ARTICLE

ENGAGEMENT, DELIBERATION AND INFORMATION: HOW STUDENTS THINK ABOUT DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT: This work sought to understand the how high school students in a public school in Porto Alegre (RS) understand the concept of democracy. The premise of this objective is that understanding democracy is necessary to engage effectively in civic society and that this could also show how education can affect public life in this context. This is a qualitative and exploratory study and is part of a larger piece of research. A school was contacted in May 2018, and 197 high school students participated in the survey. The article will present the results of the analysis of the students' answers to the question "What is democracy?". Thematic Analysis was used as the method. Five thematic axes were generated, based on the responses of the participants, in which their ideas about democracy seem to show a significant lack of interest in the subject of democracy. It is argued that, despite the many resources available to promote it nowadays and clear pro-democracy postures being taken, the biggest barrier to its effective exercise in public life may still be the lack of opportunities to be politically active, by providing more information and defending the values of democracy.We lack, therefore, support from institutions for an aspect that has been clearly evidenced to be indispensable, according to the academic literature: political education. It is argued that the most deficient aspect in achieving active youth citizenship is ensuring that they do have the opportunity to develop their understanding, and this must take place within schools..

Keywords: citizenship; civic engagement; youth; school; education.

ENGAJAMENTO, DELIBERAÇÃO E INFORMAÇÃO: COMO OS ESTUDANTES PENSAM A DEMOCRACIA[1]

RESUMO: Este trabalho buscou compreender a forma que jovens do Ensino Médio de uma escola pública em Porto Alegre (RS) compreendem o conceito da democracia, partindo da premissa de que esta noção é necessária para o engajamento cívico efetivo e serve de indicativo dos efeitos da educação para

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a vida pública que tem ocorrido em nosso contexto. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa e exploratória, fruto de uma pesquisa maior. Uma escola foi contatada em maio de 2018, e participaram da pesquisa 197 estudantes de Ensino Médio. Serão apresentados os resultados da análise das respostas dos estudantes para a pergunta: "O que é democracia?". Como método de análise, foi utilizado o método de Análise Temática. A partir das respostas dos participantes, foram constituídos cinco eixos temáticos, que demonstram que as ideias sobre democracia parecem evidenciar um importante distanciamento do tema da democracia. Discute-se que, mesmo com diversos recursos de mobilização na atualidade e de posturas pró-democracia, a barreira maior para um exercício efetivo da vida pública possa ser a oferta da oportunidade de instrumentalizar-se politicamente, através de maiores informações e a defesa dos valores desta. Carecemos, portanto, de garantias institucionais no aspecto mais defendido como indispensável pela literatura acadêmica: a garantia de sermos educados politicamente. Defende-se que o aspecto mais deficitário para a cidadania jovem ativa seja a garantia de espaços formais para que esta possa ser construída, e que isso deve ocorrer dentro das escolas.

Palavras-chave: cidadania; engajamento cívico; juventude; escola; educação.

PARTICIPACIÓN, DELIBERACIÓN E INFORMACIÓN: CÓMO PIENSAN LOS ESTUDIANTES SOBRE LA DEMOCRACIA

RESUMEN: Este trabajo buscó comprender la forma en que los estudiantes de secundaria de una escuela pública de Porto Alegre (RS) entienden el concepto de democracia, a partir de la premisa de que esta noción es necesaria para un compromiso cívico efectivo y sirve como indicador de los efectos de la educación. para la vida pública que ha tenido lugar en nuestro contexto. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo y exploratorio, resultado de una investigación más amplia. Se contactó con una escuela en mayo de 2018 y 197 estudiantes de secundaria participaron en la encuesta. Se presentarán los resultados del análisis de las respuestas de los estudiantes a la pregunta: "¿Qué es la democracia?". Como método de análisis se utilizó el de Análisis Temático. Con base en las respuestas de los participantes, se construyeron cinco ejes temáticos, que demuestran que las ideas sobre la democracia parecen mostrar una distancia importante con el tema de la democracia. Se argumenta que incluso con varios recursos de movilización en la actualidad y posturas a favor de la democracia, la mayor barrera para un ejercicio efectivo de la vida pública puede ser el ofrecimiento de la oportunidad de instrumentalizarse políticamente, a través de más información y la defensa de los valores de la ciudadanía. Por lo tanto, carecemos de garantías institucionales en el aspecto más defendido como indispensable por la literatura académica: la garantía de ser educados políticamente. Se argumenta que el aspecto más deficiente para la ciudadanía juvenil activa es la garantía de espacios formales para que pueda construirse, y que esto debe ocurrir dentro de las escuelas.

