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Reification and Consensualization in communication – An analysis of the impacts of two
distinctive communicative formats

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Abstract

This paper discusses the potential of the notions of *reification* and *consensualization* as developed by the theory of social representations as analytical tools for addressing the communication between the lay and scientific spheres. Social Representations Theory started by offering an over-sharp distinction between the reified and the consensual universes of which science and common sense, respectively, were presented as paradigmatic. This paper, however, suggests that the notions of *consensual* and *reified* can be considered as describing two distinct communicative formats: *reification* implying the use of arguments which establish prescriptions for representations and action, and *consensualization* relying on arguments which recognize the heterogeneity of representation and action. We illustrate this proposal through the analysis of a case in which the expert and the lay spheres of a Lisbon neighborhood opposed each other regarding the new laws of public participation in community matters. This analysis showed how *reification* and *consensualization* can be used as discursive strategies by both spheres. The implications of the use of *reification* and *consensualization* as communicative formats and how they may depend on several power resources and have different impacts on change are discussed.

Keywords: communicative formats; consensualization; power relations; reification; social representation

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1 *Reification and Consensualization* in communication – An analysis of the impacts of two distinctive communicative formats

1.1 Introduction

The relations between science and common sense have been one of the main objects of scientific inquiry in the social sciences (Jovchelovitch, 2008) mainly due to the constant clash of representations between these two systems in modern societies (Gillespie, 2008) and the enormous relevance this clash has for social change (Beck, 2009; Lidskog, 2008; Wynne, 1996). Within social psychology, a prolific conceptualization of the relations between these spheres can be found in the Theory of Social Representations (TSR) (Moscovici, 1961/76). The Theory has focused on how communication both reproduces and transforms scientific and techno-scientific innovation and on how these twin processes transform social knowledge, producing new representations (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008; Castro & Gomes, 2005; Raudsepp, 2005; Wagner, Kronberger & Seifert, 2002; Moscovici, 1993). However, it has also been remarked that the theory needs to more extensively examine the consequences of unequal power relations for the communication between the two spheres (Voelklein & Howarth, 2005; Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). This would namely imply looking more closely at how power differentials shape the concrete transformations suffered by the innovative ideas, analyzing the direction of these transformations and whether they accelerate social change or slow it down (Castro & Batel, 2008; Voelklein & Howarth, 2005).

In this paper we shall argue that although the TSR already has some essential tools for a comprehensive conceptualization of how relations between the scientific and the lay spheres affect the diffusion of innovation and change, some of these tools can be more extensively developed and used to examine communication¹, dialogue and debate. We will specifically discuss the potential contributions of the notions of *reified* and *consensual* for

this purpose (Moscovici, 1988, 1984, 1981). These notions, extensively discussed and defined in several texts of the TSR (Moscovici, 1998; 1993; 1984; 1981; 1961/1976), were initially formulated for distinguishing between two universes – the consensual and the reified -, often identified as corresponding to those of common sense and science. The notions were subsequently questioned and criticized (Foster, 2003; Bangerter, 1995), and consequently suffered a number of clarifications. However the potential of these notions as good descriptors of two very distinct “ideal-type” communicative formats, which use different arguments and originate and enable also different types of debates between spheres, has mostly been left unexplored. This, despite the fact that the detailed characterization of the notions offered in the aforementioned texts can arguably assure their usefulness for this purpose.

This article proposes then that *consensual* and *reified* can be considered as good descriptors of two distinct orientations regarding communication, with different consequences, instead of static notions applying to sharply differentiated universes. Despite the long-lasting controversy surrounding the notions (Jesuino, 2008; Foster, 2003), we contend that their re-conceptualization as analytical tools used for examining utterances and arguments employed in concrete interactions between the scientific and lay spheres can further our understanding of how power affects these interactions and these, in turn, affect social change. We shall assume that the diverging communicative orientations associated with the two notions – *reification*² and *consensualization* - imply different types of utterances and arguments, coalescing in distinct discursive formats which will have also distinct consequences for the relations between the scientific and lay spheres.

We argue, moreover, that to fully understand how the differential of power between the scientific and lay spheres affects argument use, it is also important to consider the role of the legal sphere for indicating what arguments are socially legitimate in a certain epoch, and

which are not (Castro & Batel, 2008). We shall illustrate this proposal with examples from a public debate opposing the expert and lay spheres of a Lisbon neighborhood. But first we synthesize below the main lines of the distinction between the *reified* and the *consensual* universes as they were proposed, and indicate how this distinction has been problematized.

