

## Corporate Communication in Peculiar Environments: Reflections on Dialogues in Mediated and Mediator Landscapes

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## Abstract

The command of contextual elements where face-to-face interactions take place may facilitate the planning and execution of corporate communication programs and actions. This differential tends to be more pronounced in environments that are considered peculiar, such as the Pantanal and Amazon biomes, where technological appeal is less evident. Enterprises that operate in such places and link their missions with the territory can exploit face-to-face communication in a professional and strategic way, which in Brazil is still little explored in the communication field. This article invests in the identification of mediations imposed by this kind of environment and analyzes the way in which these scenarios are built and mediated by the media.

## Keywords

Corporate communication; Face-to-face communication; Pantanal.

## Introduction

Corporate communication work in enterprises installed in urban centers have been continuously explored by scientists in that field. Case studies of communications practices in these enterprises have provided subsidies to the theoretical development in the field of corporate public relations and communications: a good example is the growing number of publications involving the use of social media by organizations – one kind of communication which is well spread especially among urban publics.

However, there are other nuances of corporate communication that are yet little explored by academic research. Face-to-face contacts in peculiar environments – where, in essence, urban and rural landscapes are brought together – are short of deeper theoretical knowledge. This is the case of work developed by communication teams of enterprises that operate in biomes such as the Pantanal and the Amazon, whose missions are tied to physical space. Settings in these cases are more than just a simple workplace for such professionals. They impose specific issues on the communicator's routine that deserve some reflection – due to how circumstances are mediated by the media as well as to its particular mediating instances. Better explained: activities related to corporate communication in regions with rich biodiversity such as the Pantanal and the Amazon are under a double mediating bias, i.e., the previous knowledge that the involved interlocutors accumulated about the territory they have not yet visited and the mediating role of the landscape itself which bears upon the interactions that occur in these environments.

The aim of this article is to identify some mediations that characterize the Pantanal as a peculiar landscape which relates to the corporate communication work developed in this region. The experience of this author in this environment allowed observing singular situations which eventually are repeated in other landscapes with rich biodiversity, such as the Amazon. The perception of other researchers about the environment/communication relationship involving the Amazon is reclaimed in this study.

The two biomes are marked as mediating instances of dialogues that take place within their geographic boundaries. Specifically in the case of the Pantanal it was observed that the landscape itself conditions the content and form of face-to-face communication that takes place there. This sort of interaction – highly valued in that locality – has strategic potential for corporate communication yet lacks theoretical knowledge that can guide and optimize its development.

This research begins with a description of the immersion methodology, which is contemplated not only in communication science, but especially by theoreticians of geography in their studies of landscapes; it presents theoretical foundations, highlighting authors who conceptualize mediations, corporate communication and face-to-face communication; it advances into a brief contextualization of collective imagery built by the media in regard to the Pantanal; it identifies mediating instances of face-to-face communication in the Pantanal, based on observations made during immersion; and it concludes that environmental conditions and its mediations need to be adequately known and explored by corporate communication carried out in these localities<sup>1</sup>.

## Immersion methodology: landscapes and shared experiences

As a result of its transdisciplinary character, communication often seeks other sciences in search of contributions that help to explore communicational phenomena. Sociology, linguistics, social psychology, philosophy and other disciplines are commonly deployed by communication scholars. Studies undertaken in the field of geography may also cooperate in this regard.

It is from this latter area of knowledge that aggregating notions about the concept of landscape arise - which must be understood in its rural and urban dimensions. Authors of this discipline point out that research on a given geographic space cannot do without immersion. In the field of communication this same methodology seems adequate for some studies on the perception of mediations.

"Why study the meanings of landscapes? Because they reveal values and conceptions of the world, personal experiences and historical processes that are far beyond the form apprehended by the more immediate sight" ponders Sakaguti Junior (2010, p. 20). The author explains that the idea of landscape should not be restricted to the panoramic view or the visual set of a certain place. He joins a line of geography that interweaves landscapes with culture, a very promising connection for the research of the mediating aspects inherent to physical spaces.

Also a representative of this line, Sandeville Junior (2004) links landscape to experience, discourages studies made exclusively by indirect means, such as images and cartography, and advocates transdisciplinary looks for the

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the reflections developed in this article are in "The role of face-to-face communication in the context of organizations of mediatized society", a doctoral dissertation presented by this author on February, 2016 at Universidade Metodista de São Paulo (São Paulo Methodist University).

understanding of places. According to that geographer, due to their nature, immersion stands as a methodology capable of producing meanings for the knowledge of landscapes. Sandeville Junior warns that in the following citation 'common' must be understood both as 'ordinary' and 'collective'.

