) guideline for participatory projects. At times, hand in hand with a critical approach that brings reflection and awareness raising, discussions over the more ethical aspects of journalism and the media too develop, naturally, and not rare technical knowledge in journalism is reinterpreted and adapted in light of their experienced realities and context. Thus, as the work develops, the use of the inverted pyramid
and the journalistic lead, aimed at giving a quick overview to hurried readers facing information surplus, gives space to text formats to attract attention, inform and generate debate. Another example in this sense is the journalistic rule of ending an interview with an open ended question, giving space to the source to add important information, which gained more focus to avoid hours-long diversions by the sources that used to make the Rama Ataúro young reporters uncomfortable, and the interviews they held literally never-ending.

3.3. A Closer Look on Empowerment

Such description of a grassroots participatory process in communication points to its potential for promoting critical thinking and thus raising awareness of one’s own condition, what Freire (2006) has termed ‘naming the world’ – which he defined as the initial step towards fostering social change that is sustainable. Equipped with journalistic tools, improved interpersonal skills, knowledge of writing, photography, computer skills and graphic design, the participant youth, at the same time, start to critically analyze their own reality, and to voice their views.

That learning by doing approach, and the attention dedicated to young participants’ knowledge, was possibly a factor in the rapid development of the youth willingness to take risks in talking and starting the production of news stories, pictures, and working in graphic design in the first phase. The journalistic tools were presented as the need came about, thus the fear of failure that comes after a traditional training full of alien technical rules was avoided. In my role as facilitator, I provided support throughout production by solving doubts as they appeared and, while to do by themselves was the rule, I would accompany the youth in more complicated interviews, such as with the national director of the maritime transportation unit, until they felt ready to go alone. After the stories were ready, handwritten, once again we would sit together so they would transcribe it – at the same time learning, or improving knowledge, in computer use – until we would finally edit the stories together. The editing was a dialogue
as well, during which views on text format, content and clarity, were exchanged as to reach the final version. In the first editions, this was an extremely difficult process because of the novelty of it for me and for them. At the beginning, the texts were difficult to comprehend, often would leave out important information, and were full of orthography mistakes. However, as more editions were published, stories would come ready for publishing with steady increases in quality.

The new phase is, in many aspects, a completely new experience. If at the beginning of the first phase the idea of a locally produced community newspaper was one of the few certainties the initial group of participants' had, the restarting of Rama Ataúro, though, brought about the ideal of a more formally structured organization from its inception. This move from 'process' to 'project' was not incidental, and reflected an attempt to fill gaps observed in the first phase. As noted somewhere else in this chapter, the 'process' format, and the independence from agencies or organizations, allowed the flexibility needed for the group to instill their ideas, priorities and rhythm into Rama Ataúro. This was likely central on keeping the group interest and building a strong sense of ownership. However, the severe limitation of resources – insufficient equipment, no funds for activities, transportation, etc. –, and inexistence of a 'formal institution' behind the newspaper, certainly contributed to the ceasing of its operations: as some of the more active group members had less available time due to work and study commitments, and I moved away to another district; and lacking equipment, funding and the means to obtain those, the group dispersed.

My proposal to reopen Rama Ataúro, in January 2013, was received with excitement by the veterans, who had several times in the past couple of years approached me with this intent. The experience gained in the first phase was the basis from which to build the new one, and the need of formalization as a civil society organization was clear. In many ways, the path is inverse to those of most projects in participatory communication, which often times have 'participation' limited by institutional constrains. Putting this transition into the
freedom versus resources dilemma, it is important to give participants’ free reign and to have great openness and flexibility but, as the experience develops and the group matures, and to guarantee sustainability, improvement of activities and increase the number of members/beneficiaries— all declared aims of the participants—, the articulation of self-defined goals into proper planning and the implementation of systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential. To operate within a more rigid format that allows a more concrete structure and the positioning of Rama Ataúro as an established civil society organization and firm commitments with partners and donors without losing the experimental essence of any participatory process is perhaps the group central challenge at this point.

The list of topics addressed during the first meeting aimed at reorganizing Rama Ataúro was headed by an evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of the previous work, held from April 2008 to September 2009, from where the remaining issues were brought for discussion— including the need to register Rama Ataúro formally, the initial discussion of Rama Ataúro’s vision and mission, an assessment of logistical and equipment needs, and ideas around the criteria for the formation and structuring of the new group. Although the dynamics were that of an open dialogue with all participants speaking their views and opinions, the meeting started in strict compliance to several aspects of the formal structure— consisting of a facilitator that opens the meeting with acknowledgements, gives an introductory speech and reads out the meeting program, and traditional markers of formality such as thanking for the time given to speak before starting every intervention— that were subsequently relaxed as the conversation developed.

Again, drawing from the cultural pattern of meetings from where decisions are taken, this structure can illustrate the weight of the cultural references but, as the dynamic following was one of a two-way dialogue, it might also suggest that the use of elements from their pattern for formal interaction was a way to express the seriousness of the event and the subject in discussion. The two-way
conversation can be, on one hand, understood as a result of the meeting participants having friendship ties, but on the other was possibly influenced by the participants' experience of typical Rama Ataúro meetings developed over the course of one and a half year of the first phase.

From this initial gathering, a follow-up meeting with some eight of the local youth who were interested in participating, identified in one-to-one interactions, was held a week later. Organized by the four Rama Ataúro veterans cited above, the meeting was aimed at formally informing them of the intention to reopen Rama Ataúro and on discussing the plans, proposed vision and mission, and actions needed for implementation. At this time, the figure of the 'senders' and 'receivers', characteristic of a vertical communication, was visibly more present throughout. In accordance to the framework prescribed for formal social interactions. Rama Ataúro veterans were the 'leaders', transmitting information, and 'receivers' or 'followers' would resist on speaking even when asked to, and manifestations would be always on agreement to the first. Loosely, the same occurred in the first meeting/training described at the beginning of the section, when the newcomers' voices were mostly heard only during the discussion of stories to be covered, initiated by asking what was happening in their suku, thus pointing towards the effectiveness of opening space for topics related to their realities and experience.

Although those could be an indication of the abandonment of participation as a guiding principle, both situations recall the beginning of the Rama Ataúro, when the challenges in establishing dialogue were enormous, and rooted in the participants' own resistance in speaking out and interacting in an open dialogue. It also suggests that, while wishing to move towards a more democratic organization, the participants have difficulties operating in a framework where the figure of the authoritarian leader is absent, and veterans are uncertain about the ability of the newcomers to adapt to such a change. Finally, the veterans also possibly want to occupy the space as group leaders and holders of knowledge. This example points to the tensions around maintaining and changing the model

Rama Ataúro
of local hierarchy structure and social interaction. At the same time that the veterans reproduce the leader figure, who has power from being older and holding knowledge, they cause changes by stimulating the newcomers to have active voice in sharing their knowledge. This, again, demonstrates a process of adopting new models within an established one, modifying both and creating a new form of group interaction, enhanced by the positioning of the veterans as facilitators or catalysts.