Palabras clave: ciudadanía; compromiso civil; juventud; escuela; educación.

INTRODUCTION

After a civil-military dictatorial period of two decades, Brazilian democracy emerged with the synthesis of the Federal Constitution in 1988. It provides the right of access to public policies on health, education and the position of citizens through voting and political manifestations. Therefore, not only access to rights is provided for in the Constitution, but also the participation of Brazilian society through compulsory voting (BECKER and RAVELOSON, 2011; GALSTON, 2001). Democracy is understood as a socio-political organization in which personal rights (consisting of the right to life, for example), political and civil rights (citizen participation in the political life of their community), social and economic rights (guaranteed basic supplies for survival and the right to education itself) are guaranteed. In addition to these rights, the right to suffrage is also guaranteed, with periodicity (with elections always free, egalitarian, with secrecy in the vote and disclosure of the electoral process) (BECKER e RAVELOSON, 2011).

According to Brown (2019), everything else is optional with the exception of political equality, that being the real basis for democracy. Only political equality can ensure that the structuring and exercise of political power is authorised by the whole and with the responsibility of all. In the circumstance where political equality is absent, either through exclusions, political privileges, social and economic disparities, or inequality of information, power is being exercised by one part of the population and consequently the population ceases to govern. Therefore, the author argues that in a society where systematic inequalities exist, the exercise of democracy is not possible, and it is up to the state to act deliberately to reduce inequalities of power so that political life can effectively serve all.

Popular participation in the sphere of politics in the context of democracy has different perspectives in Brazilian academic literature, with more positive views, which point out that the engagement of the Brazilian population, with political agendas of different institutional spheres, continues to occur in non-traditional ways, such as the internet (LUVIZOTTO, 2016). In contrast, less optimistic views defend an important discredit with regard to the political sphere by the population, either by lack of interest, disbelief in change, or even distrust of political representatives (MARCOVITCH, 2018; MESQUITA, BONFIM, PADILHA e SILVA, 2016). This unbelieving position towards politics makes the topic of participation a difficult issue to dissolve, resulting in the lack of involvement of the civic population in the political sphere, actively and responsibly facing the political agendas of their own daily lives. Moreover, the culture of disbelief also serves as a justification for the lack of understanding with regard to public practice itself and the potential of civic engagement for changes in their own community (MARCOVITCH, 2018; BRASIL e COSTA, 2021).

Regarding its potential political function, Brazilian education could be the promoter of common spaces for debates and discussions about the demands of young people and the preparation for their citizenship in adult life. However, almost as a reaction to the dictatorial period, disciplines specifically focused on politics in schools were removed from the curricula. In addition, several political agendas have suffered attempts to ban academic discussions by various private institutions and political representatives, under the argument that some agendas should not be presented to young people because they do not correspond to supposed morals in force, such as the example of the program and bill, currently blocked by the Supreme Federal Court(STF), known as Escola sem Partido (School without Party). (BRASIL e COSTA, 2021).

The current paper assumes that the State's support in reducing social inequalities also needs to occur through civic education. It rests on the premise that the existence of democracy requires explicit efforts to enable the formation of a people capable of engaging in forms of self-government (BROWN, 2019). Therefore, the subject of politics should be introduced in a formal manner and the institution that should take responsibility for this introduction is the school. It is understood that for popular participation to be something viable in social terms, it needs to be pedagogically introduced to the population. However, the term "citizenship" itself presumes active, critical participation and the citizen as the holder of a formal status that recognises his or her belonging to the political community (MOISÉS, 2005).

Individuals need to have knowledge about the functioning of the political sphere at their disposal in order to fulfil their civic role (FINKEL, 2003; FINKEL and ERNST, 2005; MARTINS and BARROS, 2018). The political role of education is fundamental for a democratic society, since there is no real democracy without educated people. Because this topic is not inserted in the school curriculum, it ends up being neglected, since it is not part of a recognized essential knowledge for the Brazilian educational system. The lack of education to understand and act in the democratic political environment is accompanied by a feeling of distrust in relation to the institutions that underpin our democratic system, making its effective functioning even more difficult (BRASIL e COSTA, 2021; SAMPAIO e SIQUEIRA, 2013).

