A CONVERSATION WITH WOMEN IN COMMUNITY NETWORKS

2019
INTRODUCTION

Report of women involved in community network projects. These answers were collected during the LOCNET project in 2019, in the communities of Marrecas, state of Rio de Janeiro and the Casa dos Menino Association of southern São Paulo.

INTERVIEWEES

Edwirges, 15 years, resident of the community of Marrecas. Telecentre Monitor.
Beatriz, 17 years, resident of São Paulo, monitor of Casa dos meninos.
Daiane, 29 years, President of Casa dos meninos.
Aline, 39 years, communication at Instituto Bem Estar Brasil, born in Mogi das Cruzes and volunteer in Marrecas.
Mercia, 53 years, volunteer at Casa dos meninos.
1. WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN YOUR NETWORK?

All interviewees understand that they have a role in the community network and that this role is linked to responsibilities. These responsibilities may be formally delimited or broader.

Edwirges is a young monitor in the community of Marrecas and has recently joined the Telecentre.

Daiane is president of Casa dos meninos, and among her responsibilities she mentions educating herself technically in networks to share with her community. She must do so by approaching other technology collectives.

Aline approaches the community of Marrecas with a definite role of communicator. “This is my role, to understand their needs, how they see technology and what it can add to their lives.”

Mércia introduces herself as a resident of the community and part of Casa dos meninos. She defines her functions as ‘eclectic’ and cites collaboration in the electrical configuration and in the kitchen, which is her favorite part.

Beatriz is also a young monitor in Casa dos meninos, but unlike the other she sees her role more broadly:

“I SEE MYSELF IN EVERYTHING, I’M ALWAYS PART OF MEETINGS, IF THEY NEED HELP I’M HELPIN. SO I THINK I’M AN IMPORTANT ROLE.” (BEATRIZ)
2. WHAT OTHER FORMS OF COMMUNICATION EXISTED IN YOUR COMMUNITY BEFORE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES?

In Aline's view, the community of Marrecas has a strong family relationship, "It's a very religious place with many rites. It is a natural, cultural and religious communication... For example, in the practice of making crafts with Tabôa, braiding, these are spaces for exchange and conversation among women, especially older women."

"The form of communication was by word of mouth, in meetings, we gathered the community in the streets as in Festas Juninas, and events of this kind; got together in each other's house. The famous... human warmth, right?" (Mercia)

For the two younger respondents, prior to digital technologies there were no other types of communication, only limited options for mobile or landline communication.

When asked about other forms of organization, Edwirges answered about the existence of the Association of Residents, where today is the Telecentre she works as a young monitor.

"WE SAY THAT OUR COMMUNITY NETWORK STARTS WITH A ‘DAY CARE FOR ALL’ PROJECT. IN SÃO PAULO IN 2008 THERE WAS A DEMAND FOR CHILDREN FROM 0 TO 4 YEARS OLD FOR DAY CARE, (...) AT THAT MOMENT WE STARTED TO ORGANIZE CASA DOS MENINOS WITH OTHER COLLECTIVES: AÇÃO EDUCATIVA, PRÓ-MORAR ASSOCIATION... SEVERAL PEOPLE WHO GAVE THAT NAME TO THIS FIGHT FOR DAY CARE. WE REGISTERED THE COMMUNITY ABOUT WHICH CHILDREN WERE OUT OF DAY CARE AND SEEING THIS DEMAND FROM THE COMMUNITY WE BEGAN TO THINK TERRITORIALLY HOW TO SOLVE IT. (...) AS LONG AS THE DAY CARE CENTER WAS NOT GOING OUT WE COULD THINK OF PEOPLE WHO COULD TAKE CARE OF CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY, THE COMMUNITY LANDS THEMSELVES THAT WERE EMPTY AND PROPOSED TO BE BUILT DAY CARE CENTERS, WE ORGANIZED THE MOTHERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS MOVEMENT. (...) SO WE LIKE TO SAY THAT THIS WAS OUR FIRST COMMUNITY NETWORK "(DAIANE)"
3. HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN TECHNOLOGY / COMMUNITY NETWORKING?

Edwirges joined the community network extension project because of her father. ‘Seu Manel’, community leader, went to talk with her family to introduce the program and her father insisted she attended.

“I went there and signed up. For people who are not used to it, they think there is only home-school-phone. Is this all for us? No. There is a whole world out there for us to explore (...) For most of the young people of Marrecas it is a very new thing, because we have never seen it. We live in a simple community that doesn’t have much access to the internet.”

Beatriz came to the Casa dos meninos project to do a homework assignment at her school. She was invited to participate in intranet and audiovisual networking courses along with other teens.

Mercia approached technology because of work, sought courses and possibilities to technically graduate to work in the market.

Aline already worked with communication, but did other work with technology in the area of development. “And it’s becoming increasingly magical for me to understand that there are so many ways to distribute this content that we do.”
4. WHICH OF THE TECH THEMES HAVE YOU SEEN THAT YOU LIKED THE MOST?

