

Popular documentation: proposition of a concept

Documentação popular: proposição de um conceito

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Submitted/Recibido: 08 de fevereiro de 2025; Approved/Aceptado: 02 de junho de 2025



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Abstract

The study examines the motivations behind the creation of spaces dedicated to popular documentation initiatives, highlighting their relevance to society as well as to the information and documentation sciences, and further proposes a concept of popular documentation. The method employed was a narrative literature review, exploring the interconnections between scientific and popular documentation while recognising their political dimensions and effects. Different modes of institutionalisation and their relationships were identified through a reflection on the materiality of information, considering the “epistemic-practical triad” – memory, knowledge, and protagonism – as a central and distinctive element of documentation. Finally, a concept of popular documentation was proposed, grounded in reflections on who produces it, for whom it is produced, with which sources, and through which approaches. These elements also proved relevant for the formulation of heuristics that make it possible to distinguish popular documentation arising from democratic and anti-democratic social movements.

Keywords: Popular documentation; Scientific documentation; Documentary practices; Social movements; Social protagonism; Heuristics.

Resumo

O estudo aborda as motivações para a criação de espaços voltados a ações de documentação popular, destacando sua relevância para a sociedade e para as ciências da informação e documentação, além de formular um conceito de documentação popular. O método usado foi uma revisão narrativa da literatura, com a exploração das articulações entre a documentação científica e a popular, reconhecendo suas dimensões políticas e seus efeitos. Foram identificados modos de institucionalidade e suas relações a partir da reflexão sobre a materialidade da informação, considerando a “triade epistêmico-prática” – memória, conhecimento e protagonismo – como elemento central e distintivo da documentação. Por fim, foi proposto um conceito de documentação popular, fundamentado na reflexão sobre quem a produz, para quem é produzida, com quais fontes e mediante quais abordagens. Esses elementos também foram relevantes para a formulação de heurísticas que permitem diferenciar a documentação popular oriunda de movimentos sociais democráticos e antidemocráticos.

Palavras-chave: Documentação popular; Documentação científica; Práticas documentárias; Movimentos sociais; Protagonismo social; Heurísticas.

INTRODUCTION

Popular documentation constitutes a topic that, although not entirely overlooked, has been underestimated or insufficiently explored within the fields of information and documentation sciences. Its potential contributions to the sociocultural, political, and ethical studies of information deserve to be accompanied by theoretical, conceptual, and procedural tools capable of making its scope and complexity explicit.

A recurring limitation in this field lies in approaches that tend to oversimplify popular documentation – either by morally idealising it in contrast to scientific documentation or by reducing it to instruments and practices exclusively linked to democratic social action. Although these aspects are indeed part of popular documentation practices and their conceptual developments since the mid-twentieth century, such simplifications hinder a deeper understanding of its complexity.

When discussing popular documentation, it is common to associate it with social movements, which distinguishes it from scientific documentation. In this study, the adjective “scientific” is deliberately employed to emphasize this distinction, since the authors most often referenced in the study of the latter (Otlet, 1934; Briet, 1951; Woledge, 1983; Meyriat, 1993; Rayward, 1994, 1995, 2014; Buckland, 1997; Rieusset-Lemarié, 1997) refer to scientific documentation simply as “documentation.”

This distinction often raises questions – for example, that popular documentation is “political” while scientific documentation is “technical,” as if technique could be separated from politics. However, it is understood that every epistemic dimension – whether linked to scientific knowledge or to popular wisdom – is inherently political and non-neutral, as it shapes actions within, by, and among communities according to the interests and intentions that guide it.

The aim of this study is to investigate the reasons why communities create, preserve, and use popular documentation. More specifically, it seeks to understand the motivations behind the creation and maintenance of

spaces dedicated to a more fluid form of documentation, not necessarily institutionally formalized. Moreover, it advances the hypothesis that both scientific and popular documentation share a fundamental “triad” composed of the relationship between memory, knowledge, and protagonism.

The effort to identify a common teleology within documentation process ultimately requires questioning the notion of neutrality, as it reveals political intersections between scientific knowledge and popular wisdom. This area of connection is manifested, above all, in the act of preserving material memory with the purpose of producing knowledge that, in turn, promotes or enables forms of social protagonism.

Such a perspective appears to place in tension the notion of scientificity frequently reiterated within information and documentation sciences. Are we therefore confronted with a link capable of bridging two worlds – one “scientific,” the other “popular” – that have been historically separated by a scientific tradition? Although this paper does not aim to provide a definitive answer, it gathers arguments and evidence intended to provoke reflection and invite readers to construct possible dialogues.

This essay adopts a flexible argumentative approach to explore a broad theme, drawing on authors from various disciplines such as sociology, popular education, and information and documentation sciences. The inclusion of influential thinkers (Durkheim, 2007; Weber, 1978, 2002, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Freire, 1979; Tragtenberg, 1985; Bourdieu, 1989, 1996, among others) may prompt epistemological and political debate, especially given the diversity of sociological traditions (functionalism, interpretive sociology, historical-dialectical materialism, etc.) and neodocumentary approaches, which integrate contributions from science and technology studies and post-structuralism (Frohmann, 1992, 1995). Within the limits imposed by the scope of an academic article and the author’s choices, the essay seeks to contribute conceptual articulations and stimulate further reflection.

The review and development of the concepts of documentation, mediation, and information users throughout the author’s research trajectory have contributed to the theoretical foundation of the proposal for popular documentation. This framework originates in a doctoral thesis that examined the document within information science (R. Rabello, 2009), later unfolding into a research program focused on the materiality and institutionalization of information (R. Rabello & Rodrigues, 2019). The continuity of this theoretical path has resulted in studies addressing the relationship between information, document, and monument (R. Rabello & Rodrigues, 2019); documentary practices in regimes of materiality (R. Rabello, 2022a); and the connections between material memory and popular documentation, particularly in anti-democratic contexts (R. Rabello, 2024). Within the domains of mediation and users, the author highlights the ethical-political dimension embedded in the idea of informational agency (González de Gómez & Rabello, 2017) and analyses of social inequalities and invisibilities within information units (R. Rabello & Almeida Junior, 2020), which underpin the concept of in-presence information mediation (R. Rabello, 2022b) and the proposal of non-user studies (R. Rabello, 2023).

The first section of the narrative review discusses the relationship between “institutionality and information,” defining “modes of institutionality” and the “materiality of information.” The second section focuses on “documentation in perspective,” exploring the particularities of “scientific” and “popular” documentation and culminating in a reflection on the institutionalities of the latter and on the documentation “triad.” The third section examines “who produces, for whom, with which sources, and through which approaches” in popular documentation. In this section, “sources” are analyzed through the relationship between “memory and protagonism”; recipients are discussed in terms of “users and non-users”; and approaches are framed through dialogues “between recipients and protagonists.” The final sections propose a concept of “popular documentation” and elaborate on it through “heuristic matrices” that encourage critical and situated reflection on the subject.