As the aforementioned, the Brazilian distrust the institutions in charge of promoting the well-being of the population is a result of historical and cultural context factors, which shape the Brazilian political culture, which ends up being guided by a negative evaluation of politics. Most young Brazilians have a disbelief in and devaluation of politics and its institutions, since young people associate politics with "corruption", " thievery" and "opportunism". Furthermore, it is observed that young people have a position of indignation and frustration in relation to politics as a whole. Besides such disbelief related to politics and politicians, the complexity of political knowledge and the lack of access to political education are also significant catalysts for the lack of interest of Brazilian young people in relation to politics (BAQUERO, BAQUERO e MORAIS, 2016; BRASIL e COSTA, 2021).

Political education ends up increasing the population's trust in politics and developing discernment skills and critical sense, favoring the legitimacy of democracy (SAMPAIO and SIQUEIRA,2013). In addition, such knowledge has repercussions in greater tolerance with minority social groups, since it generates civic attitudes, which cause greater reciprocity among citizens, facilitating collective actions (SAMPAIO and SIQUEIRA, 2013). Political education results in the intensification of popular participation, in addition to providing citizens with important cognitive skills to communicate their demands to their political representatives (VERBA, SCHLOZMAN and BRADY, 1995). Thus, citizens' political knowledge about the functioning of the political system is essential for them to be able to influence and control the actions of their representatives (STOLLE, 2007).

According to the literature, in the absence of formal institutional space, the substitution ends up being the family reference, at least with regard to the political values of young people (BAQUERO, BAQUERO e MORAIS, 2016). This issue has already been widely criticized since classic authors of political philosophy, such as Hannah Arendt (1954/2007) and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1936/2012). The amalgamation of the family sphere and the political world and, consequently, the undifferentiation of the public and private spheres threaten democracy, according to both authors. Another element that intimates the conditions for the healthy survival of democracy is the growing advocacy of neoliberal order thinking in the West, which attacks the sphere of the social and sees political equality as a supposed threat to the true freedom of socioeconomic growth of citizens. As well as traditional conservative moral norms, which run counter to the political cultivation of a plural and egalitarian common good (BROWN, 2019).

Brazilian young people's civic potential was evident in the 2016 school occupations, the so-called Primavera Secundarista(Secondary School Spring), which had the involvement of students and university occupations, in addition to having the support of teachers from all over the country (JANUÁRIO et al., 2016). After this period, there was a growth in the academic literature, which recorded an optimistic perspective in relation to the relationship that students seemed to establish with school. This contrasts with an idea that the precariousness of the public school structure influenced a perception of non-belonging of students in relation to school and non-bonding with their teachers (MORAES e XIMENES, 2016).

Despite the unsatisfactory structure of the teaching and working conditions, the students maintained a positive relationship with the public school, recognizing it as a fundamental space for learning and sociability, to the point of mobilizing to preserve it (MORAES and XIMENES, 2016). Moreover, they demonstrated an important capacity of political organization and mobilization, which also aroused the admiration of the Brazilian population (JANUÁRIO et. al., 2016). However, studies after this period continue to show indications that the potential civic engagement of young Brazilians may not have had a longitudinally relevant effect (BRASIL and COSTA, 2021). In addition, the youths'

forms of engagement are much more frequently linked to less institutional manifestations, such as the use of online platforms and social networks. In any case, the importance of thinking about the guarantee of spaces for democratic construction seems to direct us to the idea that the school should occupy its social place in the lives of the young population: that of first experience of common space.

Considering the foregoing, this paper aimed to understand how high school students of a public school in Porto Alegre (RS) perceive democracy concept, starting from the premise that such notion is necessary for an effective civic engagement and serves as an indication of the effects of education for public life that has occurred in our context. For this purpose, we will present the results of a broader research on the notions of citizenship and other elements of the political sphere.

