

Multiple dimensions in the communication of flood impacts in Rio Grande do Sul: an essay on the social construction of the notion of volunteering

Múltiplas dimensões na comunicação das inundações no Rio Grande do Sul: ensaio sobre a construção social da noção de voluntariado

Rodolfo Bezerra de Menezes LOBATO DA COSTA^{1*}, Tarinê Cortina Poeta Castilho da SILVA^{1**}, Vinícius Luiz CORRÊA^{1***}, Carolina EFING^{1****}, Lara SENGER^{1*****}, Marjorie Reis MULLER^{1*****}

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Abstract: This article examines multiple dimensions in the communication of the socio-environmental impacts of the floods that occurred in May 2024 in Rio Grande do Sul. Field research and data collection were conducted in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre and in the Taquari River Valley, six months after the disaster, observing the recovery process and the lasting traces of destruction. The focus of the study was to understand the forms of engagement produced, exploring the role of social media and messaging apps in climate crisis situations. The methodology adopted included extension activities (film discussion with the documentary “O Resgate”), field reports, direct observation, interviews, and conversation circles, with a focus on the categories of risk, affected populations, and volunteering. The analysis is guided by a reflection on the dilemmas of the social construction of volunteering in emergencies, the role of informal communication relationships in building solidarity and disseminating information. The final analysis focuses on three aspects of the relationship between communication and volunteering: interaction with public institutions, subtle forms of communication between non-human elements, and the social construction of volunteering, based on a supposed dichotomy between the state and civil society.

Keywords: risk communication; socio-environmental disasters; volunteering; floods in Rio Grande do Sul; extreme climatic events.

Resumo: Este artigo examina as múltiplas dimensões na comunicação dos impactos socioambientais das inundações que ocorreram em maio de 2024 no Rio Grande do Sul. A pesquisa de campo e a coleta de dados ocorreram na região metropolitana de Porto Alegre e no Vale do Rio Taquari, seis meses após o desastre, observando o processo de recuperação e as cicatrizes deixadas pela destruição. O foco do estudo foi compreender as formas de engajamento produzidas, explorando o papel das mídias sociais e dos aplicativos de mensagens em situações de crise climática. A metodologia adotada incluiu atividades de extensão (cinedebate com o documentário “O Resgate”), relatos de campo, observação direta, entrevistas e rodas de conversa, com foco nas categorias de risco, afetados e voluntariado. A análise tem como fio condutor uma reflexão sobre os dilemas da construção social do voluntariado em emergências, o papel das relações informais de comunicação na construção de solidariedade e disseminação de informações. A análise final enfoca três aspectos da relação entre comunicação e voluntariado: a interação com instituições públicas, formas sutis de comunicação entre elementos não-humanos e a construção social do voluntariado, fundamentada numa suposta dicotomia entre o Estado e sociedade civil.

Palavras-chave: comunicação de risco; desastres socioambientais; voluntariado; inundações no Rio Grande do Sul; evento climático extremo.

1 Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR), Curitiba, PR, Brazil.

Contact emails:

* rodolfolobato@ufpr.br

** tarine.silva@ufpr.br

*** vinicius.correa@ufpr.br

**** carolina.efing@ufpr.br

***** lara.senger@ufpr.br

***** marjorie.muller@ufpr.br

1. Introduction

Six months after the major floods in May 2024 in Rio Grande do Sul, a research team from the Federal University of Paraná arrived in the capital city to investigate the dynamics and impacts of the climate disaster. Our investigation covered the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre and the Taquari River Valley, allowing us to observe different contexts of resilience. When we arrived, the city showed some signs of returning to normalcy, but a brief walk revealed the marks of destruction not only on the facades of houses but also on the faces and expressions of the residents.

Rio Grande do Sul faced a recurring series of extreme weather events in the early 2020s. Between 2020 and 2023, the state suffered from prolonged droughts, followed by heat waves in the early months of those years. However, the focus of this study is on the major floods that occurred in 2023 and 2024, resulting from extratropical cyclones and atypical precipitation. The analyzed regions have geomorphological characteristics that make them especially vulnerable to hydrological threats. The area is characterized by mountain ranges with a dense network of water bodies, where several municipalities are situated in floodplains.

The Taquari-Antas watershed, whose tributaries converge into Lake Guaíba, constitutes a drainage system that directly impacts the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre. This geographical configuration favors the phenomenon of cascading floods: events that begin in the Taquari Valley progressively propagate toward the capital. Such vulnerability explains why municipalities like Muçum, Encantado, Santa Tereza, and Roca Sales, as well as Porto Alegre, have developed a historical relationship with flooding events. In the capital, this adaptation materializes in the Flood Protection System, infrastructure implemented in 1971 in response to the catastrophic flood of 1941.

In this article, we will seek to analyze the different accounts collected to identify the multiple dimensions in the communication of the floods. In addition to traditional media, we focus on seemingly marginal objects of analysis, such as social networks and their different forms of engagement, including communicational aspects between humans and animals in the context of extreme climate events.

In response to the question “what is a disaster?”, we are guided by what Mattedi (2017) understands as cognitive disputes related to the processes of “naturalization” or “culturalization”, closely linked to communication experiences. By emphasizing a sociological approach, the author asserts that extreme climate events can be instruments for analyzing the rupture in the sociotechnical network of stability between the social and natural worlds. Therefore, we consider the reports as data and *locus* privileged for investigation.

Using a methodological approach that combined field reports, direct observation, discussion circles, and interviews with different agents, we

sought to observe emerging analytical categories among the interlocutors, identifying notions of risk, affected individuals, and volunteers. The critical analysis of institutional practices sought to understand how volunteering is organized and operates in emergencies, whether they are civil, specialized professionals, or linked to organizations. Furthermore, we explored how social networks and informal communication relationships played a crucial role in building networks of solidarity and disseminating information, often filling gaps left by formal structures.

The constitution of the research field and the identification of actors, mediators, and interlocutors were inspired by Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2012), which contributed to tracing the interaction and connection between human actors (public or private agents) and non-human actors (mobile applications, film exhibition sites, radios, and animals)¹. This methodological approach combined the analysis of normative references and dialogue with social actors involved in the response to flooding. In this way, it was possible to construct a multidimensional understanding of the issue, articulating socio-environmental, political, and legal aspects.

We begin the article by contextualizing the climate event and the steps of data collection, with a description of the notion of risks and affected individuals. Subsequently, we highlight as an object of analysis the documentary “O Resgate”, produced by Brasil Paralelo (Mesquita & Viana, 2024), which is strategic for understanding the emergence of the activated analytical categories. The choice of the documentary as an object of analysis is due to its importance in narrative disputes about the event and for placing the figure of the volunteer at the center of a symbolic dispute. It thus configures itself as strategic for analyzing the meanings attributed to solidarity and civil engagement, even though we recognize its intentionally ideological and partial character.