INSTITUTIONALITY AND INFORMATION

Modes of institutionality

The concept of an institution may be understood in terms of functions, structures, or collective constructions that guide behaviors and practices, based on criteria for ordering, cooperation, and the orientation of actions. This and other perspectives find theoretical grounding in authors of modern sociology, whether in relation to the functioning of social structures, the rationality of the State, or the social construction of reality.

Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), observes that social institutions – such as religion, education, and the family – are central to the maintenance of social cohesion and order. From this perspective, social institutions are transitory, evolving and becoming more complex, and can thus be described, compared, and explained (Durkheim, 2007). In the twentieth century, authors such as the American sociologist Talcott Parsons extended the functionalist study of institutions (Parsons, 1951).

Max Weber (1864-1920), in *Economy and Society* (1921), situates the institution within the context of bureaucracy and the rational forms of organization and administration of the modern State, conceived as a political association (Weber, 2012). In this view, bureaucracy is structured between the relationship between the whole (the State)

and its parts (individuals), within which agents' actions acquire meaning and intentionality (Weber, 1978). Bureaucracy is understood as “a system of meaningful conduct, and not merely a form of formal organization” (Tragtenberg, 1985, p. 187-188), whose meanings articulate themselves across relatively autonomous spheres. It thus becomes an ideal type of “practical rationality,” manifesting both as an administrative model and as a mode of scientific production. Within this dynamic, the State tends to suppress individual particularities. As a symbolic expression of state power (Bourdieu, 1996), bureaucratic rationality in modern administration is grounded, among other elements, in the production and preservation of “written documents (‘the archives’), preserved in their original form or as drafts” (Weber, 2002, p. 230).

In *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), sociologists of knowledge Peter Berger (1929-2017) and Thomas Luckmann (1927-2016) discuss how social reality is constructed through institutionalization within collectivities, by means of habits (whose repetition reduces effort), typifications (of actions, procedures, and actors), and intersubjectively shared permanences (intersubjective sedimentations), which entails historicity and social control over predefined patterns of conduct. This process enables the prediction of actions and the naturalization of what is, in fact, a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The gap between the creation of an institution and its externalized permanence – appearing as something opaque and detached from its own biography – creates the impression that the institution has always existed. This “naturalizing” gap arises from the notion of institutional objectivity. Among these and other features, the social world can be summarized in at least three propositions: “Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 79).

Institutions follow an order represented by specific roles or typifications of actors and their actions. A role may represent itself – as in the case of a judge who judges – or represent an institutional need for conduct, that is, a function. There are also representations expressed through linguistic objectifications, ranging from simple verbal designations to complex symbolizations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Documentation, along with its technical and institutional apparatus, is part of these complex representations.

An understanding derived from these concepts is that institutions are governed by rules and norms that both influence and are influenced by particular practices. Consequently, institutions may manifest in different ways – either as “modes of institutionalization” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), focusing on human actors, or as “modes of institutionalality” (Rabello, 2019, 2022a, 2024), emphasizing the receptive dimension of both human and nonhuman actors.

The **modes of institutionalization** (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) depend on the extent of meaning and its “reification.” In these processes, specific individuals perform certain actions, knowledge is distributed according to specific roles, and meaning faces an objective problem: the challenge of institutional continuity, given individuals' difficulty in recognizing themselves within institutions that fail to reproduce expected archetypal actions. Added to this, “reification” occurs because of the objectivity attributed to institutions, roles, and their actions. The institution becomes a “natural” thing, as if it had a life of its own, detached from social construction.

Institutionalization is not, however, an irreversible process, despite the fact that institutions, once formed, have a tendency to persist. For a variety of historical reasons, the scope of institutionalized actions may diminish; de-institutionalization may take place in certain areas of social life. For example, the private sphere that has emerged in modern industrial society is considerably de-institutionalized as compared to the public sphere. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 99).

Although this study does not focus on the process of deinstitutionalization – while not excluding that possibility, since an institution may gradually or abruptly lose strength until it ceases to exist – the concept of **modes of institutionalality** (Rabello, 2019, 2022a, 2024) introduces distinctions within the institutional order according to formal disposition and its variations.

Formal institutionalities operate through explicit, codified rules such as laws, norms, and regulations that guide rituals and practices. These institutions tend to have rigid structures with vertical chains of command. A predominant characteristic is hierarchical organization, strongly grounded in technical-scientific and legal – hence professional – knowledge and language. Within the informational field, such institutionalities include communication media (digital and analog, public and private), such as news outlets, as well as cultural and informational entities like archives, libraries, museums, and documentation centers – present in both public-state and private contexts.

Informal institutionalities may consist of uncodified norms and practices, such as traditions, customs, and cultural values. In these institutions, arrangements tend to be fluid, characterized by more horizontal forms of coordination and practice. Hierarchy is not a central factor, and actions are guided voluntarily, grounded in popular wisdom and traditions, or in colloquial or specialized languages shared within the community – something commonly observed in social movements. Within the informational field, these include alternative communication initiatives produced by communities or individuals through analog or digital means, such as community newspapers and radio stations, blogs, and fanzines, as well as alternative informational entities such

as community or popular archives, libraries, museums, and documentation centers.

Semiformal institutionalities occupy the space between formal and informal modes. In these cases, rules, rituals, and practices strike a balance between flexibility and hierarchy, potentially aligning both with formal principles and knowledge and with popular wisdom and social demands. Many of these institutionalities emerge from, or **develop**, through social movements. Examples include the so-called Third Sector, encompassing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Communicational initiatives and alternative informational entities created and managed **in** this context often involve professionals and volunteers of various kinds, each contributing in specific ways.

Regardless of the type of institutionality, the degree of dependence on private digital platforms or public-private partnerships becomes an additional variable, since the rules of the dominant platform or institution – typically the one with greater resources – can influence not only content but also its means of distribution, visibility, and access, through algorithmic logic and the interests and intentions of those who govern it (Gillespie, 2016).

Materiality of Information

Information produces effects (Frohmann, 2008a), whether in its most fluid, intangible, and ephemeral form (as in orality) or in its tangible and physical form (as in documents), that is, in less fluid modes. Its materiality, in this sense, is more closely related to the epistemic-political effects of information than to the medium through which these effects are manifested (Amorim & Rabello, 2023).

By producing effects and intervening in collectivities, the materiality of information can be understood through its layers or dimensions, each with particular characteristics: the **symbolic dimension**, defined by social conventions – encompassing both episteme, related to knowledge, and *agnoia*, related to ignorance – which guide intentional or unintentional actions; the **political dimension**, linked to the power to intervene in one or more collectivities; and the **ethical dimension**, linked to reflection and action in response to the effects produced, guided by the common good, justice, and moral responsibility.

