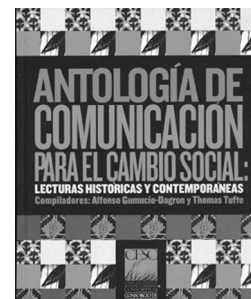


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Conceptual maps for emancipating communication

At times of crisis and uncertainty, such as those we are currently undergoing, reflecting on the potential for generating change of the participatory processes of social communication becomes more current, pertinent and necessary than ever. Even more so when communication faculties and schools tend to reduce the understanding of communication in their curricula to the mere production and transmission of journalistic or persuasive information, weakening its etymological meaning (from the Latin *communicare*, “to make common”, “to share”) and ignoring its dialogic and “ritual” dimension (Carey 1989).

Thinking about the relationship between communication and social change requires us to go beyond the media and the message and pay attention to the flows, relations and processes of communication in which social and power relations are created, recreated, challenged and transformed (Castells 2009). This is the path that invites us to consider the accurate and rigorous selection of more than 200 historical and contemporary readings that comprise the *Communication for Social Change Anthology* compiled, with the collaboration of experts from the five continents, by Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron, a specialist in communication and development and former executive director of programmes of the Communication for Social Change Consortium, and the professor at Roskilde University in Denmark and co-director of Ørecomm, the Consortium for Communication and Glocal Change, Thomas Tufte.

An initial version of this work was published in English in 2006 and presented at the First World Congress on Communication for Development in October of that same year in Rome, jointly hosted by FAO, the World Bank and the Communication Initiative Network (a virtual community that groups together communication activists, practitioners and researchers into communication for development). The Spanish edition, which has come to light a little more than a year and a half later, has five new chapters and substantially extends the length of some passages from the first edition.

Throughout its more than 1,400 pages, the book traces and

presents, in the writings of 150 worldwide academics and experts, the thoughts and concepts that have contributed to the emergence and evolution, under the studies of communication for development, of the specific field of communication for social change. Communication for development emerged and evolved from the 1950s, linked to the increasing activity of international development cooperation (Melkote 1991; Servaes 1999; Waisbord 2001; Beltrán 2005). This is summarised and contextualised in a useful introductory chapter, in which Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte define communication for social change as “a process of public and private dialogue through which people determine who they are, what they need and what they want in order to improve their lives” (p. 44).

While the work’s editors explicitly state their preferences, from the beginning, regarding this approach, the selection of readings avoids favouring one theoretical focus over another, in such a way that the reader benefits from a wide range of approaches and arguments from which they can form their own criterion. The texts belong to such diverse areas as sociology, political science, media research, rural development, education, philosophy and anthropology. However, they share the conviction of the intrinsically dialogic and participatory nature of the different practices, flows and processes of communication with the potential to generate relevant social transformations.

The anthology is divided into two parts. The first brings together a hundred historical readings in chronological order. This starts with a classic Bertolt Brecht text from 1932 about radio as an apparatus of communication and continues up to the end of the 1990s. It presents the historical roots and pioneering thoughts of a proposal of communication for a development seen as emancipatory social change, highlighting the importance of the praxis of participatory communication as an inspiration for theory (Gumucio-Dagron 2001).

This first block of texts represents an exceptional effort to recap, highlight and, in some cases, recover the significant contribution made by Latin America, Asia and, to a lesser extent, Africa, not only to the edification of this tradition of

thought but also to that of the study and philosophy of communication. In this way, the compendium provides well-deserved recognition for the work of thinkers such as Pasquali, Beltrán, Díaz Bordenave, Boal, Prieto Castillo, Reyes Mata, Beltrão, Quebral, Feliciano, Jamias, Cádiz, Valbuena, Dissanayake, Ugboajah, Mowlana, Ascroft and Jayaweera, amongst many other non-Western authors, whose intellectual works have hardly had any projection in academic circles in Europe and the USA. This also includes distinguished conceptual works by western academics such as Berlo, Schramm, Rogers, Matellart, Schiller, Nordenstreng, Gerbner, Servaes and Richeri.

In the second part, the anthology includes contemporary readings on issues that have characterised the research agenda and practice in this field since the middle of the 1990s. Back then, a generalised critical review was carried out of how development and social change was conceived to pay renewed attention to human rights, sustainability, participation, gender equality, good governance and social justice. The texts that make up this part of the work are ordered around five themes for discussion: “paradigms in communication for development”, “popular culture, narrative and identity”, “social movements and community participation” “power, media and the public sphere” and “information society and communication rights”.

It is perhaps in the selection of these themes, texts and authors where the reader can occasionally disagree with the editors since, given the necessity to limit the size of an already large work, they evade and exclude issues and approaches that nonetheless are also clearly profiled in the contemporary theoretical reflection and practice of communication for social change. They therefore obviate the impact of new information and communication technologies on displacing barriers to public participation in a range of political, cultural and economic processes, even the possibility of working for change in the field of the mass media (civic journalism, media advocacy, social mobilisation in favour of a new legal framework for the audiovisual sector, media observatories, etc.). Another omission, for example, is the absence of an interdisciplinary methodological approach such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), which has been used to show the discursive nature of most contemporary social and cultural changes (Fairclough 1992; Fairclough, Cortese and Ardizzone 2007).

Finally, it is surprising that little reference is made to the methodological challenge posed both by empirical research of the processes of participatory communication oriented towards achieving social transformation as well as by the subsequent interpretation of its findings — both tangible and intangible. This is one of the essential questions in order to further the foundations of this theoretical approach, to increase its visibility and strengthen its legitimacy, above all in the area of formulating strategies and policies for development and social change.

Thanks to the NWICO debate, studies of how communication, social change and development relate to one another went

beyond the area of interest of the so-called “developing” countries more than three decades ago. Today these studies are showing themselves to be strategic in confronting the collective construction of the future for our complex and dynamic societies. This compilation, the most exhaustive on this issue, is therefore destined to become an obligatory source of reference and consultation for all researchers and activists of communication as a factor in, platform for and process of change.

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