To critically analyze this narrative construction and the phenomena observed in the field, the article is structured around three central aspects of the relationship between communication and volunteering that emerged from the research: interaction with public institutions and social movements, the emergence of the agency of non-human elements as social actors, and finally, the social construction of the notion of volunteering itself.

1 In Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2012), the notion of ‘actor’ (or ‘actant’) is not restricted to human beings but includes any entity that produces effects in society, modifying relationships and social dynamics. Thus, applications, websites, radios, and even animals are considered non-human social actors, as they mediate actions, influence decisions, and actively participate in the construction of reality – without possessing intentionality in the human sense, but exercising material and symbolic agency.

1.1. Methodology

Between November 16 and 22, 2024, a collective of students² linked to the Graduate Programs in Environment and Development (PPGMade) and Sociology (PPGSocio) conducted fieldwork in Rio Grande do Sul. The initial objective was to analyze the institutional and community responses triggered by the extreme climate event that occurred on May 16, 2024.

The initiative included visits to public and non-governmental organizations, and direct interactions with the affected communities. The team, composed of master's and doctoral students from the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), sought to understand and document the perceptions and practices that could serve as a basis for the formulation of individual academic research projects.

The team visited the municipalities of Encantado, Roca Sales, Muçum, Porto Alegre, Canoas, Viamão, and Guaíba, cities that faced significant challenges, including population displacement, damage to local wildlife, and loss of critical infrastructure. The Civil Defense of Porto Alegre and the Municipal Zoo of Canoas, for example, presented challenges for risk communication. Another highlighted aspect was the work of organizations such as the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST), which operated through Brigades; the Movement of People Affected by Dams (Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragem – RS); NGOs focused on rescuing affected animals; and a social impact company, that is, a private entity with profit motives that presents itself as a humanitarian platform. These initiatives demonstrated the crucial role of organized civil society in times of crisis.

As a strategy for engagement in the field, we held meetings with two teaching, research, and extension groups from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS): TEMAS (Technology, Environment, and Society) and the Environmental Journalism Research Group (GPJA), responsible for the extension project 'Observatory of Environmental Journalism.' These two meetings allowed for deeper discussions on the challenges of risk communication and the dissemination of information about extreme climate events.

The investigation was also anchored in the discipline of Environmental Epistemology, offered by PPGSocio (UFPR), which provided the theoretical-methodological framework and a space for collective organization. As part of the activities, a university extension event was held in the format of a film discussion session ("cinedebate"³), during which the documen-

2 Students linked to the Research Group "Observatory of Socio-Environmental Conflicts" at UFPR, and involved in the research project "Socio-Environmental Conflicts and Socio-Climate Markers".

3 Sociologist Camila Dellagnese Prates, linked to the Department of Economics and Statistics of the Planning, Governance, and Management Secretariat of RS, acted as a speaker and interlocutor at the event.

tary O Resgate (Mesquita & Viana, 2024) was screened and discussed. The analysis of the documentary was conducted with the aim of identifying the meanings attributed to volunteering and the actions of civil society. The choice is justified by the relevance of the work in the symbolic construction of public narratives about disaster and politics, along with the fact that the documentary's release occurred on the eve of the municipal elections.

The analysis was based on legal references, including the National Policy on Climate Change (Law No. 12,187/2009), the National Policy for Protection and Civil Defense (Law No. 12,608/2012), and the Law on Climate Change Adaptation Plans (Law No. 14,904/2024). These regulations allowed for an understanding of the regulatory landscape and the institutional guidelines that guide risk management and disasters in Brazil.

In this article, we selected interlocutors who will be identified by letters, such as the agents of the Civil Defense of Porto Alegre (N, R, and T), with whom we collected information through a discussion circle; two members of the Movement of People Affected by Dams (M and Y); residents of Sarandi (A and X), one resident from Lami beach (I), and a community leader of the Haitian community in the municipality of Encantado (F); a humanitarian coordinator from a social impact company (W). In addition, we had the collaboration, in direct observation work on care practices, of two managers from NGOs (SOS Pets and "Don't Leave Me Behind"), three veterinarians linked to these organizations, and two veterinarians from the Zoo of Canoas.

The adopted methodology included the use of individual field notebooks, in which each researcher recorded notes, accounts, and impressions about the visits and interactions. At the end of each day, the team gathered in the shared accommodation to organize and systematize the collected perceptions, using posters as a visual tool to structure the main perceptions, reflections, and findings. The team was composed of six researchers, who divided into pairs or trios to carry out the activities.

2. Floods as Gaia's intrusion: "the waters at the ankles, at the waist, and on the roof"

The metropolitan region of Porto Alegre occupies an area of high hydrological risk. In 1941, a historic flood impacted the city, with water levels reaching a peak of 4.75 meters, significantly surpassing the three-meter mark of the port dock. Since then, several other significant floods have been recorded, but none of them exceeded the maximum level of 3.50 meters. In 1967, Lake Guaíba reached 3.13 meters, prompting the construction of the flood protection dike system (Silveira, 2020).

The floods that hit Porto Alegre in 2024 caused the deaths of 183 individuals, according to Civil Defense (G1 RS, 2024), and displaced over 629,000 people. The level of Lake Guaíba reached 5.35 meters, surpassing

the historical mark (Silva & Oliveira, 2024). Neighborhoods like Sarandi were particularly affected, where the waters reached up to three meters in height and took months to recede (Audi et al., 2024). During the field visit, reports from residents reinforced this scenario, where homes were completely submerged, losing almost all belongings, and became dependent on public, private, or community assistance.

Since the 1970s, the city of Porto Alegre established a Stormwater Department (DEP), responsible for managing risks related to drainage and stormwater runoff, as well as flood gates. Almost fifty years later, the DEP was absorbed by the DMAE (Municipal Department of Water and Sewage) in 2018. This initiative was part of a “broad administrative reform” of the municipal government, which aimed to reduce bureaucracy and facilitate citizens’ access to public services (Prefeitura Municipal de Porto Alegre, 2025).

In 2020, the State Court of Accounts initiated an audit, which concluded that, between 2015 and 2019, the executive branch undermined the agency, despite the DMAE being profitable. As a consequence, the contractual action with BNDES for privatization was suspended. In the following years, the surplus was maintained, according to the Transparency Portal of Porto Alegre, but controversies persist regarding the quality and quantity of necessary investments (Portal Transparência, 2025).