In 2019 Casa dos meninos organized 3 simultaneous courses of Networks, web development and audiovisual. To the surprise of the project organizers, of the 40 interested teenagers, 35 initially wanted to learn about community networks.

Beatriz during her stay in Casa dos Meninos took courses in networking, web development and audiovisual. Although she is very fond of photography, her favorite area is still networking.

Edwirges liked the webradio practice best, seeing it as part of the telecentre’s role in providing local services to her community.

Mercia defines herself as eclectic, and says she likes it all.

“I ALWAYS FOUND IT VERY HARD TO BELIEVE THAT I WAS CAPABLE TO DO THIS, THE ABILITY TO LEARN TO HANDLE SOFTWARE, ROUTERS, HARDWARE…” (DAIANE)
5. HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED ANY GENDER BARRIERS?

‘YES, SURE, ALWAYS. I’VE DONE SOME COURSES IN SOME OTHER PLACES (…) AND HAD SOME DIFFICULTY, EVEN TO BE SELECTED. THE PREJUDICE IS STILL VERY HIGH IN RELATION TO THE WOMAN, BECAUSE YOU ALWAYS HEAR IT INSIDE: ‘IH, BUT WILL YOU LEARN TECHNOLOGY? FOR WHAT?’” (MERCIA)

“No barrier, but I always listened to comments. “Wow, a woman in technology, playing with a computer, opening a computer.” I always listened to these comments, but I don’t care anymore.” (Beatriz)
Edwirges did not identify any gender barriers, but rather a lack of communication between the community: “The only comment that has been around for a long time is that we have no accessibility. It’s very bad communication, people here don’t communicate much, they don’t talk. We live close to each other and we don’t communicate. I think we have to talk more, open up more, to be happy.”

Aline sees many barriers. “When I got into technology there was a huge movement of companies giving back to technology the leading role of women (…) And I had a very personal criticism about it (…) that as they did with telemarketing, they could be doing with these women; entering them into the job market and then charging a very large return. (…) When I started going to mixed events I started to see a big bias for example in comments like ‘code like a little woman’ and also a lot of sad testimonials from women alone.”

For Daiane, the mission of approaching technical collectives to gain knowledge brought up identity issues:

“FIRST THE GENDER ISSUE, THERE IS A VERY LARGE ABSENCE OF WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY. ALMOST EVERYWHERE I GO, I SEE A MAJORITY OF WHITE MEN ... OFTEN IN UNFRIENDLY AND UNCOMFORTABLE SPACES. (…) IN THIS LAST MONTHS I HAVE BEEN THINKING A LOT ABOUT HOW BESIDES BEING A WOMAN, BEING A BLACK AND PERIPHERAL WOMAN IN SPACES OF TECHNOLOGY. (…) THIS IS ONE OF THE THINGS THAT MADE ME THINK ABOUT GIVING UP MY WORK WITH COMMUNITY NETWORKS, BECAUSE THEY ARE VERY DIFFICULT AND VERY LONELY SPACES. ”(DAIANE)
6. WHAT DO YOU THINK COULD CHANGE THAT?

"Trying to work on this question I get a little closer to what I like to do which is braiding hair and from the braid I started to study ethnomathematics and afromeathematics. I found a way that makes me resume my participation in community networks and that I believe can make black women identify with this place in technology. " (Daiane)

"The women have to raise their hands and say, 'Hey, today our place is here with equal rights.' There is no man or woman who knows less or knows more. We all have our knowledge, and the woman for being a warrior, for making a little of everything, being eclectic in life, I don't see why she can't be an icon of technology today. " (Mercia)

"It's hard to change someone's mind, but I think it's all about talking and showing them that nothing is impossible for women or men, whatever." (Be atriz)

According to Aline, in Marrecas because it is a rural region there is a shortage of jobs, which reflects in the woman often occupying a role indoors. She believes that access to information and the possibility of knowledge exchange among women can transform this situation. "There is still a lot of resistance, a lot of sexism. It's a cultural sexism and I believe it should be fought with attitudes, movements and more programs for women as protagonists, from women to women."

"I believe that bringing the network, the information and having the opportunity to do something collaborative, street fairs, exchanges of knowledge between them, be it in the area of cooking, crafts, human and philosophical issues and that they can debate even sexism and cultural issues. (...) Bringing this debate and show that they can talk and that they will have this space. (...) One thing that catches my attention is that during community networking activities there are always many old ladies sitting listening to us. And you can tell that they make little faces of 'we don’t understand everything, but I want to be part'. And they understand that being a part is not necessarily sitting at the computer, but also having a dialogue with others who have a dream or something she wants to achieve. And to see that there are people around them - I think women have begun to understand that they are not forgotten, they are not alone." (Aline)
Thank you!