
Rediscovering the Latin American Roots of Participatory Communication for Social Change

Alejandro Barranquero

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain

Abstract

The history of communication theory for social change has tended to adopt a *Westernizing* and colonial perspective when describing its origin, evolution and main paradigm shifts, as a US and European contribution complemented with peripheral ideas from other world regions – Latin America and, to a much lesser extent, Asia and Africa. All of the ideas from the periphery were underestimated, if not considered ideological or political disputes and, consequently, non-scientific. Despite this lack of recognition, the Latin American legacy to communication for development and social change constitutes one of the main theoretical frameworks for building a more complex, participatory and democratic communication paradigm. Some of the first proposals of Latin American communication scholars in the 1970s and 1980s shared similar ethical/political aims. These involved a grassroots and critical basis and, above all, a constant attention to praxis as the core of a new way of thinking, researching and planning communication.

Keywords: communication, communication for development, communication for social change, community communication, development, participatory communication

Rediscovering the Origins of Communication for Social Change

Communication and development constitute two inseparable spheres of human activity. That is, whenever we communicate we introduce some type of change – progressive or regressive – within social structure and, at the same time, any programme or project oriented towards individual or social development implies a conception – more persuasive or dialogical – of the communication process. Such is the importance of this prolific crossroads that the preoccupation about jointly interpreting both dimensions emerges in the very origins of the science and theory of communication. Thus, if we examine the pioneering texts of US *administrative* communication research, we will find an almost permanent interest in the study of

modern mass media potentialities –essentially film-making, press and radio – to modify human behaviours and to introduce transformations in the social framework (Lasswell, 1948; Lerner, 1958; Rogers, 1962).

Nonetheless, the history of communication has tended to adopt a colonial and *Westernizing* view of the discipline (Curran and Park, 2000) when narrating its origins and main historical periods, viewing it as an essentially North American contribution, with peripheral or subsidiary collaborations from other regions, considered of lesser value, if not mere ideological or political disputes, and, therefore, non-scientific.¹ This partial perspective derives from the very process of the epistemological construction of communication sciences – and of social sciences in a wide sense (Wallerstein, 1996) – estimated, as a general rule, to be a US invention (administrative theory) and, to a lesser extent, European (critical theory).²

Nevertheless, if we look at the thesis of Bolivian specialist Luis Ramiro Beltrán (1993), we find corroboration for the view that this veteran subdiscipline was born in two very close but culturally dissimilar geographical contexts at the same time, although with different premises and objectives: Latin America and the USA.³

The following article aims at tracing a new *genealogy* (Foucault, 2004) of the subdiscipline, in a direction opposed to that adopted by a good number of meta-

¹ This is evident in classic or contemporary studies such as those by Hedebro (1982), Hornik (1988), Mefalopoulos (2008), Reeves (1993), Rogers (1989), Sparks (2007), Stevenson (1988; 1994) or even Servaes (1999). However, there are interesting exceptions on this matter: Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006), Huesca (1994), Manyozo (2007), Melkote (1991) or Sosale (2007).

² This is easy to prove if we review university academic programmes around the world, or the main bibliographical volumes which systematize or provoke debate around this matter, as a general rule limited to a small number of canonic authors and texts, for the most part of occidental, Anglo-Saxon or ‘Eurocentric’ origin – Lasswell, Schramm, Berlo, Adorno, Williams, etc. – and with a glaring absence of scholars from other latitudes.

³ Other regions of the world such as Africa and Asia also participated in its origin, but in a more limited way (Barranquero, 2008; Fernández Viso, 2010; Manyozo, 2007; Melkote, 1991).

theoretical and historical analyses of the field.⁴ That is, we will start the journey in the practice – not in the theory – in Latin America and not in the USA, and we will move from the description of the first citizen projects (small and scarcely institutionalized), and not from the great development agents: cooperation agencies, companies, private foundations, universities, etc.

In fact, Latin America is a pioneering continent in alternative and participatory communication experiences, which were often contrary to cultural expressions of the elite exercising power. All this advocated a research committed to the struggle against cultural dependence and to the search for alternative models to the dominant persuasive-informational one of *mass communication research*, in the hopes of a more inclusive and democratic communication. On the other hand, Latin America is where the central difference between information (strategic exchange of ideas and meanings with persuasive purposes at the service of a transmitter) and communication (horizontal dialogue between interlocutors, which contributes to reinforce consciousness and social transformation in the long run) was first posed (Freire, 1969; Pasquali, 1963).