Modes of institutionality find in information and its materiality – characterized by relative permanence and political force to act, mobilize, mediate, and enlist actors (Frohmann, 1992, 1995, 2008a) – the “amalgam” that produces and reproduces networks. Among the effects of information, therefore, is its capacity to mobilize communities. These collectives constitute networks and institutions – formal, informal, or semiformal. Regardless of the type of institutionality, the network-institution is characterized by being created or maintained under the guidance of one or more *enunciations*, whose direct or indirect commands that circulate, acquire, or display some degree of social adherence.

In **formal institutionalities**, guiding enunciations emphasize technical, scientific, and/or legal characteristics, directed by institutional missions and formalized objectives (recorded in official channels), among other commands.

In **informal institutionalities**, the enunciations guide the satisfaction of a community demand, often through orally established pacts or, when formalized (recorded), operationalized through informal channels (such as social media, private platforms, or documents drafted without legal certification), that is, through informal means produced or shared by the community itself.

The **formalized state of the enunciations** that guide institutionalities is fundamental to defining “border zones” and possible transversalities, enabling interaction or transition between different modes of institutionality – for example, from informal to semiformal and from semiformal to formal.

Enunciations constitute a system of linguistic signs whose objectification of experience enables their incorporation into a set of traditions, as well as their sharing. The formalized state of enunciations functions as a **systematized mnemonic aid** for maintaining coherence in the control and legitimation of certain practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The **pragmatic force of enunciations** – which expresses, for instance, the need to “organize or act within the organization to...” or to “act with the purpose of...” – mobilizes actors, creates bonds and affections, generates identities, and enables the construction, appropriation, and/or (re)signification of spaces and institutionalities.

The enunciations that guide modes of institutionality and their network formations are, therefore, “**information with materiality**,” whether tangible or intangible. As previously indicated, the study of materiality focuses primarily on its effects rather than on the meanings of information. It is not taken as a prerequisite that information must be recorded in some medium to be studied. The interest, instead, lies in the **process of documenting and its implications** rather than in the information itself. In this sense, the study of information materiality led Frohmann (2008b) to prioritize a “**documentary ontology**” over a “**semiotic ontology**” or an “**ontology of information**.”

Reality can be investigated from this diversity of meanings and through the analysis of shared observations whose significance constitutes a consensus defining **orthodoxy**, that is, the prevailing “correct opinion,” or becomes

incorporated into it (Froehlich, 2017). The meanings of representations of reality tend to vary according to the interpretive frameworks of subjects (R. Rabello & Rodrigues, 2019).

Orthodoxy represents the dominant view or the “correct answers” according to a given paradigm – that is, aligned with certain scientific, social, or moral beliefs (Froehlich, 2017). Thus, network-institutions can orient or be oriented by “**semantic**” information that is contingently true (Frohmann, 1995; Floridi, 2005). Nevertheless, in contemporary society, alongside the right to information, a **right to ignorance** has also taken shape (Froehlich, 2017).

In the ignorance fostered by today’s **anti-Enlightenment**, knowledge is rejected and replaced, for example, by anti-scientific propaganda amplified through the internet (Atton, 2006). Ignorance is the object of study in **agnotology**, a field that investigates the production and dissemination of ignorance as manifested in public policies and in the strategies of specific groups (Proctor, 2008) – as seen in science denial-movements grounded in dogma, misinformation, and/or disinformation, such as the **anti-vaccine movements** (Vignoli, Rabello, & Almeida, 2021).

The study of reality – whether of orthodoxy or ignorance – is what enables an understanding of the **epistemic, political, and ethical effects** of the materiality of information in its semantic multiplicity. In this regard, **information ethics**, according to a taxonomy proposed by Froehlich (2017), must address ignorance itself, misinformation, disinformation, missing information, and self-deception or bad faith.

Ignorance itself consists of the absence of knowledge or awareness, including the possibility of being uninformed about a particular subject or fact. It manifests both in **accidental misinformation** and in **intentional disinformation**.

Misinformation, or **pseudoinformation** (Floridi, 2005) refers to incorrect or inaccurate information that may lead to error – whether through honest mistake, negligence, unconscious bias, or, as in the case of disinformation, through intentional deception (Fallis, 2014).

Disinformation, therefore, refers to false information produced and/or shared with the intent to deceive, harm others, or obtain personal gain (Fallis, 2009). Even when an explicit intention to deceive is not stated, it is assumed that the source anticipates that people will be misled (Froehlich, 2017).

Missing information refers to the omission of crucial data necessary for understanding facts and making decisions. Such omission may occur inadvertently or through deliberate intent to mislead (Froehlich, 2017).

Self-deception or bad faith involves believing in what one does not actually believe, resulting in contradiction. It may be **motivated** by deliberate objectives – political, social, ethical, or personal – or occur **unintentionally**, as in **confirmation bias**, which reinforces personal beliefs (Froehlich, 2017).

Among the forms of defamation stemming from informational ignorance are **doxing** – the act of seeking or disclosing private or identifying information about an individual or group with malicious intent – and **fake news**, often produced and disseminated by anti-democratic extremists through so-called “alternative media” (Atton, 2006), also referred to as “pseudo-media” (Palau-Sampio & Carratalá, 2022). These modes of **semantic information distortion** can be understood as informational effects grounded in psychological traits and internalized biases that make individuals vulnerable, for example, to political misinformation and disinformation (Froehlich, 2017).

One of the driving forces behind the spread and consolidation of **political ignorance** is **authoritarianism**, characterized by deference to authority, hostility toward outgroups, and resistance to novelty. **Social dominance orientation** reflects a preference for hierarchies and domination of groups deemed “inferior,” expressing an anti-egalitarian worldview. Prejudice toward those who are “different,” low intergroup contact, and **relative deprivation** – in which a group, despite lacking economic problems, justifies its sense of deprivation – are also relevant factors (Froehlich, 2017).

The effects of the **materiality of information** within network-institutions – considering the semantic plurality of content – can also be observed in **activism** (Abers & Von Bulow, 2011) and in **community participation** (Gohn, 2019). The challenge lies in analyzing these effects in the context of **extremist and anti-democratic social movements** (Krouwel, Kutyski, Van-Prooijen, Martinsson, & Markstedt, 2017), which adopt **post-truth** as a strategy (Waisbord, 2018) and/or resort to **denialism** and **dogmatic challenges to science** (Vignoli et al., 2021). Such dynamics can lead to the development of **conspiracy theories** and other manifestations that negatively affect people’s lives (Douglas et al., 2019).

