The 'Enabling Reciprocal Voice' (ERV) Methodology.
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In the following paragraphs I will describe the methodology that was developed to create enabling environments for *reciprocal voice* through a transformative usage of mobile phones and the Internet. Considering that the modes of communication enabled by digital communications technologies may have contributed to the devaluing of *voice*, and that the values inscribed in those technologies correspond to individual self-interest, strengthening reciprocity with mobile phones and the Internet might seem a paradoxical endeavor. However, the ERV Methodology puts forward that resistance against the erosion of *voice* and individualistic communication can be actively exercised as a critique from within contemporary technological culture.

The ERV Methodology was developed and applied within the contexts of artistic intervention and *cross-community research* in rural settings. The complexity of such contexts poses the necessity of continuous adaptation, and therefore it might be argued that a fixed methodology might prevent a certain degree of improvisation. However, I have formalized the ERV Methodology as an open-ended set of guidelines, presented here with the purpose of making them available for their application and further refinement.

The main purposes of the ERV Methodology are threefold:

1. Help a group establish a shared communicational praxis through which the *voices* of its members can be heard.

2. Enable the collaborative production of a knowledge *commons*.

3. Strengthen reciprocal relations within the group and, potentially, with other members of its social context.

The ERV Methodology was specifically designed to be applied in interventions involving groups at risk of social exclusion and seeks to help people who belong to those groups or communities to project their *voices* and broadly express their views, aspirations, and needs. Because the modes of communication that digital networks offer may turn the expression of *voice* into mere self-communication, the ERV methodology seeks to carry out

a guided dissemination so that *voices* can find their desired listeners. Concretely, the methodology was designed to function as an interface between different domains of *voice*. It does not seek to orient the *voices* of those involved in a particular direction, but rather to help them develop an autonomous dialogue within an open-ended sociotechnical setting that seeks to strengthen reciprocity.

In order to achieve its purposes, the ERV Methodology seeks to transform the modes of usage of the communications technologies involved in it. It attempts to strengthen reciprocity by rewriting the individualistic values inscribed in mobile phones and transforming them into communal, shared devices. Nevertheless, a particular technology cannot be understood in isolation from the social context in which it performs its functions. Therefore, the ERV Methodology seeks to shape a small-scale sociotechnical system by transforming the values inscribed in mobile phones and the Internet and reinterpreting their usage according to locally observed reciprocal behaviors and social relations.

5.1.1. Technological components of the ERV Methodology: the *ojoVoz* software platform.

5.1.1.1. The *ojoVoz* mobile app.

Smartphones are the key technological component of the ERV Methodology. They allow those who take part in the methodology to send messages to a shared web-based platform. These messages are composed using a mobile app for the Android operating system that I specifically developed for that purpose. The mobile app allows participants to easily compose and send *messages*. It is important to note that, within the scope of the ERV Methodology, *messages* are a combination of the following elements:

- A picture taken with the smartphone's camera.
- A voice clip recorded with the smartphone's microphone.
- A keyword, or *tag*, chosen from a list or typed using the smartphone's keyboard.
- A geographical location that corresponds to the place where the message was composed. This location consists of latitude and longitude values, obtained automatically by the smartphone's built-in GPS.

Once a message has been composed, the app allows participants to send it to a shared web platform immediately or at a later time.

The *ojoVoz* mobile app is roughly based on the smartphone application used throughout the Megafone project and follows the same principle of simplifying the process of composing and publishing audiovisual messages. However, the mobile app was also designed with the intention of overcoming certain limitations of the Megafone application, namely by introducing the capability of functioning in contexts with little or no Internet connectivity.

5.1.1.2. The *ojoVoz* web platform.

The messages composed and published using the mobile app can be browsed on a web-based platform which, by default, is openly accessible to the public. This platform allows users to browse through messages under different criteria: date, keyword, geographical location, or a combination of these filters. The web platform also allows users to comment and provide feedback to published messages. Registered users may edit and delete messages and perform general housekeeping tasks.