A conversation held during the first meeting illustrates this: Obed, declaring his concerns with the practical aspects of production with the inclusion of new members and the group’s organizational chart, asked whether the structure would be pyramidal or circular – defined as opposites, where the first is structured in a vertical hierarchy while the second is based on cooperation and shared decision-making. Aniceto completed: ‘we should keep it like it was, circular, with everyone participating in all aspects of production and decision-making’. Obed then proposed that, as the time progressed and the new group becomes more solid, focal points and coordinators could be chosen by the group according to their abilities and commitment, which was agreed by all. His concern, as he later explained, was that the new members wouldn’t be able to operate without having the presence of a ‘superior’ leader, who not only facilitates activities, but gives orders in the group.

In the restart of Rama Ataúro, the decision of the group of veterans in charged of forming a new group was to keep the system of peer-support, identified as effective in the overall process of developing technical skills and a teamwork mentality. The need of delivering training in basic journalism to start, though, was identified as essential if the newcomers were to be able to produce their first news stories. I declared my view on the importance of showing how simple journalism is when approached from the aim of communicating, which is an everyday activity to everyone. Sessions building on the veterans’ experiences with Rama Ataúro could complete the activity, along with the discussion of suggested topics to be covered in the coming edition, to be decided collectively.
The overall activity was to be facilitated by the veterans, while I would provide inputs or answer questions whenever they found necessary. Moreover, as for the group request, I quickly produced a guide on basic reporting and writing skills, a collection of materials from the time I was lecturing in the National University of Timor-Leste\textsuperscript{28}, to be distributed to the participants and be used as the work in the community newspaper develops.

When opening this section I described the initial meeting towards producing Rama Ataúro’s March 2013 edition with the image of the scratched whiteboard. However, although incorporating presentations of veterans’ experiences in the newspaper and a quick presentation on journalism roles, the meeting was built more around the content of the journalism guide, especially on its ‘technical’ side – inverted pyramid, lead, the 5W+1H, and so on. The 17 newcomers remained largely quiet even though veterans made efforts to make them talk through group dynamics and coffee breaks. In my participation in smaller groups meetings, both during the preparation of interviews and coverage phase and in the editing of the stories produced, the confusion caused by the great number of concepts and rules presented on the first day had confused the newcomers and made them feel insecure. Many questions arose, such as one asked by Ricardo Magno, 20, when we prepared together questions for an interview about the water supply system at his village of Makili: ‘but aren’t we supposed to ask only what, when, who, why and how?’

Although the above declaration suggests that the initial meeting was confusing and, in my view, somehow disempowering to the extent it caused the newcomers to feel that they lacked knowledge while not necessarily having promoted understanding of the presented concepts, the practice together in smaller groups helped recover from this failure. The issue was partially recognized by the veterans, who did actively participate in the peer-support

\textsuperscript{28} From October 2008 to July 2009, I was a visiting lecturer for the inaugural class of the Faculty of Social Communications at the National University of Timor-Leste (UNTL), the only existing public university in the country.
works during the production process, although there is still an impression that the newcomers ‘lack knowledge and aptitude’. During conversations, I asked them to think about their own trajectory, as individuals and as a group, from the time Rama Ataúro started to provoke reflection. My aim was to help them improve their skills as facilitators, or catalysts, of the process of making Rama Ataúro, by instigating their belief on the capacity of the newcomers. The identification of lack of communication as the main negative point of the group work thus far, proposed by veterans as an evaluation topic during the second group meeting, indicates that they are reflecting about the need for change and suggests that improvements are on the way.

Different from the newcomers’ experience, when the 14 Rama Ataúro members attended the first formal training in journalism, several months after the community newspaper started, in December 2008, they were already able to produce their news stories independently, and had a good knowledge in basic journalism. The training was delivered by a group of Timorese professionals under the trainer of trainers program of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), a North American international non-governmental organization that worked in Timor-Leste until September 2012. At that time, soon after the training was held, declarations from the participants pointed to the contact with Timorese professional journalists working in the capital as a high point in the training, and identified the course completion certificate as a central gain obtained – understandably important for youth concerned with their opportunities for future employment. However, only one of the 14 participants, who did have some previous experience in journalism, is working directly with media or journalism, as a communication officer in a government ministry. The overall gains from the participation in the newspaper, declared during individual conversations held with five Rama Ataúro participants from the first phase, were described more broadly. This was illustrated by Obed Mouzinho, 29, who was part of the community newspaper group for over a year and is involved in the restarting process as well, although he currently works as a project officer for a national NGO in Ataúro:
One of the contributions we have got [from Rama Ataúro] is extensive experience that we never learned at school and from the involvement at Rama Ataúro we have learned, about journalism’s theory and practice, and about sharing knowledge among team members. Also, the participation [at Rama Ataúro] gave me a high stand when I wanted to get involved in institutions, apply for jobs at NGOs, people didn’t have doubts about the experience I have. It also made us brave to speak to anyone, without fear; and many people know you, at almost the whole [Ataúro] island people know you because of the work as a journalist. We built a strong mentality within the team, a teamwork mentality, we participate in the team our mentality gets stronger and we are not afraid, we are brave, we are ready to talk to anyone and during meetings we are quickly accustomed in the environment\(^{29}\) (author’s translation).

Magallanes-Blanco and Perez-Bermudez (2009), on analyzing the empowerment of participants from street newspapers in Brazil, drawn from Bery’s (2003) work around empowerment processes in participatory video experiences the four key elements of empowerment, identified as follows:

\begin{itemize}
\item[(a)] a psychological concept of being that includes self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence;
\item[(b)] a cognitive understanding of power structures and the place one has in the existing system;
\item[(c)] economic independence that allows other freedoms such as thinking, exploring, and taking risks; and
\item[(d)] a political analysis that implies a will to change the system in which people act (Magallanes-Blanco and Perez-Bermudez, 2009: 658).
\end{itemize}

Applying this framework to the first phase participants’ answers, it is possible to identify the four elements, or dimensions, of empowerment. On the ‘psychological’ aspect, the youth said they have considerably improved self-esteem and self-confidence, commonly expressed as an enhanced ability to actively participate in social interactions, including public meetings with various

\(^{29}\) Tetun version: ‘Kontribuisaun nebe mak ita hetan, ida mak esperiensia lubuk uluk ita iha eskola ita nunka aprende nebe ita envolve iha Rama Ataúro ita bele aprende ba jornalismu ninian hanesan teoria no pratika no mos fahe matenek ruma husi membrus ekipa rasik. Depois, partisipasaun ne’e fo fatin aas wainhira hau atu envolve iha instituisaun sira, hatama aplikasaun ba NGO ruma ema laiha duvida konaba esperiensia nebe hau iha. Mos halo ami barani bele koalia ho se deit, la tauk, depois, ema barak konese ita, iha kuaze ilha tomak ema hatene ita tamba servisu jornalista. Hari’i mentalidade ida forte iha ekipa laran, mentalidade ekipa servisu hamutuk, ita envolve an iha ekipa mentalidade sai forte ita latauk, barani, se-se ita preparado atu koalia no iha enkontru ruma ita toman lalais ho ambiente.’
purposes and people. Regarding the understanding of ‘power structures’ and their place in it, two dimensions need to be considered: at the community level, hierarchies and power roles were already widely known by the participants, although an enhanced understanding on their own condition as youth in the community was likely enhanced by the experience in re-signifying or dislocating from this same condition through the journalist ‘tag’.