The sense of a landscape cannot be given only by the theoretical and existential universe of the observer, at the risk of a stereotype. In fact, the landscape is more intensely revealed from the people who have a common experience in it (SANDEVILLE JUNIOR, 2004, p. 3).

The idea of shared experience for the understanding of landscapes reveals itself as fitting to decipher the mediation processes that involve the physical environment. For Sandeville Junior (2004, p. 4), immersion becomes valid even for territories that are not inhabited by humans, "because it will reveal aspects that cannot be perceived indirectly through databases or instrument readings."

Basically, I am referring to the need for direct contact, not only at the rudimentary level of visual perception of the objects that are in the landscape, since they by themselves do not shape the landscape. This contact must put human experience in evidence. It is about recognizing the landscape in its aesthetic dimension, not of plastic beauty (formal arrangement) or of utility (functional adequacy), but of a sensorial experience, which is the way we use the term aesthetics here. Landscape is a human experience. It poses a challenge, therefore, towards a relation of alterity and outgoing, of revision of assumptions, where we are immensely renewed by this experience, that is, if one constructs the meaning of a shared landscape (SANDEVILLE JUNIOR, 2004, p. 4).

Sandeville Junior's methodological proposal goes beyond the concerns of geography and provides support for interesting discoveries in the field of communication. If the physical space is recognized as a human experience and if the mediations researched herein have their essence linked to live experience, then displacement and immersion appear as viable alternatives for the study of mediating instances in communicational processes. They tend to allow other types of observations.

The author reinforces the importance of this methodology by means of an example similar to those provided by French sociologist Louis Quéré (2010) on experiences. For this latter author, the subject will only know exactly what an apple is when it is tried (no matter how well descriptions indicate its color, texture, taste and dimensions). Similarly, Sandeville Junior (2004) suggests that landscapes can only be understood if they are experienced live and if there is involvement.

According to Sakaguti Junior (2010), the bonds established with the physical space are responsible for the construction of special meanings attributed to it. In notably urban environments, where the majority of the population lives, mediations

seem less noticeable because they are incorporated into everyday life. When displacement of urban actors to a rural environment occurs, then "estrangement" arises as reported by Bianchi (2011, p. 134):

Urban daily life experience is very different from what is experienced in a rural context, temporalities are different, there are other ways of looking at work, relationships and, in many cases, of relating to the media. It is certainly a relationship of lived "estrangement," in which are present rituals and experiences with which one is not accustomed.

Thus, the contrasts between urban and rural persist as distinctive elements of spatial mediations and will be addressed in more depth later herein. Another relevant mediation that assumes a leading role in the construction of imageries is the one produced by the media and that, in mediatized society<sup>2</sup>, establishes itself as hegemonic. In this sense, some scholars - usually knowledgeable of other realities - are beginning to question the coherence between the places as presented by the media and the real places.

Therefore, the individual who knows spaces such as Pantanal and the Amazon exclusively by visual images made available by the media will have a different conception from one who moves to the region, opens fence gates, shakes in trucks or horseback and feels the temperature and the smell of the place. This guy builds another kind of imagination and will certainly come back from these places with a different repertoire and renewed experiences, since he will have undergone other mediations. This reasoning seeks to support the choice of immersion methodology as a privileged way of observing communication phenomena, especially those related to the conditioning provided by physical space. It is worth remembering that the elaboration of this study was only possible due to immersion in the evaluated environment, in its urban and rural dimensions. Bibliographic research complements the methodology.

## Less connected corporate communication

"No organization can escape today the impacts caused by new technologies. Non-adaptation may lead it to become obsolete and stagnant," predicted Kunsch (2003, p. 261) as early as at the beginning of the century. In fact, corporate communication depends on the use of technologies for its routines, planning,

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<sup>2</sup> According to Martino (2012, p. 222), "broadly speaking, mediatization can be understood as the set of transformations occurring in contemporary society related to the development of electronic and virtual means of communication." This definition can be considered very simplistic, since the phenomenon of mediatization does not begin with the appearance of electronic and digital media. However, the understanding that the process of social transformation has been furthered and accelerated from them it is acceptable. This discussion advances in the doctoral dissertation cited above.

contacts, analysis of results, etc. This dependence, however, does not mean abandoning more conventional and less connected forms of human interaction, such as face-to-face dialogues. It is not uncommon to witness in organizations people "talking" through technical devices despite sharing the same physical space.

