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An information literacy lens on community representation for participatory budgeting in Brazil

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Abstract

This paper presents an evaluation of the information literacies used by community representatives when engaging with participatory budgeting in São Paulo City, Brazil. Using questions established from context-setting interviews with stakeholders, a focus group was held in 2019 with eight participative councillors, with *in situ* interpretation, resulting in a translated transcript of the discussion. Thematic analysis was used to understand information issues faced by community representatives in relation to past research. It was found that the community representatives face informational barriers to their engagement with participatory budgeting, in (a) learning about their role (b) understanding the information needs of the communities served and (c) gathering and sharing information about local issues with stakeholders. These findings allow the refining of CILIP's definition of information literacy (IL) for citizenship and provide the basis for proposing a model for the IL of community representatives. It is also proposed that future IL research could further develop the role of digitally-enabled place and community in shaping the landscape of literacy and the role of hyperlocal representation. Additionally, the role of translation in cross-lingual IL research is considered.

Keywords

Brazil; citizenship; democracy; everyday life information literacy; information literacy; political agency; translation studies; UK; workplace learning

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1. Introduction

Successful participation in democratic processes carries a risk of information overload, for citizens, for officials charged with implementing the decisions (Davies et al., 2021), and for citizens' representatives (Hall et al., 2018a). Representatives work together to gather and evaluate information, to make decisions, then share these with government officials, and (importantly) the rest of their community. This is particularly important in participatory models of democracy when representatives often act on behalf of citizens in their communities, acting in a role which intermediates between citizens in their community and formal government processes. That is, community representatives have an informational role. Information literacy (IL), therefore, provides a relevant lens to evaluate the role that information plays in their practices.

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a form of direct democracy in which citizens decide how some or all of a public budget is spent (Davies et al., 2021; Dias et al., 2019). It provides an opportunity for evaluation against previous research into the information practices of community (or hyperlocal) representatives found in Scotland (Cruickshank et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2018a).

In this paper, the first evaluation is presented of the factors shaping the use and impact of IL on community representatives in the context of participatory budgeting in São Paulo City, Brazil (henceforth referred to as São Paulo). This research was carried out as part of a wider study in January 2019, which addressed the role of information systems in the low participation of the very poor in democratic processes in Brazil, and the inequalities that result from this (Demeke & Ryan, 2021).

This article contributes to IL research in a non-educational context. It addresses a gap in research related to the information literacies involved in community representation, namely the IL of community representatives in the context of PB, through an evaluation of a focus group transcript. It concludes with discussion of the implications of the findings and insights on the general applicability of the issues found. It also considers methodological implications from the translation process.

2. Background

2.1 Participatory budgeting, community and place

A key feature of participatory democracy is a shift away from restricting citizen engagement to the electoral cycle, to a continuous process of democratic governance (Lee-Geiller & Lee, 2019). PB emerged as part of a movement to ensuring the legitimacy of decision-making through participatory democracy, where there had been a perception that decisions were being made by distant bureaucrats or politicians (de Souza et al., 2022). It is a form of democracy in which citizens decide how some or all of a public budget is spent (Davies et al., 2021; Dias et al., 2019; Pogrebinschi, 2023), with some monitoring of how their decision is implemented. Lupien and Rourke (2021) argued that PB is one mechanism for public pedagogy and democratising the information landscape.

PB was pioneered in Brazil as part of a process of broadening democracy and engaging poorer citizens in decision making after years of authoritarian rule (Dias et al., 2019), and although its use has declined recently, largely due to budgetary constraints (de Paiva Bezerra & de Oliveira Junqueira, 2022), it is still significant. Most PB processes are operated by local authorities at the neighbourhood level. Typical decisions could be in the areas of healthcare and education (Wampler, 2007). In practice, community representatives can be chosen from the citizens involved. São Paulo provides an example of this: participative councils are formed from community representatives selected at *subprefeitura* (city administrative district) community assemblies (Hernández-Medina, 2010; Wampler, 2007).

When considering PB with its emphasis on decision making by the local community, geographical context and constraints on information behaviour become significant (Case & Given, 2016). Some communities are not geographically bound. Savolainen's (2008) book, for example, is based on the information practices of a community of environmental activists—this form of community is centred on a topic rather than a place. In the context of PB, citizens have different reasons to identify with their location—geographical, social or other interest—and a

sense of place provides social capital underpinning their communities (Acedo et al., 2019). Additionally, the relationship between online and offline presence is not straightforward (Barnes, 2016; Wang et al., 2018). At the hyperlocal level, the environment is inherently multi-channel (Case & Given, 2016): physical conversations and meetings are (normally) always available as an alternative to online engagement.

2.2 The role of information literacy in participation

In order to make rational choices, decision-making citizens and their representatives must be informed about the alternative choices on offer and their consequences—and the effectiveness of the implementation of the decisions. IL is of obvious relevance, because it centres around the ability to think critically about information and use it effectively, as expressed in the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) (2018) widely accepted definition:

> a set of skills and abilities which everyone needs to undertake information-related tasks; for instance, how to discover, access, interpret, analyse, manage, create, communicate, store and share information. It incorporates […] an understanding of both the ethical and political issues associated with using information.

