

Melo, J.M. de, Gobbi, M.C. & Sathler, L. (Eds.) (2006). *Mídia Cidadã: Utopia Brasileira*. São Bernardo do Campo, SP: Universidade Metodista de São Paulo.

BRL 32.00 (Brazilian reais). http://editora.metodista.br/livro_midiacitada.htm

Noah Lenstra

[University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#)

On November 28-30, 2005, a group of Brazilian academics and activists came together at the Methodist University of São Paulo to discuss “Media Citizenship.” The conference participants, in the collective manifesto that resulted from the event, state: “In the media society, citizenship includes not only access to information, but also its comprehension, with citizens taking on the role of active agents in the processes of communication” (243). This democratization of the means of production of communication is elaborated upon in the four “media territories” of the conference: Local Press, Community Radio, Folk-Communication, and Digital Media. The book that resulted from the conference includes original essays around each theme followed by response essays by other conference participants.

Perhaps of most interest to non-Brazilian audiences may be the essays on Folk-Communication, which draw on the theories of Luiz Beltrão, written in the 1960s and 1970s, on how the de-linked, marginalized Brazilian under-class stays informed and participates in processes of communication through “activist mediators” able to operate as bridges between mass media and local communities. Beltrão’s theories, never translated into English, continue to have an important role in the Brazilian Academy. The author of the article on Folkcomunicação, Osvaldo Meira Trigueiro, a member of Brazilian Network of Folk-Communication, shows how the theories can enrich our understanding of the present information age.

Equally strong and compelling are the three articles on Community Radio, which describe a reality wherein around 15,000 community radio stations operate without any government authorization whatsoever. This profoundly grassroots movement, dating only to the 1970s, Lilian Bahia argues, shows the ability of the Brazilian population to democratize media production without requiring state or corporate intervention. Bahia, citing Coelho Neto, describes the resiliency of the movement: “Political repression has not in any way stunted the increase or proliferation of community radio, owing to its popular appeal – it is common that the community will save the equipment from the stations invaded by police and private agents and, in surprising rapidity, re-open the station.” (p.124)

However, Bahia also notes that this movement has remained profoundly under-studied, with almost no archival sources or systematic studies on the community radio movement.

In the essays on digital media, in contrast, the focus centers on the policy contexts and initiatives within which digital citizenship operates. André Barbosa Filho and Casette Castro provide a demographic portrait of technology use coupled with a policy analysis of President Luis Inácio da Silva’s initiatives around open-source technology and the diffusion of technology. In response to this

essay, S. Squirra speculates that technology diffusion alone will not have an impact without a broad shift in the way education is conceived of in Brazil: "Life-long learning represents the differential that will maintain or eliminate people and businesses from the economy" (219).

In conclusion, "Midia Cidada: Utopia Brasileira" offers a compelling portrait of the social, policy, intellectual and historical contexts of community informatics research and practice in Brazil. On the one hand driven by empirical analysis, on the other driven by envisioning the ways in which the democratization of media production could contribute to the "Brazilian Utopia," the book presents a model for thinking about community informatics not only in Brazil, but everywhere.