Moreover, discussions around the organization of the new group and its structure brought more conscience around the existing options or, one can say, showed more concretely that alternative ways of organization are possible. At the national level, reflection regarding their position as community members was caused by debates on local issues that are related to the government. This sometimes raised the notion of powerlessness before national level politics and the need for collective organization of the community as an option for taking action. The achievement of economic independence offers mixed results and, as can be said about the remaining elements presented in the framework above, it varies widely between individuals.

As stated by Mefalopulos (2008: 42), empowerment is more of an inner condition and as such, as Cornwall (2000: 33, quoted in Mefalopulos, 2008), ‘it is not something that can be done to people, but something people do by and for themselves.’ Considering that, four out of seven interviewees declared that the skills and experience they acquired during their time at Rama Ataúro enhanced their CV, thus increasing their chances of finding work, while two cited their participation at Rama Ataúro had been one of the reasons why they were selected for a job. Finally, as the reflections on power structures advanced, an analysis of political terms led to discourse on democracy, equality, and participation in decision-making that is more inclusive.

The gains identified above by Obed were featured as well during the

30 More detailed discussion in the meanings of being youth and the young people social role, including the perceived changes caused by the group members’ participation as journalists in Rama Ataúro, were held in chapter two.
meeting aimed at discussing the possibility of reopening the community newspaper, held by four participants from the first phase, including Obed, Leopoldo Fernandes, 29, Aniceto Araújo, 29, and Zeca Soares, 28. Those same gains were put as positive aspects of Rama Ataúro and came along with a manifest sense of obligation both to contribute to the development of their community and to provide other youth with the opportunity they have had, including by sharing their own experiences. The resignification around the meaning of being youth through the new identity of ‘journalists’, by giving an improved sense of agency and an enhanced status before the community in general, was possibly another strong factor motivating the continuous participation of young people, and the high number of youth who showed up for the re-opening of Rama Ataúro.

Thus, although clearly it is not possible to make decisive statements around empowerment of the new participants who joined the group in February, the evolution on their behavior in group meetings, taking an increasingly pro-active attitude; and their involvement in their first assays on gathering information, holding interviews and writing news stories suggest that they are building up their self-esteem and self-confidence, and taking ownership of Rama Ataúro. The realization of the ongoing empowerment process comes clear after every edition is printed: pages in their hands, the pride created by the newspaper they are producing themselves is evident. The anxiety for the distribution phase, that will put their work into evidence, makes the posting of over 70 editions throughout the most distant sites of the 140 square kilometers island just a matter of hours, and a cause of satisfaction.
4. Of Words and Thoughts – Community, Communication, and Social Change

As we all know, in today’s world, the role of the media is extremely important on disseminating events and issues that are important and interesting for people to know because they have an impact in the lives of many people and have great value.

Rama Ataúro, as Ataúro’s community monthly newspaper, in past years has served its mission as a local media, becoming the first and only newspaper in Ataúro. It was self-named as a community newspaper because it features the rhythm, the changes and the facts happening amid the community, for the community to be aware of.

During the past period, from 2008 to 2009, Rama Ataúro newspaper started covering stories and publishing in Ataúro’s five villages, having launched already sixteen (16) editions distributed to posting points in Beloi, Bikeli, Makadade, Makili and Vila Mau-Meta villages. Although often facing several challenges in its course, the existence of Rama Ataúro built a strong commitment and courage in holding reporting and publication from knowing that the media becomes a channel for communication and agency for transformation in the community.

Jornal Rama Ataúro is not a new name for Ataúro’s people in its five villages, that comes to be a means of control to contribute on establishing the development process in Ataúro, because we want it or not the time for this newspaper to rise and walk together encouraging all people’s participation to assure and guarantee information with quality to achieve the many people interests’ to be included in development.

Currently in 2013, Rama Ataúro newspaper wishes to continue fulfilling its mission Vision that is “Empower the community through information to participate in the development process”. From this Vision, Rama Ataúro has five main pillars that constitute its Mission, those being “Spread information in the community; Raise consciousness and deepen knowledge; Open opportunity for all people to express their ideas; Value Ataúro’s history and culture; Promote Ataúro’s richness and touristic potential.”

For this reason Rama Ataúro team asks the community to better comprehend journalism’s role and invites to bring your ideas and suggestions, for the overall course of gathering and publishing stories to brings quality outcomes on building together an equitable society and elevate the fundamental principles of the rights of all. (*

(*) Author’s translation. For the original text, published in Tetun, see Rama Ataúro newspaper edition on the Appendices section of this paper.)
4.1 Starting point

The text above, a full transcription of the editorial session extracted from Rama Ataúro’s first edition on the occasion of its restart, published in March 2013, is a declaration of intent from the group to its community. Reflecting discussions held by the youth participants throughout their time working in the newspaper since the first phase back in 2008/2009, it gives elements of the participants’ views on media and their aims, as well as fixes their place as a group. It is also a good starting point to examine the communication practices the group employs within the community they professedly serve.

4.2 Communication practices

Given the discussion presented in chapter three, I depart here from framing Rama Ataúro as a grassroots participatory experiment in communication. The hypothesis I aim at discussing here is a simple one: although within the group the approach taken is largely a participatory one, in the lines of Freire’s dialogic model, the group’s understanding of communication actually draw on elements from both the participatory/bottom-up and the diffusionist/top-down paradigms in communication for development and social change.

Current views of the issue are that, while to have bottom-up initiatives is assumed as essential, a ‘tool-kit’ approach allowing for a combination of elements within development communication models is in order if the complexity of the field is to be grasped. Waisborn (2005) indicates that there is increasing agreement in the field of communication for development that ‘top-down and bottom-up communication strategies are necessary to tackle a host of problems successfully’. This view is shared by Nancy Morris (2005) who, in examining project reports of communication for development programs identified either with the diffusionist or the participatory models, concludes that strategies need to be tailored with a view on the multiple, complex reality of each society, and no unique, generalizing formula for successful development communication is
possible. In a world ‘in transition’ (Hemer and Tufte, 2005), a good answer to the issue might be the multi-track model, which prescribes a hybrid framework to communication that, although departing from the participatory approach in defining development priorities and deciding initiatives’ objectives, favors flexibility and adaptability to various situations by adopting monologic or dialogic approaches, or a combination of the two, depending on the objectives set (Mefalopulos and Tufte, 2009: 13).