It is necessary to mention a specific element of the educational context of the city of Porto Alegre, which has a historical landmark known as the educational policy of the Escola Cidadã (Citizen School), which lasted for almost two decades, until 2004. The proposal was to enhance the relevance of community participation in educational decision-making processes, as well as the participation of schools in guiding the city's investments. However, educational policies after the Popular Administration discontinued this approach, and the Escola Cidadã project was deprived of its character as a socially referential and popular institution. (DE FREITAS, 2020). For this reason, it was thought that the memory of the democratic management of education, of participatory democracy also through the experience of the Orçamento Participativo (Participatory Budget), could be observed in some way in this study. Thus, the crossing of this historical mark can serve as a backdrop to the answers of the participants, possibly evidencing answers that show the importance of engagement and popular participation, since the proposal of the Escola Cidadã was precisely that of active participation in the processes of democratization of the city.

METHOD

This is a qualitative research of exploratory nature, fruit of a larger academic master's research. A public school in Porto Alegre was contacted by convenience criteria, in May 2018. Due to the data collection to be carried out through the application of a questionnaire on an online platform, this school should have a computer room with internet access. The institution requested that the invitation was held for all high school students, to avoid the selection of which students could participate. All participants were informed about the voluntary nature of participation in the research, and all signed the Free and Clarified Consent Term (TCLE). The study followed the guidelines of Resolutions No. 466/12 and No. 510/16 of the Brazilian National Health Council, ensuring the care to be taken in research with human beings. The project of the present study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the UFRGS, under protocol code 57635315.6.0000.5334. Such approval granted the research to offer autonomy to the young participants for the decision to answer the questionnaire without requiring their legal guardians to sign the TCLE. In the same way, the right of the participant to refuse to participate in the study was guaranteed, as well as their withdrawal at any time during the collection of data..

The outcomes of a survey on students' answers to the question "What is democracy?" will be presented. The questionnaire applied also contained other questions about citizenship and aspects related to the public sphere. In this research, the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006a; 2006b) was applied. This material analysis is of a qualitative nature, made with the themes that emerged a posteriori. In the light of the political conceptions and of Critical Social Psychology that will be defended in this work, from the Thematic Analysis method it is sought to identify and interpret patterns found in the data collected, from stages. The stages followed are: familiarization with the data, codification, search of themes, revision of themes, definition and nomination of themes and final report/analysis (BRAUN e CLARKE, 2006b).

After gathering the questions from the 197 participants on the online platform, all answers were tabulated in a spreadsheet. Three judges read the collected material and performed a survey of the most relevant themes in the students' answers. After being discussed the themes initially codified, it was from the agreement of the three judges that the thematic axes presented for analysis in this work were

arrived at. The answers do not necessarily exclude themselves from one thematic axis or another. Occasionally, it was identified that an answer themed in one axis was confused with an answer themed in another axis. Thus, the general analysis, on some occasions, was limited to one axis only. In others, the answers also corresponded to more than one. The authors arbitrarily decided to categorise answers that seemed to be more strongly linked to one or the other axis, even if they corresponded to two different thematic axes.

RESULTS

Five thematic axes were constituted from the answers of the participants to the question "What is democracy? The first axis, called Democracy and Equality, refers to the answers that have the idea that democracy is associated with the theme of equality among all and universality. This axis corresponds to 27 answers in the sample. Whereas the axis Opinion and Freedom refers to a comprehension that democracy is associated to freedom of expression, majority, and corresponded to the frequency of 32 answers of the sample. Conversely, the People Power axis has a more positive view, that a democracy is characterized by the centralization of power in the people, in the whole population, with the frequency of 43 answers in the sample. This axis counted with a subcategory, denominated Majority Power is crossed by the perception that democracy is a system in which the majority wins, since it has the capacity of final choice. It was evidenced in 12 answers. Finally, the axis Voting Power refers to the idea that democracy is marked by the importance of elections and the right to vote, corresponding to 44 answers.

Table 1: Findings based on the thematic axes	
Name	Frequency (%)
Democracy and Equality	27 (13,70%)
Opinion and Freedom	32 (16,24%)
People Power	43 (21,82%)
Majority Power	12 (6,09%)
Voting Power	44 (22,33%)
Total	197

There are 27 answers pertaining to the Democracy and Equality axis, which is equivalent to 13.7% of respondents. This axis includes answers that have the central idea of equality among all, that democracy guarantees a balance of rights and that all are treated equally, regardless of factors such as socioeconomic conditions, race, religion, gender, sexuality etc. Some examples of this axis are: "Democracy is an equal country for all"; "Democracy is a government format in which everyone would have the same rights and would be treated equally"; "It happens when several people have the same level, leaving aside race or the person's salary".

