

Communication and social change: perspectives on development and citizen participation in the age of digital culture

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HERMIDA, Marcelo Martínez; SIERRA CABALLERO, Francisco (orgs.)
 Communication and Development. Communicative practices and local empowerment.
 Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 2012

Abstract

Dealing with value systems, hierarchies, and western power structures in times of significant change is one of the proposals in the most recent book edited by Francisco Sierra Caballero and Marcelo Martínez Hermida, in a collection composed of 14 articles, *Communication and Development. Communicative practices and local empowerment (Comunicación y Desarrollo. Prácticas comunicativas y empoderamiento local)* presents a vision that is not only centered on discussion of social realities which navigate through accelerated transformations, but above all, it also addresses the role of communication in the understanding of new codes that ensure a transdisciplinary point of view that has a commitment to social science research. Faced with the need to disseminate the benefits of accessing Information and Communication Technologies, the authors present with special interest alternative and creative forms of innovation and social development along with the construction of processes that integrate communication as a system of cultural representation.

Keywords: digital culture, information and communication technologies, citizen participation, social change, methodological approaches

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Information and the flow of data have recently become revolutionary tools responsible for the redefinition of public space, starting with a new episteme and political cooperation, development of citizenship, change and social processes based on social development, embodied in symbolic capital and experienced with an emphasis coming from the Global Information Society. In *'Communication and Development. Communicative practices and local empowerment'*, still without a translation into Portuguese, Francisco Sierra Caballero and Marcelo Martínez Hermida organize, in one of the volumes that make up the *Comunicación* series, published by Gedisa Editorial, a compilation of 14 essays. It is divided into three parts, in which present day communicational thought is superbly presented from a transdisciplinary point of view related to issues that surround communication and social development as a strategic area for investigating culture in the digital era.

The book explores a position centered on facilitating processes of social change originating from alternative and creative innovation among cultures and traditions and from the idea that the means mediate the praxis and inspire new points of view. This is all done from the appropriation of new technologies for local development. The scope that shapes the content proposed throughout the essays is reflected in the objectives of the networks directed by Marcelo Martínez Hermida, coordinator of Red Europa América Latina de Comunicación y Desarrollo (Real_Code) 'Europe Latin American Network for Communication and Development' and Francisco Sierra Caballero, director of the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Estudios en Comunicación, Política y Cambio Social (Compolíticas) 'Interdisciplinary Group for Studies in Communication, Politics and Social Change (Compolitics)'.

The three parts that constitute the work are composed firstly of: *'Rethinking mediations. New frontiers of knowledge'*; secondly, *'Methodologies and Strategies for Intervention'*; and thirdly, *'Best Practices'*. Alfonso Gumucio Dagron inaugurates the first chapter, from a total of five essays that deal with the ideological roots and theoretical horizons that have shaped communication and processes of social change, where the right to communication and the appropriation of participative culture are at the core of a theoretical field born from the heart of independent and antidictatorial struggles in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Carlos del Valle Rojas critically addresses the field throughout the second chapter entitled, *'Criticality and complexity in the field of communication: epistemic considerations on participative communication and for social change in Latin America'*, with an important theoretical-conceptual contribution on participation and social change. The third chapter from Thomas Tufte, *'The rebirth of communication for social change. Redefining the subject and practice in the post "Arab Spring" era'*, analyzes social struggle movements that are organized and made up of autonomous movements and collective action that require something in common, "la

petición de un proceso de desarrollo más inclusivo (...)” (p. 86), ‘the demand for a more inclusive a process of development (...)’. In view of this context, communication takes on a fundamental role by virtue of platforms for inclusion and citizen participation. In the fourth chapter, *‘Between dilemmas and certainties. Development and its path in Latin America’*, Gustavo Cimadevilla discusses development as a mechanism of intervention and César Ricardo Siqueira Bolaño em *The concept of culture in Furtado and the issue of cultural dependence*, presents the relationship between communication, cultural dependency and hegemony in the fifth and last chapter that make up the first part of the book.