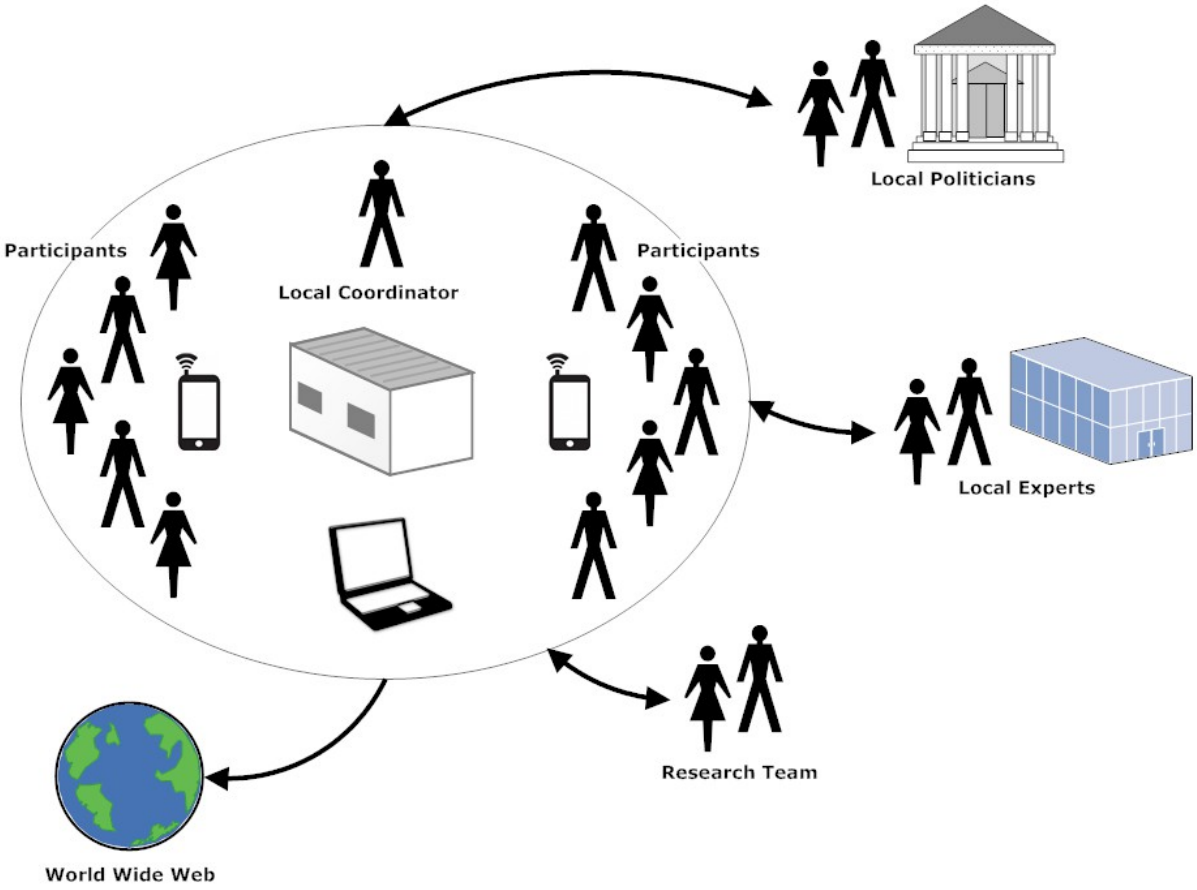
5.1.2. Social and organizational components of the ERV Methodology.

The following table presents the social and organizational components of the ERV Methodology as a series of sequential steps, which I will describe as generically as possible.

Methods	Principles and Processes
1. Identifying a community at risk.	Choose a risk-generating issue within the community that is specifically and clearly identifiable. The concrete effects of this issue have to be mindfully and explicitly felt by the community.
2. On-the-ground research and interviews.	Conducting on-the-ground research of the community's concrete settings and interviewing its members allows for the assessment of the challenges they face. On-the-ground research aims to: - Detect observable, concrete features of the risk-generating issue. - Determine the technological scenario in the community, and therefore the technical feasibility of the methodology. It is essential to find available wireless connectivity (WiFi or mobile broadband) within reasonable distance. - Determine the community's general level of familiarity with technologies such as the Internet or mobile phones. The interviews will be aimed at answering questions such as: - How do the challenges faced by the community manifest themselves in daily life? - How do the members of the community perceive these challenges? - What are their main concerns related (directly or indirectly) to these challenges? - Are they interested in *voicing out* about their concerns? If so, who would be their desired listeners? - Achieve familiarity with members of the community.
3. Gathering the community, explaining the methodology, and seeking participation.	Initial meeting: - Hold an initial meeting, gathering as many members of the community as possible, with the aim of explaining the methodology to everybody. - Participation: Invite the community as a whole, even those people who will not participate directly in the methodology. The invitation can be stated in clear and simple terms: "would you like to use mobile phones and the Internet to express your views and opinions about ... ?" Answer the questions posed by the community as thoroughly as possible. It is very important to make sure that the purposes of the methodology, the ownership of its contents and methods, and the potential benefits and dangers posed by the offered technologies