1.2 “The Distinction between the Reified and the Consensual Universes: Does it fill any Intrinsic Need?”³

As mentioned, at its inception one of the main aims of the TSR (Moscovici, 1961/76) was to investigate the processes through which scientific knowledge is received and absorbed into a culture, generating new social representations (Moscovici, 1961/76). For understanding these processes, the distinction between a reified and a consensual universe, viewed as a “distinctive feature of our culture” (Moscovici, 1981, p. 186), was deemed crucial (Moscovici, 1988). Through it, a number of sharp contrasts concerning several social objects – society and the status of its members, thinking and its procedures – were drawn. These are briefly summarized below.

Society:

- *In the consensual universe, society is (...) permeated with meaning and purpose (...).* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 20)
- *In the reified universe, society is transformed into a system of solid, basic, unvarying entities (or objects) (...)* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 20). *In as much as the scientific disciplines are linked to these objects, scientific authority is able to impose this way of thinking and experiencing on each of us, prescribing in each case what is and what is not true* (Moscovici, 1981, p. 186).

Status of members in each universe:

- *In a consensual universe, (...) no one member is assumed to possess an exclusive competence, but each can acquire any competence which may be required by the circumstances* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 21).

- *In a reified universe society is seen as a system of different roles and classes whose members are unequal. Only acquired competence determines their degree of participation according to merit (...)* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 22).

Knowledge, thinking and communication:

- *In a consensual universe (...). Thinking (...) becomes a noisy, public activity which satisfies the need for communication and thus maintains and consolidates the group (...)* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 21).
- *Thinking in [the reified universe] (...) calls for (...) specific communication rules which organize information into a unified or even a unique representation* (Moscovici, 1988, p. 233).
- *Although common sense changes its content and ways of reasoning it is not replaced by scientific theories and logic. (...) And it resists every attempt at reification, which would turn the concepts and images rooted in language into rules and explicit procedures* (Moscovici, 1998, p. 235).
- *In this universe [the reified universe], all truth (...) is confirmed by its conformity to prescribed procedures and terminology. Rules are trusted, not persons (...)* (Moscovici, 1988, p. 233).

Social representations:

- *Representations (...) restore collective awareness and give it shape, explaining objects and events so that they become accessible to everyone and coincide with our immediate interests* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 22).
- *[the purpose of the sciences] is to establish a chart of the forces, objects and events which are independent of our desires and outside of our awareness and to which we must react impartially and submissively* (Moscovici, 1984, p. 22).

The above assumptions, with their over-sharp contrasts, are also accompanied by the premise that the two universes stand in a hierarchical relation in which the universe of science is higher in value and power (Moscovici, 1998)⁴. In time, however, most of these assumptions were questioned. It has been stressed, for instance, that science cannot be seen as

the only driver of change in social knowledge, as innovation has various sources (Billig, 1988) and it was underlined how legal and policy innovation are also a source of social transformation (Castro & Batel, 2008). It was also highlighted how the relations between science and common sense are two-way, and examples from the health domain were used to show how common sense sometimes is able to “influence professional understanding in some ways” (Foster, 2003, p.241; Lidskog, 2008). All of this stressed how both the lay and the expert universes are dynamic, composed by a plurality of forms of knowledge (Marková, 2008; Wynne, 1996), mutually influential (Bangerter, 1995) and presenting fuzzy rather than rigid boundaries⁵.

None of these criticisms and questionings has, however, considered that the detailed descriptions of the two universes can also be taken as a proposal indicating “ideal-type” arguments used in the debates between them. This, despite the fact that the descriptions of the two universes are easily recognizable as culturally developed self- and hetero- definitions fashioned in the countless past debates between the lay and scientific spheres, in which the superiority of the knowledge of the scientific sphere has constantly been claimed by many (although not all) voices, through arguments of the type Moscovici (1981) uses to describe the reified universe (see for instance Latour, 1999, or Rorty, 1979 for comprehensive overviews). These arguments are therefore today abundantly available for continuing those same debates, and this fact, in our view, makes the notions of *reification* and *consensualization*, as developed by the TSR, potentially powerful tools for looking at communication and examining how different arguments unroll in it and either work for maintaining power differentials or changing them. The fact that this potential has been left unexplored has determined that little attention has been paid to how they are concretely used when the two spheres – lay and scientific - clash and one attempts to impose its representation upon the other. This, despite the facts that, on one hand, the relationships

between these spheres remain central in our society and, on the other, the notion that communication and dialogue can happen under very different presuppositions with very different relational consequences has become increasingly central in the TSR.