On analyzing the editorial transcribed above, some issues are of special note in this sense: on presenting the role of the media in the contemporary world, the view of a diffusionist, top-down model is portrayed while, at the same time, mentioning the information disseminated is one classified as being important on the perspective of the readers and their lives. Conversations within the group point to the fact that there is a great concern around the lack of access to information that leaves the bulk of their community without adequate tools to participate in the development process and improve their life condition. That coincides with the view of ‘poverty as a lack of access’, and essentially as a lack of awareness on how to fight poverty (Thomas, 2007: 34) and is at the center of Rama Ataúro’s vision statement: ‘Empower the community through information to participate in the development process’. The use of the word ‘information’, which suggests the top-down approach, was a result of not dominating the differences it holds with communication, as being horizontal and multiple, and opening space for participation and empowerment. Both words, ‘information’ and ‘communication’, are contained in the mission and vision statements presented. The need, however, to make education-entertainment videos and ‘socialization’ programs – meetings usually promoted by NGOs and the government aimed at disseminating information on specific issues such as legislation, prevention of diseases, etc. to community members other than the local leaders, also illustrate that the combination of models in seen as desirable in enhancing people’s ability to meaningfully participate in social change and better tackle their everyday issues.
Regarding the positioning of Rama Ataúro as a community medium, the text notes that the newspaper features issues of local concern and has the community as its main audience. Participation from the community is constantly promoted by calls for the people to bring suggestions and opinions, and invitations to join the newspaper group. The eventual publishing of texts from community members seeks to reinforce this openness, as general calls tend not to be too effective due to the formalistic character of invitation in the community. The main site of community participation, however, is through one-on-one interaction. The concern to include representatives from each of the five suku in the new phase – differently from 2008/2009, when participants mainly came from Makili and Vila Maumeta – points to the intention of enhancing participation. This brought as well members from the Protestant Church, who did not participate before, to join the Catholics.

4.3. Renegotiating Places

The first paragraph states the central role of the media in general is of great importance worldwide. The connection made to the world illustrates, on one hand, a consciousness regarding the globalization process, and gives the small community a part in it through the suggestion of belongingness. On the other, it seeks to legitimize the youths’ presence as a local media by referring to the centrality of the media in other communities/societies. Indirectly, the activation of a sense of proudness for having their own media is also stimulated. Commenting on the effects of participatory communication within the communities, and within community identity, Gumucio-Dagron notes:

Especially in communities that have been marginalised, repressed or simply neglected during decades, participatory communication contributes to install cultural pride and self-esteem. It reinforces the social tissue through the strengthening of local and indigenous forms of organisation. It protects tradition and cultural values, while facilitating the integration of new elements (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001: 25).
This search of legitimacy, for an entry space, is reaffirmed by the presentation of Rama Ataúro credentials as the only community medium ever on the island, that has already been recognized for serving the community needs in communication and information. Besides trying to give a sense of continuity of the previous popularity and promote wide acceptance of the newspaper, thus avoiding a new start that demands explaining what they are doing, why they are doing it, and having to establish from zero a relationship of trust and respect with community leaders and members alike, the aim of an affirmative stance reinforcing the Rama Ataúro’s place in the community can be understood within a constant re-negotiation of social relations.

During the first phase of the newspaper, many participants would declare a deep sense of mistrust coming from their communities, hampering the task of holding interviews. Perseverance, many explanations given, and the publication of the first editions have largely dissipated the problem but the insistence on the need of having identification cards, which for me didn’t make much sense as the community is small and most Ataúroans are familiar with each other, indicated that the issue was one of power, the cards being symbols of a position held, within a very rigid and formalistic system.

The editorial introducing the return of Rama Ataúro, first observations of the new phase activities, and, especially, the interviews held by the group newcomers, showed that this remains an issue of concern. The declaration from the sub-district administrator, a higher state authority in Ataúro, during the local leadership meeting when the restart of Rama Ataúro was announced, suggests this: he welcomed the initiative, acknowledged the importance of the newspaper as a vehicle to transmit important information on leaders’ activities and government programs to the community, and instructed suku chiefs and other authorities in attendance to comply with information requests by the newspaper members as needed. In this speech, he also expressed his expectation of Rama Ataúro’s role in the community: basically one of disseminating information given
by usual formal sources, the community leaders, to its members, reinforcing the 
*status quo* and seeking propaganda for their activities and programs.

In analyzing the group’s practices and the news stories’ content, one can 
say that this has been the result. A story on a *suku* competition for the most 
organized, clean and safe suku was simply an account of a government program 
which basically gave space to the local leadership to portray themselves as 
leaders. Along the same line, the coverage of the opening of classes of an 
undergraduate level course by a private university in Ataúro, in March 2013,
could have raised issues of economic difficulties facing local youth in accessing 
tertiary level education and the problems in the established fees – which included 
amounts described as library and internet costs, neither of which was actually 
offered to the students, and building maintenance costs, when the rooms being 
used are public and maintained by the state. However, the account was 
published without addressing these issues. These questions, like many others, 
didn’t make to the story, remaining a topic of conversation only within the group.

In a conversation with two participants from the first phase and one new 
member, they noted that although not everything is written down, they have 
observed that the simple exposing of certain events at the newspaper generates 
discussions between readers around involved issues. To foster this process, a 
section called *Foto atu Hanoin* (in English, photography for reflection) portrays a 
photo and a short text calling some sensitive issue into attention, while not 
bringing the details – or putting on the sources demanded when producing a 
regular news story. Nonetheless, this dynamic of the production process and 
content definition reflects not only a tension within the community’s social 
structure, but a tension that the group members themselves experience and are 
still trying to solve, and about which they sometimes disagree.

Frequently part of the issues raised during discussions among Rama 
Ataúro members do not make it into the newspaper’s published stories, that is 
not for a lack of disposition in doing so. The group's explanations, commonly, are
along the lines that ‘the community is not ready for it [the publicizing of sensitive issues] yet’. At least into some extent, they are probably right: as noted by Siapno (2010), the clandestine resistance practices and the impact of the war and the subsequent conflicts in Timor-Leste’s recent history make it difficult for Timorese to trust each other and openly engage in debate. In addition, the culture of paternalism and patronage, and the suppression of dissent – which I believe are typical both of the country history colonial occupation and of the traditional rigid hierarchical structures as well –, severely hamper the existence of critical dialogue in Timor-Leste.