Thus, according to some authors, one of the most radical epistemological revolutions in the history of communication sciences would have taken place then, leaving as its legacy an *other paradigm*, radically different from the American positivist-functionalist model and substantially dissimilar to European critical theory – in this last case, due to the fact that European research has usually been less tied to praxis than Latin American research (Atwood, 1986; Dervin and Huesca, 1994; 1997; Fox, 1996; Hardt, 2005; McAnany, 1986; Schlesinger, 1989). In this line, Luis Ramiro Beltrán (2000) reminds us that:

Latin American scholars were in fact the first to examine the classical communication concept derived from Aristotelian unilinear thinking, which had prevailed without essential changes until the end of the 1960s. They were the ones who, going beyond the apparent simplicity of the

⁴ A significant sector of the *dominant* literature in the field tends to describe the origin of communication for development as a matter linked to the first development projects from North American – USAID – or international cooperation agencies – FAO, UNDP/PNUD, UNICEF, UNESCO – as well as private foundations – Rockefeller, Ford, Kellogg.

paradigm, discovered its non-democratic implications. And, consequently, they were also among the first to propose new perspectives in communication, and new models to redefine it, aiming at a genuine democracy.⁵

Centred in the field of alternative communication, Jesús Martín-Barbero (1981: 14) expresses himself in the same way:

Although said in different ways and with very diverse scopes, from the utopias up to the limited possibilities of immediate intervention, a fundamental purpose seems to define the alternative in terms of communication in Latin America: transform the process, the dominant and normal form of social communication, so that dominated classes and groups would become the ones to speak up. And in this sense alternative communication is not recent news since, from the pioneering experiences by Paulo Freire, later projected to multitude of groups in all countries of the continent, communication has been linked more to the liberation of speaking, activity and popular creativity rather than to the power and type of resources.

Though a *genealogical* journey, the main objective of my reflection is to contribute to the visualizing and synthesizing of a primary legacy in the struggle to link communication to the liberation of speaking, activity and popular creativity, which still has a leading presence and influence on the global democratizing debates on communication (CRIS Campaign; World Communication Congress on Communication for Development, Rome, 2006; OURMedia; Communication for Social Change Consortium; The Communication Initiative; etc.)

The Pioneering Character of Praxis

If we understand communication for development as a discipline aimed at the study and planning of the link between communicational processes and the improvement of human and natural life,⁶ the origins of the discipline cannot be

⁵ The translation of the original Spanish quotes into English are by the author.

⁶ We understand the discipline in the same ways as Rosa María Alfaro (1993), who indicates that positive social change never appears casually or immediately, but that it is an intentionally directed and systematically planned process. According to this approach, communication for development constitutes an applied knowledge which studies the historical, theoretical and procedural links among the communicative processes, and the improvement of human life conditions in harmony with the natural context. More specifically, the field is oriented towards

situated in university or in any strictly scientific ground, but in human being own practice. But what exactly is the meaning of this *praxis*, referred so many times by scholars such as Luis Ramiro Beltrán (1993) or Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron (2001)? Should its genesis be circumscribed to the institutional cooperation agents – UNESCO, FAO, UNDP– or is it necessary to understand it in relation to other types of more spontaneous experiences, or those resulting from the action of social collectives disregarding the *development industry*?

Praxis, in the history of thinking, has been interpreted in two ways: in its more extended and popular meaning, as ‘something which brings along utility or produces immediate material benefit’ (RAE, 2001); or in its Marxist vision, from two different but complementary senses: as man’s revolutionary activity in order to transform the material conditions of existence, or as dialectical unity between theory and practice, which helps to break with the idealistic dualism between thinking and action.⁷

Whether we consider it one way or the other, the first institutional development communication programmes emerged by the end of the 1940s, ten years before the outset of the pioneering *modernizing* theories (Lerner, 1958; Rogers, 1962).⁸ Something similar happened in Latin America where the work of Paulo Freire, Mario Kaplún or Luis Ramiro Beltrán was inspired by and helped to systematize the prolific transforming experience of a large number of citizen collectives, also from the end of the 1940s: community radios, radio schools, non-formal

the design, execution and evaluation of change strategies in the individual, social and environmental areas, whether with the support of instrumental information or from a communicative approach.