One example of this accrued attention to the consequences of different types of communication comes from research comparing the consequences for representational processes of monological and dialogical communication (Jovchelovitch, 2007; Marková, 2008, 2003). In our view, the descriptions that the TSR offers of the notions of *reified* and *consensual* can precisely help develop a more detailed understanding of the monological and dialogical consequences of different types of communication, therefore adding to those efforts. In fact, the human capacities for dialogue and perspective-taking, which involve recognizing and conceiving “social realities in terms of the Alter” (Marková, 2003, p. 85), can be used in rather different ways, with very different consequences. These capacities can be used in order to take the perspective of the Other and share and negotiate representations, but they can also be used in order to strategically protect one’s own representations and positions (Gillespie, 2008). Consequently, we need analytical tools for helping us identify when strategic action is being used and when dialogical encounters are in fact happening. We contend in this regard then that the choice of *reification* arguments is usually associated with strategic action used for displacing the representation and knowledge of the others, and has monological consequences, while the use of *consensualization* arguments has a more clear potential for achieving dialogical understandings.

In this way, the definitions of *reification* and *consensualization* offered in the texts of the TSR can be used as a heritage for identifying types of utterances and revealing the consequences associated with different types of communication these utterances promote. In line with the literature, we assume then that *Consensualization* as a communicative format implies arguments revealing some or all of the features below.

- *Heterogeneity of representation*; this is expressed in arguments revealing awareness of the fact that representational fields are multiple and hybrid (Jovchelovitch, 2007); it is also present in arguments revealing the acceptance of the diversity of knowledge and of the fact that thinking satisfies the need for communication, and communication is a way of maintaining and consolidating the group (Moscovici, 1984).
- *Heterogeneity of action*; arguments revealing awareness that actions are also multiple and adapted to context, and conveying the notion that “any competence which may be required by the circumstances” (Moscovici, 1984, p. 21) can be acquired and used in action and debate with the Other.

Also in line with the literature, we assume *reification*-like communication to express the fact that awareness of alternative social representations may just be put to strategic use and perform the function of protecting one’s own representations (Gillespie, 2008). This may result in the imposition of certain representations on others (Gervais, Morant, & Penn, 1999). Therefore, we assume that *reification* implies first of all strategic action, that is, using our knowledge and awareness of the position of the Other in order to debunk it and impose our representations and options of action. This is expressed in:

- *Establishing prescriptions for representations*; this involves using arguments “prescribing in each case what is and what is not true” (Moscovici, 1981, p. 186), trying to pass certain representations as reality, rather than attempting to achieve negotiated consensus by debating alternative versions of events and objects (Moscovici, 1984).
- *Presupposing inequality between members*; this involves the use of one-sided arguments which devalue the knowledge of others by affirming hierarchy in relationships (Jovchelovitch, 2007) and accentuating power and expertise; this can be

done namely by arguments stating that “only acquired competence determines (...) degree of participation according to merit” (Moscovici, 1984, p. 22).

- *Establishing prescriptions for action*; this involves arguments affirming that action has to be shaped according to “prescribed procedures” (Moscovici, 1988, p. 233), which are considered legitimate, and need to be followed in all cases.

Usually the consequences of *reification* are monological encounters where there is the attempted enforcement of a version of reality, presented as the only true one. This implies that a constructed version expressing a certain perspective is presented as solid reality, therefore justifying the *reification* label.

In the empirical sections of this article we shall offer examples of the potential usefulness of *reification* and *consensualization* as analytical tools for a detailed analysis of communication between the lay and expert spheres and of the consequences of both for power relations and change. First, however, we shall present the context of the empirical case from where the examples will be drawn, explain the type of innovation involved and indicate how it is meant to reformulate expert-lay relations with regard to decision-making within communities.

1.4 The Context: Community Involvement in Urban Rehabilitation

In August 2004, a Portuguese newspaper called attention to the fact that the residents of *Bairro Alto*, a historic neighborhood of Lisbon, intended to resist the approved architectural project for the *Convento dos Inglesinhos*. This is a 17th century Convent located in the heart of the neighborhood and the project implied transforming it into a closed condominium. When the project was advertised by out-doors on the outer-walls of the Convent, a group of community residents initiated a series of protest actions. They contested the project, namely opposing the changes planned for the facade and the elimination of the

garden, and also claimed the right to participate in the decision-making processes taking place in their community. Besides organizing public debate sessions and using an internet forum, the group also went to Court to obtain an injunction based on public utility for halting the project.

The professionals of the *Bairro Alto* Office - the community's Local Authority structure for urban rehabilitation, hereafter referred to as the "BA Office" -, had approved the transformations without public consultation. However, the BA Office had been moved to the neighborhood five years earlier with the explicit aim of fostering closer proximity with the community and more public involvement in local matters. This followed the new Directives on public participation currently imperative in many European countries. These innovative laws have been incorporated in national legislations as a result of the commitments signed in international treaties – like the *Aalborg Charter* (1994), the *Lisbon Action Plan/Local Agenda 21* (1996), or the *Aarhus Convention* (2003). The treaties initially proposed general directives regarding the need to guarantee that "all citizens and interested groups have access to information and are able to participate in local decision-making processes" (*Aalborg Charter*, 1994). More recently, the treaties have established more specific directives to ensure that "the public concerned shall be informed, either by public notice or individually as appropriate, early in an environmental decision-making procedure, and in an adequate, timely and effective manner" (*Aarhus Convention*, 2003).