The media scenario in the country, and the ‘role model’ coming from professional journalists, also do not offer much help: exception made for very few media outlets that seldom produce content with critical thinking and analysis, newspapers, radio and television in Timor-Leste are largely made of one-sided news stories, often featuring declarations of a handful of political leaders, as corroborated by Siapno’s (2010) observations on national media content collected from 1999 onwards. An assessment of media development in the country held by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) indicates that an enormous amount of training has been provided to the media in Timor-Leste in various ways, including by non-governmental organizations, the international community and at universities, but ‘there is a general consensus that the quality of media output has not improved significantly since independence or at least in the last five years’ (UNESCO, 2011). While UNESCO points out to the need of identifying the causes for that as to adjust media training programs, I contend that the core issues are that, on one hand, journalists need to amplify and adjust their sense of citizenship and of responsibility with their society, while on the other they are a portrayal of it,

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31 Some stories published by the weekly newspaper Tempo Semanal are possibly the main example. Its’ role on the case of former Minister of Justice Lucia Lobato conviction to five years imprisonment for misuse of State funds, was a very positive step on bringing the role of media as society’s watchdog into practice. Accusations to Lobato, documented with investigations and copies of government contracts, were first raised in the pages of Tempo Semanal and, according to the Prosecutor’s Office, central to sustain their arguments leading to conviction.
enacting the paradoxes of the transition into a post-colonial, independent, democratic reality.

While, as discussed above, Rama Ataúro members are working with the system’s codes and from a position within the system, they also more or less subtly introduce new codes in a number of different ways, such as by advancing human rights principles in their texts (the editorial section, as the one reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, being a good example of this) and giving space for unusual sources to voice their opinions and concerns in the newspaper. Thus, to say that Rama Ataúro does not promote a full rupture is very different from saying they purely reproduce the status quo. When discussing the focus of a story to be included in the May 2013 edition about a new water supply system, and after agreeing it would be important to somehow depict the changes it created in people’s lives, I suggested to the group of three youth tasked with the story that they talk to children, as we agreed that most of the times they were the ones walking long distances to bring water home in heavy containers every day. The reaction was of deep surprise, and a wave of nervous laughing. After a while, one gave the explanation: ‘children’s intellects are not developed enough’ [for speaking to a newspaper, for having voice]. They decided to portray a child in the main story photograph, and to describe her experience in the coverage. It is worth noting that beyond improving community members’ self-esteem and encouraging further participation by giving their opinions and testimonials a space, the impact of seeing themselves, and their fellows portrayed in the newspaper’s pictures cannot be discounted, although that is not the focus of my analysis here.

For the veterans of the first phase, such a practice of portraying the view and the faces of commonly stereotyped people such as children, other youth, and women, who usually have no space to express their opinions, has become a natural process. Then a high school student, Alcino de Araújo described his daily routine which included a two hour walk to go and return from school, followed by agricultural activities at home until dawn, in the November 2008 edition. In the
March 2013 edition, a big space was dedicated to a story on the celebration of International's Women's Day in Ataúro, which displayed women voicing their concerns and calling for action against domestic violence. Here, one can observe that Rama Ataúro, as a group, is concerned about giving community members access to communication, giving them a voice, and fostering their own empowerment processes.

Following the discussion presented above, I contend that Clemencia Rodríguez’ (2011: 102) framework of citizens’ media can offer good insights on analyzing Rama Ataúro, as it emphasizes the 'processes of empowerment, conscientization, and fragmentation of power that result when men, women, and children gain access to and reclaim their own media.' Rodríguez uses Mouffe’s notion of citizenship, which implies seeing citizenship not as a right given by the state but as a form of political identity defined in people’s daily political actions (Mouffe, 1992 as quoted in Rodríguez, 2006: 773).

Citizens’ media trigger processes that allow individuals and communities to recodify their contexts and selves. These processes ultimately give citizens the opportunity to restructure their identities into empowered subjectivities strongly connected to local cultures and driven by well-defined utopias. Citizens’ media are the media citizens use to activate communication processes that shape their local communities (Rodríguez, 2011: 102).

The aim of providing space for multiple voices is stated in the editorial transcribed above as well. It is coupled with a call for participation in providing ideas and suggestions to the newspaper, the aim of ‘building together an equitable society and elevating the fundamental principles of the rights of all.’ The community is called into action to enact this aim. Such discourse and practice is in line with Hamelink's considerations on the centrality of fostering the 'culture of service, the culture of dialogue and community and the culture of human rights' (Hamelink, 1994 cited in White, 2004: 22) into empowerment processes, based on the concepts of ‘value formation’ and ‘reinforcement’ noted by Cadiz (2005).
Empowerment is central to the process of development, but empowerment, it is argued, needs to be located within a broader framework, which sees the goal of development as the cultural and political acceptance of universal human rights. Power must be seen as a source of social responsibility and service. Movements cannot stop at their own empowerment but must gain the respect for the rights of all in the society (White, 2004: 7).

Magallanes-Blanco and Perez Bermudez (2009: 658) state that ‘empowerment is an individual growth process that transcends the limits of the social and leads individuals and communities towards new horizons’. For Rama Ataúro, as stated in the editorial, there is a sense of duty to serve the community and contribute, on one hand, to the establishment of development priorities and programs which are in accordance to the interests of the community by providing needed information and stimulating debate, and on the other hand establishing the newspaper's role as watchdog, particularly in reference to the constant claims of government initiatives lacking quality and being affected by corruption. For some community members such as the entrepreneur and NGO director from suku Bikeli, the latter is the central role of the media in the community: to exert pressure and subject authorities, government officials and holders of government contracts to public scrutiny.

The extent to which Rama Ataúro can effectively play this role, however, might be lower than expected, at least when the issues at stake are connected to local social actors. However, problems that are perceived as the responsibility of national level institutions, many of which affect community’s everyday life, are constantly portrayed in the newspaper: issues of the lack of power on the island due to lack of maintenance and fuel, the lack of quality water supply throughout Ataúro, inadequate transportation from Ataúro to Dili, and the use of the soccer field as a United Nations (UN) heliport which caused dust in dozens of houses in the vicinity. All these issues were addressed during Rama Ataúro’s first phase. The community and the participants saw the publishing of those stories as a way
of pressuring the responsible institutions to take action, and indeed the UN did move its heliport after the story was published.

The story that caused the most discomfort with a local leader was one from the July 2009 edition about the death of a five year old child that, after seeking treatment in Ataúro’s public health clinic and having been sent home, returned a couple of days afterwards in serious condition and subsequently died at Dili National Hospital to where she had been evacuated. Questions around the treatment she received in Ataúro’s health facility and on why she was not sent to the hospital earlier had great repercussion in the community. Even two years afterward, the head of health services in Ataúro avoids speaking to the newspaper about even the simplest issue.

The blocking of access to information, though, is not the main issue: the youth, as community members, live within these leadership structures and can become targets of reprisals if they adopt a perceivably aggressive stance and directly defy local social structures. The young man who wrote this story was not a member of the newspaper group, but offered the story for publishing. For that and a number of similar episodes in which he defied the hierarchical systems, he felt forced to move to Dili and his brother was evicted from the abandoned building where they used to live, which belongs to the government but was not being used. He had become a social outcast. This example illustrates how the definition of content and of the appropriate approach to an issue needs to be thought through, taking into account such sensitivities, and decided through reflection and collective processes. Rama Ataúro participants’ stance now is that the extent to which criticism at the local level can be voiced depends not only on local sensibilities, but also on the strength of the group – recently formed for the restart. There is an overall feeling that the newcomers need to be empowered before they are able to endure these tensions.