In relation to the context, it must be considered that communication in organizations, as well as in society, suffers all the impacts caused by the digital revolution. Consequently, the way to produce and convey organizational messages is also undergoing profound transformations. This new dynamics of information processing and communication in the digital age completely changes the forms of relationship and the way to produce communication (KUNSCH, 2010, p. 54).

This reality has attracted the attention of some researchers in the area, such as Martins (2012) and Kunsch herself. In addressing interpersonal communication - which manifests itself through verbal and nonverbal exchanges - the latter author considers it to be "singular, irreplaceable, interdependent and intrinsically compensatory", in addition to observing that "organizations in general cultivate it scantily or even avoid enabling an environment conducive to truly qualitative interpersonal relationships in everyday work relationships" (KUNSCH, 2010, p. 56).

Martins (2012), on the other hand, is also following the phenomenon and directs her research to the strategic use of orality in organizational communication. In this author's view, the option for face-to-face communication determines a differential for the management of corporate communication.

The presence of technology in internal and external processes is well placed and received, yet human issues are those that need to urgently have a role in the higher levels of managerial discussion - and this may be possible from a dialogic approach between academia and the labor market (MARTINS, 2012, p. 218).

For her, communication is justified by the need to establish relationships and, even within the organizational context, interlocutors seek human relations. In this aspect, face-to-face communication theoreticians point out that the intermediation of contacts by means of technical objects leads to an impersonal tone in interactions.

Schutz (1979), for example, conceives the world structured in terms of actual reach, that is, of here and now. Although this perspective does not coincide with the mediatized world, which retains another type of structuring, the author's contribution is expressive for the constitution of the concept in question, especially by associating indirect knowledge with impersonality and the need for inferences - which are not always plausible.

The researcher treats in person contact as "relationship of Us", a situation

that requires participants to "orient themselves to You" – different from the mediated communication in which the orientation is to Them. However, the author's major contributions to the concept of face-to-face communication are the ingredients that he considers indispensable for the relationship of Us to in fact materialize. They are: a common language, capable of allowing the interpretation of shared meanings; the reciprocity of motivations and the discovery of the motives of the person with which one interacts; a similar system of relevancy among the actors; and, in particular, the attention given during the meeting, since "the participant must become intentionally aware of the person confronting him" (SCHUTZ, 1979, p. 181).

Another concept that needs to be addressed before moving on is mediation. Surrounded by inaccuracies and mistrust, it can be considered complex because it involves elements that surround the communicational process. In the Latin-American conception mediation represents the process of negotiation of meanings that involves the reception of messages, based on the cultural elements of the societies where it occurs. Physical space, as an integral part of the context in which face-to-face communication develops, manifests its mediating role, conditioning the conduct of emitters and receivers.

For Martin Serrano (2010), the forerunner of Social Mediation Theory, the media (he studied television) exerts a mediating power before the audience by restricting the codes of interpretation of content transmitted through messages, not the message selection process itself.

According to this hypothesis, the Mediator will be able to control the world view offered to the television audience without the need to explicitly declare value judgments. [...] There would be a correspondence between the social value judgments - by which the Mediator achieves control - and the logical relations by means of which the medium encodes the messages (MARTIN SERRANO, 2010, p. 6, own translation).

The Spanish researcher defines mediation as "the activity of social control that imposes limits on what could be said, and to the ways of saying it, by means of a system of order" (MARTIN SERRANO, 1976, p. 180, own translation). This reasoning also applies to understand the mediating role of physical spaces. A room, a landscape, a boat - in and of themselves - do not impose restrictions on the behavior of those who occupy them. However, it is known that there are social rules (codes) that provide for certain types of conduct for each environment. This conception is fundamental to understand how and why some spaces end up formatting the face-to-face communication that develops in them.



## The media and the construction of the imagery about peculiar regions

In didactic and scientific publications, the Brazilian Pantanal is described as a floodplain where the flood and drought regime regulates environmental conditions, favoring the conservation of biodiversity. In the media, specifically in journalistic framing, the same region has been presented as a sanctuary or ecological paradise, highlighting the scenic beauty formed by extensive green areas interspersed with small ponds and inhabited by wildlife. The fictional framing, by its turn, reveals a mysterious Pantanal, at the same time tranquil and tranquilizer, a set for innocent romances lived by rustic and remarkable characters.