As mentioned, the legal system is also responsible for the introduction of innovation in our societies (Castro & Batel, 2008), and like other innovations, legal ones are also the object of complex appropriation processes. The laws and regulations governing public participation are a type of laws which aim to re-shape the relations between the techno-scientific and the lay spheres, pressuring both systems to change, and therefore need to be appropriated by both spheres. Their mere integration in the legislative framework confers

legality to lay claims for participation in decision-making, but as legality is not entirely synonymous with legitimacy, at least not for every social system (Weber, 1978), these claims may not immediately receive recognition. As a consequence, decision-makers and experts may sometimes neglect innovative practices, like calling the lay public for partnership in decision-making, despite the laws, as is often currently the case (Castro & Batel, 2008; Lima, 2004).

This was also the case in the above mentioned debate, as there had been no involvement of the community in the decision. However, the existence of the new public participation laws gave the community members legitimacy to publicly claim for the right to participate. Therefore, the heated debate which started in the press, the internet and public sessions, involved not just the lay and expert spheres, but also the legal one. This is so because the actors in the expert sphere – the professionals from the BA Office - are simultaneously holders of expert knowledge and institutional power and, as citizens, are also subjected to the new laws of public participation. In this position, for their communication with the lay public/protesters they can choose between: (1) using *reification*-like arguments, based on expertise and denying the lay sphere any valuable knowledge, thus resisting the change towards more shared decision-making and a more dialogical approach of the lay public; (2) using *consensualization*-like arguments, based on the new laws which imply negotiating with the lay sphere, looking at the situation also from their perspective and accepting the innovative incitement of the new laws to value also lay inputs to decision. In turn, the lay public can: (1) use *consensualization*-like arguments to communicate with the authorities and experts, recognizing their expertise, while offering also theirs; or (2) use an institutional tool – the new laws of public participation - as a legitimate tool for attempting to devalue the expert's position, interacting with the expert sphere in a *reified* way.

Below we shall examine the arguments and discursive strategies used by the groups involved in this debate to see whether they resort to *reification* or to *consensualization*. *Reification* and *consensualization* are rendered visible by the content and structure of the arguments, but when combined, arguments become organized in discursive strategies which will be the focus of our analyses.

1.5 Method

1.5.1 Participants and Procedure

Audio-taped narrative interviews were conducted with the experts from the BA Office responsible for urban rehabilitation; more specifically, one was made for each professional category (N=7; average duration =1h30min.). The interviews took place in the BA Office. A narrative interview with the spokesperson for the group of community residents (Duration=2h) was also conducted. In these interviews we asked the interviewees to tell the story of the transformation process of the Convent, to refer to urban rehabilitation, the protests and public participation.

In a second stage, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted and audio-taped with residents of *Bairro Alto* (Average duration=25min.) in the streets of the neighborhood. These interviews were conducted 22 months after the beginning of the controversy but when it was still in the press⁶. The interviews invited community members to comment on the Convent and the controversy, as well as to express their views about public participation in urban matters and their own neighborhood.

1.5.2 Guidelines for the Analysis of the Data

The analysis of all interviews was simultaneously guided by theory and data-driven. From a theoretical point of view, the analysis of the interviews sought to understand whether

the interviewees were using *reification* as a discursive strategy or alternatively were resorting to *consensualization*. Hence, the analyses of the interviews with the professionals that are presented below concentrate on two themes: the project for the Convent and urban rehabilitation. These two aspects were chosen because they were central to the debate and directly implied the role of the experts. In the interview with the spokesperson for the group of protesters, we mostly explore the discursive strategies used for referring to the experts. On the other hand, the analyses of the interviews with the residents examine their views on the actors and main aspects of the controversy. Following these criteria, the extracts of the interviews were selected on the basis of their representativeness of the whole corpus of the data and their clarity in illustrating the main discursive strategies used by the interviewees.

1.6 Analysis

1.6.1 Interviews with the Professionals: The Many Arguments of Reification

One of the main features of the interviews with the experts is how they accentuate their own irreplaceable functions in urban rehabilitation matters. Throughout the interviews, they repeat arguments prescribing expertise as necessary for a correct evaluation of the transformations planned for the Convent. The two extracts below exemplify this type of argument, which is a way of *establishing prescriptions for representations*.