There are signs that extreme weather events, such as heavy rains, have become more frequent due to global warming (Silva & Oliveira, 2024), although some public authorities and opinion leaders in Rio Grande do Sul claim that the flood protection system is sufficient. In other words, there is a controversial opinion that the flood would be a consequence of a technical problem. We found arguments indicating the need for an update of this system to perform in accordance with climate changes, or that the flood protection system is extremely costly and inefficient, or that there is a need for population displacement. In this sense, the controversy mixes arguments, values, and technical and political references.

Despite the controversies, there is a relative consensus that the urban infrastructure of Porto Alegre is not prepared to handle such events. During the interviews, Civil Defense agents reinforced this concern, highlighting that the city’s drainage system was not designed to cope with such high volumes of water. One of the agents mentioned that the initial response to the disaster was hampered by a lack of communication between different levels of government, which delayed the dispatch of essential resources for rescues. It is necessary to problematize the meaning of the notion of “lack of communication”, which will be unfolded in the article.

In addition to structural damage and population displacement, the lack of immediate assistance was also a critical factor. Residents of the municipality of Canoas reported that the inefficiency of communication from public agents caused people not to evacuate risk areas, even when alerted.

According to them, due to several false alarms issued, the calls from the Civil Defense loudspeakers were ignored by a large part of the community on the most critical day of the floods.

Agent N from Civil Defense highlighted, referring to the last two years, that Rio Grande do Sul has entered a “disaster route” and that the population has not yet assimilated the gravity of the situation. The resistance of residents to evacuate their homes before the worsening of the floods, due to fear of looting, was one of the main challenges. N reported that, in some operations, those rescued only accepted help from state agents, refusing the presence of volunteers for fear of losing their belongings.

Data gathered in a single field visit indicate that the floods that struck Porto Alegre between 2023 and 2024 did not occur suddenly, a process that will be presented in the collected reports. There was a succession of events that intensified over time. On November 21, 2024, during the field survey, agent N described this evolution using a metaphor popular among those affected: *first, the water came to the ankles, then it reached the waist, and now it has risen to the rooftops*. This expression synthesizes a chronology and identifies an evolution of the phenomenon.

In early 2023, the “ankle-deep floods” hit areas of recurring flooding, also narrated by M (a member of MAB) when using the following characterization: *the population of Sarandi raised their children with water at their ankles* (report made on November 22, 2024). Resident A reported that his son *couldn't take it anymore* (reported on November 22, 2024), attributing the change of residence to the floods. The interviewee himself considered emigrating to the interior of the state and changing professions, as living with the floods offered him no prospect of recovery in that region of Porto Alegre. Despite being inconvenient, these floods were previously considered manageable or naturalized by residents and local authorities.

By the end of 2023, the advance of the rains and soil saturation raised the water levels, characterizing the phase of “waist-deep floods”. During this period, several families needed to be relocated, and essential services began to be compromised, with reports of difficulty in assistance. At the end of 2023, the activist collective “Eco for Climate” along with lawmakers held a public hearing in an attempt to declare a climate emergency in RS (Garske, 2023).

The movement, despite not achieving the declaration of emergency, minimally mobilized public authorities. In response, the city hall of Porto Alegre launched Public Notice No. 126/2023 for the hiring of thirty Technical and Operational Service Agents for Civil Defense. In the same vein, after the floods of May 2024, a new Public Notice (No. 071/2024) was opened with seven more vacancies for Technical and Operational Service Agents, following the logic of hiring only after tragedies.

The peak of the disaster occurred when the water surpassed the roofs of numerous homes, leading to the collapse of levees and essential infra-

structures. Civil Defense and the Armed Forces had to intensify rescues, but many residents were left isolated. The account of agent N confirms that the tragedy of 2024 surpassed any previous event in magnitude and impact.

This sequence of events reaffirms the warnings issued by researchers about the precariousness of the city's drainage structures and the absence of operational plans by the responsible agencies. In an interview granted to IHU (Instituto Humanitas Unisinos [IHU], 2024), UFRGS professor Rualdo Menegat also cited the deficiencies of the floodgate system, plans for electricity, and drinking water in flooding situations.

The catastrophe experienced by Porto Alegre cannot be understood merely as a punctual failure in public management or as an isolated event in the city's history of floods. As Isabelle Stengers (2015) suggests when addressing the "intrusion of Gaia", events like the floods of 2024 should be seen as expressions of a new planetary condition, in which the boundaries between nature and society are irreparably crossed.

2.1. Groping the risks and identifying the notion of those affected

The act of thinking about the risk society is an invitation to analyze the perceptions and interpretations of extreme climate events. The concept of risk (Beck, 2001) highlights how society is capable of creating technologies while simultaneously producing new and complex types of risks. In the case of Porto Alegre, the floods are not merely a product of natural variables, but also of socioeconomic factors.

With the intention of identifying the social construction of the collective imaginary about risks, it was possible to find clues of a tendency among residents of affected areas to underestimate the real danger of climate events beforehand. In their accounts, many admitted to having ignored the warnings from Civil Defense and resisted leaving their homes – behavior that reveals a normalization of risk, stemming from familiarity with past floods. This naturalization of extreme events, even in the face of signs of threat, demonstrates how individual and collective perceptions can amplify vulnerabilities.

Another crucial issue in the debate about the impacts of extreme climate events concerns the concepts of environmental injustice (Acselrad et al, 2009) and environmental racism (Herculano & Pacheco, 2006; Belmont, 2023). The most vulnerable populations are often the most exposed to these threats, given their location in peripheral neighborhoods. The Farrapos neighborhood in Porto Alegre, heavily affected in 2024, has the highest concentration of self-identified black individuals (40%) compared to other neighborhoods in the city, according to IBGE (2022 cited for Corrêa, 2024).

Understanding the multiple dimensions of communication is strategic for comprehending the internalization of socio-environmental risks. Elements such as promoting socio-environmental education and raising

awareness about climate change can be tools to achieve the necessary civil engagement in prevention practices and emergency responses (Teixeira & Sebastião, 2023).

In the Praia do Lami neighborhood in Porto Alegre, we walked through deserted streets lined with abandoned houses or those under reconstruction. Materials were piled up on the facades, while the residents, sometimes resilient and sometimes resigned, tried to recover their homes. During one of these visits, we encountered Mr. I, who was reinforcing one of the pillars of his house with boards and ropes. When asked about his safety, he evasively replied: *it's...* (November 19, 2024). The waterfront of the neighborhood bore the traces of the successive floods of 2023 and 2024.