The different mediations around this landscape are thus manifested as cuts that direct visibility and perception about the environment. The likelihood present or absent in these discourses is not under discussion; what this section intends to identify are the different perspectives of description of the same geographic space, which establish themselves as references in the collective imagery, to the point of conditioning any type of actions developed in that territory, whether they are daily or exceptional.

The linkage of "different" environments to a mythical conception - such as that which supports the idea of an ecological sanctuary -, built by the media discourse, is not a recent phenomenon. Schettino (2013), when studying both the mythical and the real Amazon, uses literary fiction to uncover the mediated descriptions of the space. His research cites works such as the novelist Gastão Cruls, who in 1925 wrote *A Amazônia Misteriosa* (The Mysterious Amazon) and, five years later, *A Amazônia que Eu Vi* (The Amazon that I Saw), recounting, respectively, the imagined and lived environment.

Also in 1930, Ferreira de Castro, a Portuguese writer who lived during four years in the Amazon forest, published *A Selva* [The Jungle], a work of fiction set in that territory. Finally, Schettino (2013) mentions Euclides da Cunha, author of *Um Paraíso Perdido – ensaios, estudos e pronunciamentos sobre a Amazônia* (A Paradise Lost - essays, studies and pronouncements on the Amazon), a collection of texts produced from an expedition to that region in 1904, launched in the 1990s. According to Schettino (2013, p. 11),

comic books, which are easy to read and readily apprehended, movies and TV soap operas deal with building peoples' imagery, regardless of differences in culture, nationality or capacity to abstract required by the symbolic imperviousness of words. The two Amazons lie forever confounded in the profusion of films and teleplays

produced throughout the century just as it is no longer possible to distinguish truth from fiction.<sup>3</sup>

The bias towards the heavenly that infuses the media coverage of the Amazon is also the subject of a study by Dutra (2001, p. 2), for whom the media reproduces or transforms old stereotyped visions, "especially those that portray the Amazon as a paradisiac place and, contradictorily, at the same time inhospitable, in which the physical exuberance of nature and human invisibility coexist".

The stereotypes to which Dutra refers also feed much of the contemporary journalistic and fictional narrative about the Pantanal. It is not the case to condemn these imaginary constructions, since they fulfill a discursive function. As Lippmann puts it (2010, p. 92), "renouncing all stereotypes in favor of a completely innocent approach to reality would impoverish human life."

The mythical perception of the Pantanal has been fostered by the media, especially through the mediation of fictional products. According to Maio (2009, p. 217), "until the 1980s the population of the rest of the country knew less about it through the media than from schoolbooks and textbooks used in geography classes". The media's own access to the region was difficult, which prevented regular journalistic coverage.

This picture begins to change as of an intervention by the extinct TV Manchete. The Pantanal soap opera, first shown on this network in 1990, presents to the country an unknown, strange, mysterious and mythical region, adopting an innovative narrative for the time.

Suddenly, a soap opera appears that clearly draws away from standards. It brings another pace, another time, another rhythm, admittedly slower, with longer contemplative takes, focusing more on landscapes than on characters, with a more elaborate plastic treatment and a marked presence of music (MACHADO; BECKER, 2008, p. 12).

The success of this soap opera shook the prime-time monopoly of the largest open TV station in Brazil, Rede Globo. Written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa and directed by Jayme Monjardim, it had a simple plot: the love story between Juma Marruá, a *pantaneira* [a woman from the Pantanal] known for turning into a jaguar when irritated, and Jove, an urban young man who lived with his mother in Rio and then decides to travel to the Pantanal to live with his father, the farmer José

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<sup>3</sup> Concepts such as "truth" and "real" should be taken in their subjectivity in regard to which a philosophic discussion would be fitting. This study, however, will not delve deeper into this debate, but just try to draw attention to the relativity of these definitions.

Leôncio. There he meets Juma and the romance begins. The main role, however, was Nature's.

According to Balogh (2002, p. 142), "with regard to the exploration of space, the choice of the Pantanal as a location was of rare aptness: few spaces would lead us so vehemently to the 'lost paradise' myth." The play was repeated on two other occasions: in 1991 by TV Manchete itself and in 2008 by SBT (Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão - Brazilian Television System).