H1 – *my role in this Office is very specialized* [p. 33]. *We accepted the project by asserting that from the heritage perspective the project is not harmful to its [the Convent's] integrity, because what is important is to preserve the fundamental [historic] elements, and the fundamental elements are guaranteed.* [p. 17] [Historian1]

J - (...) *they* [the protesters] *are against the project, but they probably don't even know how the project was prepared, whether or not it was approved, and what the conditions were, what happened and did not happen in previous studies, so... they didn't understand much about it, I'd say...* [Jurist, p. 4]

By accentuating how the actions of professionals are exclusively linked to specific expertise about urban rehabilitation, these extracts are paradigmatic of a central characteristic of *reification: establishing prescriptions for representations*. In this case, both extracts contend that there is one right position regarding the transformation of the Convent, which can only be based on historical and architectural knowledge. In other words, the extracts accentuate that specific skills are suited for intervention in specific domains, and each actor has “appropriate information for a given context” (Moscovici, 1984, p. 21/22). Specific knowledge is then what allows the professionals to decide on urban rehabilitation matters and on this specific project.

The first extract presents knowledge about urban rehabilitation as something independent of agreement or disagreement and based instead on expert knowledge about the *fundamental* [historic] *elements*. In this sense, the professionals accentuate the primacy of expertise and rules (Moscovici, 1988, p. 233), a characteristic of *reification*. In the second extract, the primacy of expertise becomes clearer through the comparison between the knowledge held by the professionals and the (lack of) knowledge held by the protesters regarding the transformation of the Convent.

In turn, an even clearer expression of how prescribing representations can be a form of excluding the knowledge of others can thus be found in arguments *presupposing the inequality between members*, as exemplified below:

A – *People are always complaining oh that “grotesque building” [referring to buildings of contemporary architecture]. Grotesque or not, someone is responsible for what the population here calls a “grotesque building” and the fact of the matter is that whoever is responsible is someone with knowledge, because it is someone who has studied. Often, people who use the expression “grotesque building” have no idea what they are talking about [Architect, p. 11]*

By emphasizing that “only acquired competence determines degree of participation according to merit” (Moscovici, 1984, p. 21/22), the extract accentuates the differences between professionals and community residents and presents participation in urban rehabilitation as a privilege of those *who studied* and know, and therefore have the legitimacy to decide. This over-accentuation of the differences between experts and residents is precisely what the new laws of public participation intend to prevent, by including for participation in decision-making more criteria than just specific expertise. However, *reification* arguments associated with the expertise of the professional spheres seem to be hard to avoid.

The expert sphere, however, also has to take the new laws into account, and the professionals cannot therefore rely entirely on arguments based on the accentuation of power and expertise. They also need to present other reasons for closing down participation to residents. The next extract, claiming that the residents need to follow specific *prescriptions for action* in order to participate, shows an example of these other reasons:

H1 – *The “Convento das Bernardas” [a Convent also located in Bairro Alto] is residential, and as far as I know no one has ever contested that [the transformation of the Inglesinhos into a residential condominium is a contested dimension]. As for the intervention, what is planned for the “Inglesinhos” is much less than what is planned for “Bernardas” (...). So,*

you see how things are... one cannot understand why people do not contest other interventions, or why... like I said, it is all a question of opportunity of the people living in front of it, in fact. [Historian1, p. 13]

The extract accentuates how the protesters lack consistency and act only out of “*a question of opportunity*”, that is, because they live near the Convent. If they were consistent, they would “*contest other interventions*” as well, but they do not. The framing of the protesters as inconsistent and guided by private interests disqualifies their actions in a way which already responds to the new laws. These arguments have the strategic consequence of demonstrating that the professionals accept that expertise is not the only criterion for entering decision-making. Consistency, or a “clear, precise, totally unambiguous” (Moscovici, 1984, p. 22) way of acting, is presented as another characteristic of those who are really concerned with defending the heritage. However, the residents are described as not following these action prescriptions either. This, together with their lack of expertise, allows the professionals to argue that the responsibility of preserving the heritage cannot be put in the hands of community members. Together, these arguments seem strategically oriented to slow down the transformations stipulated by the new laws. This can be seen as a goal instrumental for maintaining power relations unchanged, and a generic consequence of *reification*-like communication. Another example of strategic use of perspective-taking for *prescribing representations* is given below:

A – [in *Bairro Alto*] *even an average house, or maybe a bit above average, always had a Portuguese tile panel, which nowadays we realize is very valuable. Those situations..., often the people living there wouldn't be sensitive to those things, which is a big problem (...)* *But still I don't know if we can expect them [the community residents] to be sensitive to that, this*

is a personal opinion, I don't know... but it is obvious, as an expert I do have that obligation
 [Architect, p. 4]