⁷ This last concept, taken from Paulo Freire (1974), helps to *pragmatize* knowledge, in the sense that practice becomes all action illuminated by knowledge; and the *truth* of knowledge is something which emerges and that is measured in this action. In this respect it is necessary to recall the famous ‘XI Thesis about Feuerbach’ by Marx (2002): ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is, however, to change it.’

⁸ It is important to remember other practical precedents of development communication in the region, such as the first rural information programmes or *agricultural extension*, *health* and *audiovisual education* (Beltrán, 2002; Cimadevilla, 1997).

educational projects with the support of new technologies, etc. That is, the discipline came to light without even having a distinct name or a theoretical/methodological framework. And it was born linked to two different kinds of promoters and objectives: state/exogenous (USA) and private/endogenous (Latin America) (Beltrán, 2002). In order to appreciate the implications of this last hypothesis, it is convenient to study both systems separately.

In the first place, it is convenient to clarify that the birth of communication for social change should be strictly situated in the scarcely *institutionalized* and *professionalized* (Berger and Luckmann, 1972, 185–216) alternative communication practices, since these preceded the first cooperation projects from the middle of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, it is extremely complex to establish its chronological start with accuracy, given that the beginning of popular communication is rather situated among combined actions – pedagogical and communicational, group and technologically mediated – which can be traced back to ancestral times, whether in the shape of the symbolic manifestations of indigenous people before and after the colonial period, or in cultural and identity representations over centuries (Beltrán et al., 2008; Cadavid, 2007; Peppino, 1999).

However, at a worldwide level, we can consider that Latin America is the pioneering continent in so-called *participative communication*; that is, grassroots projects oriented to articulate means for the visualizing and the representation of communities traditionally submerged in the *culture of silence* (Freire, 1970). Its precedents date from 1947, although they were unconnected experiences which pursued divergent objectives: miners' radio stations in Bolivia and the national radio school project Sutatenza-ACPO in Colombia.

Miners' radio stations promoted a communication directed to the working and rural class of the Bolivian Highlands. This was specially tied to the support of political-union consciousness and to the search for autonomy and structural transformations against the economic and cultural exploitation of the mining

oligarchies. ACPO was instead a national and popular literacy and education project through the combined use of radio and presential teaching, with the aim of emancipating – although also evangelizing – the rural and urban population of Colombia (Beltrán, 1993; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Peppino, 1999). The most relevant ground-breaking actors of this type of communication in the continent can then be glimpsed from these two initiatives: (new) social movements – rural, labour unions, indigenous, feminist, etc. – and *base ecclesiastical communities* (CEBs), linked to the progressive movement of *liberation theology* (*teología de la liberación*).

On the other hand, these experiences should be interpreted according to the Latin American historical context of the second half of the twentieth century. This could be defined in terms of the dialectical relationship between dependence and liberation; that is, historical cycles of marginalization or structural (post)colonial violence (oligarchic governments, military dictatorships, US imperialism, exclusion of popular sectors, etc.) against which reformist or revolutionary alternatives emerged. In many of them communication and education acquired a very relevant role – if not the main one – as an instrument for the raising of critical consciousness (*conscientização*), the organization of militancy, or the fight for freedom and democracy.

In an autodidactic way, great creativity and, with greater or lesser success (Beltrán, 2002), the first citizen communicational projects defied traditional mass media and development practices, and they contributed to organizing and spreading the ancestral knowledge of communities, as well as to building autonomous discourse, often contrary to the culture of the elites.

In the second place, also starting at the end of the 1940s, in the post-war context, the US started to implement the first technical and financial assistance programmes for the most impoverished regions of the planet, mainly promoted by national or transnational cooperation agencies, companies and foundations – the World Bank, FAO, UNDP/PNUD, UNESCO. In all of them, the Southern countries – of

Asia, Africa and Latin America – were designated as *non-developed* and in need, therefore, of external aid to *develop* themselves (Escobar, 1998).

Many of these projects included budgets for an instrumental use of information in order to stimulate regional *modernization* according to a simplistic model of knowledge transfer for individual attitudinal change based on the imitation of the *advanced* North by the *laggards* of the South.