Furthermore, as argued in this section, the value of Rama Ataúro does not come from a frontal assault with the system, but from the ability it has, as being
inside the system and operating within it, to gradually introduce changes and new ways of thinking which are held as important and valuable by the youth. The participants, while acting for the promotion of change and fostering of societal transformation, keep their communal identity and their culture in high regard. The newspaper's name itself, a reference to the legend around the origin of the Atauroan people\textsuperscript{32}, suggests that.

A session of the paper called \textit{Ita Nia Kultura}, portraying historical events, local myths and traditions, however, is possibly the main example of this constant process of putting important issues into discussion while, at the same time, keeping a sense of cohesiveness and fostering community identification. Valuing elders' experience and views by respecting the role of the \textit{lia nain} – elder men entitled to tell and recognized as the holders of a \textit{lisan}'s original history and knowledge –, the youth search their stories and interview the legitimate sources to tell them, giving special attention to the accuracy of every detail. By doing this, they do not confront the social place of the \textit{lia-nain} and enhance the traditional leaders' prestige. They also, while making a transition from the oral to the written language and registering those stories that, the youth fear, could die with their 'owners', socialize knowledge, generally very restricted and transmitted in fragments, by creating wider access to it. In one edition, the picture of one of Rama Ataúro members from Beloi, Neka Soares, 22, interviewing the \textit{lia-nain}, represented a shift in paradigms, providing an image of a young woman interacting with a traditional local leader.

Commenting on the \textit{Ita Nia Kultura} published in the March 2013 edition, which was about the origin of a family group in \textit{suku} Beloi, a member of the National Police who was born and works in Beloi declared he couldn't stop reading it until the very end. He approached the two participants, Beloi natives, and I, as we were passing near the police station, and expressed his satisfaction.

\textsuperscript{32} The legend around the formation of the three original kingdoms, Makili, Makadade and Beloi, says that the division of territory was made when the three brothers, children of the original inhabitant of the world, launched arrows that fell in the land that became each of their kingdom centers. The remaining two \textit{suku} where formed during Portuguese and Indonesian colonial rules.
on having the chance to get to know the story which was new to him. *Ita Nia Kultura* makes the *lia-nain*’s exclusive knowledge one of public domain, indirectly encourages the practice of collective communication and dialogue, and fosters negotiation around interpretation and meanings.
5. Conclusion

During this research, I noted that there is a strong tension between the old and the modern and between traditional, customary practices and symbols and new practices coming from liberal-democratic values, human rights, and the accelerated globalization process in course. In Timor-Leste, this is added to and interacts with the numerous changes brought by dramatic transformations in the newly independent country with a recent history of conflict.

Rama Ataúro plays a part in and reflects this dynamic. The community newspaper opens up a space where youth, and the community as a whole, can engage in reflecting on their lives and participate more effectively in this ongoing process of constant rebuilding of identities and reconfiguring of places – collective and individual. The youth-led community publication facilitates empowerment and creates an alternative channel for societal dialogue. These can foster development and social change processes based on the community’s own perceived terms and priorities, enhancing ownership and, thus, sustainability of proposed initiatives.

The processes of empowerment, ownership and social change offered by belonging to Rama Ataúro group, however, are not linear. Inside the group there are tensions, different paces and different perceptions about how the group should proceed, if it should approach or move away from traditional structures and social norms, how the relation with the community should be negotiated, and about the kinds of changes that need to be pursued.

Therefore the participant group, at the same time, causes ruptures and continuities in traditional power divisions and hierarchical system, symbols, and rules. This dynamic, although not necessarily being totally conscious, is as much
a strategy of the youth for creating an entry point through which to foster change from inside, as it is a manifestation of a truthful sense of respect to the community’s tradition.

Rama Ataúro members gradually introduce changes and new ways of thinking without promoting a frontal assault on the system that would likely hamper the newspaper’s own existence by generating repudiation from community members and their leaders. The negotiation, here, is to a great extent one of power, where the constituted leaders resist losing importance, but it involves as well a process where the community members themselves have to occupy a space in redesigning the social structure into an agreed one. To keep a healthy sense of respect for strongly held sensitivities while keeping a strong connection with the community, thus, becomes as well a form of negotiating the terms of change, dialogue and debate. To some extent, the newspaper serves as a channel to transmit information from the leaders to its communities and reinforces their prestige, while on the other hand it gives space to non-usual sources to express their views and concerns and carries information to people who did not have access to it before.

Nonetheless, the newspaper creates a new space in which young people can occupy different social roles and which can re-signify the social construct of ‘youth’ within their community. They become valued interlocutors in the societal debate. While being immersed in the customary codes, structures and norms, they also receive multiple external influences, thus living a search for their own identities and a quest for finding their own space in the community. It is exactly this condition of being constantly questioning, reflecting on their own being and of their society, that can potentially make the youth important social actors in promoting dialogue, raising questions and collectively searching for solutions to community issues.

Timor-Leste is a young country, and it is a country of many youth. Young people represent around one-third of the country’s population and will be over
half of it in the near future. Reflecting international discourse, Timorese youth are displayed as ‘the nation’s future’, while being at the same time depicted as lacking the knowledge and experience needed to meaningfully participate in society, and strongly linked to instability and violence. They are compelled by extremely negative material and subjective conditions, lack voice and agency, and face very limited life choices.

Rama Ataúro’s participants, by being acknowledged by their community as holders of journalistic skills, forge a unique place in the society without directly challenging the power of others but instead by fostering a sense of cooperation towards tackling local issues collectively. This experience indicates the potential of participatory communication projects for offering young people a new insertion, bypassing the limitations imposed by their condition of ‘youth’, and on potentially weakening a social structure in which young people are subordinates and followers, opening an alternative way of existing, belonging, and participating in society.

While resisting the mistake of making wide generalizations, I believe that some aspects observed in the Rama Ataúro experience, as a community newspaper grounded in the participatory communication approach, makes the promotion of similar projects valuable to the current context of Timor-Leste for a number of reasons. Firstly, it helps promote empowerment, and encourages participation by the large bulk of society without voice. Secondly, it offers an effective way of tackling the widespread lack of access to information experienced by the Timorese, especially in rural areas. Finally, especially in a moment when the country moves towards discussing the implementation of an administrative decentralization process, it helps generate debate around structural social issues and the mechanisms to solve them and stimulates a development process drawn from the inputs of all, potentially generating a more meaningful and sustainable development process. This set of potential effects arising from participatory communication practices certainly has contributions to offer in the area of conflict prevention and peace building as well.
That is not to say that establishing successful youth-led community newspapers is an easy task, nor that it is possible to do so following ready-made formulas with built-in, predictable results. Notwithstanding all the possible analyses that can be made with a diverse range of tools, the truth is that the examination of Rama Ataúro experience alone illustrates that there are multiple ways open to the community newspaper as a group and to their influences as a group in the community. The experience thus far points out to a redefinition and empowering of the youth participants, which is being extended to all of Ataúro’s young people, and children, and women, and men, who do not have ‘voice’. The effort, then, is worth doing.
Appendix I

Guiding questions to the semi-structured interviews:

Personal identification
- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- Where do you live? Are you from there? If no, where are you from?
- What is your primary language? Which other languages do you speak?
- What is your religion?
- Where were your parents born?
- Do you live with your parents?
- Is anyone within your family occupying a leadership role (community, government work)? If yes, who and in what position.
- Are you married? If yes, for how long.
- Do you have any children? If yes, how many, and their ages.
- Do you/your family have cultivable land? If yes, is it enough for your living.
- Do you/your family have animals? If yes, is it enough for your living.
- Are you studying at the moment? If yes, which grade. If not, when did you stop studying, in which grade, and why.
- Do you have a job? If yes, where do you work.