Much IL research focuses on education or library-based contexts (Hollis, 2018). However, there are papers relevant to democratic participation. A significant strand of information science research focusses on the individual community member in relation to citizenship. A perceived need for improving social justice was one of the drivers behind the emergence of IL as an area of academic study (Lloyd, 2017; Lloyd et al., 2016; Saunders, 2017). IL has long been seen as an essential component of citizenship (Cloudesley, 2021; Lupien & Rourke, 2021; Smith, 2016). More generally, media, digital and information literacies are associated with taking part in civic activities and engaging with democratic processes (Duran et al., 2008; Hobbs et al., 2013; Kahne et al., 2012; Martens & Hobbs, 2015; Polizzi, 2020). In summary, IL has been argued to enable citizens to play a full part in democratic life, "providing disadvantaged or marginalised groups with the means of making sense of the world around them and participating in society" (CILIP, 2018, p. 4), supporting civic engagement by allowing assessment of the information provided by authorities.

In contrast, there has been a tendency to neglect representatives as stakeholders in information science research, albeit with some exceptions such as Baxter, Marcella and Illingworth (2010). Understanding the IL practices of community representatives is important because they often act as information intermediaries (or proxies) between the government and the citizens in the communities they represent (Cruickshank et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2018a). Any such analysis should take into account social and geographical context. It should also include the manner of working, in particular the different forms of collaboration that are involved in their information activities and practices. However, even recent accounts of IL for democracy, such as Cloudesley (2021), have no role for representatives. Other issues in the research include a lack of consideration of the context of the information activity—for example the role of training, skill-acquisition, and teamwork for community representatives.

Although most IL research measures individual skills, IL has also been considered a collective and socially situated activity, particularly in a workplace context (Collard et al., 2016). As with other concepts in this research, finding a definition of workplace can be difficult. For example, Sayyad Abdi and Bruce (2015) distinguish the physically located workplace from information

focussed professional work. Despite this, the role of the workplace is considered widely, particularly in the IL and lifelong learning literature (Forster, 2017); much of Lloyd's output (for example Lloyd, 2017; Olsson & Lloyd, 2017) considers IL as it is situated in the workplace. Finally, IL research often does not evaluate the impact of information presentation (Cruickshank et al., 2020).

A challenge is the nature of the role of being a community representative: it is not paid work, but it is work-like. The review of role- and context-focussed research in Case and Given (2016) is of relevance to this: the authors draw a distinction between occupational and non-occupational roles and note the relative lack of research into non-occupational roles. However, consideration is given to "citizens, voters and the public at large" (section 10.2.1). Others address the activities of organisations and elected representatives (Baxter et al., 2010) and citizen-activists (Savolainen, 2008). Analogies for community representatives can be found in voluntary groups. Together, these concepts provide insights into community participants such as citizens and representatives as information actors.

The nature of community representatives' activity also raises questions on what is meant by "work" in models of work-based IL (Forster, 2015; Lloyd, 2017). Cruickshank et al. (2020) provided evidence that in this context, IL is a joint activity with representatives coordinating their information-related tasks with colleagues. This implies that learning also happens through joint activities, shaped by information skills previously acquired in other contexts. IL here is shaped by social context, with evidence of the transfer of IL at work and everyday life (Martzoukou & Sayyad Abdi, 2017) to the quasi-workplace of a community council.

Critical information literacy (CIL) can include the questioning of the systems underpinning information production and consumption (Cope, 2010; Gregory & Higgins, 2013). Social justice therefore is an important aspect of CIL (Saunders, 2017) because it affects citizens' ability to engage with political processes (Mariën & Prodnik, 2014). Information science research raises awareness of the impact of the digital divide. Individual demographic characteristics have been found to be significant in determining one's level of engagement with the political process, for instance age (Wang et al., 2018), personality traits (Deng et al., 2017), and deprivation (Smeaton, et al., 2017).

Critical digital literacy matters for democracy in general (Polizzi, 2020). In this view, although engagement in democracy may not influence outcomes, it shows what matters to people. Engagement may range from accessing government websites to seeking, sharing, or commenting on content to signing petitions and participating in demonstrations. Critical digital literacy includes an understanding of the internet as being embedded in power structures. A critical perspective can cause conflict between existing structures, such as traditionally elected representatives (city councillors) and the officials who serve them. This frequently leads to reliance on community leaders and representatives as they are the individuals who have the time and information skills to inform themselves and engage with formal processes, while also remaining embedded in the community in question.

2.3 IL Frameworks

The definition of IL is somewhat contested and unclear (Webber & Johnston, 2017), with separate research taking place in conceptual and practical spaces (Haider & Sundin, 2022; Lloyd, 2017). Some well-known definitions are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Definitions of information literacy

Model	Definition
CILIP definition of information literacy	"IL is the ability to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use" (CILIP, 2018, p. 3).
SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy	People who have IL will "demonstrate an awareness of how they gather, use, manage, synthesise and create information and data in an ethical manner and will have the information skills to do so effectively" (SCONUL, 2011, p.3).
Information literacy as embodied practice (Lloyd, 2017)	IL "…contributes to our performance in everyday life and which, when explored carefully, references the context that shapes and enables that performance" (Lloyd, 2017, p. 91).
Everyday life information literacy	IL is connected to "searching for, critically evaluating and using information effectively to solve everyday problems" (Martzoukou & Sayyid Abdi, 2017, p. 634).