As information circulates, it conveys ideas and worldviews. Embedded within an institutional context and acquiring permanence through a physical medium, its **materiality** finds, in the process of documenting and in documents themselves – in short, in **documentation** – the potential to amplify the production of effects. In other words, documentation facilitates and broadens the reach of enunciations and their effects. In the twentieth century, documentation became a central focus of attention both within political-academic sphere and among social movements.

DOCUMENTATION IN PERSPECTIVE

Scientific Documentation

The comparison between scientific documentation and popular documentation is shaped by the notion that the former, grounded in the discourse of technical neutrality, differs from the latter – which functions as a means of political resistance and struggle among popular classes, with social change as its horizon. In this context, scientific documentation is conceived as an ideological medium (Rocha, 1994) that conceals social relations and economic exploitation, propagating a false consciousness that benefits the dominant class (Chauí, 2001).

This dualistic view, however, oversimplifies scientific documentation by overlooking its potentialities. Paul Marie Ghislain Otlet (1868-1944), a Belgian lawyer regarded as the “father” of scientific documentation, is a figure of his time whose trajectory allows interpretations that underscore the political dimension of his work, considering the historical context, the prevailing thought of his era, and the networks of collaboration that partly enabled his projects (Rayward, 1994, 1995, 2014).

Scientific documentation emerged from the bibliographic movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Wollege, 1983; Meyriat, 1993). Although the movement was initially aligned with the principles of scientific communication – aimed at the production and dissemination of knowledge – its evolution into a discipline called “documentation” transcended a strictly scientific policy.

In an effort led by Paul Otlet and Henry La Fontaine (1854-1943), documentation initially sought to organize scientific knowledge internationally to facilitate access to it. However, both men were motivated by the conviction that access to organized knowledge could contribute to making the world a better place, for instance by promoting a culture of peace (Rayward, 2014). The historically technicist-utilitarian conception of scientific documentation has obscured the broader scope of these original ideas.

Shaped by the context of the *Belle Époque*, documentation became part of the cultural, philosophical, technological, and scientific effervescence of Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. The period was marked by thinkers who aspired to overcome scarcity, war, and ignorance (Rayward, 2014).

Within the international organization of knowledge records and pacifist initiatives, bibliographic efforts coincided with a period of significant scientific advancement in Europe. This period was marked by increased research activity, knowledge specialization, the formation of institutional networks, and the internationalization of science (Rayward, 1994, 1995). The European world fairs of the time – despite their universalist rhetoric – reflected nationalist and colonialist aspirations, aiming to improve the living conditions of the European population (Rayward, 2014).

Scientific documentation relied on the broadening of the concept of “document” as one of its politico-epistemic strategies, a development systematized by Otlet in his *Traité de Documentation: Le livre sur le livre: théorie et pratique*, published in 1934. This expansion was fundamental for later identifying at least two phases – or moments – of documentation: positivist and hermeneutic (R. Rabello, 2009).

Scientific documentation was influenced by positivist thought (Rayward, 2014), which envisioned, among other aspects, a society organized and governed by the learned, devoid of instability and social conflict (Benoit, 1999). This early phase (Otlet, 1934) was largely guided by an emphasis on the supposedly neutral and informative function of the medium in relation to its content (Rayward, 1994). The second phase, centered on the indexicality (representation) and interpretation of objects (Briet, 1951), introduced new nuances to Otlet’s conception of the document (Meyriat, 1981; Buckland, 1997).

Otlet envisioned documentation as part of the “international body” of the League of Nations, created in 1919 during the Paris Peace Conference after World War I. Designed to mediate and arbitrate conflicts, this institution later inspired the creation of the United Nations (UN) on October 24, 1945, following World War II (Costa, 2014).

Documentation assumed a crucial role in the interactions among institutions responsible for producing, organizing, preserving, and ensuring access to scientific knowledge. What Otlet initially conceived as a World Center in 1914 evolved, by 1928, into the Mundaneum project – a repository designed to assemble documentation as a kind of “encyclopedia of knowledge” (Rieusset-Lemarie, 1997).

The idea still prevails that documentation was exclusively confined to technical and scientific activities under the imperative of neutrality – within scientific communication policies – and directed toward a privileged, specialized audience (Rocha, 1994). However, in contrast to this perspective, other epistemic frameworks have emerged. These frameworks found fertile ground in the expansion of the concept of information policy through neodocumentation, which began to gain momentum in the mid-1990s.

Popular Documentation

The sphere of action of social or popular movements is typically characterized by the total or partial absence of the State – whether due to the lack of public policies or to their insufficiency or ineffectiveness in addressing the needs of one or more communities.

The popular network-institution, like other network-based institutions, is generally formed through the collective organization of community members around the defense of a particular argument or proposition. Within this context, initiatives often give rise to entities committed to social justice, whether by advocating for rights (including access to information, culture, education, and healthcare), or by addressing economic demands through the creation of cooperatives and community banks, and related initiatives.

Within spaces dedicated to the collection, production, and preservation of documents that support such initiatives, popular documentation centers may take on various terminological forms – sometimes referred to as popular documentation and information centers, popular information centers, or popular information services, among others (Almeida Junior, 1993). They may also be identified as community or popular libraries, museums, or archives.

Established mainly in urban peripheries, these centers function as spaces of community support, responding to local needs and filling gaps left by the public sector. Moreover, they represent a grassroots response to the mechanisms of power exercised by dominant classes (Almeida Junior, 1997, 2015b). This is the characteristic setting for the production and practice of popular documentation. Collections are created or displayed both to compensate for the absence of the State and to challenge traditional and conservative frameworks (O. C. P. Rabello, 1987).

Popular documentation gained momentum in Latin America during a period marked by dialogue between Marxist thought and religious-political engagement, particularly within the Catholic Church. Liberation Theology involved the participation of prominent Latin American intellectuals – such as the Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez-Merino Díaz (1928-2024), the Brazilian Leonardo Boff (1938-), and the Uruguayan Juan Luis Segundo (1925-1996), among others.

Liberation Theology played a key role in the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) of the Catholic Church, which sought to overcome poverty and to organize civil society in the pursuit and defense of social rights (Almeida Junior, 2015b). In this context, initiatives dedicated to popular documentation began to emerge in the early 1980s. The engagement of philosopher and educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) with popular educators from the CEBs underscores the significant relationship between academic knowledge and popular wisdom within social movements (Reis, Reis, & Rabello, 2024).

Another example is the role of the Comisión Evangélica Latinoamericana de Educación Cristiana (Celadec), which criticized the alleged neutrality of European scientific documentation, viewing it as an instrument of capitalist alienation. In contrast, it emphasized popular documentation as a tool for education and political awareness, capable of breaking the information monopoly and facilitating communication within popular struggles (Comisión Evangélica Latinoamericana de Educación Cristiana [Celadec], 1981).