For Machado and Becker (2008), the soap opera transferred to the imagery of viewers a poetic and Eden-like discourse on the biome. The ethos of the place is strongly evidenced in the testimony presented to Becker by actress Cristiana Oliveira, who played the character Juma Marruá (Figure 1):

The day I arrived in the Pantanal I wanted to cry. Because the shock is absurd. The shock of the urban milieu with that wild thing, you know? It's too big and you feel that small. You see how insignificant you are. The Pantanal is now my second home. I felt this need to improve as a person, to develop myself as a human being. I learn. At this whole distance I'm having, I learn to value many things. Things I did not value because they were all day by my side, you know? Now I value that (MACHADO; BECKER, 2008, p. 54).

This "shock" to which the actress refers can also reflect the rupture between the idealized Pantanal that composed her personal repertoire before the visit and the experience in that space during the filming period. In fact, there are no striking inconsistencies between the atmosphere displayed by the soap opera and reality. "A work of fiction can have almost any degree of fidelity, and as long as the degree of fidelity can be taken into account, fiction is not misleading" (LIPPMAN, 2010, p. 30). However, the fictional perspective and the television production itself are configured as mediations and restrict the possibilities of interpretation, as advocated by Martin Serrano (2010).

Figure 1 Actress Cristiana Oliveira in the role of Juma Marruá



Source: UOL Celebridades<sup>4</sup>

Another fictional piece that follows in part the same formula of the soap opera is the film *Cabeça a Prêmio* (Head at Prize), released in 2009 and directed by Marco Ricca. Despite being included in the crime genre, the plot unfolds in the border region of the Brazilian Pantanal and is characterized by "a mixture of acclimatization to an inhospitable and unknown environment and a great tranquility in the conduct of its narrative" (VALENTE, 2009).

The poetic style of narrative of the soap opera and the film seems to have migrated to non-fictional media products, such as journalistic articles and documentaries, and persists until the present time. The most contemplated news sections in national coverage are related to the environment, science and tourism, with content very close to fiction - on TV it is common to display programs accompanied by instrumental or regional soundtracks illustrating the images of beautiful landscapes.

The cultural characteristics that delimit that space and technological development as a differential for the support of the local economy are some of the approaches absent or little explored by big-circulation journalism in the coverage of the Pantanal. Some silences are also observed by Dutra (2001, p. 2) in relation to the Amazon. "Alongside an urban and modern Amazon, there are other singular amazons with specific characteristics that make them frequent items on the media, especially television."

The prioritization of the "exotic" reinforces the discourse of immutability, perpetuating the ecological havens and inhospitable environments stereotype for both the Amazon and the Pantanal. The notions of modernity, urbanity and development always sound strange to the consumer of symbolic goods who do not have the opportunity to travel to these territories.

## Distinguishing mediating features of the Pantanal

Some distinctive characteristics of the Pantanal plain function as mediating instances of the interactions developed in that environment. One of them is rurality itself, which has been interrelated with temporal perception by Bianchi (2011) and other authors. In this way, the rurality / temporality binomial distinguishes a mediation that affects spatial properties.

The different temporalities inscribed in the daily life of those who live in rural areas are negotiated and become a unique time, where work,

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<sup>4</sup> Available at <http://celebridades.uol.com.br/album/2013/10/09/veja-fotos-da-atriz-cristiana-oliveira.htm#fotoNav=3>. Accessed on Aug. 23, 2016.

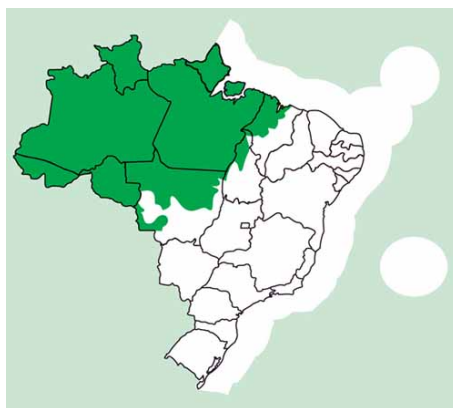
family and rest time are inserted and where the media also enters into negotiation. The existence of those who live in the countryside is constantly marked by the time to sow, time to harvest, time to fertilize, time of sun, time of rainy weather, time of work, time for home, media time. All these times present an individual existence, yet it is their junction and relationships that establish the lifetime of the fellow living in the countryside (BIANCHI, 2011, p. 140).