One result of the focus of IL research on education- or library-based contexts (Hollis, 2018) is that there is a relative lack of research relevant to e-participation. However, research into IL as a situated practice is relevant, because it addresses the challenges in measuring IL outside from the education context (Hollis, 2018; Lloyd, 2017; Widén et al., 2021). Others have also proposed a model that incorporates everyday life into IL models (Martzoukou & Sayyad Abdi, 2017). Despite limitations noted by Hall et al. (2018a), the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) (2011) model provides an approach to categorising activities, supplementing the general definition provided by CILIP (2018). Everyday life and embodied models of IL provide further context.

Hall et al. (2018a) also identify a number of cross-cutting issues specific to community representation which can be used to frame this analysis. First, there are challenges in finding information on the role. Learning about the role was frequently dependent on official websites, with limited training or support from local authorities, and little evidence of planning by the representatives to fill gaps in their knowledge. Skill gaps were identified in the use of digital skills, including those related to social media and engagement metrics. Previous IL research has demonstrated the benefit of training (Kennedy & Gruber, 2020; Seifi et al., 2020). Second, there is strong evidence that in the context of this study, information practices are largely collective through all stages of information collection, evaluation, and dissemination (Cruickshank et al., 2020); this is a challenge to some models of IL. Third, a major informational challenge is to understand and meet the information needs of the communities served, including digital and physical channels of communication. Finally, a fourth challenge includes the relationship with the government and a lack of control over decisions. Information is seen as the main currency of power for community representatives.

In conclusion, PB and its socio-political context in Brazil presents a chance to extend and validate past research about the IL of community representatives. The following research questions examine the information literacies shown by community representatives:

RQ1: How do community representatives find information on their role, including the role of teamwork?
RQ2: How do community representatives identify the information needs of their local community?
RQ3: How do community representatives use information when working with government bodies?

3. Methods

As community representatives were the main source of data for this study, a focus group was a particularly suitable format, because encouraging free conversation can uncover unexpected issues.

Following good practice (Case & Given, 2016), eight participants (4 male, 4 female) were chosen from different *subprefeituras* (municipalities) across São Paulo, with invitations handled by a Brazilian partner (T2 – see Table 2). Participants were asked to sign informed consent forms that had been translated into Portuguese using Google Translate, then checked by T1 and T2. Resource and time constraints meant that a simple discussion format was used, with no breakout groups. No reward was offered for participation (other than small souvenirs), and none was requested. The participants in this study are summarised in Table 2. The focus group was held in January 2019.

Preparation included desk research and gathering background information through interviews with interested academics and stakeholders in the process. These were arranged in conjunction with the project's Brazilian academic partners. English was the main language used in background interviews with academics; Portuguese was used with hosts from the city council, with interpretation by supporting academics and notes in English taken during the discussions. This process led to agreement on eight main questions to use during the focus group, listed in Appendix 1.

Two PhD students (T1, T2) acted as interpreters during the focus group data gathering. This had the advantage of being simple to arrange and ensured that the interpreters and translators had relevant background information. The data gathering took place before COVID-19, so there were no restrictions on travel or social distancing.

Table 2: Summary of participants

Participant	Details
R1 (PI) R2 R3	Field researcher Field researcher Post project analysis
T1, T2	Translators/interpreters: PhD students from University of São Paulo – native Brazilian Portuguese speakers who acted as interpreters. T2 also worked part time for the Prefeitura.
T3	Native Brazilian Portuguese-speaking post-doctoral researcher who assisted with background research, carried out transcription of recording, and validated the machine translation of the resulting Portuguese into English
CS1, CS2	Officials from São Paulo city with responsibility for participative councils
CA1-3	Community activists – pilot study
CR1-CR8	Community representatives – participants in main focus group

Multilingual, transnational research is an area of growing importance, with funders such as the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund[1] encouraging knowledge exchange between the UK and developing countries. Research such as this, working across languages and cultures, requires special consideration by researchers of translation of questions and responses between the research language and the participants' language (Abfalter et al., 2021; Demeke & Ryan, 2021; Pinto da Costa, 2021; Temple & Young, 2004). At the same time, it is rare for translation to be surfaced as part of the research process (Regmi et al., 2010). Making the translation process visible helps surface the disparities of perspectives between researchers, interpreters, and research subjects (Bergen, 2018). In the research described in this paper, the language used by community representative participants is Brazilian Portuguese, while the language used by the researchers to analyse the data and publish the findings is English. Data in this form of research was generated by a mix of live interaction and subsequent transcription and translation. Key considerations included the timing of data coding before or after translation (Abfalter et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2015) and whether any machine translation (MT) is of usable quality (see for example Abdel Latif, 2020). Validation of the quality of the translation requires the researcher to be clear about its purpose and whether it has achieved its objectives (Ruitenberg et al., 2016).

