

This book questions the political tools and the basis upon which the values of an informed and objective communication rest, and that nowadays encompass most of the ordinary situations encountered in institutions. What is the fate of the involuntary drifts of communication, such as disturbances, misunderstandings and troubles, in the use of decision-making tools, participatory mechanisms, and the establishment of contractual procedures or informed consent practices? How do they open a discordant and potentially critical gap in the protocols and assessment and categorization measures that govern these institutions? How can the virtues of these drifts, whether in the exercise of sociological research or of scientific discovery be revalued? Crisis situations seem implicitly or explicitly to involve communicative issues. The efforts of normative framing of communication and of information formatting are then numerous. However, as this book shows, one can question not only the effectiveness of these efforts, but also how the actors receive them and how they transform the actual modalities of their communication processes.

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Challenges of Communication
in a Context of Crisis

J. Resende, A. Cotovio Martins,
M. Breviglieri and C. Delaunay

Challenges of Communication in a Context of Crisis

Troubles, Misunderstandings and Discords

Edited by José Resende,
Alexandre Cotovio Martins,
Marc Breviglieri and
Catarina Delaunay

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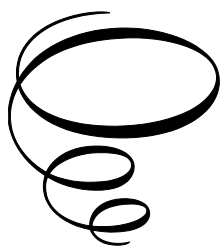
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
A Landscape Research: Some Notes on the Constitution of a Pragmatic Sociology Agenda <i>José Manuel Resende and Alexandre Cotovio Martins</i>	

Part I: Problematic Assessments, Insufficient Measures

Chapter One.....	7
The Delicate Composition of Commonality in Palliative Care: Between Critical Moments and Invested Forms <i>Alexandre Cotovio Martins</i>	

Chapter Two	18
Priority Intervention Educational Areas and the Construction of Their Educational Project: Challenges to Coordination and Agreement among Different Educational Actors <i>João Feijão</i>	

Chapter Three	35
The Gaze of Others Under Scrutiny: On the Experiences of <i>Abraço</i> Volunteers Under the Guise of Misunderstanding <i>José Manuel Resende and Pedro Duarte</i>	

Chapter Four.....	54
Relational Challenges in the face of School Governance by Standards: Mistakes, Disagreements and Criticisms <i>José Manuel Resende, Luís Gouveia and David Beirante</i>	

Part II: Extension/Restriction of the Conviviality Frames of Institutions

Chapter Five	85
The Implications of Relatedness in an Academic Context from the Point of View of the Student <i>Pedro Caetano</i>	

Chapter Six	103
Doctor-Patient-Caregiver Communication Put to the Test by a Medicine That Does Not Heal: Troubles in Medically Assisted Procreation and Palliative Care <i>Catarina Delaunay</i>	
Chapter Seven.....	124
The Relational Adventure in School's Day-to-Day Life: The Discomfort of Misunderstandings and the Comfort of Understandings <i>José Manuel Resende, David Beirante and Luís Gouveia</i>	
Chapter Eight.....	148
Living with Chronic Illness: Stories and Discontents of Patients with Hypertension <i>Beatriz de Oliveira Xavier</i>	
Chapter Nine.....	160
Between the Hospital and the Domicile: Paradoxes and Misconceptions in the Paths of the End of Life <i>José Manuel Resende and Inês Pedro Vicente</i>	
Chapter Ten	178
Urban Misunderstandings of the Art Worlds. Spatial Politics of the Creative City <i>Mischa Piraud and Luca Pattaroni</i>	
Chapter Eleven	200
The Guaranteed City. The Ruin of Urban Criticism? <i>Marc Breviglieri</i>	
Bibliography.....	228
Institutional Affiliation	251

INTRODUCTION

A LANDSCAPE OF RESEARCH: SOME NOTES ON THE CONSTITUTION OF A PRAGMATIC SOCIOLOGY AGENDA

JOSÉ MANUEL RESENDE
AND ALEXANDRE COTOVIO MARTINS

Although this is an international book, in the sense that its authors, as well as its theoretical frames of reference, are themselves international, we think that this is a good opportunity to address some very basic issues about the process of practicing sociology through the ‘pragmatic’ reference frame in the country of some of its editors, Portugal. As a matter of fact, the works which are integrated in this volume are inspired by the plural theoretical framework of pragmatic sociology and are inserted in the dynamic of research which began at CICS.NOVA-Interdisciplinary Center of Social Sciences – *Making, unmaking and remaking the common in the plural in modern sociality: controversies, recognition and vulnerabilities* –, more than a decade ago, with the work of José Resende, strongly inspired in the work of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot and, more recently, especially by the work of the latter author. Researchers in this group – the collective named *Pragmaticus* – have been producing research about various themes – from education to health care, from political socialization to professional demands, from public controversies to proximity regimes of engagement –, which we will not try to synthesize here. Nevertheless, we would like to say some very brief words about the work which has been (and is) being made, namely trying to identify some challenges which pragmatic sociology leaves us and, also, to Portuguese sociology and Portuguese sociologists as whole, challenges which we think the researchers in this collective, our research group, try to integrate in their research processes. Of course, what is about to be said has no intent of being thorough or exhaustive.