In a good part of these first programmes an economicist, techno-deterministic and ethnocentric bias prevailed. On other occasions, development was understood as an additional tool for the expansion of the capitalist system; that is to say, an instrument oriented towards the stimulation of the economy, in order to incorporate the Southern countries into the circuits of international commerce, taking advantage of their low labour costs, their productive *hyper-specialization*, or the irruption of new contexts for the surplus from occidental production (Barranquero, 2008). During the Cold War (1945–90), the first cooperation programmes were also determined by the interest of the two blocs in dispute – the capitalist and the socialist – in order to ensure the reproduction of their respective economic, political and cultural systems (as well as to resist the ideological expansion of the opposing bloc) in the *Third World*. In this manner, the notion of *development* was inevitably associated with that of *national security* and constituted the particular *security–development–communication* triangle of the first modernizing programmes (Mattelart, 2009, 84).

In the third place, in the scope of the theoretical reflection that followed the pioneering institutional programmes – at Michigan State University, University of Wisconsin, etc. –, the first North American research attempted to look for theoretical and methodological frameworks for the projects which were already being conducted. Thus, from the end of the 1950s –1958 is mistakenly quoted as the date of birth of the discipline, corresponding to the publication of the famous study by Daniel Lerner *The Passing of the Traditional Society* – different academic works tried to demonstrate that there are theoretical, methodological and procedural links between human development and communication. Also, the

earliest theorizing from the North discovered that the best way to promote structural changes is planning through the design of communication methodologies, strategies and policies. All in all, for the first time, communication was conceived as an instrument capable of helping the *laggard* groups and regions on the basis of economic growth, nation-building and behavioural change in favour of progress and technique (Lerner, 1958; Rogers, 1962; Schramm, 1964).

However, most of these early works were sponsored by governmental organisms and private companies, often with undeclared political, economic, cultural and military goals,⁹ and the *official* history of the discipline has inaccurately situated these analyses as the origin of the new field. On the contrary, in Beltrán's terms, it is only as a concept, a first formalized methodological approach or an attempt to institutionalize a new scientific discipline that we could affirm that development communication is a North American invention (Beltrán in Barranquero, 2008).

Something similar happened in Latin America. Some years after the first development programmes and the pioneering alternative communication initiatives were implemented, essential volumes such as *Comunicación y cultura de masas* (Pasquali, 1963) or *¿Extensión o comunicación?* (Freire, 1969) were published, both of them determinant for the conformation of a more critical and participatory perspective on communication for social change. Thus, what at first was a spontaneous research movement (with no order and lacking regional links) would organize itself around academic networks (CIESPAL, CEREN, ININCO, INTERCOM, IPAL) and could be characterized, at least during the 1970s and 1980s, by a number of common premises, among the main ones: a strict relationship between theory and practice, a strong critical and political commitment, criticism of dependency and search for informational alternatives, and a profound rupture with the dominant positivism and functionalism in the emerging communication sciences.

⁹ Three of the most relevant works for understanding the political and military interests underlying the first research on communication and development are: Samarajiwa (1987), Simpson (1993) and Tunstall (1977).

The Latin American Matrix of Participatory Communication

If we define the participatory communication paradigm according to its ability to involve civil society in its own process of transformation through dialogue and participation, we can state that Latin America is the most relevant world region in its conception and later configuration.¹⁰ It is there that the first dominant theoretical models of both communication and development were challenged – as well as the ways of planning of *mainstream* media and cooperation agencies. This challenge, particularly intense during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, was not based exclusively on criticism of the mistakes, prejudices or inadequacies of the old paradigm – as occurred in US or European critical theory: Frankfurt School, Cultural Studies, political economy of communication, French post-structuralism, etc. – but moved towards the construction of renovated participatory outlines for development communication. We have, at least, three pieces of evidence which let us support this thesis.

First, in the field of social movements and alternative communication, the first instances in the world of practices conceived from a real participatory (and even self-managemental) perspective can be found in Latin America: Sutatenza/ACPO network, Bolivian miners' radio stations, Freirean popular education actions, etc. Nowhere in the world is there such constant upheaval of popular communicative projects oriented to the welfare of societies in a context generally averse to development (Gumucio Dagron and Tufte, 2006; Huesca and Dervin, 1994). Good examples of this are the thousands of community and alternative radio stations which spread across the entire continent ever since the 1950s (ongoing), among the most relevant ones: non-formal education projects with the support of technologies, radio forums and radio schools, media observatories, or cultural strategies such as the *theatre of the oppressed* by Augusto Boal, or *New Latin American cinema* (Rocha, Pereira dos Santos, Solanas, Favio, Gutiérrez Alea, Littin, Gleyzer, Ruiz, etc.).