This extract illustrates how conceiving “social realities in terms of the Alter” (Marková, 2003, p. 85) may sometimes just perform a strategic function. It suggests that because people are not “*sensitive to those things*” and because it is doubtful that the professionals should expect this from them, it is the professionals who need to be responsible for defending the heritage. In other words, then, looking at urban rehabilitation through the eyes of community residents enables the strategic claim that the experts should have higher value and power (Moscovici, 1998). These *reification* arguments re-position the expert and lay spheres in a hierarchical relation, resisting the dialogical premises of the new laws (Castro & Batel, 2008 Lidskog, 2008, Lima, 2004). They imply that only one sphere has something to teach the other, in a monological way, enabling the experts to redefine public participation as legitimate way for the professionals to educate the public. Finally, they sharply differentiate the experts from the inhabitants of *Bairro Alto*, again against the dialogical premises of the laws, while avoiding an obvious violation of these (Castro & Batel, 2008), a type of discursive management of power differentials which is also well documented in research with other inter-group relations (see Whitehead & Wittig, 2004).

However, the legality of these laws also acts as a pressure on the professionals to change, constraining them to re-examine their practices, as exemplified in the next extract. In this extract we find some mitigated *consensualization* arguments, assimilating a weak version of *heterogeneity of representations*:

S - I think it's in the interest of both the Town Hall and its professionals that people are concerned and try to get involved. (...) And maybe the Town Hall still hasn't been able to

help people understand the importance of preserving the heritage , you see... so, maybe a more active role could be taken, and maybe that could be one of the things the sociologists and perhaps other areas could do in [de-centralized] Offices like the one I belong to.

[Sociologist, p. 8/9]

The extract emphasizes the importance of the public's contribution to the experts' work, moving one step towards the perspective of the Other: maybe community members are not more concerned with the heritage because the Town Hall has not provided them the necessary resources to be able to participate more actively. While taking the perspective of the Other, this extract seems to open some space for the interests of both the professionals and the community members to meet, as it stresses how the Central Office of the Town Hall and the Local Offices could have a more active role in helping people to overcome present constraints. Nevertheless, this step toward the Other never supposes the public can have something to offer and simply means that the professionals should help the inhabitants to participate.

TABLE 2 HERE

As Table 2 above summarizes, the experts used mainly *reification* arguments. In fact, Table 2 shows that only one example of *consensualization* was found in the discursive strategies used by the experts. It is also worth noting that discursive strategies based on *reification* are frequent both when the professionals are discussing urban rehabilitation in general and when they debate the transformation of the Convent. This pattern suggests that they do not see any need for community participation in urban rehabilitation in general, not just in the specific case discussed here.

1.6.2 Interviews with people from Bairro Alto: When Reification and Consensualization Meet

One dimension that emerged from the analysis of the interviews with *Bairro Alto* residents is their recognition of the importance of expert knowledge for decision-making regarding urban rehabilitation. However, expert knowledge is not considered the only legitimate entry into this debate. Other representations concerning the project for the Convent are also conceived as important and legitimate. This is expressed in arguments illustrating the recognition of *heterogeneity of representation and action*, such as the one below, which is characteristic of *consensualization*:

I – *are these protests important, when people contest decisions they do not agree with?*

R1 – *Yes. Sure. They [the protesters] do not agree, they have their own ideas. Personally, I agree [with the transformation of the Convent]. Everyone has their own ideas, isn't it?*

[Community Resident 1, p.3]

The extract reveals awareness of the existence of divergent representations concerning the issue under debate. Moreover, in this case, agreement with the decision of the professionals does not prevent the recognition of the legitimacy of alternative representations and practices (*Yes. Sure [these protests are important]*). This highlights how *consensualization* arguments may allow negotiating different representations.

The next extract also illustrates the recognition of *heterogeneity of representations*. In this case, however, this recognition involves a specific communicative format, that of alternating between disagreement and agreement:

R2 – *... she [a neighbor] told me that the bricks [of the Convent of Inglesinhos] were falling off, they were all falling off and fortunately they had never fallen on anyone, and so she also*

agrees with that... [the plans for the transformation]. But still, she disagrees with cutting down hundred year old trees too, doesn't she, and me, too...[Community resident 2, p.2]

The extract presents the same object - the transformation of the Convent - conceived through disagreement and agreement. It breaks it down in several components, and finds reasons for agreement with some and motives for disagreement with other: it states that the Convent should be rehabilitated due to its advanced deterioration and claims that this rehabilitation should preserve certain aspects, such as the old trees. In this sense, the extract opens up to the heterogeneity of representations and brings various voices to bear on her simultaneous agreement and disagreement with the decision of the professionals, revealing how *consensualization* allows for both/and forms of reasoning (Moscovici, 1984).