In urbanity, the temporal parameters also characterize the way of life, however, they are elaborated from other scales: time of congestion, time in waiting queue, length of the cinema session, overtime worked, time of download, date of credit card deadline, among others. The intervention of time as an element of space configuration is similar: they change the variables. In addition, the scarcity of dwellers in rural land contributes to a sense of monotony. "The panoramic views seem static, creating a sense of immobility and unchangeability over time. The impression is that they would continue to be as they are for a long time" (SAKAGUTI JUNIOR, 2010, p. 116).

When guests from urban areas visit rural areas, such as the Pantanal or the Amazon (located in the extreme north of Brazil, see Figure 2), they encounter this differentiated temporal mechanism and develop adaptation or misalignment reactions to it. The presence of mass communication transmitters, such as television and radio, partially attenuates the feeling of isolation / estrangement. The internet connection is gradually occupying these spaces, ensuring greater familiarity with the place.

If the panoramic view conveys the sense of immutability, in the Pantanal it is also associated with infinity or absence of limits. The very location of the biome (Figure 3) - distant from the great economic centers of the country – contributes to this perception. With an area of approximately 140 thousand square kilometers, the plain is spread over two Brazilian states: Mato Grosso (35%) and Mato Grosso do Sul (65%).

Figure 2 Map with the location of the Amazon



Source: Probio Educação Ambiental<sup>5</sup>

About 1,400 kilometers separates, for example, the cities of São Paulo and Corumbá, in the Mato Grosso do Sul portion of the Pantanal, a distance that, when traversed, evokes the notion of the country's territorial vastness. Apart from the perception of the distance and the extension of the Pantanal, the simple fact of living in that space seems to impress certain characteristics on inhabitants:

Figure 3 Map with the location of the Pantanal in Brazil



Source: Embrapa Pantanal/Geoprocessamento

Although each environment or ecosystem can affect people differently, there is probably a general effect that causes practically the same reactions in all those who go there. Whoever spends a lot of time at sea, for example, is more exposed to certain feelings - and most people feel precisely those same "certain feelings"; those who live in the Pantanal tend to speak tamely, be suspicious and, at the same time, supportive; the fellow who lives in the Amazon rainforest has a different nature from that who lives in the Atlantic forest (MORAES, 2014).<sup>6</sup>

There is a distinctive characteristic of that natural view that refers to the absence of limits, also perceived by poet Manoel de Barros when describing that "in the Pantanal you cannot pass a ruler. Notably when it rains. The ruler is the existence of limit. And the Pantanal has no limits" (BARROS, 1997, p. 29). This sensation relates to the wide areas of flat, continuous land, comparable to the sea (Figure 4).

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <http://www.ecoa.unb.br/probioea/guia/index.php/amazonia/75-amazonia>. Accessed on Aug. 23, 2016

<sup>6</sup> The contributions of socioeconomist André Steffens Moraes, a former researcher from Embrapa Pantanal, a former seaman and current researcher at Embrapa Soja (Londrina-PR), were incorporated into this research due to the perspicacity of his personal impressions on the Pantanal landscape, elaborated over the years during which he frequented that ecosystem. I am thankful for this rich collaboration.

There is a real and effective limit to the landscape, but by some feature of the environment we have the impression that there are no limits, that the landscape has no end, that there are no horizons, etc., and that impression is thereafter permanent. For example: in the open sea where wherever you look you can only see sea and sky which get mixed up as a continuous and constant horizon; mainly after several days at sea and without seeing land. This type of sensation also occurs in the Pantanal, because the landscape, although multivariate, always seems to be the same; one has the impression that there is no limit; one has the impression that there is no horizon (MORAES, 2014).

The perception of the lack of horizons or limits is imposed as a physical and psychological element of interference during face-to-face interactions. There are substantial differences between talking in open, broad and indefinite surroundings and a dialogue delimited by walls. The sensations that can be associated with face-to-face communication in the Pantanal are diverse and unpredictable, and may include lack of control, loss of references, excessive informality, lack of protection, concreteness, concentration or determination, among many others. The description of the actress Cristiana Oliveira can also be recovered, particularly when she mentions feeling small before the immensity of the space. This projection before the environment is reflected in some way in the conversations developed there.

Figure 4 Area of the Pantanal plain: enlarged horizon



Source: Private collection

The discussion about physical space also raises the debate about the public and the private, since the Pantanal can be considered hybrid: the farms are private properties, owned by a natural or legal person, and the Pantanal, insofar as being a biosphere reserve, is a territory of public interest. Research conducted by Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (Embrapa) indicates that 95% of the plains are occupied by private properties.