Google Translate was used to translate the questions into Portuguese; these were discussed with T1 and T2 and piloted the day before with CA1-3. Informed consent was recorded for these two data-gathering sessions. MT was also used to translate the informed consent forms—this translation was checked by T1. The main focus group took place on 24 January 2019 with eight participants (CR1-CR8) from different subprefeituras across São Paulo. The social context and geographical spread of the communities involved meant the event took place in the *Prefeitura* (City Hall). Based around the previously discussed script, questions were posed in English by R2, with T1 and T2 acting as interpreters. The gist of responses was translated into English, and R2 took field-notes. The focus group lasted approximately two hours and 15 minutes. The

[1] https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/international-funding/global-challenges-research-fund/

entire conversation was also audio recorded for later transcription. Transcription and translation of the audio recording took place in the UK later in 2019. This transcription was anonymised before translated to English using Google Translate. This translation was checked and corrected by T2 and used as the basis for analysis.

R2, the main field researcher, has a strong personal commitment to the issues addressed in the research. He has extensive experience of community councils and is a strong supporter of participatory budgeting in Scotland. Since 2018 he has been on the steering group of a local PB instance. There was, therefore, some risk that his personal opinions led to leading questions and shaped the findings. This risk was mitigated largely by his experience as a researcher and the social status of the participants, that is they would feel free to disagree. The risk of bias in analysis is mitigated by the use of a separate researcher [R3] to analyse the data.

The transcription contains 432 separate statements in a mix of English and Portuguese. As was expected, the interpreters worked about equally between English and Portuguese. A review of the transcription showed no significant disagreements between the participants, nor was there a significant gender difference in participation. However, as is typical of focus groups, some counsellors spoke more than others, introducing a bias toward more educated representatives from wealthier areas:

> [the counsellors] from more wealthy areas (perhaps with higher educational level as well) were more excited in participating on the focus groups and therefore were willing to provide more frequent feedbacks than counsellors from poorer areas. I felt these last ones were somewhat intimidated by the presence of academic researchers and the fact that part of the communication was being made in English. [T1]

Another impact was procedural. Time was taken to clarify options around process and fulfilling requests for translation breaks. There was also interruption of dialog while questions were being answered. 140 (32%) of the recorded statements were by the interpreters—this has implications for planning the timing and depth of discussion that is realistic in an interpreted focus group.

Analysis was undertaken independently by R2 and R3. Later in 2019, R2 used NVivo 12 to analyse the transcription and field-notes. A first coding pass was used to become familiar with the data by coding by participant (CR1-CR8). A second coding pass applied mostly emergent codes but also used some a priori codes generated from the questions in Appendix 1. (This analysis is not discussed further in this paper.) In 2022, R3 carried out a thematic analysis of the transcription, with a focus on the impact of the interpretation process on the focus group data. R2 reviewed this analysis for consistency.

Findings were verified with the interpreters using a questionnaire (Appendix 2). It was not possible to confirm findings with the participants due to a combination of delays with research compliance in internal processes, and then the impact of COVID-19 related lockdowns. It is acknowledged that the inevitable lack of contextual knowledge in such a short visit may have led to gaps in understanding. The use of PhD students rather than professionals in the translation process allowed for greater time for background briefing and contextual understanding, but may have led to lost information collection opportunities during the focus group. These risks were mitigated through discussion of the coded data and initial findings with the translators.

4. Findings

The following findings are ordered by the research questions guiding this study. References to statements are bracketed as follows: [10, CR3] indicates statement 10 on the transcript, made by participant CR3. The language is indicated where relevant, for example [16, R2, en]. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

As is often the case in this form of research, the focus group gave the participants a chance to reflect on the impact of participation on their own position: “your questions are making them think about how they are not [supporting] the very poor. It is a learning process for them too” [236, Translator].

4.1 RQ1: How do community representatives find information on their role, including the role of teamwork?

4.1.1 Defining the role—who is being represented

The participants see themselves as part of *“*civil society*”* [3, all], and this role is *“*all voluntary*”* [187, CR3]. This role is therefore distinct from legislators or formally elected representatives. This is illustrated by participants’ activity descriptions which show that they see themselves as distinct from the political process: *“*The participatory counsellor, naturally, is a voluntary person, [and] develops a work that is totally autonomous, independent of the administration*”* [295, CR8].

Implicit in this are barriers to participation, effectively excluding members of poor communities from directly engaging; this is also reflected in the fact that the participants did not ask for funding to attend the workshop, as noted above.

4.1.2 The role as understanding the information environment

Representatives are working in a complex information environment, which means it is not easy for people poor in time or resources to keep up. They need to handle a range of information (for example Court of Auditors, local and city councils), for instance:

> Now when there is a work that has intervention from the city hall, such as the channelling of a stream, who takes care [… of] who holds all the information is the city hall, through the secretariat of construction, and its secretaries, finances and everything. Then the participative councillor does not have this information [32, CR2].

The representatives have to coordinate and integrate information representing a range of diverse communities, and these tend to be place-based: “I am elected by a poorer community, I am elected by a trade association, I am elected by friends, I am elected by residents of a housing estate” [127, CR7].