About this issue, we would say that the relevance of pragmatic sociology in the Portuguese ‘sociological landscape’ which has been somewhat revealed to us by mobilizing it to develop research, lies in at least two points: its innovative character and its sociological fertility.

- i) In the first place, pragmatic sociology represents an innovative approach in the frame of sociological reasoning in our country, since: Portuguese sociology has been constructed around what Fernando Luís Machado, in his article “Half a century of sociological research in Portugal” (Machado, 2009), calls two great ‘institutional generators’: the socio-cultural generator and the socio-political generator. In the former, we have as leading institutions CIES-ISCTE and ICS-UL, as well as other institutions, such as CICS.NOVA and IS-FLUP; in the latter, we have as leading institutions CES-UC and CICS-UM. According to F. Luís Machado, the epistemic and methodological orientation of the socio-cultural generator is rationalistic, with strong articulation between theory and empirical research; the main international references are Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens; as to the socio-political generator, the epistemic and methodological orientation is post-modern critical theory, with strong articulation between theory and political doctrines; its main international references are the School of Frankfurt, Immanuel Wallerstein or Ulrich Beck. Our purpose is to develop a political sociology of Portuguese society.
 - a) Pragmatic sociology provides an analytical framework which allows us to upset what we would like call this ‘institutional frame’ in Portuguese sociology, opening field to new objects and fields of analysis, new issues, new forms of perceiving and working analytically social beings. Our purpose is to develop a political sociology of Portuguese sociality within the framework of the general program referred to above.
- ii) In the second place, pragmatic sociology introduces an extremely fruitful and productive approach to social phenomena which characterize Portuguese’s sociality formation:
 - a) Pragmatic sociology induces us to deepen our understanding of human action and coordination, having always as questioning axis the one which stems from what we think is a fundamental finding of this approach: the internal complexity or, more strictly

speaking, the internal plurality of human action, with its multiple, although limited, regimes of engagement; with its complex architecture of internal relations, more peaceful or tensional according to different situations; with its ambiguities and polarities between guarantees and doubts or uncertainty in social situations; with the mobilization of different grammars in action, namely in order to reduce tensions in social settings; with its movements from proximity to generality.

- b) Also, pragmatic sociology invites us to take society and ‘the social’, not for granted, but as problematic issues. With this analytical framework, society is not a self-evident, explanatory variable, as in other sociological approaches, which seem to first reify the social to, then, use it as explanatory and determinant to any observable behavior. On the contrary, pragmatic sociology, taking society and ‘the social’ as problematic issues, instigates us to seize the sometimes very delicate movements by which social actors manufacture the common in plural forms, the ways by which they, supporting themselves in the result of past and current investments in forms (Thévenot, 1986), try to build commonality in a rather complex, fluid social world.
- c) Pragmatic sociology leads us to take in account objects in human action: the ways by which a regime of engagement involves not only an interaction between human beings in a kind of ‘physical vacuum’, but also, and sharply, the close interaction between human beings and their physical environment, and the ways by which they engage objects in their individual and collective actions.
- d) The attention which pragmatic sociology dedicates to the forms of qualification of beings, whether they are human or non-human, also challenges us to take very seriously in our work as sociologists the ways by which cognition is supported by forms of understanding which are built in complex frames of action and which result from different regimes of engagement. In these complex frameworks of action, it is important to highlight the forms of coordination of action and its multiple consequences. Among its possible effects, we highlight the possible critical operations of the subjects submitted to the orientations out of the investments as a result of actions’ coordination. However, if there are critical operations, there may also be situations where criticisms are suspended. In this sense, our regard is attentive to

all these possible combinations. Following the actors forces observers to a small-scale craft.

- e) Finally, we would like to highlight the methodological relevance of a principle which pragmatic sociology tends to pursue, which is to follow social actors and take seriously their own view of their actions. This principle, here presented in this metaphorical form, challenges us to think in new methodological approaches to sociological objects and, on the other hand, to mobilize strategies which can lead us to take a big, deep dive in the terrains of research, striving to think through fieldwork in the pathway to a better understanding of human action in social settings. Handcrafting of observation work is a crucial point. Ethnographic immersions in different research contexts, informal conversations with actors involved in object-related occurrences, semi-directive interviews, the use of photography and videos, the detailed transcription of the scenarios where the actors interact with each other, are all moments which are part of making sociological science in a crafted way.

As we started to highlight, we didn't intend to be exhaustive on this issue. We are just trying to pinpoint and highlight some aspects of pragmatic sociology which we modestly think are, and can do it even much more, challenging the usual way of practicing sociology in our country. Doing so, we were trying to introduce, in a way, the following texts, which certainly will be much more enlightening about these and so many other issues than we could be.