The physical presence in the region will be governed, therefore, by mixed occupation codes. Visitors and hosts can observe in the landscapes the overlap of interests: the public seeking the preservation of the territory and the private trying to increase the profits from the economic use of the place. This apparent confrontation, until now, is reasonably balanced due to the concept of sustainable development being operative. The harmonious coexistence between the ox and the wild species is held as an example of this balance. This circumstance also manifests its mediating role, since the dialogues in that territory routinely touch on the question of sustainability

Closeness between interlocutors and wild animals is another factor that often bears on interactions. Scenic beauty and biodiversity, in general, enthrall visitors, who also see many oxen, since beef cattle is the activity that has best adapted to the region. The vegetation and the waters that accumulate in bays and *corixos*<sup>7</sup> complete the visual.

Given the unpredictability with which animals can approach humans, the dialogues in the field are likely to be interrupted for contemplation or even for moving toward safer areas. It is observed that the presence of fauna causes some types of sensations, such as dread, anxiety, curiosity, apprehension, fear, etc. Invariably, animals are themes of conversations that take place in the Pantanal.

Other mediating elements present themselves as characteristic of that place. The welcoming manner of the inhabitants of the region is one of them. Although distrustful, as indicated earlier, the *pantaneiro* is distinguished by hospitality and solidarity. The cultural habits of this population - among them the *tereré*<sup>8</sup> rounds, the *moda de viola* (a typical music style played with a special local guitar) and storytelling - invite the visitor to integrate into the environment, a behavior reinforced by the still precarious access to information technologies. The phenomenon of mediatization, however, tends to alter this daily life, imposing other types of mediations.

## Final considerations

Some conditions present in the physical spaces seem, in fact, to condition the development of face-to-face communication, particularly the pre-established codes that determine conducts during the use and occupation of places. Social rules define typical behaviors for certain environments, such as remaining silent during a movie session, worship at a religious temple, or a lecture in an auditorium; whereas

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<sup>7</sup> Corixos are rivulets that form during the rainy season and flow into bigger rivers.

<sup>8</sup> A beverage similar to *chimarrão*, but made with cold water.



demonstrations of effusiveness are expected and welcome in a football match, inside a stadium. Cordial dialogues are planned in offices and similar work environments; screaming, running and joking appear as usual habits in the school yard during class intervals of a child education unit.

As shown in the theoretical foundations, the contexts where face-to-face interactions develop impose different degrees of constraints. It is likely that environments with concrete and artificial physical barriers, such as interior and exterior walls or counters, will establish more limiting – yet safer – conditions for communication. The environment seen as an obstacle may justify a more palpable perception of the compelling potential of some installations. On the other hand, spaces inserted in nature may appear as more relaxing and less formal scenarios, where possible tensions during the dialogues would be contained by the landscape's own intervention. It is advisable to expand the set of sites studied to establish these relationships more solidly.

In this article it was possible to observe that the physical environments – and their mediating codes – induce certain behaviors and attitudes. However, it is also noticeable that the physical space, in itself, has a limited impact on conducts. The forms of face-to-face interaction are determined by an articulated collection of contextual elements, such as the environment, social rules and customs, the type of relationship between interlocutors, time, and so on.

The discussion about the mediating functions of physical spaces raises a vigorous debate regarding the intensification of the process of mediatization in society as a whole and in some geographical spaces in particular. The work of corporate communication developed in regions considered exotic must take into account the evolution of this process. The knowledge of the mediating instances of these environments will be acquired, to a large extent, through trial and error, since the research in communication about these contextual conditions is incipient.

The discussion developed in these pages points to the centrality of the human being inserted in a social context, bound by mediations and experiences. Researchers who venture through this area face at least two compelling challenges: the complexity of articulating the mediating aspects of the context and the impossibility of reproducing the sensations felt during the experiences (CARDOSO FILHO, 2008; QUÉRÉ, 2010; WOLTON, 2004).

Hence the relevance of methodologies such as immersion, pointed as a way to explore the geographic space by Sandeville Junior (2004) and Sakaguti Junior (2010). Even knowing the difficulties that he will face in trying to scientifically describe his experience in a particular place, the researcher who opts for live experience will acquire a unique and indispensable knowledge if he wants, in fact,

to unravel the mediating role of the environments in the communicational processes.

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