However, it cannot be forgotten that in this specific debate the lay sphere has a powerful tool - the laws of public participation - to directly claim the right to participate. It can therefore use also *reification*-like arguments, such as *prescribing representations* based on the new norms of public participation. This is illustrated in the example below:

R6 – ..., *we protest but we don't know what's going on, you see? (...). It's just a formality - they've been out round here asking questions so they could say: oh we've talked to the people of "Bairro Alto". But they don't talk at all, because...I mean, they talk, but they don't listen to what we really say, you see?* [Community resident 6, p. 1]

Unlike the previous extract, there is no attempt at *consensualization* here. The protests are qualified as useless because people are not informed of what is happening (“*we don't know what's going on*”) and because the new laws are taken by the institutions as a mere formality which does not translate into real dialogue (“*they talk, but they don't listen to what*

we really say”). *Reification* is the form of communication used here, legitimizing the positions of the Self with the rights the law brings, that is, *prescribing the representation* associated with the new norms of public participation. The positions of the Other are depicted as wrong and illegitimate and the ones in need of change. The extract reveals that community residents recognize that the experts have the power of using the laws of public participation as *just a formality*. Moreover, the extract also shows how representations of the Other can be brought to the utterances of the Ego in order to protect the Ego’s own representations and to try to re-shape power relations.

A similar *reification-like* discursive strategy was used by the spokesperson for the movement of residents when contesting the professionals’ exclusive power to decide on urban rehabilitation. This is shown in the example below, which *establishes prescriptions for representations*:

SP - *It is in that really beautiful garden that they are ready to perpetrate what I consider a real crime, at various levels, patrimonial, ecological or environmental, take your pick, and that shows an enormous lack of sensitivity by the people who think there’s no harm in cutting down big trees, hundred year old trees, so as to take over spaces that were conceived after the earthquake in the 17th century ...* [Spokesperson, p. 2]

The spokesperson uses *reification* arguments similar to those used by the professionals, which *presuppose the inequality between members and prescribe a representation* about this issue. The use of *reification* is possible for several reasons: he is the spokesperson for an organized movement receiving public support from well-known architects and a number of people connected with the media. These resources, plus the law of public participation, allowed the group to have the necessary tools to publicize their claims

and to counteract the emphasis experts had put on their unique expertise, as exemplified in the next extract:

D7 – *it's useful, it's useful* [protesting, like in this case] *and there should be more. We saw that we forced them* [the professionals of the BA Office] *to think twice...* [Community resident 7, Participant in the movement of community residents, p. 3].

Table 3 presents a summary of the arguments found, their organization and frequency across the interviews.

TABLE 3 HERE

As table 3 summarizes, community residents use arguments based both on *consensualization* and *reification*. Their *reification* arguments are supported by the legality brought by the new laws of public participation, which they recognize as also legitimate. It should also be noted that the spokesperson of the protesters uses only *reification*-like communication. This reveals how some groups within the same sphere may rely on *reification* and *consensualization* arguments simultaneously. As *reification* demands some source of power the choice between mixed or single discursive strategies depends mainly on the resources available, but it seems to also depend on the characteristics of the interaction between groups, and the level of the identities mobilized or relevant to the debates (Simon & Oakes, 2006). In this case, the context of polarized opposition between protesters and experts made the use of *reification* by both sides more probable, revealing how sometimes “alternative representations only exist as dialogical shadows within polemical representations” (Gillespie, 2008, p. 381).

If we now consider Tables 2 and 3 together, their joint results suggest that both groups involved in the debate – protesters and experts from the BA Office – resorted heavily to

reification arguments. These make the negotiation between both spheres difficult, as they polarize the perspectives, positions and identities involved. In this case, the result was that the antagonist positions expressed in *reification* arguments acted as a further barrier to change in the direction proposed by the new norms of public participation. In contrast, *consensualization* was less present. *Consensualization* proposes a way to construct alliances between different spheres of knowledge. It enables the recognition of several forms of power and legitimacy, therefore opening paths for agreement with the other and consensus building between different identities and social representations. *Consensualization* arguments would have made the debate less polarized but are, by the same token, less probable when the debate *is* already polarized, as this one was.

1.7 Discussion

In this paper we argued that the notions of *consensual* and *reified* as characterized by the TSR could be viewed as describing also two different communicative formats – *reification* and *consensualization* – and as such used for examining communication between the lay and expert spheres and for analyzing their impact on power relations and social change. We also proposed that in order to extend our understanding of the relations between these two spheres the role of the legal system must be taken into consideration, because, as shown, legal innovation may be important in re-shaping the relations between science and common sense.