They may involve coordinating information across different consultative councils (for example community and health) [142 & 197, CR5].

4.1.3 Functions required by the role

The functions of the representative’s role include leadership, such as acting on behalf of poor people in the community and expressing the experiences of their constituents (poor people) [285, CR6]. Community representatives’ training in their role is provided by the city government

[14 & 17, CR4] and attendance at training workshops is required: “to participate in the meeting we have to participate in a workshop, whoever participates…gets their diploma...” [60, CR1].

One participant praised the role of local academics in providing skills to participative councillors: *“*he arranged courses to properly form us, a course with transparency, an integration, a unity that did not exist*”* [169, CR4].

Teamwork and joint work were not a significant area of discussion, but the participants did state that councils make decisions through consensus [14, CR4]: “…if they want to change the project, everybody, some raise their hands…It all depends on how many you want to change…you modify, but in agreement with everyone” [18, CR1].

Overall, in relation to RQ1, the community representatives are, to an extent, able to find out how to take on their roles. The fact that they take on the roles in the first place could be understood as tacit evidence that they feel empowered to do so.

4.2 RQ2: How do community representatives identify the information needs of their local community?

Information is an important factor in the effectiveness of participatory councils [127, CR7]. One source of information is through engaging with the population to understand their needs, for example through public meetings: “it is important to listen to the population” [200, CR5]. This is important because listening to the poor is not part of the political culture of São Paulo (that is the poor are not often used as a source of information) [214, CR2]. Another challenge is that the political context in Brazil (the then ongoing impeachments of politicians) can reduce citizens’ willingness to engage in participatory budgeting processes [334, CR2; 340, CR2].

4.2.1 Impact: Use of information in developing and empowering the community

The participants can see themselves as “agents of transformation” [297, CR8], though provision of training and other support to citizens, while using social participation as a source of information. Skills development for citizens is essential—it also depends on culture [313, CR6]. In particular, digital skills development is essential but is lacking—not just in poor people [331, CR3]. One of their perceived roles is to engage with young people [341, CR6]. Another is in training the citizens in how to ask questions and make demands from government: “the population is open to participate…we trained the people, the people said, ‘look, if it wasn’t for you I'd still be in deep shit’” [228, CR7].

The community representatives can make recommendations, but several complained that they cannot follow decisions through to actual budget and spending [31, CR3; 137, CR2]—though in some places it is possible [33, CR1].

This means that training and capacity building is a key part of the role [297, CR8], but one major challenge is that awareness is low among citizens of their potential power through the PB process [346 & 348 CR5]. Another participant highlighted the need to raise awareness of the impact of the process: “The point is that we get money…people make events, make forums…and nobody knows” [111, CR3].

One issue is whether the information is reaching the right people. That is, there is a need to measure the impact of the information presented:

> …the municipal administration provides for people to have the information…Between the communication of what goes out of the administration and gets there at the end of the community there is a limbo…Is this [information] reaching the population properly? Can the population understand everything that is being provided?...So, there you have this [break] which is the discussion that I think fits the research [284, CR8].

The above provides evidence of the information practices of sharing with communities, including the channels used for communication, and some of the barriers to such information-sharing. There is still a preference for face-to-face, but an awareness of the increasing role of digital in information sharing.

4.2.2 Engaging with citizens: young and poor people

Generally speaking, economic status and access to education impacts citizens' access to information: "the economic level of the person also influences the type of access they will have, in relation to information" [384, CR8; 385, CR6]. There is an awareness that representatives need to select which information to share—including from citizens—while avoiding the risk of "manipulation" [295, 297, CR8].

The term *poor* can mean more than lack of money as initially assumed by the researchers. It can also include lack of access to services [217, CR6; 222, translator]. In the São Paulo context, poor is characterised as vulnerable [239, CR7]. There was a general consensus that the interests of poor people are not served [209-211, CR1/CR2/CR3], with issues raised by poor communities being ignored [216, CR3], and poor people frequently not being used as a source of information "I think the very poor never participate…[they] have no voice" [230 & 232, CR2]. This leaves the representatives to act as proxy information sources based on their own personal experience [215, CR6].

Another group discussed was young people and their engagement with the planning process, and hence the need to use digital tools: "[the teenagers asked] Why they do not send messages on WhatsApp, [or] Facebook?" [94, CR1]. Some participants deliberately engage young people by meeting with them [341, CR6] or showing them the official information sources: "in the meetings I go with teenagers, youth and adults, I tell them to open the Official Gazette" [247, CR6].

4.2.3 Sharing information with citizens: channels and the role of digital media

Websites are a key source of information [47, CR3], highlighting the importance of digital literacy. However, social media and digital literacy are not everything: much information is still presented "on paper" [257, CR3]. Nevertheless, social media (Facebook, WhatsApp) are a communication channel for seeking and sharing information, particularly when engaging young people [94, CR1]. More generally, technology use helps with information seeking [260, CR1]. For instance, poor people can use mobile devices to search for information [265, CR1]. The IRIS app is an example of how digital literacy can help information seeking.