Heading to the Vale do Taquari, we met Mr. F, a community leader of the Haitians in the Navegantes neighborhood in Encantado. The city, heavily impacted by the floods, illustrated the inequality in recovery among different communities. Mr. F guided us through the ruins of the Navegantes Municipal Early Childhood Education School, located in the center of a public square, without a roof and covered in mud. The neighborhood, predominantly Haitian, is situated on a plain just 500 meters from the Taquari River. Many homes were located six meters below the level of the plain, and the tallest building in the neighborhood was completely submerged. The disaster required state intervention, but also highlighted the protagonism of civil society in responding to the crisis.

In Praia do Lami, a marine mechanic organized a community support network with the help of a local housing cooperative. Together, they established a donation and food distribution center, temporarily relying on the support of an international organization. In the Vale do Taquari, a non-profit organization, initially focused on managing a tourist spot, transformed into a *hub* for the distribution of humanitarian assistance. In Porto Alegre, an NGO dedicated to serving underprivileged women began producing hundreds of meals daily, later being integrated into the federal program Cozinha Solidária.

Another relevant aspect observed was the relationship between humans and animals; the emotional bond with dogs and cats emerged intensely, driving mobilization. However, the tragedy also exposed practices of abandonment, often disguised as spontaneous rescues. NGOs reported that some guardians disposed of their animals under the pretext of having found them homeless, overloading the shelters. The situation of production animals followed a distinct logic; the loss of cattle, pigs, and birds was often treated as a financial loss.

Wild animals exhibited their own dynamics during the disaster. As reported by the veterinarians from the Municipal Zoo of Canoas, many species managed to seek refuge. However, the human reoccupation of the affected areas generated conflicts with residents finding animals in previously uninhabited places. Moreover, the lack of technical training for

rescuers resulted in unnecessary rescues, overloading triage centers and zoos. Another observed phenomenon was the increase in the surrender of wild animals kept illegally in captivity.

Disasters not only destroy homes and infrastructure but also profoundly transform lives. As Vainer (2008) points out, the figure of the affected is not limited to those who suffer material losses, but rather to people whose social trajectory is reconfigured by the event. In the accounts of residents from Praia do Lami, Vale do Taquari, or Sarandi, we find clues of this impact: the experience of disaster does not end with the receding waters, but persists in housing insecurity and unequal reconstruction, fraught with uncertainties.

In this context, being affected means dealing with the rupture of daily life and the forced reinvention of individual and collective trajectories. Whether in the abandonment of their own homes, in the reorganization of the community to fill gaps left by the State, or in adapting to a transformed territory, the affected are those who, from the disaster, enter a new social condition. Thus, recovery should not be thought of merely as the replacement of what was lost, but as a process that recognizes and confronts the historical inequalities that render some groups vulnerable.

3. Documentary “O Resgate” (The Rescue) and “o povo pelo povo” (the people for the people): the idealization of volunteering

The documentary “*O Resgate*” is a production of Brasil Paralelo (BP), released on August 8, 2024, on the video platform *YouTube*⁴. Brasil Paralelo self-identifies as a journalism, entertainment, and education company. On its online platform, we find films, documentaries, e-books, and journalistic articles.

As we navigate through the BP portal, we find information that provides important clues about its content, such as the company’s mission: *to rescue the good values, ideas, and feelings in the hearts of all Brazilians*⁵. The rescue of a nationalist sentiment, the appeal to the image of “people” combined with a liberal discourse becomes even more evident through the declaration of its values: *Truth, Freedom, Art, Ambition, Meritocracy, Unity, Diplomacy*⁶.

According to data provided on its own website, today BP has more than 400,000 subscribers, over 3.6 million subscribers on its channel, and more than 6 million followers on its social media, aiming to be, according

4 Brasil Paralelo. (2024, agosto 8). *Documentário completo sobre a tragédia no Rio Grande do Sul: O Resgate*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/live/7mR5nNUQxYw>

5 Brasil Paralelo. [s.d.]. *Sobre nós: O que é a Brasil Paralelo*. <https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/>

6 Brasil Paralelo. [s.d.]. *Sobre nós: O que é a Brasil Paralelo*. <https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/>

to them, *the ecosystem with the greatest cultural influence in Brazil*⁷. In 2021, Forbes magazine published a ranking of the most influential *think tanks* of the free market⁸, and the BP platform stands out in the area of educational videos.

When we delve into BP's content, we notice a strong presence of a war rhetoric, an omnipresent bond with symbols and terms of the armed forces, and a unique appreciation for stories of past or contemporary wars. This form of advocacy appears to the reader as an idea that there is an ongoing war. This war has a cultural and ideological character, primarily against issues of gender, climate change, and public policies aimed at reducing inequalities.

The documentary we analyzed is organized as a selection of interviews and accounts made by victims, members of organizations from the state of Rio Grande do Sul, such as public managers and politicians from the region, and mainly members of civil society who helped rescue people and animals during the days of the flooding. It begins with a sequence of images of the affected areas, aiming to show all the damage caused by the force of the water, while we hear in the background only the voices of different people, still anonymous, regarding their memories of the tragedy. Then we follow some interviewees visiting what remained of their homes, accompanied by instrumental music that creates a sensitive and unsettling atmosphere.

From the interview with a manager of the Central Public Market of Porto Alegre, the documentary shows the plaque fixed to the wall of the market, which signals and reminds visitors of the height that the water reached during the flood of 1941. The protagonist, raising his hand a little higher along the wall, shows the mark left by the water during the flood of 2024, 41 centimeters above. Beyond the trauma of the moments of despair they experienced, due to the lives lost and destroyed, the magnitude of the economic impact that this calamity represents for the affected municipalities is outlined.

In the second part of the documentary, titled "chronology of a tragedy", a survey of news and data begins that tells the story of how the events started and unfolded. The BP brings to light that, in 2018, engineers from the city of Porto Alegre issued a warning about a failure in the city's flood protection mechanisms and that three pumping stations, which serve to drain rainwater, were experiencing operational problems. In the event of heavy rains, these failures could lead to significant flooding and, therefore, required urgent repairs; however, this request was not addressed by the city

7 Brasil Paralelo. [s.d.]. *Sobre nós: O que é a Brasil Paralelo*. <https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/>

8 Chafuen, A. A. (2021, march 30). The 2021 ranking of free-market think tanks measured by social media impact. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alejandrochafuen/2021/03/30/the-2021-ranking-of-free-market-think-tanks-measured-by-social-media-impact/>

hall. A first hypothesis of the documentary is then presented: the flooding would be a technical problem, which downplays the climatic dimension.