¹⁰ The continent's influence is also crucial in the new perspective of *communication for social change*, put forward by many professionals and collectives since the end of the 1990s (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte, 2006; Rockefeller Foundation, 1999).

Second, with regard to theory, since the second half of the past century we also perceive a strong regional resistance – greater than in any other part of the planet – to Western positivist knowledge and methods inherited from the nineteenth century. This objection is based on the questioning of the alleged neutrality of the researcher, and the commitment of sciences to structural change. Methodologies such as participatory research or participatory action-research (IAP), inspired by authors such as Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals Borda or João Bosco Pinto, helped to decentre knowledge from its habitual locations of production and diffusion – among scholars and universities – contributing to the revaluing of ancient and frequently tacit knowledge of communities and placing it on the same level of the *avant-garde* thinking.

Related to this contribution, recent years confirm the thesis that the continent has inspired a pioneering and very deep postcolonial or ‘post-Western’ criticism of the cultural and political project derived from Western modernity. From the approaches of *liberation philosophy, ethics, pedagogy* or *theology* (Dussel, Boff, Cardenal, Freire, Gutiérrez), inspired in classical emancipatory projects (Mariátegui, Martí, Sarmiento) or in recent propositions (Brunner, Castro-Gómez, Escobar, Hopenhayn, Lander, Mato, Mendieta, Mignolo, Quijano), this fruitful approach has its own distinct features compared to other regions’ philosophical discourse, in particular the radical criticism of the links between knowledge and colonial power, and the search for the emergence of voices (indigenous, Creole, rural, feminine, etc.) traditionally silenced in positivist culture, due to its white, Eurocentric, androcentric, middle-class, etc. nature.

On the other hand, in no other part of the world can we find such virulent opposition to the first theoretical models of communication, development and, therefore, communication for development. This region can be considered the *founding father* of the *theories of dependence* (Cardoso and Faletto, 1967; Prebisch, 1949) and precursor of original advances in the field of political economy of communication and in the *cultural imperialism* thesis (Mattelart, 1970; Pasquali,

1963).¹¹ In the specific area of development communication, authors such as Paulo Freire or Luis Ramiro Beltrán contributed to neutralizing the ideological prejudices hidden behind the dominant US paradigm: its ethnocentrism, its *economicism*, its behaviourist bias, its technocentric and media determinism, its verticality, its neglect of the social structure and local contests, and, lastly, its harsh conservatism, scarcely functional for solving problems in the quest for an authentic emancipation (Beltrán, 1974a). Thus, according to Spanish researcher Miquel de Moragas (1981, 85):

We can affirm that, against the communication-modernization binomial proposed by authors such as Lerner, Pye, Schramm, etc., stands the couple communication-social structure by Beltrán, Díaz Bordenave, Marqués de Melo, Ordóñez against the psychologistic model of diffusion of innovations, and a constant claim for the context as the starting point for development theory.

The role of Latin America in the creation of a new paradigm cannot be understood without fully analysing the reflections produced by its prominent scholars and, above all, the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1969; 1970). His theory, praxis, methodologies and even his categories constitute the basis for popular education and participatory communication projects around the world. His main contribution is the *Copernican turning point* in the conception of the roles interacting in the communication for social change process. After his work, specialists and practitioners stopped being external and non-committed examiners within the social processes and they became apprentices and learners – *educandos*, in Freirean terminology – as well as mobilizing agents qualified to uncover the underlying *performative* density in people's language and culture. Thus, communities – formerly *object* of development policies – became active and autonomous *subjects* competent to empower themselves and transform their own destiny.

¹¹ Even though the thesis of *cultural imperialism* is usually traced back to the works of US scholars Schiller (1969) or Smythe (1981), authors such as Pasquali (1963) or Mattelart (1970; 1972; 1973) were evident precursors of this theoretical approach around the world, with some differences with regards to the political economy that arose in North America.