> [it] is an application of the Municipal Court of Auditors which is an [independent agency]…that gives you the possibility … to enter … all the budget layers of the city … It is a device that monitors the entire budget that is spent on health, education, transportation [281, CR8].

In general, participants felt that there is a generally low level of digital skills in the population [331, CR3]. Technology can help poor people access information [366 & 369, CR2], and conversely, lack of access can inhibit access to information [368, CR6]. Technology depends on basic infrastructure being in place and prevents poor people accessing information (not their lack of intelligence or motivation) [372, CR1]—so digital infrastructure such as free Wi-Fi helps where provided [271, CR4].

Overall, in relation to RQ2, the community representatives are somewhat able to identify their communities' information needs. However, there are clear barriers to this.

4.3 RQ3: How do community representatives use information when working with government bodies?

4.3.1 Sources of information

Representatives are dependent on official sources of information [14, CR4] in making decisions and tracking how the money is allocated and spent [24, CR1]. Overall, the participants highlighted the poor information environment, not just for the representatives.

> But I think the essence is that different bodies of the same management do not communicate, do not talk for 'n' reasons, I think the challenge is...make the gear work... are small parts working, sometimes it works [90, CR2].

Good information skills are needed to find and evaluate information. One challenge is becoming aware of projects [42, CR3], including finding information on available funding [111, CR3; 137, CR2]. "Close to zero" information on current and planned projects can be presented to representatives [80 & 81, CR2], and the information environment is not stable. For instance, the representatives now have no access to spending plans [77, CR8].

One of the challenges is being aware of which parts of government to seek information from [88, CR2]. The experience of the participants is they have to work with multiple information sources—there is no single place for finding information [87, CR4; 166, CR7], and there is a lack of knowledge about who holds or should hold information [100, CR2]. Examples include the subpreifetura's official diary of decisions [46, translator] or records of the other institutions, such as the Court of Auditors [50, CR3]. Open government programmes have made little impact [325, CR3]. The key information skill is knowing where to look and how to bring it together—not a skill set that every citizen will have.

4.3.2 Making sense of government information

There are challenges in making sense of available information and identifying the audience: "so, there is the information. But who will consume that?" [305, CR3]. Once information has been found, it must be assessed for adequacy: "Now, is this information, or rather this means available, sufficient for the population's demand to have access to the budget?" [284, CR8].

Information is not often presented by government bodies to participatory councils in time [43, CR3] and projects may start without involving the representatives. There is also an awareness that the information available may not be completely reliable [155-161, CR4, CR2, CR6 and others]. To complement official sources, personal experience is used as a source of information [227, CR4]. A key skill is assessing information given by or about politicians [196, CR6]. Only bad news is often discussed, and scandal in government sets the context of information seeking

[343, CR8]. The information that is available can be delayed or “truncated” due to wider political clashes [202, CR7]. A wider informational issue is that elections and other causes of political change (such as internal restructuring) mean that knowledge can be lost [77, CR8].

4.3.3 Overlapping sources of information

As well as multiple government information sources, representatives are working in a context of multiple overlapping participatory councils. This creates a need to share information about what has been achieved to other community groups [142, CR5]:

> Somewhere passing this information to spread the word [across 32 city administrative districts]. You should have this information, it's important, it's interesting, it's encouraging. So, you see what a region…is doing for the community, you can copy 'starting' a process that also benefits the community of that region… [229, CR6].

At least one participant expressed an awareness of the need to consider the wider context and work across councils. For example, councils in different areas could do more to coordinate their activities and consider the context of overlapping areas [136, CR7]. There is disagreement though on how much this is already being done [137, CR2]. At the same time, representatives can be on more than one council [197, CR5], providing a chance to transfer knowledge and experience between councils. This is a contrast with the simpler governance structures faced by Scottish community councillors.

Overall, in relation to RQ3, the community representatives have used their role in transmitting information to carve out a space distinctive from government and elected representatives.

5. Discussion

The research addresses information literacies involved in interaction between community representatives and the citizens they represent, and government bodies and elected representatives. In this section, the emergent themes for community representatives in São Paulo are compared to the themes of findings previously reported for Scotland in Hall et al. (2018a; 2018b), Cruickshank & Hall (2020), and elsewhere. These are then mapped against the pillars of IL in the SCONUL (2011) model.

5.1 Issues arising from the role

5.1.1 Finding information on the role

The findings presented in section 4.2 point to the role of IL in community representatives as they support community engagement and empowerment. Another emergent theme was the role of generational and social differences in the use of digital and physical channels for sharing information with citizens. The informal and financial barriers to participation limiting access to information skills are similar to those found in Scottish community councils (Cruickshank et al., 2020). There is a dependence on representatives bringing existing information skills and acting as campaigners/change-makers, not just transmitters of information. The training of the participative councillors is an example of good practice by local government in São Paulo, recognising the need to enhance the information skills. Membership of multiple participative councils provides a transfer of knowledge and experience.