In Brazil, the Centro Popular Vergueiro (CPV) highlighted the importance of popular documentation as an instrument of awareness and mobilization within social movements (Centro Popular Vergueiro [CPV], 1982). The Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação (CEDI) recognized the need to apply more sophisticated techniques from scientific documentation but warned that, within the capitalist context, such knowledge production was being used as a tool of manipulation (Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação [CEDI], 1984).

Institutionalities and Popular Documentation

In **semiformal** institutions such as popular documentation centers, research within the fields of information science and documentation (Lima, 1986; Carvalho, 1999; Camoleze et al., 2019) emphasizes the possibility of integrating information professionals to manage documents produced and/or maintained by the community. This emphasis may stem from a reaction to a previously noted characteristic, according to which the concept of semiformal institutionality allows, in addition to professionals, the participation of volunteers without specific training. There is, indeed, a defense of professional engagement in these spaces.

Although they do not address the concept in the same terms as the notion of semiformality proposed by Rabello (2024), studies suggest that the efficiency and effectiveness of services in popular documentation centers follow approaches similar to those found in formal environments. These approaches are influenced by knowledge from librarianship (Carvalho, 1999), museology (Chagas & Gouveia, 2014), and archival science (Camoleze et al., 2019). However, while such knowledge can contribute to the development of popular documentation centers, it may also constrain creativity by reproducing established academic practices and behaviors (R. Rabello, 2024).

Informal, community-based, or popular institutions – representing another variety of popular documentation centers – promote community autonomy and participation in their own management, operating without the need for formally trained professionals such as librarians or documentalists (Rocha, 1994). Sustained through voluntary action or university outreach programs (O. C. P. Rabello, 1987), these centers are established and managed by community members themselves, who collectively decide on the participation of external professionals or volunteers and on the management of materials of local interest (R. Rabello, 2024). When present, individuals external to the community participate only through the community’s invitation and consent.

The absence of professional intervention in informal spaces dedicated to memory and popular documentation does not preclude these spaces from becoming fertile environments for innovation – particularly because they do not necessarily adopt the established techniques of scientific documentation. Informal institutions created by communities develop their own dynamics. Popular documentation centers emerging from social movements offer an alternative means of preserving memory and sustaining collective struggles, with a distinctive sense of protagonism.

Informal popular institutions are not subject to professional codes of ethics, market restrictions imposed by professional associations, or dependence on universities for guidance or validation. Nevertheless, they adhere to respect constitutional frameworks. Their actions are driven by values shared within the community, evoking – through the materiality of shared narratives – a cohesion grounded in collective recognition of belonging and identity and/or on the mobilization of rights claims (R. Rabello, 2024).

Within **informal** and **semiformal** institutional environments, community actions have the potential to create memorial spaces and popular documentation centers by collecting, preserving, and providing access to objects and documents of community interest or produced by the community itself (R. Rabello, 2024). In this context, popular documentation acquires strategic importance in provoking or demanding the formulation and implementation of public policies related, for example, to information, culture, and memory.

The popular library – and likewise the archive or museum with similar characteristics – “is generally connected to associative or community movements that raise awareness among groups and work with them toward citizens’ rights and needs” (O. C. P. Rabello, 1987, p. 33). In this sense, popular documentation centers also represent alternatives to traditional informational and cultural institutions and devices.

When compared to traditional documentation – which positions itself as “scientific, apolitical, and neutral” – in popular documentation, “the political stance is clearly in favor of popular classes, considering documentation as an instrument for social change” (Rocha, 1994, p. 12). This distinction highlights the political dimension inherent in popular documentation. However, as noted, interpretations of this nature tend to overlook certain foundational aspects or developments of scientific documentation.

The Triad of Documentation: Memory, Knowledge, and Protagonism

Originally, the proposition of scientific documentation was not an end in itself but a means to advance a political project. This endeavor initially sought to promote international bibliographic protagonism and, later, to mobilize efforts toward fostering a culture of peace. In both cases, a strategic role was envisioned for the memory of recorded knowledge, enabling the protagonism of and within scientific communities in the international context.

As with scientific documentation, what characterizes a documentation center in a popular context is the relationship among memory, knowledge, and protagonism – forming what can be termed the “**epistemic-practical triad**” of documentation. In this sense, the community seeks, through memory, the resources for reading, learning, and action, aiming to obtain and appropriate knowledge that enables the protagonism of its own actors.

Both scientific and popular documentation function as means of political action, employing documentary techniques and/or strategies to achieve their goals. The expansion of the notion of information policy, as argued by Frohmann (1995), led him to conceive documentation in the direction of what he termed “new documentation” or “neodocumentation.”

Bernd Frohmann’s reading found theoretical grounding, among other concepts, in Michel Foucault’s (1926-1984) notions of regimes of truth and materiality; in Gilles Deleuze’s (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari’s (1930-1992) concept of assemblages; and in the actor-network theory developed by Michel Callon (1945-2025), Bruno Latour (1947-2022), and others (González de Gómez, 2012; Rabello, 2022a).

“Neodocumentation” emerged in the 1990s within the fields of information science and documentation. Beyond Frohmann, other authors – such as Boyd Rayward, Michael Buckland, Niels Lund, and Ronald Day – demonstrated a critical interest in revisiting the original propositions and later developments of Otletian documentation (Ortega & Saldanha, 2017).

In this context, documentation (scientific or popular) refers to documenting beyond the governmental sphere, encompassing informational actions within hybrid networks or information regimes. It includes formal, informal,

and semiformal institutional modes, as well as the effects of informational materiality (R. Rabello, 2024). In other words, “neodocumentation” is characterized more by a Foucauldian re-signification of the act of documenting than by a mere substitution of “information” with “document” (González de Gómez, 2012, p. 51).

Through the hybridity of actors, the materiality of enunciations enables and supports the analysis of the epistemic and political effects of information. While the epistemic and political dimensions relate to the permanence, force, and agency of documenting in society, the ethical implications concern the reflexivity of information’s effects on collectives.

Thinking in terms of permanence immediately invokes the dimension of memory, which must be maintained and preserved through documentation to remain accessible and retrievable. Reflecting on knowledge allows one to understand the epistemic force of documentation, which translates into political action by provoking or guiding the formation of networked institutions and by differentiating practices that emerge in and from such formations. Finally, protagonism presupposes that intentional – practical – interventions carried out in, with, and by communities are, to some extent, operationalized, shaped, and/or guided by documentation.