After two episodes of flooding in the city in 2023, a new warning was issued; nevertheless, there was no resolution. The city hall of Porto Alegre, under the management of Sebastião Melo (MDB) since 2021, does not receive criticism in the documentary for its lack of action regarding the reported problems. It is relevant to mention that this same mayor, preserved by the documentary, was re-elected in October 2024, six months after the incident and two months after the release of this documentary.

The day of April 27, 2024 marks the beginning of heavy rains in the state, which were followed by alerts. On the fourth day of rain, April 30, the impact of the waters was already of large proportions. According to the interviewees, the media coverage of the event was deemed insufficient, directing criticism mainly at Rede Globo, which allegedly downplayed the tragedy, even giving more coverage time to the pop artist Madonna's show on Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro. However, we checked the reports from *Jornal Nacional* starting on April 30 and 31, and the news program dedicated the first nine minutes to the disaster, the day of Madonna's show; that is, more than one-third of the total duration – 24 minutes and 52 seconds – was occupied by the floods⁹.

Rede Globo seems to be one of the targets of *Brasil Paralelo* in the name of “good values”. This becomes more evident when we see the public questioning and condemnation created around the show of an international pop artist, marked by performances that challenge moral conventions (“Madonna”). Due to the unprecedented size and format of this event, the media coverage took over Brazilian television and social networks. The mentioned show appears in the documentary as a symbol of what the narrator describes as *frivolity and lack of connection with the real world*. This mega-event seems to gather many of the banners repudiated by *Brasil Paralelo*, such as public investment in art and culture, mainly represented by the Cultural Incentive Law (Lei Rouanet). It is also noteworthy that the pop singer is recognized for her activism for social causes and human rights.

In addition to strong criticisms of the media outlets, we identify accusations of state inefficiency and the imposition of “bureaucracies” for the arrival of donations in the region. Only one state agency is spared, and the image of “Strong Arm” is the title of the third part of the documentary, a direct reference to the motto of the Brazilian army “Strong arm, friendly hand”. The “strong arm” signifies military power in the name of national defense, while the “friendly hand” is aimed at contributing to the maintenance of peace and the well-being of the country. This part of the docu-

9 *Jornal Nacional*. (2024, maio 04). *Programa de 04/05/2024*. [Vídeo]. Rede Globo. <https://globoplay.globo.com/v/12572099/?s=0s>

mentary focuses on the actions of volunteers, members of civil society, who participated in the rescues; it is the central narrative of the documentary.

Accompanied by a soundtrack worthy of classic action films, centered on the image of a “hero’s journey”, we watch videos made by the volunteers themselves on their cell phones. Subsequently, various people introduce themselves and begin to share their stories. They are mostly men and women who felt compassion and decided to help in numerous ways, using boats to search for people, maintaining the vessels or food, gathering addresses of people waiting for rescue, collecting donations, etc. The voluntary action gained so much momentum that it became a symbol, gaining space on social media and creating a discourse about kindness, grounded in a nationalist idea that organized itself within notions of brotherhood.

The idea contained in the concept “*o povo pelo povo*”, used in the documentary, goes beyond the mention of the success of a self-managed operation by citizens, but carries the view that public power and its institutions would be inefficient, unprepared, or even uninterested. In contrast, an “apolitical” image of the volunteers is created, suggesting that they do not belong to ideological and party organizations. The term “politics” appears at different moments and is used pejoratively, as a synonym for greed or deviation from altruistic sentiment, even questioning whether donations would be diverted in corruption schemes.

There is a complete disbelief and distrust in institutions and political agents present in the accounts of different volunteers, which is evident in the words of the entrepreneur and volunteer: *no one is here for politics, no one here is a mercenary, no one is here to make money. We are here to honor the name of our family and honor the gaúcho people and honor the Brazilian people* (Documentary O Resgate, 2024, 38:54).

Despite no recognition regarding what was done by the State as a form of mitigation, the army and police forces end up being the only state bodies mentioned positively. References to the army appear in contrast to the criticisms made of the State and represent a sector that disconnects from politics and seems to be alongside civil society. Volunteers are elevated to the role of heroes, capable of great sacrifices to save strangers.

Cases of digital influencers who helped set up a million-dollar donation operation gain prominence, as described in this testimony: *the feeling of people here who have a little more discernment (...) is a feeling of total bankruptcy of everything! We supplied hospitals (...) we brought water!* (Documentary O Resgate, 2024, 49:08). This testimony was one among many, especially from entrepreneurs and influencers, who used social media to raise donations and mobilize a supposed fleet of trucks and planes. These initiatives by the private sector gain a burst of true altruism and heroism, but they also help to show the size and extent of the donation network that was created throughout Brazil, which had social media, like *WhatsApp* and *Instagram*, as their tools for mobilization and engagement.

There is a feeling of abandonment, rhetorically produced, in which the moral singularity of volunteers encounters a supposed “inaction” or “immorality” in the absence of the State and formal media. This way of characterizing reality produces a Manichean rift between the State and volunteering, or between the State and civil society. It is, therefore, a deepening of political polarization in favor of a liberal project of dismantling state functions.

4. Communication and volunteering

Communication and volunteering emerge as central elements in crisis scenarios, performing functions that transcend the simple mobilization of resources or the execution of specific actions. In the context of the 2024 floods in Rio Grande do Sul, these dimensions proved indispensable for articulating quick and effective responses, while also exposing structural fragilities and organizational challenges. This item proposes an analysis of the multiple facets of volunteering, considering its performance in different spheres and investigating how communication was mobilized to enable humanitarian actions.

The analysis is structured around two main axes: the interaction between volunteers and public institutions, such as Civil Defense and the Army; the actions of civil society organizations encompassing NGOs, social impact companies, social movements, and local communities.

4.1. Volunteering and public institutions (Civil Defense, Army)

The role of volunteering reveals nuances that go beyond the simple willingness to help. In the context of the floods in Porto Alegre, volunteers emerged as key elements in mediating between the population and the public power, both in emergency response and in communication about rights and assistance. The field experience demonstrated that, while the presence of volunteers in rescue and assistance operations was essential, the relationship with public institutions often fluctuated between cooperation and a lack of coordination.

During visits to the municipal Civil Defense, we identified that institutional communication faced significant challenges, especially in conveying reliable information to the affected population. The account of N, a Civil Defense agent, illustrates this difficulty by mentioning that communication was the greatest barrier during the critical period. During the floods, the Civil Defense of the State of Rio Grande do Sul issued alerts to the population through the *WhatsApp* number. The Municipal Civil Defense of Porto Alegre began providing service through a messaging app on February 19, 2024, allowing residents to receive weather alerts.