5.1.2 The (collective) nature of the role.

The self-perception by participative councillors noted in section 4.1 is of their role being like that of a volunteer, rather than part of official government. They also noted the importance of teamwork, implying that joint information behaviours will be found and that joint IL will be a fruitful avenue of research. An area that warrants further research is the relationship to everyday life IL (Martzoukou & Sayyad Abdi, 2017) and the characteristics shared by community representation between volunteer activities and the workplace.

5.1.3 Understanding the information needs of the (place) community

It is clear from the data that representing a place (a range of people and opinions) is different from representing an interest group. The impact is apparent in the fact that a place is geographically bound in a relatively small area, and this has implications for the use of communications channels—a mix of digital and personal can be expected (Cruickshank & Hall, 2020). This contrasts with communities of interest mentioned in 2.2 above, which often use a single digital forum.

Evidence is also found of representatives finding information on behalf of others (Cloudesley, 2021), acting as a proxy information source for their communities (Cruickshank & Hall, 2020) and for branches of government. Additionally, further evidence is provided in section 4.3 of the importance of digital IL in accessing and sharing information (Cloudesley, 2021; Lupien & Rourke, 2021).

The findings presented here emphasise the joint importance of the geography and digital engagement of the community, particularly at the local level. Previous publications have adapted the term *hyperlocal* from news media research (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Metzgar et al., 2011). Following the findings here, *hyperlocal representation* can be further refined as:

> The actions of representatives in the context of the smallest official level of democracy: digitally enabled, geographically based, community-oriented and intended to promote civic engagement.

Future research could continue to focus on IL in the hyperlocal context, developing further the role of digitally-enabled place and community in shaping the landscape of literacy and the role of hyperlocal representation.

5.1.4 Relation to government and lack of control over decisions

Evidence was provided in section 4.3 that, given their lack of control over decisions, information is seen as the representatives' main currency. This is similar to findings found in research in Scotland (Hall et al., 2018b). Community representatives are able to apply information skills not generally available to many members of their communities, identify and evaluate sources of information such as local authority websites or social media, and share information. Difficulties in finding information from the government have been reported elsewhere (Hall et al., 2018a) where community representatives find it difficult to access information in a timely manner.

5.2 Mapping against the pillars

Overall, the findings presented in section 4 can be aligned to the Hall et al. (2018a) mapping to the SCONUL (2011) model (Table 3). This provides a useful framework for analysis of information practices in this context.

Table 3: Mapping of findings against the SCONUL model

Pillar	Description (Hall et al., 2018a)	Comment in relation to the findings
Identify	Able to identify role, a need for information and the available sources.	Learning about role is dependent on training and official websites. Little evidence of planning on fill gaps in knowledge.
Scope	In relation to the community, can assess current knowledge and identify gaps and options	Impact of working in the context of overlapping participatory councils.
Plan	Can construct strategies for locating information and data.	Lack of training/need for support from local authorities Understanding the needs of the communities served—what do they do to find them
Gather	Can locate and access the information and data they need	Gathering and sharing local issues: given lack of control over decisions, information is seen as main currency. Sources of info used: local authority website, social media, and conversations with citizens [plus ensuring accuracy/timeliness]
Evaluate	Can review the research process and compare and evaluate information and the impact of the process on the community	Identified skill gaps: social media (and metrics), digital engagement and data collection
Manage	Can organise information professionally and ethically. Can work together to manage the information	Information practices can be collective—not easy to fit with the SCONUL model
Present	Can apply the knowledge gained: presenting the results of their research, using appropriate channels and language. Can evaluate effectiveness of presentation.	Consideration of channels of communication—preference for face-to-face, but awareness of digital options. Lack of awareness of the impact of the information activities is seen as an issue.

6. Conclusions

The primary contribution of this study is to extend knowledge of the IL practices of community representatives, opening up new areas for further investigation. This research has also highlighted the role of the translation process in cross-lingual IL research. Further evidence is provided of the value of information practice and IL as lenses for analysis of this under-researched area of work-like voluntary activity by representatives. In terms of the use of literacies by the community representatives to support citizen engagement, it was shown how they use their information skills to understand available information, and make proxy-like

decisions on behalf of their community in a wider context of perceived powerlessness. More research is needed into the nature of the teamwork between members of their community council and how that impacts their IL, and the role of place when considering everyday information practices in a community.

Cloudesley (2021) argued that IL for citizenship is based on social interactions embedded in a community, including "information seeking on behalf of others" (p.28), without mentioning the role of representatives. Information seeking by proxy is inherent in the community aspect of IL for citizenship (Cruickshank & Hall, 2020). However, extant IL research has little to say about those doing the seeking, generally the community representatives. The findings presented here extend this to show that understanding that representatives act on behalf of others is key to understanding how communities collectively engage with wider government. It has been shown here that it is important to look past the personal responsibilities of individual citizens, who are often not in the position of having the time or other resources to make an individual impact. If PB is part of the democratising process then the community representatives have a key educational role in making sense of the information landscape (Lupien & Rourke, 2021). This means that the role of community representative in empowering communities use of information is an important but neglected area.

Building on this is the idea of self-enablement, or how community representatives acquire the skills and knowledge to become effective in their role. The work here has identified gaps in research into work-like activities by volunteers, which are not covered in Lloyd's writings, and extending the concept of everyday life IL (Martzoukou & Sayyad Abdi, 2017).