One of the key elements highlighted in approaches proposed by neodocumentation – as a documentary practice – is the emphasis on human protagonism and on the agency of hybrid artifacts such as technologies and documents (Frohmann, 2007). In any case, both memory – conceived as a set of systematized formulas for permanence – and knowledge – understood as symbolic objects and actions – are integral to the composition of institutional activities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In light of the modes of institutionality and the materiality of information, as well as the “epistemic-practical triad” that guides documentation, it becomes possible to distinguish scientific (formal) documentation from popular (informal or semiformal) documentation based on theoretical and conceptual aspects, with the aim of elucidating their characteristics and contexts of action.

It is crucial to determine which documents are appropriate to each perspective and to identify who benefits from the knowledge they contain. These questions have been widely discussed in the literature on scientific documentation; it is now necessary to reflect on who produces it, for whom, which sources are used, and which possible approaches relate to popular documentation.

WHO PRODUCES, FOR WHOM, WHICH SOURCES, AND APPROACHES

Sources: Between Memory and Protagonism

What are the sources of interest for popular documentation? When compared with scientific documentation, some argue that while the latter “is broader and, in principle, has as the protagonist of the documentary task all fields of human activity,” popular documentation takes as its main subject “the social forces that make up the popular movement and, as the central fact to be documented, the social contradictions” (Rocha, 1994, p. 12).

In documentary terms, it is reasonable to affirm that the diversity and breadth of sources used in scientific documentation also apply to popular documentation. In the early twentieth century, both in scientific documentation and in French historiography, every object came to be regarded as a potential document (R. Rabello, 2009).

For the French historian Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014), every document is also a monument, and under these conditions, it becomes a political object (Le Goff, 2013). From this premise, it follows that the document is a means of “legitimizing discourses **about** reality” (R. Rabello & Rodrigues, 2019, p. 19, authors’ emphasis).

In popular documentation, the political dimension of the document-monument – within the realm of social movements, particularly in informal contexts – tends to be approached in ways that are not theoretically articulated, unlike what occurs in scientific documentation or historiography. In this scenario, the articulation among memory, knowledge, and protagonism becomes a defining element.

A popular library that merely gathers books or other materials to meet the informational needs of the community will remain a library. A popular museum that collects objects for exhibition and community enjoyment will remain a museum. However, both – a popular library and a popular museum – can also be considered popular documentation centers if they seek to preserve the community’s memory through oral accounts, residents’ portraits, photographs, and audiovisual records of local events, among others. Furthermore, both are characterized as popular documentation centers when they support the mediation of information and culture – reading, appropriation, and critical use of information (Almeida Junior, 2015a) – within the community, thereby promoting or enabling the knowledge and protagonism of its members, for example, in the struggle for rights.

Recipients: Between Users and Non-Users

To whom is popular documentation addressed? Compared to scientific documentation, some interpretations suggest that the latter has traditionally been directed toward an elite group of intellectuals, scientists, and

scholars – namely, “all the segments of the social forces that make up the ruling class” – whereas popular documentation “is intended for those social forces that constitute the popular movement, including the ignorant and the exploited” (Rocha, 1994, p. 12).

However, there are nuances regarding the recipients of scientific documentation that are not always taken into account. If members of the elite occupy professions intended to serve the public good, scientific knowledge may influence and/or reach, even indirectly, segments of the population that are culturally, educationally, and economically disadvantaged. Other characteristics concerning the recipients of scientific documentation also deserve attention, as they are relevant for reflecting on popular documentation.

For this purpose, it is useful to analyze a concept widely discussed in information and documentation sciences: the **information user**. These fields tend to focus on both actual and potential users, seeking to meet the informational needs of both groups. The actual public – composed of effective users – consists of those who in fact use the system, its products, and information services. The potential public, in turn, includes those with the capacity for such use but who must be reached or encouraged by information professionals to access and utilize institutionally offered content, thereby meeting their needs (R. Rabello & Almeida Junior, 2020).

In light of this construct, certain epistemic limitations can be identified that may influence the work of researchers and professionals. Among these are: an excessive focus on the functioning of **formal information systems** (such as libraries, museums, archives, databases, and institutional websites); an exclusive emphasis on information **use**, to the detriment of considering processes such as **reading** and the **appropriation** of information for knowledge production; the idealization of users with “socially accepted” attributes, which can generate bias and silence subjects whose living conditions do not fit such standards; and the presumption of passive recipients, defined more by content reception than by communicative, reflective, or historical action (R. Rabello & Almeida Junior, 2020).

The epistemic limitations of the concept of the information user – particularly the neglect of subjects and their potentialities – are relevant for reflecting on the recipients of popular documentation centers. This reflection leads to a strategic distinction between **users** and **non-users** of information, as well as between the recipients of information and social protagonists.

The concept of the information user can be analyzed from the perspective of class privilege, in which the “ideal profile” reflects attributes of the middle and upper classes. From this viewpoint, the traditional perspective of information intermediation seeks to transform the potential user into an actual one (Rabello & Almeida Junior, 2020; Rabello, 2023), based on the attributes of privileged classes – particularly those related to economic and cultural capital. Economic capital refers to the accumulation of material goods, while cultural capital includes values, behaviors, degrees, and cultural objects. Both economic and cultural capital can be transformed into symbolic capital, or social distinction (Bourdieu, 1989).

The traditional perspective of information intermediation assumes that only subjects possessing the attributes of privileged classes hold prerogatives within the informational field and are therefore studied as users (R. Rabello & Almeida Junior, 2020). Those who lack certain predefined attributes are often overlooked and rendered invisible. In light of this, the limitations of the concept of the information user open space for studying the **non-public** (Jeanson, 1973) and **non-users** of information (Rabello & Almeida Junior, 2020; Rabello, 2023).

The **non-public** may represent a collective condition but is not limited to class-related circumstances. Information institutions may exclude or silence individuals through prejudice or by implementing policies that fail to address the diversity of community members, thereby transforming users into non-users. This occurs, for instance, when institutional barriers to accessibility are present – encompassing architectural, communicational, methodological, instrumental, programmatic, and attitudinal dimensions (Sasaki, 2016) – the latter exemplified by discriminatory attitudes such as racism, homophobia, misogyny, or ageism, among others (R. Rabello, 2023).

The transition from non-public to public can be conceived as a social and attitudinal transformation (Jeanson, 1973; Flusser, 1980). Paulo Freire proposed the use of **generative words** to mobilize groups and promote social transformation through a “cultural action for freedom.” From this perspective, technique is used to overcome the mechanistic view of the alienated word, fostering understanding that enables individuals to name the world and to stimulate critical action. Praxis is constructed through dialogue, respecting individuals’ worldviews and cultures, without prejudging one culture as superior to another, thus preventing subjugation (Freire, 1979).

Approaches: Between Recipients and Protagonists

When reflecting on the recipients of interest in popular documentation, at least two complementary approaches stand out in information and documentation sciences: the **framing approach** and the **dialogical approach** (Rabello, 2023, 2024).