This proposal was illustrated with the analysis of a case of public participation that opposed the expert and lay spheres of a Lisbon neighborhood. The analysis showed how the professionals attempt to undermine the legitimacy of lay actions by accentuating expertise and accusing the protesters of lack of specific knowledge and self-interest. Resorting mostly to *reification* arguments, the professionals claim exclusive responsibility for urban

rehabilitation, resisting the change proposed by the laws of public participation. In turn, community residents resorted more frequently to *consensualization* arguments which opened space for both agreement and disagreement with the experts and create the possibility of conciliating interests. Even so, discursive strategies based on *reification*, which challenge the expert sphere by mobilizing the legality offered by the new laws, were also abundant. The use of *reification* by the two spheres both happens in the context of a rather polarized debate and works to maintain the polarization. Its consequences can then be seen as monological (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

In this sense, conceptualizing *reification* and *consensualization* as communicative formats has implications at theoretical and practical levels. It provides the TSR with analytical tools capable of diagnosing, in a systematic and heuristic fashion, how communications unroll in practice and whether their consequences are monological or dialogical. Moreover, by showing that *reification* and *consensualization* can be used by both lay and expert spheres, this proposal also reveals the importance of better understanding the different contexts and representations which promote *consensualization* and may have dialogical consequences. Research on inter-group relations with power differentials has highlighted the need to promote practices which challenge and reformulate power relations (Howarth, 2006; Whitehead & Wittig, 2004). In our view, taking *reification* and *consensualization* as depictions of different types of communication and examining how they are used in the communication between lay and expert spheres can help us progress in that direction. Since the analyses here presented show how *reification* arguments can be used by the expert sphere to close down the access of the lay sphere to decision-making processes, they can be an alert for policy-makers. On the other hand, these analyses can also offer insights for community practitioners to help residents access the type of resources that may empower them and reinforce their capacities to negotiate with the expert sphere.

In short, the analyses here presented provide detailed evidence of how different spheres in their struggles for power and recognition can both claim change or resist it, and use *reification* and/or *consensualization* as a means to that end. By fleshing out how power relations and change are managed in specific situations by particular groups and individuals they furthermore suggest that *reification* and *consensualization* may be useful analytical tools to examine also other types of inter-group relations involving power differentials. Finally, they also highlight the need to further examine, in future research, the psycho-social processes influencing the use of *reification* or *consensualization* by different groups within the same sphere, and the repercussions of these use upon the representations and practices of the broader community.

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Notes

1. We use the term “communication” in a broad sense, referring to communication between both physically present and absent interlocutors (Skinner, Valsiner, & Holland, 2001).
3. The notion of *reification* usually has the meaning of considering or making an abstract idea or concept real or concrete (Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1995). Critical analyses of the consequences of the *process* of reification were articulated by many authors (e.g. Bakhtin, 1981; Gramsci, 1971). The notion was also extensively developed by Moscovici (1961/76) in his conceptualization of the Theory of Social Representations (see volumes 26 - issue 2, 1996 - and 38 - issue 4, 2008 - of this journal for an overview). In this

paper the notion of *reification* is used only as it is defined in the literature of social representations.

3. Moscovici, 1988, p. 232.

4. This is the full quotation: “One might perhaps try to classify the forms of belief and knowledge according to the place assigned to them in a hierarchy, the reified forms being readily considered as higher in value and power than the consensual forms” (Moscovici, 1998, p. 234).

5. This is a focus later assumed also by Moscovici (1998, 1993).

6. For instance, on 11th July 2006, the newspaper *Público* had an article entitled: *Citizens attempt to stop the cutting down of trees at “Inglesinhos”*.

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Table [1]

Summary of the analysis of the experts' reification and consensualization discursive strategies

	<i>Reification arguments</i>			<i>Consensualization arguments</i>
Professionals	<i>Establishing prescriptions for representations</i>	<i>Presupposing inequality between members</i>	<i>Establishing prescriptions for action</i>	<i>Heterogeneity of representations</i>
Historian 1	Present (RC/RUR)	Present (RC/RUR)	Present (RUR)	Absent
Historian 2	Present (RC)	Present (RC)	Present (RUR)	Absent
Architect	Present (RUR)	Present (RC/RUR)	Absent	Absent
Landscape Architect	Present (RC/RUR)	Present (RC/RUR)	Present (RUR)	Absent
Jurist	Present (RC)	Present (RUR)	Present (RC/RUR)	Absent
Inspector	Present (RUR)	Present (RC/RUR)	Absent	Absent
Sociologist	Present (RC)	Present (RC/RUR)	Present (RC)	Present (RC/RUR)

RC: Regarding the Convent/ RUR: Regarding Urban Rehabilitation