The findings presented here extend past accounts of community representatives (Cruickshank et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2018a; Hall et al., 2018b) to a new context, and show that it is not just the citizens that are important to understanding the process (Alcaide Muñoz & Rodríguez Bolívar, 2019; Lee & Kim, 2018): the representatives' ability to manage information is also influenced by their demographic profiles. This work also goes to fill existing gaps in research into the actions of representatives in contrast to citizens or administrators.

Based on the findings, it is possible to adapt the CILIP (2018) model of IL for citizenship to account for community representation, and emphasise the proxy-like information practices in information sharing between government and fellow community members.

> IL allows individuals *and their representatives* to acquire and develop their understanding of the world around them; to reach informed views; where appropriate, to challenge, credibly and in an informed way assumptions or orthodoxies (including one's own), and even authority; to recognise bias and misinformation; and thereby to be engaged citizens, able *to work together* to play a full part in democratic life and society. Information literacy helps to address social exclusion, by providing disadvantaged or marginalised groups with the means of *individually or collectively* making sense of the world around them and participating in society.

An aspect of this updated definition that requires further research is evaluation of the effectiveness of the IL skills used by the community representatives—that is, the impact of IL. Other themes for further exploration include:

- the proxy-like role of representatives in imagining the community being represented

- the role of place in shaping the IL of geographical communities
- the IL needs of representatives acting together in a work-like context of semi-official voluntary roles
- the role that measurement of impact should play in models of IL.

These findings share similarities with research into the IL of community representatives in Scotland (Cruickshank et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2018a). However, there are some differences between community representative in São Paulo and in Scotland. For instance, the ages and demographic profile of the representatives vary. The Scottish community councillors are older than the São Paulo community representatives in this study. On the other hand, the researchers felt that both sets of representatives are more educated and literate than general citizens (this could be tested in future research). One implication is that widening the range of backgrounds of the representatives requires training to support IL and hence effectiveness in role (Kennedy & Gruber, 2020; Seifi et al., 2020).
Finally, this study opens up new directions of research to (a) evaluate at the operation of PB in different contexts, such as Scotland (Escobar, 2022) and (b) look at the informational role of members of representative councils (Pogrebinschi, 2023) more generally.

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Declarations

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Appendix 1: Focus Group Question Guide

This was used to as a guide to the issues raised during the focus group. The data was gathered as part of a wider project to which the original RQs (ORQs) given here relate.

ORQ1 To what extent do trust and transparency between municipal mayors/executives, legislators/councillors, civil servants and the judiciary facilitate PB projects that aim to satisfy the needs of the very poor in São Paulo city?
• How do you build trust in São Paulo City's participatory budgeting processes and projects? • How do you create and maintain transparency about these? • How difficult is this? • How do the other 4 groups help or hinder this? • Any other comments?
ORQ2 To what extent are relationships and procedures between the bodies in RQ1 geared towards PB projects that aim to satisfy the needs of the very poor in São Paulo city?
• What are the benefits and drawbacks of working/interacting with the other 4 groups? • How do you work with them?
ORQ3 To what extent do citizens' representatives (e.g. civil society organisations) perceive that the interests of the very poor are now served by PB in São Paulo city?
• To what extent do you perceive that the interests of the very poor are now served by participatory budgeting in São Paulo City?
ORQ4 To what extent does the use of ICT increase participation in São Paulo city?
• In your experience, to what extent does the use of ICT increase participation in São Paulo city?

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for interpreters

The aim of this questionnaire to bring out the interpreters' perspective and insights. It will provide some level of reflexivity to the research process that was carried out in January 2019.

We are aware of the long period of time since the visit to São Paolo! Answer it as best as you can, if possible, remembering how you felt at the time.

Only short answers are needed. The answers you give to this questionnaire will be used for research and may be published.

Here, *interpreting* means translation activity that involved live/conversational translation between two languages. PB is short for *participatory budgeting*.

1. Name	
2. Native language	
3. Level of English skills a. Spoken	
b. Written	
4. Past experience translating and interpreting from English to Portuguese	
5. Past experience translating and interpreting from Portuguese to English	
6. Any other translating or interpreting experience? If so, please state which languages were involved.	
7. How familiar are you with the governance of São Paolo City?	
8. What was your knowledge of PB (in São Paulo city, São Paulo state or anywhere else – please specify) before this project? What was your opinion of PB (is it a good idea? Is it effective?)	*(Only one or two sentences needed)*
The following questions should be answered in relation to the focus group:	
1. How do you feel the event went?	
2. What issues did you perceive at the time?	
a. How did you resolve them, were any issues unresolved?	
b. Are there any points where you feel your interventions or clarifications impacted on discussion?	
3. How (if at all) did taking part in this process change your opinions of PB, and the communities represented?	
4. What would you do differently as a translator / interpreter in future?	
5. Any other comments, including suggestions for any improvements to this questionnaire for future research.	
6. I consent to these answers being quoted in my name in future publications.	**Yes/No.** *If you say no, your answers will be anonymised.*