Media access
- What communication resources do you have access to? (radio, TV, internet, mobile phone, newspaper)
- How often you use these communication resources? For what?
- Do you think access to information is important? Why?
- What kind of information are you usually interested in? (sports, politics, national/international news, entertainment)
- Do you talk about news to people? Who?
- Do you think the media can influence the way people think? If yes, can you provide an example? If not, why?
- What communication resource is most widely used in your community? Why do you think that is?
- What kind of information do you think is important for your community? Why?
- What media would be more attractive for your community? Why?

The community newspaper
- What do you think a community newspaper is?
- How did you first hear about Rama Ataúro?
- Why did you want to be part of the Rama Ataúro team?
- What do you think the contributions from Rama Ataúro to the community are, if any? Why?
- What do you think the contributions from Rama Ataúro to you are, if any? Why?
- What kind of issues do you think Rama Ataúro should feature? Why?
- How do you think the issues to be featured at Rama Ataúro should be decided?
- Do you think Rama Ataúro can help people/community to find solutions to issues of their concern? Why?
Hasa’e kapasidade

Rama Ataúro loke fali ho treinamento ba membrus foun hodi sira bele halibur informasaun atu hato’o ba komunidade Sub-distríito Ataúro

Iha Ioron 9 no 10 fulan Fevereiru, iha Salaun Memoria suku Vila Mau-Meta, jovem sira suku lima Ataúro nian halao treinamento kona ba jornalismo. Ema nebe tuir treinamento hamutuk 20, no sira nia objective atu hamoris fila fali Jornal Rama Ataúro.

Rama Ataúro mak hanesan jornal ida nebe hari iha ona iha tinan 2008 liu ba, halo huji foin’sa’i Ataúro oan rasik. Iha momento neba Rama Ataúro mak sai hanesan jornal ida iha sub-distríito Ataúro hodi halu’o informasaun atu komunidade sira bele hatene saida mak akontese iha komunidade sira nia le’et. Grupu nebe participa iha tempo neba mak fo treinamento dahuluk ba membro foun sira, hodi sira tama foun nebe’o mos bele hatene konaba oinsa bele buka informasaun hodi hato’o ba komunidade rai doben Ataúro.

Tuir avaliasaun partisipantes husi Vila Mau-meta hakle’an kaitak treinamento ne’e diak tebes atu aumenta sira nia kapasidade no hari’i mentalidade ne’ebe forte tebes, atu nune’e wainhiru ba entervista ema rumu ka halu’o kobertura ak akontesimentu ruma, bele fo rezultatu ida nebe’o ke diak. (Yana, Ito, Nallya, Erlin, Clarinha)

Hakbi’it komunidade liu husi informasaun hodi partisipa iha prosesu dezenvolvimentu
Feto sira Ataúro halibur palu hodí selebra Loron Mundial Feto

Loron 8 Fulan Marsu, nu’udar loron Mundial Feto sira nian ne’ebé komemora tinan-tinan iha fatin hotu iha mundu, sai hanesan mos tradisaun ba nasau membru sira husi Organizaun Nasoins Unidas nian ne’ebé mak ratifika ona konvensaun internasionais sira hanesan Deklaraun Universal Direitus Umanus nian. Nune’e mós ílla Ataúro komemoraasun ba loron feto sira nian halâ’o íla loron 11 Marsu, íla Suku Vila Mau-Meta. Xéfe komisaun organizaun, Zelia Gorreti dalen katak “loron feto sira nian importante tebes, tamba ohin loron feto barak mak has’o problema no sinte mak’as hodi la konsege atu resolve mesak. Iha Ataúro bele mos kria kondisaun oina ita bele fo sai ba malu konaba feto ida -dak nian halerik no susar, la’o hare’e deit’ bá buat ne’ebé akontese grave, maibe mós bá feto sira ne’ebé mak nonok deit’ sei sai grave liu tan tamba liga ba psikolojia”.

Aktividades komemoraasun ba loron nebe’e refere mak hanesan buat hotu ne’ebé mak ìla rona no partispantes diskute no halibur ideias, hatene, tamba ohin íla ko’alia konaba no lori ideias sira ne’e hodi manifesta violencia, ba oin íla mak prevene vio-ho pasifiku íla loron, husi restaurante Manucoco ba Kapela Mutiara, hodi uma laran, íla ita nia sosiedade”. Halo refleksaun durante oras balun, fíla fali ba vizita Maluk feto ne’ebé mo-ne’ e $ 500.00 ne’ebé oferese husi Pe-ras, han meu-dia hamutuk, diskusaun groupu no plenariu no animasaun muzi-no Boneka Ataúro. Partispantes ka. Aktual kordenadora Kooperativa evento ne’e mai husi Boneka Ataúro. Boneka Ataúro hatutan tan katak mo- Biajoiá, restaurante Manucoco, Mes-su mos hanoi husi partispantes sira, tra sira no mos inan feto sira husi ne’ebé mak sai hanesan proposta aldeia Eclae, Ili-Manu no lieto-hodi kontinua evento hanesan kada Karakula. Total partispantes ema feto fulan hamutuk ho inan feto no maluk besik 60 mak partispais. (Zeca)

Român Luan halå’o enkontru

Iha loron 12 Febriúru, Konsellu Representa-tivu Komunidade (KRK) ba organizaun Roman Luan’o suru-mutu hodi hare’e mandatu hu-i sa komunidade ne’e rasik, iha Vila Mau-Meta. Membru sira KRK mai husi suku lima íla Ataúro, nudar orgaun a’as liu, ne’ebé sai hanesan ponte ba komunidade no NGO Rolu iha procesu hari’i no dezenove interese ba nesesidade ema bar-ak nian íla Ataúro.

Tuir rezultadu enkontru ne’e, Lourenço Soares, aktual xefe konsellu, re-eleito nafatin ba periodu 2013-2015. Membru ba KRK ba organizaun RO-LU nebe’e eleitu durante enkontru ne’e mai husi suku lima ho naran: Lourenço Soares (Makikí), Mar-çiano Braz (Makadade), Affeo Tilman (Belo), Cris-tovão Barreto (Bikeli) no Filipe Ximenes (Vila Mau-Meta). Papel husi membru KRK nian mak atu tau matan, kontrola, no sai mahon ba organizaun NGO RO-LU no komunidade, ema sira ne’e halå’o serbisu voluntariu ka la manan osan.