Regarding the concept of "Democracy", 32 respondents referred to the issue of freedom to express themselves, corresponding to 16.24% of the total number of answers. We denominated this thematic group as Opinion and Freedom. This axis focused on the answers that had the idea of freedom of opinion, voice, expression, so that democracy ensures this right without individuals suffering any form of retaliation or oppression. For example: "It is to be able to have a free voice, to give one's opinion without being oppressed"; "The right of each person to express their will and opinion"; "It would be above all the freedom of expression as a whole, assuring us the freedom to expose our opinions about people and authorities without fear of retaliation".

On being asked what a democracy is, 43 respondents (21.82%) used the literal meaning of the word, defining it as the power/government of the people. The axis in question was named People Power. This idea involves a concept of sovereignty of the people, a government whose power is centralized in the population itself. Examples of this axis are: "It is when the choice power is in the hands, not of a single person or a single group, but of the whole population"; "Democracy is a form of government in which the people govern"; "Government in which the people exercise sovereignty"; "Democracy is a kind of regime in which the government must listen and follow what the people want".

Still within this grouping, we could evidence a frequent incidence, but of a lower proportion, of answers that encompassed a notion that democracy is a system in which power is in the decision of the majority, so that the interest of the majority of the population will be satisfied. This sub-axis was termed Majority Power and referred to 12 of the respondents (6.09%). For example: "Democracy is the choice of the majority"; "Democracy is a kind of state in which the population votes and the interest of the majority wins"; "Democracy is knowing that the majority wins".

The last grouping was named Voting Power. This axis corresponds to 44 of the collected answers, comprising 22.33% of the total number. This axis covers the idea of the right to vote and the power of elections, so that democracy was defined by these respondents as a system in which power is decided by the vote, the act of electing someone. Examples of this axis consist of: "A system of politics that consists of the election of a candidate by the people"; "System in which the inhabitants vote for their representative according to their interests"; "Democracy is to elect someone through voting".

DISCUSSION

As evidenced in previous works (BAPTISTA, et al., 2018; BRASIL and COSTA, 2021; MESQUITA, BONFIM, PADILHA, and SILVA, 2016), the analysis of the young participants' answers shows that their ideas about democracy are supported in somewhat theoretical and common sense narratives, not seeming to evidence a greater engagement with the subject. This statement is given by the succinct character - even if correct - of the way they elaborate their ideas on this subject. This is not enough for us to state that the young people in this research are not apt for public life and to transit in different spaces that demand civic action, but it seems licit to state that the elaborations in these molds may be evidencing a certain degree of distancing. We may theorize a probable lack of interest or even a certain misinformation, but the findings are not enough for this statement to be sustained. It is worth mentioning that, as a result of a wider research, these participants have already pointed out a certain rejection towards the politics subject, as it is sustained in Brasil and Costa (2021), in which the negative view about the politics agenda would also serve to cover up a certain ignorance about issues related to.

Civic engagement in democratic life can be considered from two interdependent conception ways: the first corresponds to the requirement to understand the functioning of the public space and the political sphere in general, its structure. The second concerns deliberative behaviour, which corresponds to an attitude capable of stimulating deliberative actions among young people and students, ensuring respect, inclusion and efficiency of discursive engagement in conflicts in general. Deliberative capacity is understood as the cognitive tool capable of creating enlightened understandings of problems, mutual comprehension, tolerance and productive participation in conflict resolution at different social levels (BAPTISTA, et al., 2018). Both are necessary acquisitions in order to think about civic participation in a democracy.