Subsequently, on May 4, 2024, a specific service was implemented on *WhatsApp* for emergencies with life-threatening risks, offering direct con-

tact with a human attendant to expedite rescues. There was also a form of communication partially filled by volunteers, who coordinated via social networks and direct contacts to address urgent demands.

N reported that, in some operations, volunteers accompanied Civil Defense agents in boats. However, there were cases where affected residents refused help when volunteers were present, fearing that their homes would be looted. This fear reinforces the perception that, despite the importance of volunteering, many affected individuals placed greater trust in the assistance of state agents. There is the case of X's neighbor, who spent the entire flood in an armed boat, camping on the third floor of his house, which was the only point not flooded. His goal was to prevent looting against his residence and those of his neighbors.

The uniform, in this context, represents an essential dimension of communication. Visual symbols such as colors, insignias, and institutional clothing carry a significant weight of authority and reliability. Subtle elements, such as posture, tone of voice, and even the way of approaching the affected individuals, can directly influence the acceptance of help. Amid chaos and insecurity, the presence of uniformed agents establishes an immediate relationship of recognition and legitimacy, something that volunteers, despite being well-intentioned, have not always managed to convey. This factor highlights how communication is not limited to words alone, but involves a complex set of signals that, in crisis situations, can determine the success or failure of a rescue operation.

In addition to N, two other Civil Defense agents shared insights about the challenges faced during the floods. Another agent, identified here as R, who actively participated in the rescue operations, emphasized that the lack of adequate equipment hindered the actions of local agents, leading to the need for external support. Meanwhile, T, involved in coordinating the teams, reinforced that the municipal structure proved insufficient to handle the magnitude of the disaster, and that the Army's involvement was crucial for the logistics and execution of large-scale rescues.

One of the supports provided by the Armed Forces was the communication radio, which improved coordination between field teams and command centers. According to the agents, this equipment was essential for coordinating movements in flooded areas, ensuring that rescue requests were met more efficiently. In a scenario where the telephone and internet infrastructure was severely compromised, communication via radio represented a crucial differential for the success of operations, despite having limitations related to access to electricity.

A member of a social impact company, W reported, as a member of the *Humanitarian Cluster* for the floods, that the army became the *de facto* leadership of the emergency response, while the Civil Defense was placed in a secondary position. In turn, the action of the postal service was essential to ensure the logistical management of donations, and the orga-

nizational structure of the public company was reallocated to favor the humanitarian response. These two public entities were considered pivots of the emergency phase of the floods by the interviewee.

On the other hand, several members of civil society reported that volunteering was essential to ensure immediate support in areas where the government could not reach. A resident of an affected area commented that *if it weren't for the mobilization of the community, many people would have gone days without assistance* X (conversation held on December 22, 2024). Additionally, some local organizations formed networks to ensure the movement of displaced persons, highlighting that the speed of the voluntary response contrasted with state bureaucracy.

In a discussion circle, we identified that the agents of the Municipal Civil Defense perceived signs of a weakened structure in the face of the magnitude of the disaster. The very growth of the contingent of agents, from nine to forty, was a reflection of this emergency need, but it did not address the lack of coordination among federal spheres. As pointed out in conversations with affected residents, the role of volunteers was not limited to physical rescue, but also to building networks of solidarity and disseminating information about aid and rights.

The team from the Environmental Journalism Research Group (GPJA) at UFRGS pointed out that the way institutions disseminated information was marked by structural failures. The centralization of messages in the figure of the governor and the use of an alarmist tone, without concrete guidance, hindered the population's understanding of the actions to be taken. Additionally, maps and announcements were removed after being published with errors, generating distrust and misinformation.

Communication in times of extreme weather plays an essential role in raising public awareness and mobilizing effective public policies. Aguiar and Loose (2024) highlight how journalistic coverage can both inform about the immediate impacts of climate change and broaden the debate for the construction of coping measures. The inclusion of the topic in newscasts, such as the *Lunch News*, highlights the importance of contextualizing climate events within the global environmental crisis, beyond factual coverage. In this way, journalism has the responsibility to go beyond the mere transmission of emergency information and act as a critical agent in the discussion of public policies and strategies for mitigating climate events (Aguiar & Loose, 2024).

The relationship between volunteering and public institutions reveals a multifaceted scenario: while it was essential on various fronts, the main force of action in critical moments cannot be determined exclusively by this field research. The perception of the relative importance of each group varies among the different interviewed actors. This dynamic reinforces the need for efficient communication among public agents, volunteers, and

the population, as well as strengthening institutional capacities to face future crises.

4.2. Subtle communications in the relationship between humans and non-humans

The floods exposed not only the logistical challenges faced but also the complexity of interactions between humans and animals. In crisis contexts, interest relations become more visible, revealing forms of communication that go beyond verbal language, encompassing gestures, behaviors, and instinctive or emotional responses.

We identified examples of sensitive cooperation between humans and non-humans, such as in cases where dogs and cats were rescued, or when volunteers and veterinarians mobilized to treat animals in adverse conditions. Practical dilemmas emerged, such as the decision to perform euthanasia on animals with infectious diseases, or the invisibility of certain species, like production and wild animals, which are often neglected compared to companion animals. Furthermore, the absence of clear protocols and adequate technical knowledge for handling animals in crisis situations indicated communication failures.

It was possible to identify clues of subtle communications between humans and non-humans, as well as among the animals themselves, in flood-affected scenarios. From the observations made in shelters, zoos, and NGOs, data was collected on the challenges, possibilities, and limitations of interspecies dynamics in contexts of vulnerability.

Bruno Latour (2020) argues that the relationship between humans and non-humans should be understood as a network of complex interactions, in which both groups are active agents. This perspective challenges the traditional view that separates the 'natural world' from the 'human world', proposing instead a hybrid world. With this perspective, we guided our field observations, especially when analyzing the shelter 'Don't Leave Me Behind', the Municipal Zoo of Canoas, and the actions of the NGO SOS Pets.

In the shelter 'Don't Leave Me Behind', for example, the veterinarians reported that during the rains, the dogs climbed into their 'houses' and howled intensely, while those that were loose grouped together in search of higher ground, as if alerting each other to the imminent danger. This behavior evidences a form of communication that transcends human language, reinforcing the idea of solidarity among animals.