The *paradigm shift* (Kuhn, 2000) in the USA, and, by extension, in the whole academic community, cannot be appreciated without also examining the work of the two first Latin American PhD holders in that country: Luis Ramiro Beltrán and Juan Díaz Bordenave. These scholars managed to be heard in the hermetic US academy thanks to their profound familiarity with this community, their command of the English language and, above all, their enormous ability to introduce criticism with such rigour and moderation that no suspicion was raised – in terms of radicalism – among the advocates of the old paradigm (Beltrán, 1974a; 1976; Díaz Bordenave, 1976).¹² In fact, the *founding fathers* of diffusionism and the modernizing paradigm recognized, with the passing of time, that the influence of Beltrán and Bordenave had been determinant in the rejection of the vertical, ahistorical and ethnocentric character of the first frameworks (Berlo, 1980; Rogers, 1976; Singhal and Obregón, 2005). Today it is even easier to detect this influence in authors, like Wilbur Schramm or Daniel Lerner, who never acknowledged it (see Schramm, 1979: 9 in Lent, 1987: 28–9; Lerner, 1973, in Beltrán, 1979: 7). The best-known episode is the publication of the famous text ‘Communication and development: the passing of the dominant paradigm’ by Everett M. Rogers (1976), which many regard as signalling the collapse of the modernization perspective and the beginning of a more participatory and complex paradigm.

The continent did not only fight against the ideological bias behind the modernizing theories, it also contributed to setting up a new theoretical and methodological participatory communication model (Beltrán, 1979; Kaplún, 1985; Reyes Matta, 1978). Regardless of their diverse approaches, many specialists from the continent shared interests and programmatic agreements, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, among the most important of which were: (1) the requirement to locate participation and dialogue at the centre of the paradigm in order to facilitate endogenous processes; (2) the horizon of real democratization –

¹² It must be taken into account that when Beltrán and Díaz Bordenave arrived in the USA they had great experience as ‘rural extensionists’ in the continent, an experience which enabled them to clearly distinguish, in a pioneering way, the main deficits regarding the application of the modern dominant paradigm on the ground.

not just representation – as the ultimate goal for development communication; (3) the importance of dialogic communication for the promotion of awareness, empowerment and individual or collective autonomy; (4) the intrinsic political character – emancipating or conservative – of all educational and communicative practices; (5) the need for an integral change in all social areas, situating the focus in human beings, along with their ability to express and transform themselves through language and communication; (6) praxis as the roots of reflection and action; (7) and, last, a horizontal, dialectical and more complex conception of the communicative process.¹³

Numerous studies, both Latin American and foreign (Aguirre, 1999; Fuentes, 1992; Marqués de Melo, 2007; Tufte, 1996), consider that this programmatic agreement and the synergies among scholars come from a certain unity in Latin American thought, particularly noticeable during the 1970s and the 1980s, and based on certain features: (1) a constant preoccupation with regional problems and a conception of the continent as a whole; (2) criticism towards cultural and communicative dependence and imperialism; (3) the quest for a communication committed to change; (4) the configuration of a science based on ethical premises; (5) and, finally, the centrality of practice in the construction and recomposition of theory. These features directly relate to the outlines of the previously defined participatory paradigm. Besides, Latin American communicology has another central peculiarity which directly connects with the new approaches of the discipline: very early, around the 1960s (Pasquali, 1963), the region advanced towards the building of an all-inclusive, complex, hybrid and interdisciplinary perspective about communicational processes, in terms of *mediations* (*mediaciones*); that is to say, communication framed in the dialectical perspective of culture. This matrix, according to some authors, even anticipates the emergence of Birmingham Cultural Studies (Martín-Barbero, 2004) and helps to establish

¹³ It is also necessary to take into account the intense development in related fields such as alternative, community and popular communication (Kaplún, 1985; Simpson, 1986), preceding and setting the basis – often ignored and undervalued by current academic scholars – for the prolific contemporary Anglo-Saxon debate on radical and citizen communication (Downing, 2001 [1984]); Howley, 2009; Langlois and Dubois, 2005).

what Daniel Mato (2003) calls the autonomous movement of *Latin American intellectual practices in culture and power*, led by authors such as Jesús Martín-Barbero, Néstor García Canclini or Renato Ortíz.