Nevertheless, the argument that greater knowledge about democracy is the most decisive factor in citizenship education is more common in the literature on this theme. It is from the amount of information that an individual has about a specific topic on the political agenda that would determine his or her ability to issue opinions and attitudes about politics (ALMEIDA and KREJCI, 2020; FUKS and CASALECCHI, 2018). In this light, Fuks and Casalecchi (2018) advocate that the degree of knowledge argument is limited and should be expanded, adding the notion that there is a need for adherence, too, to the values of democracy. We argue in this paper that the aforementioned three elements are necessary: deliberative capacity, knowledge about democracy and adherence to its values. A competent citizen would be one capable of developing core democratic attitudes, such as political tolerance, support for democracy and elections, and civic participation. On this basis, it seems fair to say that the participants in this study may present at least two of the three pillars for exercising good citizenship - democratic values and the advocacy of deliberative attitudes. Embora tenham apresentado ideias de certa maneira pouco precisas com relação ao conceito de democracia, não podemos excluir a possibilidade de que os entrevistados estejam, em sua maioria, instrumentalizados para a vida democrática.

However, the argument that a certain amount of information is necessary for the exercise of good citizenship should be maintained. We believe that the information factor and the pro-democracy value stance are not effective when they do not exist together, precisely because they are complementary

and interdependent. Regarding the answers of the participants, it is undeniable the fact that the values of equality and freedom are part of the principles of democracy (as it is exposed in the Democracy and Equality axis and the Opinion and Freedom axis). What seems not to be in the same sustainable way is to verify the comprehension degree on the theoretical and fundamental concept of the idea of democracy and the use of these terms. With regard to the first thematic axis, Democracy and Equality, the concept of equality seems to be close to the notion of tolerance and respect, when the defence is about equal social treatment, that people have the "same level" (sic), independently of their socioeconomic circumstances. These are democratic values, but they seem to be expressed in an evasive way. Still thinking about the aforementioned axes, we may question, for example, through which means equal treatment could be defended within a democratic system, or also, in which way expressed opinions are defended. Again, this does not mean that the statements are not correct, but that perhaps we are still far from affirming the existence of a culture of social action on the part of young people.

Thus, the advocacy of equality in a democratic society finds support in Brown's argument (2019), which places social equality, information equality and access to rights as an essential basis for the functioning of a democracy. When the situation of a society presents social inequalities (namely information, housing conditions, health, security and education access), it can already be considered undemocratic. The author states that without these guarantees in absolute form, the population is no longer the one who governs, since power is retained by specific groups; therefore, the defence of the existence of a democracy may be problematic. In this way, the idea of equality proposed by the author is not only present in the answers of young people in the Equality axis, but also in the answers grouped in the People Power axis. There is an obvious connection between these two axes, since the idea of political equality among individuals in a population is necessary so that all individuals may exercise their political power in an equal manner, giving voice to the population as a whole, without discrimination and without favouring a specific section of the population. However, equality also concerns, according to the author, access to politically relevant information for all groups, transparency of political class activity in a satisfactory manner, but mainly the opportunity to empower the population to also evaluate such activities - this aspect is not evident.

On the second axis, the ideas about democracy and freedom of expression may reflect the mark of a period in which censorship was very strong in the country - the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship. But, also, we think that the idea of "expressing oneself" as a resource to combat anti-democratic situations is part of the daily life of these young people, especially if we recognize the events of recent years in the online universe, of social mobilizations that had their start through Internet platforms (DE CARVALHO and SARGENTINI, 2020). According to de Carvalho (2020, p.175), "[the internet and social networks] presented themselves, in that context, with an enormous democratic potential, to the extent that they allowed empowering citizens, sustaining bonds of solidarity and enabling the affirmation of a new forum of deliberation. That is, an autonomous public space, open to the participation of all and broadly representative of the interests of the majority - "we are the 99%", as the Occupy [Wall Street] protesters boasted. According to the author, it was only through online platforms that movements such as the Indignados in Spain, the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street in the United States, the 2013 protests in Brazil could be articulated. We can also add the Black Lives Matter movement, which inspired the Brazilian version entitled Vidas Negras Importam. An association to the idea of guaranteeing democracy through expression seems to have gained strength, thus synthesizing a culture linked to denunciation and mobilization to combat the control of traditional media, reiterating an idea that mobilization to the freedom of exposure of any idea or material is the central tool to combat oppression (DE CARVALHO, 2020).