Additionally, the veterinarians at the shelter faced practical dilemmas related to the euthanasia of animals with infectious diseases. Despite the risk of contagion, the shelter's position was against the practice, opting for the treatment of animals, even in adverse conditions. This stance reflects a duality: on one side, the preservation of animal life; on the other, the need to protect the collective. This decision, however, was not without

challenges. The volunteer veterinarians revealed technical and emotional difficulties in performing procedures with limited resources, highlighting that handling the animals required more than just technical knowledge about the pathologies. According to veterinarians, it was essential to understand the traumas experienced by animals during the floods, as these traumas directly influenced their behaviors, both in relation to humans and to other species.

Many animals expressed fear or pain, which needed to be interpreted to ensure proper management. For example, dogs that had lost their guardians or had been exposed to extreme risk situations exhibited behaviors of withdrawal or aggression, while others showed signs of sociability by seeking closeness with caregivers. These interactions, although silent, were crucial in determining treatment and socialization strategies, highlighting the importance of understanding the nuances of animal communication.

Latour (2020) emphasizes that the agency of non-humans should not be ignored; this perspective is particularly relevant in the context of shelters/refuges, where the decisions made by veterinarians and volunteers were constantly influenced by the behavioral responses of the animals. Thus, the subtle communication between humans and animals not only revealed the need for a sensitive approach that considers the specificities of each species.

In the context of the Municipal Zoo of Canoas, the interaction between humans and wild animals proved to be a critical point during the floods. Although the zoo technicians had extensive knowledge about wildlife and their needs, the lack of preparation of other involved agents, such as firefighters, police, and volunteers, compromised the effectiveness of rescue actions. This gap in technical knowledge and communication generated a series of unnecessary interventions, which not only overloaded the zoo but also put the health and well-being of the animals themselves at risk.

One of the main problems observed was misinformation on the part of civilians, who, out of fear or ignorance, frequently requested the removal of wild animals from their homes or properties, even when it was not necessary. According to zoo specialists, in many cases, it was enough to open the area and wait for the animals to return to their *habitat* on their own. Animals such as opossums, armadillos, and birds, which sought temporary shelter in sheds and residences during the flood, tend to move spontaneously back when normal conditions return. The lack of understanding of these dynamics led to hasty interventions, resulting in unnecessary captures and, in some cases, exacerbating stress or injuries.

Firefighters and police, while essential for rescue logistics, did not possess the necessary knowledge to handle wildlife, which resulted in counterproductive actions. Volunteers, in turn, often acted based on good intentions, but without proper guidance, contributing to overcrowding at the zoo and inadequate management of species.

A relevant aspect observed during the floods in Rio Grande do Sul was the way the media addressed the animal issue. Most news focused on companion animals, such as dogs and cats, highlighting stories of successful rescues, emotional losses, and reunions between families and their animals that had been separated. These widely publicized accounts mobilized public attention and generated emotion, reinforcing the emotional bond that society establishes with these species. However, regarding rural and wild animals, the approach was significantly different, with rare exceptions. A notable example was the case of a horse rescued from a roof in Rio Grande do Sul, which gained media attention and generated great emotion (Laboissière, 2024).

In the case of production animals, such as cattle, pigs, and birds, the invisibility was even more evident. The relationship established with these animals often distances itself from an emotional bond, being predominantly mediated by their economic value. In situations of flooding, the loss of these animals is often perceived as a financial loss, leading the owners to prioritize the search for economic compensations, such as insurance or indemnities, instead of efforts for the rescue or care of the animals. This utilitarian perspective strongly contrasts with the emotional and affective approach dedicated to companion animals, highlighting a hierarchy of value that permeates interspecies relationships.

On the other hand, wild animals have often been portrayed alarmingly by the media, reinforcing stereotypes of danger and unpredictability. An emblematic example was the case of an alligator sighted in a neighborhood in Porto Alegre, which generated sensationalist headlines and exaggerated concerns (O Globo, 2024). While companion animals are seen as family members and receive priority attention, wild animals are often treated as threats or curiosities, and production animals as commodities.

The experiences lived during field prospecting reinforce the importance of understanding subtle communications as a central element for managing animals in crisis situations. Thus, the construction of more effective and inclusive responses depends not only on technical resources but also on multiple dimensions of communication, other sensitivities, and knowledge that value all forms of life involved.

4.3. The social construction of volunteers: different engagement dynamics

We seek to understand different engagement dynamics used by civil society actors that were constructed or redefined during the emergency crisis. Volunteering has a communication structure that dispenses with formality. Digital social media and messaging apps have facilitated the dissemination of campaigns, and their function of directing public attention favors the creation of legitimacy.

For the construction of this article, we differentiate social media (such

as X, Instagram, and Facebook) from messaging apps, which are of a private nature – in the sense of restricting communications to the level of mutual adherence of the communicators. Social media do not establish such an effective counterpart, unlike the activation of social ties from apps to raise resources for volunteer actions. In any case, informal relationships have become useful sources of resources.

There is also a third predominant mode of communication: organizations used internal communication among members to activate institutionalized relationships that transformed into solidarity actions in the context of disaster. A private organization with social impact used informal social ties to garner support from the population, businesses, and civil society organizations. Two main forms of informal relationships were important for the company during the floods in Rio Grande do Sul; the first was the activation of previously established networks with private companies and NGOs; the second was the establishment of ties with local communities where the company operated during the disaster.

Social relationships are complemented by campaigns on social networks, where dozens of videos were released to raise awareness among the population in favor of the donation campaign. The company also utilized formally established contractual relationships as a result of its actions during the floods in 2023 and 2024, when commercial partnerships were formed.

The company's operations in social causes depend on the cooperation between professionalized employees in humanitarian aid and volunteers, who are recruited publicly or through previously established networks of relationships. However, a significant portion of the volunteers who worked in Rio Grande do Sul did so by receiving payment from the company for facilitating the trip, training, and providing a humanitarian field of action, assuming the role of client volunteers. Therefore, it is not possible to consider only informal relationships; they mix with formal ones or sometimes transform into market relationships, such as those who become client volunteers in social actions.

Social movements also utilized informal relationships to enhance their actions in a disaster scenario. In one case, a social movement organization that was distributing meals on the streets of Canoas took this opportunity to recruit residents, who were initially allocated to food preparation and distribution activities. The actions of this social movement expanded, and those affected were recruited to join local groups for distributing donations and “viandas” – the local term for meals. The new groups were led by local leaders recruited during the floods themselves.

In this case, organizations depend on informal communication conducted by the affected local community; the provision of pre-prepared food becomes an important tool for communication and recruitment. The distribution of prepared food was the only survival alternative for a large portion

of those affected; because of this, the neighborhood's own communication networks disseminated the locations of food distribution.