	are clearly understood by all. Give the community enough time after the meeting to deliberate and decide whether they want to take part or not, and under what conditions. Separate meetings with local authorities might be necessary in order to raise interest and request support.
4. Choosing a group of participants.	The community decides which of its members will directly participate in the subsequent processes of the methodology. Gender balance will be encouraged. The choice of participants may vary, according to criteria determined by the group. Their number may be constrained by practical criteria, including: - Manageability of the group. - Availability of space for face-to-face meetings. - Number of smartphones offered. A crucial aspect of the methodology is that there should always be more participants than smartphones, so that devices can be shared and rotated reciprocally.
5. Agreeing on common topics.	Agree with the participants on a list of common topics that become keywords. These keywords will serve to describe the issues affecting the community and will also be fed into the mobile app so that participants can choose them from a list. The list of keywords will be just a starting point, as it may be expanded at any time during the course of the methodology. The common keywords signify the concerns of the participants and might undergo transformation as events develop. The malleable keyword-based definition seeks to combine common concerns with open-ended needs and interests. This approach attempts to leave enough space for the participants to claim ownership of the methodology and treat common challenges through an open, *cross-community* perspective.
6. Identifying and training a local coordinator.	Ideally, the local coordinator is a person who: - Is a member of the community - Everybody knows and trusts - Is highly familiar with the issues affecting the community. - Has acceptable skills related to the usage of mobile phones and computers. - Can communicate fluidly with the research team. The coordinator will make sure that the local processes of the methodology function properly. He or she will: - Receive in-depth technical training, so she can train others. - Coordinate face-to-face meetings and facilitate discussion among participants. - Make sure that the smartphones are used and shared properly, and that everybody has equal chances to use them. - Report problems or issues to the research team.
7. Delivering the smartphones and carrying out training sessions.	The smartphones are delivered to the local coordinator, who will manage them and make sure they are used properly. In case there are no available computers for the participants to browse the messages they have published, one or more computers with mobile broadband connection may also be provided. Sufficient training sessions are carried out so that every

	participant has a clear understanding of how the mobile app and the web-based platform work.
8. Agreeing on a schedule for face-to-face meetings.	The participants and the coordinator agree on a schedule for periodic meetings, which will ideally take place every week. In these meetings, participants will: - Browse and discuss messages recently published online. - Share the available smartphones with other participants. Additionally, the coordinator will make sure that those who will use smartphones until the next meeting have understood how they work and what topics need to be documented with them. Specific techniques for documentation, such as interviews or surveys, may arise from collective discussion during face-to-face meetings. During these meetings, new topics for documentation may also emerge.
9. Interaction with experts and authorities, and dissemination to the general public.	After the group has published a significant body of content, the processes of interaction with other communities and dissemination may start. Interaction begins by reaching people or organizations marked by the community as "desired listeners." These listeners may be experts (scientists or technicians) who may provide assistance on specific issues, or local authorities who may intervene politically. The web-based platform may be presented to experts and authorities as a valuable source of on-the-ground information and knowledge that may inform their technical, scientific, or policy-making tasks. Interaction may also be an invitation to listeners to become engaged and respond, whether directly or by making comments on the web-based platform, about the concerns and demands expressed by the group. If the community agrees, the web-based documentation may also be disseminated among a broader, general public.
10. Conducting evaluation meetings.	Regularly scheduled evaluation meetings allow the research team to meet and discuss the methodology with the participants and the local coordinator. During the meetings, the research team may interview participants and identify possible issues and shifts in the course of the methodology. Ideally, the research team will constantly gauge the interest of participants and, if necessary, introduce adaptive changes in the methodology. Evaluation meetings allow the research team to assess whether the methodology effectively addresses the common concerns initially agreed upon by the community and the extent to which participants have appropriated and reshaped it. Whenever it becomes necessary or pertinent, the reach of the methodology may be scaled up to include additional groups of participants, who may establish a parallel, independent methodology and may communicate with the other groups using the web-based platform and, if possible, face-to-face.


Local Politicians
Participants
Local Coordinator
Participants
Local Experts
Research Team
World Wide Web

To summarize, the ERV Methodology seeks to encourage the reciprocal exchange of *voice* in four distinct ways:

1. Online messages published through the *ojoVoz* software platform. These messages, which consist of photographic images (a spatial medium) and sound clips (a temporal medium) are considered as *voice* because they conform a spatio-temporal object whose richness may be used to give an account of a fragment of the surrounding world.

2. Potential encounters with non-participating members of the community through the activity of capturing messages with the *ojoVoz* mobile app, particularly when those messages follow the format of an interview.

3. Face-to-face discussions at meetings, in which the participants of the methodology are regularly engaged.

4. Dialogues with members of other communities, such as scientists or policy-makers.