Third, and last, in the field of international cultural and development policies, the continent is the protagonist of one of the most democratizing international debates that has ever taken place in the world: that of the communication policies of the 1970s. Its presence is vital in the UNESCO discussions that led to the publication of the McBride Report (1980). In recent years, we can even state that it has had a role in the New World Information and Communication Order (NOMIC), born within the debates of Non-Aligned Countries which converged with the UNESCO deliberations (Marqués de Melo, 2007). Besides, the continent is the pioneer of one of the most transforming theoretical and methodological proposals in the field on a large scale: (*national*) *communication policies*, by Luis Ramiro Beltrán (1974b), and there we can also find some progressive initiatives on the ground (communication policies meetings in Bogotá, 1974 and San José, 1976; Ravelte Project in Venezuela, etc.). The continent is still one of the main supporters of the contemporary critical debate through platforms like the Communication Rights in the Information Society Campaign (CRIS), the First Congress in Communication for Development in Rome (2006), the Civil Society Counter Summits to the official World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva (2003) and Tunisia (2005), or some media-activist networks in alternative communication such as: OURMedia, the Communication Initiative, the World Association for Christian Communication, Communication for Social Change Consortium, etc.

Still in the area of planning in international cooperation agencies, we can also affirm that the hemisphere's influence is determinant in the critical turn experimented with by some organisations during the 1970s and 1980s in order to develop a more participatory and dialogical proposal in communication for social change. That is the case for the above-mentioned UNESCO and the United Nations FAO (Gumucio-Dagron, in Barranquero, 2008), which increasingly began to introduce participatory methods – partly derived from Latin American critical

thought – under Colin Fraser as Chief of Communication and Development (1969–85) (Gumucio Dagron in Barranquero 2008; Mefalopoulos, 2008).

Building an Integral, Global and Interdisciplinary Knowledge

At this point, we start to notice that communication for social change, contrary to the line drawn by official historiography, involves different geographical origins – Asia, Africa, and, in particular, the USA and Latin America – as well as different supporters – development agencies, but also social movements, NGOs, associations, etc.

Nonetheless, the hegemonic systematizing volumes of the discipline have tended to assume a Western and Westernizing bias, which determines – especially in the first years – excessively anti-democratic and ethnocentric ways of planning, as well as the configuration of a science excessively oriented to the search for universalist – that is, applicable to all local contexts – and instrumental models when conceiving communication as a means and not as an end in itself. This is the reason why many still consider communication for social change as an applied knowledge to obtain universal methods for communication *at the service* of development, as conceived exclusively by Northern cooperation agencies.

If we take into account that the field was born from an ancient human aspiration for using communication to meet the ‘other’, or to express human welfare or happiness objectives, its roots can be traced back to Latin America, where, unlike in other regions, and besides the fertile discoveries in the theoretical field, a large multiplicity of citizen collectives were involved in a wide *emancipating movement*. This movement engaged with the field of the institutional organization – working towards more horizontal and self-management models – and decentralizing practices in the area of science, education or culture: radical pedagogy, participative methodologies, etc. This tendency emerges from the original ways of life and the cultural expressions of common people, which learned to escape from rigid paradigms and hierarchical forms in order to move towards participation and the decentralization of the relationships between knowledge and power.

Movement is also an apt expression for the revolution which took place in the hemisphere, since it means constant alteration, restlessness, commotion, rebellion and searching. In fact, the concept helps us to understand the phenomenon not as aiming at a closed, perfect and fair universe, but as a *revolution* still in process, full of conflicts and obstacles, blurred in some aspects, but perfectible, aiming to build a more democratic system for an unknown future.

To summarize, we can also deduce that, in contrast to the procedural, universalist and instrumental perspective inherited from the first years of the discipline, communication for development acquires in Latin America a complexity never foreseen at the very beginnings of the field:

(1) Against the *procedural* view – an exclusively applied, methodological and institutionalist perspective – the continent offers an integral knowledge that tries to stimulate democratizing relationships between communicative processes and transformation, whether on a *large* scale – communication in the historical modernization processes, communication policies, right to communicate, etc. – or a *small* scale – alternative and popular communication, NGOs' communicative models, cultural interventions for development, etc.

(2) Against *universalism*, this science becomes modest, local or *glocal* and 'full of uncertainties' (Alfaro, 1993); that is to say, it does not intend to offer methods applicable to everyone – social marketing, edutainment, etc. – but conceives planning in terms of the concrete problems of communities, regarding their historical singularities and different cosmovisions and cultures.

(3) Against the *instrumental* approach – the vision of communication of developmental assistance, always *at the service* of something (health, environment, development, etc.) – communication for development turns into an interdisciplinary science, which values the potential of communication to manage what is specific to other disciplines, as well as its active role in the conformation of new experiences and imaginaries.

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