In some cases, the physical infrastructure of kitchens, donation distribution centers, and meal distribution sites became spaces for mediation; these, in turn, fostered social movements and community organizations by recruiting volunteers. The reports lead to the communicational dimension of food and home. The act of eating is a routine of various types of relationships; sharing a meal is to produce and reiterate social connections. However, at a moment when families are deprived of their homes, there is a rupture with a primary form of communication: the meal and housing.

The domestic rupture is particularly painful for women, especially homemakers, concentrating practices related to the daily provision of food and care, just as the rupture with work affects those who define a large part of their being by labor; the rupture with daily life can manifest in processes of psychosocial suffering due to the impossibility of reproducing the social role adopted by the individual (Marchezini & Forini, 2019).

Militant volunteering in a solidarity kitchen redefines the social role adopted in a disaster context. The kitchen becomes a symbol of solidarity actions that bring together volunteers, beneficiaries, and organizations. Because of this, food opens space for engagement in an organization by synthesizing actions of solidarity while mediating new positions and social networks.

Social movement organizations do not rely solely on informal relationships; two of them utilized their internal communication structures to mobilize resources and activists in solidarity actions during the floods. In the first case, the organization (MST) used the prior experience of parts of its national activism to create brigades sent to Rio Grande do Sul in the areas of health, infrastructure, food, and cleaning, totaling 47 activists.

The experience of those affected by other disasters was used by another organization (MAB) to identify with the victims in Rio Grande do Sul, thus creating a connection between the historical struggles of this social group and the recent experiences of the population in the region. Its large militant contingent "turned" towards the floods allowed for donations from unusual social spheres; we witnessed in its distribution center boxes from other countries, coming from Christian NGOs, foreign communities, and billion-dollar corporations in the food industry.

Both organizations combined informal, institutional, and internal communications to enhance their solidarity actions during the floods. This communication was largely carried out through messaging apps (*WhatsApp*), initiated by individuals who knew each other before the disaster.

The chaotic situation of the emergency operates as a communicational cacophony in which resources are collected and applied based on what is possible and immediate. Unusual alliances between unlikely actors emerge in the heat of the moment with the common goal of providing the neces-

sary supplies for preserving life. Strengthened by instant communication via the internet, these alliances largely depend on the ability to break the institutional lines of each of these organizations. At this moment, the lines of communication blend, organizational routines are overwhelmed by the need for response, as one activist in Canoas told us: *the Christian NGO I worked with during the floods had an enormous amount of donations, but they lacked enough staff (...) so I called them asking to send us the donations, they agreed and here we are* (Y, Nov. 22, 2024).

Each individual lives at the intersection of a series of organizations, potentially catalyzing an unlikely alignment between them at a given moment; the disaster scenario contributes to lowering the previously existing resistances to a certain confluence. The dynamics of communication depicted above reflect the practice of engagement.

Informal relationships are a latent chain of resources available; in the case of the floods in Rio Grande do Sul, messaging apps served to motivate, recruit, and emotionally engage individuals with the aim of directing them towards a specific action. Engagement can also be related to an idea; when Brasil Paralelo conveys the narrative of the hero around volunteering, it aims to recruit soldiers for its “cultural war”. In turn, social movements engaged in the floods with the intent of transforming the figure of the affected volunteer into the affected activist. In summary, producing engagement is a way to enhance the social legitimacy of an idea.

Disasters allow for breaking the routine not only from the perspective of those affected but also of the organizations, as they open up a multitude of previously closed communication possibilities; this is the case of the social impact company that formed dozens of business partnerships, or the social movement that recruits hundreds of people in just a few months. This communication implies the possibility of engaging, producing an emotional commitment from those involved in the mission at hand.

5. Final considerations

This article sought to analyze the multiple dimensions of risk communication and socio-environmental disasters, focusing on the accounts of the floods that occurred in 2024 in Rio Grande do Sul. Using a methodological approach that combined field reports, direct observation, discussion circles, and interviews, it was possible to explore the communication dynamics that emerged during the disaster, both in formal and informal channels. The analysis revealed that communication played a central role in the response to the crisis, acting as a key element for mobilizing resources, organizing solidarity networks, and disseminating information.

The study found that communication is not limited to official channels but expands to social networks, informal relationships, and even interactions between humans and non-humans. Social networks, in particular,

have proven to be fundamental for articulating voluntary actions, filling gaps left by formal communication structures. However, this decentralization has also brought challenges, such as the spread of conflicting information and the difficulty of coordination among different actors.

The analysis of the documentary “*O Resgate*” allowed for an understanding of how specific narratives about volunteering were constructed and instrumentalized to reinforce political and ideological discourses. The idealization of volunteering as an autonomous force detached from the State reflects a view that, while it may mobilize immediate actions, also contributes to the delegitimization of public institutions and political polarization. This narrative, amplified by platforms like Brasil Paralelo, highlights the complexity of communication in crisis scenarios, where information and discourses are contested by different groups with varied interests.

Another relevant aspect was the identification of subtle forms of communication that transcend verbal language, especially in interactions between humans and non-humans. The observation of animal behaviors during floods revealed that communication is not limited to humans but involves a complex network of interactions that includes gestures, instinctive responses, and emotional dynamics. This perspective challenges the traditional view that separates the “natural world” from the “human world”, suggesting the need for a more integrated and sensitive approach to managing socio-environmental crises.

Finally, it is important to consider social and environmental inequalities in the analysis of disasters. The most vulnerable populations, often located in high-risk areas, are the most affected by extreme weather events, highlighting the need for public policies that promote environmental justice and reduce these groups’ exposure to risks. Communication, in this context, should be understood as a strategic tool for awareness, mobilization, and the construction of effective collective responses.

In summary, the floods of 2024 in Rio Grande do Sul not only exposed the fragilities of urban infrastructures and public policies but also revealed the complexity of communication dynamics in crisis scenarios. Understanding these dynamics is essential for building more efficient strategies for prevention, response, and recovery in the face of extreme weather events, which tend to intensify in the context of climate change.

We hope to contribute to the debate on the imagery and forms of communication mobilized, and fundamentally, to the understanding that the dichotomy between the State and Civil Society is false and dangerously manipulated in moments of climate emergency. The State plays a fundamental role in implementing public policies that mitigate impacts, but civil society also has crucial responsibilities, such as awareness, activism, and promoting behavior change. The use of the idea of a dichotomy between the State and civil society can be manipulated to divert responsibility from the State, allowing it to evade its obligations.

The article indicates that the complexity of contemporary disasters exceeds the capacity for action of any isolated actor – be it the State, the market, or civil society. The effectiveness of the response depends on the interaction and communication among these different agents, overcoming dichotomous and anthropocentric views to increase the possibilities of preserving life.

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