Political action through social media is relevant and productive, but such action cannot be reduced to it. To be effective, political action needs to be present in the different forms of public and institutional life. Mobilisation in the online universe encounters some barriers that are difficult to overcome, such as the filtering tools used in all virtual environments. This means that social networks themselves cannot be understood as environments endowed with total freedom and authenticity: "there are many programmed actions, many circumstances in which the delegation of voice and the erasure of authorship reaffirm the erasure of the subject" (DE CARVALHO e SARGENTINI, 2020, p. 191).

Social media are not a genuine reproduction of public space (ZUBOFF, 2021). This is because they involve the use of information control and targeting tools, also known as "bubble filters". These work as filtering and prediction engines, which influence and direct access to content by users, restricting searches and definitions of information in virtual spaces. Such limitation favours the dissemination of phenomena such as Fake News: information arbitrarily fabricated and published with the intention of disseminating false statements or weakening verifiable facts (SASTRE, CORREIO e CORREIO, 2018).

Therefore, the socialization of information through networks for the purpose of political mobilization probably has limited access to groups with similar interests, which may hinder the perception of young people (as well as the entire population) with respect to the mediation of filters with respect to shared information - and even probably the standard of dissemination of information will filter information that may contradict or clarify one or another shared fact. This demonstrates how the online universe may be more subject to consumption norms in the form of "clicks" than in an open format such as that expected from a public space with free access.

We think that even in the presence of essential elements for civic life, the argument of information still continues without finding guarantees. The citizen does not need to use formal means to be considered a good citizen, but he deserves to have the knowledge of how to do it. Therefore, we can also think that even with various resources for mobilisation and pro-democracy stances, the biggest barrier to an effective exercise of public life is precisely the opportunity to be politically instrumentalised, through more information about how public life works. We therefore lack institutional guarantees in the area that is most defended as indispensable by the academic literature: that of educating ourselves politically, and having access to a greater amount of information and knowledge on this subject. We believe that this is the most deficient aspect within the agenda of active citizenship, which is the guarantee of formal and institutional spaces for it to be thought and built, and that the school institution should stick to this function. This argument finds support in the work of Pereira (2011). The author argues that young people trained in a school environment favourable to political debate can contribute to the " re-invention of civil society, changing the vicious cycle of political ineffectiveness, which generates the lack of participation, which, in turn, generates political ineffectiveness through vote-buying welfare practices in a scenario where corruption emerges". (PEREIRA, 2011, p.160).

In the axis we call People Power, the answers make us think that the understanding of what people power means is present, but only in its indirect form, as Almeida and Krejci (2020) put it. People Power is represented only through the actions of representatives who are elected, instead of, also, of other forms such as referenda, plebiscites or popular initiative - the tools for the exercise of direct democracy (ALMEIDA and KREJCI, 2020). This understanding is verified in the same way both in the sub-axis of this category, Majority Power, as well as in the last axis presented, Voting Power. At the same time that we think that the mobilisations of complaint previously mentioned are an element that exerts influence on current political culture, we could not verify if the young people understand the civic character of such mobilisations with such clarity, and in what way these mobilisations could also give continuity to direct democratic attitudes.

We can observe in the axis Majority Power an idea of democracy as a concept not exclusively political, but also as a construct present in social relations, mainly those that involve decision-making and group conflicts. The same can be said for some answers of the Voting Power axis, in which the voting strategy is seen as a social tool that can be used in countless situations, including resolutions of conflicts resulting from divergent opinions and group decisions. Araújo (2008) upholds the democratisation proposal of relationships through the right to dialogue, free expression of feelings and ideas, respectful treatment and dignity. According to the author, these competences are tools to deal with diversity and conflicts of ideas, which, together with equal rights, enable the exercise of citizenship. This is perceived in the answers to the aforementioned axes. Deliberative behaviour is perceived as going beyond politically formal spaces, which can be beneficial in reducing inter-group conflict and inciting pro-social behaviour (ARAÚJO, 2008).

When thinking about an active, critical and instrumentalized citizenship education, we make use of the argument proposed by Fuks and Casalecchi (2018), in which both understanding and conduct are indispensable elements to ensure an effectively democratic society. By verifying that the respondents

understand democracy as a "third" institution, indirect, in which after the act of voting the power of the population theoretically should be maintained, the present work raises the question: can we think of a deliberative democracy when the involvement of the young population seems to be perceived as distant? The role of democracy, on the part of the respondents, seems to be something instituted and set, circumscribed in the social organization, instead of a system that needs reinforcement and cultivation by social agents. They remain as spectators, with perspectives that are in some way external, not implicated. Perhaps precisely because they understand living in democracy as something indirect - taking advantage of the concept proposed by Almeida and Krejci (2020).