In the second part of the work, methodological strategies are addressed throughout three essays as a way to comprehend the complexity of the meditations that take place alongside new digital technologies. They begin with a text written by Francisco Sierra Caballero and Daniela Favaro Garrossini that deals with Network Analysis and the critical-systems approach to the field of social sciences from digital culture and the processes of citizen participation which present themselves as possibilities for “apertura de espacios públicos, formación ética de la ciudadanía, participación social, empoderamiento ciudadano y desarrollo de una nueva cultura del diálogo” (p.195) ‘for opening public spaces, shaping citizen ethics, social participation, citizen empowerment and development of a new culture of dialogue’. The authors start with an Analysis of Social Networks, as a “mapa de orientación de vectores y del conjunto social que permite poner en práctica las intervenciones comunitarias en procesos de desarrollo” (p. 189) ‘map guiding the vectors and social groups which allows community interventions in the processes of development’ to be put into practice. *Perspectives on gender in communication and development*, from the author Lucía Benítez Eyzaguirre, makes up the second chapter of methodological studies and presents an analytical point of view focused on the junction of development theory and gender analysis as an approach to understanding investigative methodologies and social transformation in the field of communication. The author presents communication studies as a privileged space for the exchange and practice of community interaction for addressing citizenship and gender in the formulation of public policies. Marcelo Martínez Hermida, closes the second part with the text:, *“Image of the city: the paradigm of film commissions as an engine and institutional practice for local development”*. Here he points out the interrelations between institutional practices in image building with respect to local public entities. He cites some examples such as the experience of the Santiago de Compostela Film Commission which operates in the city of Galicia, in Spain. As a way to complement the views presented in the second part of the book, Hermida also explores the possibilities of public management and use of images as a strategy for local empowerment in relation to the object being dealt with: the modern city.

The third part is presented to the reader through an analysis of good citizenship and community participation. It begins with a text from Amparo Cadavid Bringe, *Citizenship and community participation. Local experiences in Latin America*, containing the Latin-American experience which emphasizes the relationship between community resources and citizen, participation and local development, including a study on urban radio in cities such as Buenos Aires and Montevideo and two rural indigenous radios in Bolivia and Mexico.

Comprising the second chapter is the text from Eliana del Rosario Herrera Huérfano, *Participation and sustainable development. Environmental experiences in Columbia* and from Carme Mayugo i Majó, *Educommunication, social participation and community communication practices. The Catalan experience*, which integrates into the third essay the experiences and socio-educational practices of communicative action in networking, "anclado en la comunidad y una mayor interacción social entre todos los colectivos y personas que conviven en um barrio, pueblo o ciudad" (p. 326) 'anchored in the community and greater social interaction between all groups and people living in neighborhoods, towns and cities'. According to the author, this work should also include tools, processes and communicative approaches responsible for generating new forms of learning, identity connections and social relationships of great value and quality. The author goes on to look at the understanding of community relationships and social intervention in local spaces aiming at a global view on development and social empowerment. In the text by Cicilia Krohling Peruzzo, this is explained through social and minority movements which acquire a voice and a space for social representation centered on communicational processes in community and alternative action mirrored in Brazilian channels of expressions in the era of cyberspace. Cicilia Krohling Peruzzo presents in the chapter entitled, *Approximations between popular communication and community and the alternative press in Brazil in the era of cyberspace*, such practices as, 'choice as a means of expression and communicative-info content, in comparison with great commercial mediums of communication and public mediums of communication that have a conservative bias.'

The book concludes with chapters written by Alejandro Barranquero *Digital networks and collective mobilization. From the 15-M to new practices for empowerment and local development*) and Ana Fernández Viso (*NGOs and building peace: new actors, spaces and communication processes for conflict transformation*'). This part is designated to deal with examples of movements and demonstrations strengthened by new technologies and transformers with regard to political, economic and cultural systems marked by good citizen participation. Alejandro Barranquero explores the uses and appropriation of social networks and their role in social mobilization spaces. And, in the case of the M-15, 'a movement of a clearly inspired

youth movement, but transversely involving different ages, social classes, organizations and citizen cultures.’

For the author of the sixth chapter, Ana Fernández Viso, the protests and social struggle movements gain from the potential contribution of the media in the non-violent resolution of conflicts and as a "sustrato de la vida social y de las relaciones humanas; un proceso con efectos en la percepción, la efectividad y la conducta de quienes participan en él" (p. 403) ‘substrate of social life and human relationships; a process having effects on the perception, effectiveness and conduct of those who participate in it.’ Ana Fernández Viso pursues a line of thought which seeks in communication, procedural and symbolic lenses that do not hinder content transmission, but which are important tools for modifying the standards of social interaction and which may also be devices able to lay the groundwork for co-existing peacefully, democratically and in solidarity by way of citizen practice in building peace.

Communication and Development. Communication practices and local empowerment addresses, with great courage, the challenges faced by modern day communication. It begins from a transdisciplinary approach to our connected universe. The book represents a win in regard to communication studies. It is essential for researchers and professionals in the area seeking to make contact with the issues and realities embodied in new cultural practices and processes for social change that occur through innovative elements that take on life through the development of communication with new technologies in the promotion of citizenship and local empowerment.

This text was received at 19 January 2013 and accepted at 13 February 2013.