Tuir Soares katak “Konsellu hanoi arantate sustentabilidade organizaun RO-LU nian tenki íla fundus (osan) rasik nu’udar base ba organizaun atu la’o ba in on, lideransa sira tenki forte hodí resolve problema ne’ebe mak mosu íla komunidade no lori organizaun tuir vokasaun hodí buka ganha do-ador hodí suporar komunidade no governu lokal si-ra”. Soares dehan liu tan katak dalan balun ne’ebe atha organizaun Rolu mak liu husi Eko-Turismu, tamba ne’e nu’udar meius ajudu komunidade sira no meius hadomni ambiente, Eko Tua Koin bele sai amadu no familar ba komunidade sira íla Ataúro. Hadian estrutura organizaun Rolu hare’e liu bá lideransa ne’ebé dirji no kontratu serbisu íla organizaun RO-LU, dehan Soares. Partispais íla enkontru ne’e mak reprezentante Administrador Sub-Distritu, Membru konsellu suku lima íla Ataúro, Amu Francisco Moser, sektore rel-evante, no membru konsellu Roman Luan.
Grupu Juventude ba meiu ambiente

Iha loron 24 fulan Febreiru, iha sede suku Makadade, hala’o ba dala uluk enkontru jeral ho juventude husi aldeia Anartutu no aldeia Bite, hodhi hari’i estrutura Grupu Juventude Proteje Meiu Ambiente no Fasiliidade.

Grupu ne’e sei halo limpeza tanki unit siria iha aldeia laran no mos bee matan nebe’e mak iha, hodhi komunidade helan asesu be’e mos ho kualidade no hard’ok’an husi kontaminasaun nebe’e mak afeta ba saude ema nian. Enkontru ne’e fasilita husi NGO Belun ho programa Aseusu Bee Ho Kualidade no partisipantes mak hanesan xefe suku Makadade, xefe aldeia Anartutu, representante Belun no mos representante juventude husi aldeia Anartutu no Bite hamutuk 16. Xefe suku Makadade, Carillo Soares Maria hateten katak “knar’ita bo’ot juventude sira nian importante tebes hodhi apoiu dezenvolvimento iha suku laran, ita sai hanesan tulang punngung iha suku ne’e.”

Re-estruturasaun GMF la realiza

Iha loron 17 fulan Fevereiru tinan 2013, iha Sede Suku Makadade, hala’o sorumutu ba dala rua konaba Grupu Maneja Fasiliidade (GMF) be’e mos nian. Asuntu ne’ebe diskute mak atu halo re-estruturasaun hodhi organizan fali no servisu GMF bele efetivu.

Encontro ne’e

hamutuk ho xefe suku Makadade, Pe. Francisco Moser, responsavel Igreja Katolikoa no Protestante Makadade, Vice-koordenador GMF ho membru sira no komunidade Aldeia Anartutu ho Bite. Iha biban ne’e, Abilio Rolando Neto, huli NGO Belun, esplikata katak desde 2010, sistema foun dada be’e mos nebe’e hatutan husi projeto seegurasaun al-han hahu la’o, no GMF agora tenki fort no aktivu hodhi hala’o ma-nutensuau ho diak no bele asegura abastecimento be’e mos ba komunidade tomak husi aldeia rua sira ne’e.

Tuir xefe suku Makadade, Carillo Soares Maria, maski be’e ne’e imporante tebes ba ita nia moris, partisipasaun komunidade no membru GMF bea enkontru ne’e ladun banar. Nia hatutan tan katak “asuntu ne’e be’e importante tebes, fahe ona konvite ba komunidade sira no GMF ho nia membri sira, atu katak atu partisipa iha fat-in ne’ebe referbe, hodhi realizi no hara foun re-estruturasaun, maibe sira la partisipa”, dehan Soares.

Nune’e mos xefe Aldeia Bite, be’e mos sai hanesan viase-koordenador GMF nian, Jacob dos Santos, haktur tan katak asuntu enkontru ne’e imporante ba komunidade, no sai hanesan opportunidade iha atu hetan konesi-

mentu husi Belun konaba teknika montajen sistembe’e mos no ma-nutensuau. Relasiona ho partisipasaun menus iha enkontru ne’e, Santos tenik katak “komunidade sira mos hanesan det, katal uza bee hatene, maibe atu hadia no proteje la hatene. Mosu mos kritika ho raazan oi-oiin hodhi kutok-kutok, maibe nunka partisia.”

Alem de ne’e, Pe. Francisco Moser afirma tan katak “ita tenki halo refleksuau badak iha mundo tomak atu moditika ita nia moris, liu-liu konaba ita nia bee mosos, no tenke mos organizei no atu tau matan”. Pe. Chico hakle’an liu tan katal natureza hametin ita nia moris, no parte be’e tende hetan atensuau makas liu tan tamba numb-dansu kla-nima.

Tuir observasaun Ekipa Rama Atauro, komunidade nebe’e partisipa iha neba fo rekomendasuau lubuk kon-a ba papel no responsabilidade GMF ne’ebe la funcionar tuir regulamentu hul-si Tana Bandu ne’ebe mak implementa iha Dezembro, tinan kotuk. Iha enkontrou ne’e, partisipante sira deside katak GMF sei hala’o enkontru tuir mai hodhi bele implementa didiak ninia fun-
suau no garante sistembe’e mos ba komunidade raski bele la’o diak. (Ands, Neca, Tanety)

Vila partisipa iha kompetisaun LOS

Sub-Distrito Atauro, liu husi Suku Vila Mau-Medi, hetan opportunidade aitu tuir kompetisaun sukhu hamutuk ho suku 31 nebe hola parte ba Distrito Dili, ho nia lema suku LOS, katak “Limpo, Organizado, Saudavel”.

Komisaun organiza’i ba kompetisaun mak membros husi konselho do suku Vila tomak, inklui mos autoridade local no NGO balu. Programa nebe komisaun prepara mak hanesan, hamos estrada no baletha, hamos ida-idai nia uma, hamos haris fatin, sintinta, be dalan, tanki nst. Xefe komisaun organiza’i Simao Cabeças apela ba komunidade suku Vila katak “ita tenki fo liman ba malu atu servisu hamutuk, se komisaun mesak deti sei la halo buat ida”. Komisaun ne’e trasa iha programa no horario sevisu no sosialisasi ho komunidade.

Haktuir komunidade balan katak, kompetisaun ne hanesan opportunidade diak atu konsensialia no fo motivasaun oinsa bele moris iha ambiente ida ke limpo, organizado no saudavel. (Mesharen)
Loron aban háhú ohin’/ “O amanhã começa hoje”/ “Tomorrow begins today”

Rama Ataúro
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Rama Ataúro 74


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