Another aspect also verified is that, possibly, the memory of Participatory School remained only as a mark in the history of the educational context of Porto Alegre. It can be said that the times of Escola Cidadã(Citizen School) were occupied by the new thought apparently hegemonic that hovered during the last years in Brazil, until the year 2021 - Escola sem Partido (School without Party). The optimistic perspective on the engagement of the school institution in citizen formation seems to have been replaced by a narrative of distrust about teachers and educational institutions, being considered excessively indoctrinating and that should be prevented from exerting political influence on young people (BRASIL, CÚNICO e COSTA, 2022). Consequently, the evocation of evasive perceptions about a concept that apparently has a sense of project, and not of reality. Therefore, we can infer that, although they show a civic potential, the guarantee of this potential by young people and on the part of the schools does not occur. The problem arises because disinvestment is a factor which directly influences the degree of confidence they may have in public institutions. In a survey of students from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Peru and Chile in 2016, the International Civics and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) showed that, compared to European countries, these countries have particularly low levels of trust in public services. Moreover, political trust in Latin American countries is sensitive to changes in political contexts, showing considerable variations within each country over time (BRAZIL, 2022). The productions generated by the ICCS aim to analyse students' understanding of issues related to citizenship, democracy, as well as beliefs and attitudes associated with these issues. Their results serve to review and strengthen curriculum policies for Elementary and High School education (BRASIL, 2022). Although the ICCS has a few editions, Brazil participated for the first time in the year 2022, and the results will be released in 2024. However, it seems licit to think that such perception of devaluation generated by the project will also be present in these results, as evidenced in other studies already published (BRASIL e COSTA, 2022; BRASIL, CÚNICO, GUILHERME and COSTA, 2023).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Considering the foregoing, we can observe that the young people who participated in the current study tend to define the concept of democracy relating it to values that are certainly democratic, such as equality and liberty, even if it is still through more summarized affirmatives and statements. This is an element that deserves to be highlighted: the simplistic character of the answers already seems to define, in a certain way, the form in which this subject is elaborated within the scope of life of these young people. However, we cannot affirm that there is no knowledge in relation to the subject of democracy, only that perhaps the respondents are more inclined to adhere to democratic values and to deliberative behavior. We perceive potential conditions for young people to become social actors within their own lives. Perhaps the educational institutions are unable to exercise their social role in a more explicit manner, offering disciplinary spaces for information on how the common world and the political sphere are organised, so that democracy ceases to be a romanticised or idealised perception and can be applied in the different social spheres.

As a society, we miss many opportunities for action when the young people (or the whole population?) seem to get involved more with indirect ways of exercising democracy, or as we infer, using more the informal spaces for mobilizations to take place. This active position of engagement and productive participation was not present in the answers of the young people, since numerous participants demonstrated a comprehension of democracy as functioning indirectly, only characterized by the voting act. Moreover, the data presented can serve as a support for precisely recognising the young people as

potential social change agents, although they may not be formally encouraged to participate in this process.

We have to rely on individual motivations to learn about a subject that concerns us and influences all aspects of social life. This means that, in the same way, the civic empowerment is also weakened. Knowledge about the democratic sphere is restricted to the formal agents, the experts on the subject, the politicians. These are characters that also as a society we direct feelings of disbelief and distrust (BRAZIL and COSTA, 2021). We believe that knowledge about politics is a fundamental right and should be guaranteed by the State, as well as other basic rights. Young people have the resources and potential to become competent citizens and to organise themselves as a social group: with specific demands, specific needs. What they lack is investment, which is not synonymous with an indoctrinating ideology, as some of the Brazilian conservative classes insist on defending.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1- Elaboration, planning and execution of collection, writing, active participation in data analysis, discussion and writing of the text.
Author 2- Active participation in writing and data analysis.
Author 3- Coordinator of the project. Elaboration and planning of the collection, writing, active participation in the data analysis and writing of the text.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.

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