It is not advisable to conceive these two approaches – framing and dialogical – as autonomous or mutually exclusive types in a dichotomous relationship. The distinction serves as a heuristic device to outline directions and/or conjunctures of action, recognizing that there are overlaps and “border zones” in the practices of a single

institutional composition, whether in the formal context of scientific documentation centers or in the informal or semi-formal contexts of popular documentation centers.

The **framing approach** can be observed through Pierre Bourdieu's (1930–2002) analysis – describing the internalization of a “socially accepted” culture and social demarcation through the accumulation of capital – and Paulo Freire's critique of the “banking” model of education, which deposits and transmits the dominant class's or culture's ideas for passive assimilation. This approach, by framing subjects, imposes a preformatted reality and a behavioral pattern based on estates, where practices are accepted or rejected according to their conformity with established intentions and norms. Framing guides the traditional intermediation of information toward an **“ideal” user as the recipient**. The subjects' adherence to proposed or imposed practices and content, through actions such as information literacy and competency training, facilitates or enables the mediation of information for the use of available resources.

In contrast, the **dialogical approach** proposes that cultural action and information mediation be carried out **with** community members, rather than merely **for** them, fostering an interaction that respects and values the culture of both users and non-users of information – including those in situations of **social vulnerability**, as noted by Jeanson and Freire (Flusser, 1980; Rabello, 2023). From this perspective, both the public and non-public – users and non-users of information alike – are conceived as potential protagonists in the creation of means of contestation and participation. Institutions emerge from this network of *in-person* (or “*in presence*”) **mediations** (R. Rabello, 2022b), recognizing and valuing local culture, voice, and authorship while remaining attentive to the ethical and political implications of their denial. In summary, dialogue is oriented toward emergent mediations carried out **with** users and non-users, who are conceived as **protagonists**.

The **framing approach** tends to be applied in formal institutional settings – both educational (such as schools and universities) and cultural/informational (such as documentation centers, libraries, museums, and archives, in their diverse typologies). By framing, these institutions aim to promote a “socially accepted” culture, aligned with Enlightenment ideals that seek to “illuminate” those deemed ignorant with the “light” of reason. The documentation model proposed by Otlet, as previously noted, follows this line of thought.

Popular documentation centers, particularly **semi-formal** ones, may adopt either the dialogical or the framing approach. In the latter case, as observed in Marxist traditions or theoretical variations such as Critical Theory, the goal is to guide the population rationally toward organization and emancipation. When analyzed from the perspective of moderate or social-democratic leftist thought, such framing tends to be oriented by the promotion of democratic culture and by claims for social and civil rights. Conversely, in its radical, communist-oriented form, it may assume a revolutionary character aimed at the structural reconfiguration of power relations.

Informal popular documentation centers, like semi-formal ones, emerge from within communities and social movements, developing organically alongside local members to address shared issues. They are guided by materially grounded discourses that function as an *amalgam* of networks, identities, and collective interests. Although framing may also occur, informal institutionalities are distinguished by their capacity to foster a dialogical approach in which community protagonism plays a central role. External members may be welcomed by the community, provided they adopt an attitude that respects local culture without imposing their own views. The audience of these spaces forms as it recognizes that the initiatives emerge from the community itself and are produced by it.

POPULAR DOCUMENTATION: TOWARD A CONCEPT

The discussion thus far has sought to distinguish scientific documentation from popular documentation, based on their respective forms of institutionalization and the ways in which they relate to information. Building on this distinction, the present section turns to the proposition of a **concept of popular documentation**, grounded in the reflection on the actors and strategies involved.

Investigating the motivations for creating and working in and with popular documentation is relevant not only to the fields of information and documentation sciences but also to fields concerned with the relationship between information and social movements. Examining the epistemic, political, and ethical dimensions of the materiality of information plays a strategic role in understanding the formation of documentation institutions and networks, as well as the social effects of information, both in scientific and popular contexts.

The institutionalities of popular documentation differ from those of scientific documentation, which are centered in formal contexts. Moreover, the sources, recipients, protagonists, and approaches that shape popular documentation are characterized by – and emerge from – the interplay among memory, knowledge, and protagonism. Based on this framework, it is now possible to outline the following concept:

Popular documentation is constituted within the sphere of social movements, in informal and semi-formal institutional contexts. It is guided by enunciations whose materiality both produces and is produced by institutions and networks, mobilizing actors and seeking solidaristic and/or persuasive

forms of social claims. It is characterized by documentary practices oriented toward preserving and recovering memory, promoting knowledge for action, and strengthening social protagonism. Within these institutional spaces, professionals and volunteers – whether or not formally trained – take part in its activities, with the absence of technical training being more common in informal contexts. Popular documentation may work with a diversity of sources, provided that they teleologically compose the triad of memory, knowledge, and protagonism. It may operate within a traditional dimension of information intermediation, focused on access and use, and/or within an emergent dimension of mediation, emphasizing reading, appropriation, and the critical use of information. Furthermore, it may be oriented by at least two approaches (which may intersect in practice): a framing approach, in which predefined conceptions are imposed, shaping recipients or users of information (real or potential) to conform to established norms and available resources; and a dialogical approach, which promotes informational and cultural mediation in presence, alongside the community, valuing the voice, authorship, and protagonism of both users and non-users. The intended protagonism presupposes an ethical commitment, grounded in reflexivity regarding the consequences of documentary practices – both on the part of those who promote or carry them out and of those affected by them.

Theoretical and/or applied investigations on the creation and operation **of, with, and within** popular documentation centers – particularly through case studies in the latter case – are relevant both for comparing them with the proposed concept and for expanding or modifying it. However, research of this nature may encounter certain challenges.

The articulation of the “triad” – memory, knowledge, and protagonism – within academic contexts and/or social and popular movements constitutes a strategic key to elucidating the political sphere shared by documentation. In this light, the challenges faced by popular documentation become more complex when dealing with social movements of an antidemocratic, authoritarian, or anti-scientific orientation – such as those that reject science on dogmatic grounds or that disregard ethical commitment as a fundamental principle.

This commitment is present in Enlightenment ideals, grounded in the belief in their emancipatory potential. Interestingly, the apparent absence of such an ethical commitment, although it may alter part of the underlying logic of the proposed concept of popular documentation, does not necessarily render it entirely unviable – even when guided by a teleology with ends that are not necessarily democratic.

From this hypothesis – which affects both the proposed concept of popular documentation and its limitations – it becomes possible to outline **heuristics aimed at problematizing and distinguishing** documentary manifestations originating from social movements of different orientations, whether democratic or antidemocratic.

HEURISTIC MATRICES

Based on the proposed of the concept of popular documentation, the construct was deconstructed with the purpose of enabling the assessment of situations through qualitative indicators. These indicators function as heuristic matrices, allowing for the analysis of the characteristics and effects of documentary practices. The proposed instrument seeks to inquire, in a more substantive rather than merely operational way, whether the entity:

- i) Operates within informal and semi-formal institutional contexts;
- ii) Constitutes institutions and networks guided by materially grounded statements;
- iii) Mobilizes actors, seeking solidaristic and/or persuasive forms of advocacy;
- iv) Carries out documentary practices oriented toward memory, knowledge, and protagonism;
- v) Involves, within its institutional spaces, both professionals and volunteers, with or without technical training;
- vi) Works with a diversity of sources;
- vii) Engages in the intermediation of messages and in the mediation of information and culture;
- viii) Adopts framing and dialogical approaches;
- ix) Encompasses, as its universe of interest, both users and non-users of information;
- x) Presupposes the ethical responsibility and reflexive positioning of those who produce, implement, and are affected by documentary practices.

Although the breakdown of the concept – presented through heuristic matrices – is useful for identifying whether museums, libraries, popular or community archives (or other designations attributed by the community itself to

the informational entities it creates and/or maintains) can be understood, in a complementary way, as centers of popular documentation, its heuristic function is not limited to this purpose.

Logically, an interesting exercise consists in distinguishing what, within the proposed concept of popular documentation, can be maintained and what loses meaning when confronted with a differentiation of values. The arguments will be preceded by brackets with Roman numerals indicating the corresponding heuristics. Those that deviate from the concept will be highlighted in bold.

For example, when a social movement **lacks [x] ethical commitment** and/or is driven by a form of protagonism grounded in **antidemocratic modes of action**, a set of inquiries – anchored in the concept of popular documentation – can help identify what can be preserved and what, from an emancipatory standpoint, loses partial or total meaning in relation to the proposed construct.

Through such heuristic matrices, the objective would then be to test hypotheses according to which **antidemocratic social movements** tend to: **[i]** operate in informal and semi-formal institutional contexts; **[ii]** constitute institutions and networks, although they may also be guided by one or more “material statements,” even if, in this case, they are mobilized by the “**materiality of misinformation and disinformation.**”

Accordingly, antidemocratic social movements also **[iii]** mobilize actors engaged in the **[iv]** execution of documentary practices, producing – on the basis of a constructed and preserved memory – knowledge or **content of an agnotological nature**, that is, centered on **ignorance**, employing it in a supposedly strategic or calculated manner.

If, on the one hand, it is possible to state that popular documentation originating from democratic social movements tends to be guided by the triad **[iv]** memory, knowledge, and agency, on the other hand, the question arises whether popular documentation stemming from antidemocratic social movements intentionally and coherently incorporates the absence of ethical commitment, in addition to the use of disinformation in its actions, replacing, in some cases, knowledge with ignorance within this triad. Should this hypothesis be confirmed, the antidemocratic center of popular documentation may adopt, as a strategy for its constitution and operation, the triad of **memory, ignorance, and protagonism.**

The ignorance exploited in the popular documentation originating from antidemocratic social movements may draw on strategies of “**mnemonic and historical revisionism**,” aimed at enabling, encouraging, and shaping engagement and “agency” within analog and/or digital networks. These movements seek to influence individuals’ perceptions and behaviors by manipulating historical narratives and collective memories, thereby reinforcing dogmas or ideologies.

Furthermore, these institutional spaces **[v]** involve both professionals and volunteers, who work with a **[vi]** diversity of sources, though, in certain contexts, with an emphasis on the **[vii]** “intermediation of messages” through a **[viii]** “framing approach.” Their actions tend to focus on real or potential **[ix]** information users as target audiences. This dynamic becomes evident when one assumes that the social movement – whether situationally or overtly antidemocratic and authoritarian – seeks to intermediate messages in order to frame recipients according to shared dogmas, employing persuasive mechanisms.

Finally, it is important to note that the characteristics of popular documentation guided by democratic or antidemocratic social movements may assume configurations that extend beyond those presented here. The complexity of reality requires that instruments of this nature perform a function closer to that of a **heuristic tool** – in their capacity to provoke reflection – rather than rigid models or data collection instruments.

CONCLUSIONS

In proposing a concept of popular documentation, the aim was to establish a framework capable of recognizing informational practices as legitimate forms of production and reproduction of popular knowledge committed to social transformation. In this sense, both the proposed concept and the heuristic matrix presented seek to contribute to the theoretical and practical debate within the fields of Information and Documentation Sciences, as well as in other areas concerned with the subject – particularly regarding the appreciation of memories and knowledge originating from historically marginalized social experiences.

Thus, popular documentation is approached as a praxis of rights, articulating, among others, critical theory and social practice. By exploring access to documentation and approaches to message intermediation and the mediation of information and culture as strategies for genuinely participatory citizenship, the proposal advances a perspective that transcends technical or exclusively academic bias. This perspective incorporates subjects and documentary practices that produce, circulate, and preserve knowledge independently of formal institutional endorsement, professional councils, or other validation mechanisms.

This scenario manifests itself especially in informal popular documentation centers. In contexts of social vulnerability and struggles for rights, for instance, it is common for individuals to collect, produce, and

store community documents without seeking authorization or waiting for formal recognition. In some cases, documentary memory is preserved within the home of a community member. In such situations, the distance from institutional control mechanisms also constitutes a form of resistance and political struggle. In this regard, the conceptual proposal suggests theoretical alternatives that may, among other aspects, support inclusive public policies and strengthen informational initiatives grounded in community and popular contexts.

Furthermore, the discussion sought to reflect on the relationship between popular knowledge and scientific knowledge, especially in contexts marked by instability, institutional fragility, or the absence of democratic practices. Aligned with this perspective, the proposal introduced heuristics aimed at understanding documentary practices linked to different social movements – including those of an authoritarian and antidemocratic nature, such as those aligned with far-right ideologies and, at times, embedded within formal institutional contexts (Paulo & Rabello, 2024).

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How to cite this article (APA):

Rabello, R. (2025). Popular documentation: proposition of a concept. *AtoZ: novas práticas em informação e conhecimento*, 14, 1 – 18. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5380/atoz.v14.98390>

NOTAS DA OBRA E CONFORMIDADE COM A CIÊNCIA ABERTA

CONTRIBUIÇÃO DE AUTORIA

Papéis e contribuições	Rodrigo Rabello
Concepção do manuscrito	X
Escrita do manuscrito	X
Metodologia	X
Curadoria dos dados	X
Discussão dos resultados	X
Análise dos dados	X

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Seção de Apoio às Publicações Científicas Periódicas - Sistema de Bibliotecas (SiBi) da Universidade Federal do Paraná - UFPR

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