

The MacBride Report from Catalonia: Balance of a Hope

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From Catalonia, we had at least three big reasons to follow with interest the results of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (MacBride Commission), which prepared the MacBride Report between 1977 and 1979. Firstly, a new historical opportunity was presenting itself at that time for the national reconstruction of Catalonia and in particular the recovery of the Catalan language and culture, as part of the Spanish transition towards democracy (first constitutional elections of 1977, the referendum on the new Constitution of 1978 and the referendum of the Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia in 1979). Secondly, there was a certain degree of awareness within academic and professional circles about the importance of information and the mass media in the processes of national and cultural affirmation of the new information society. Thirdly, although more as an anecdote, Catalans were kindly disposed towards the Commission's President, the Irishman Sean MacBride - one of the leaders of Ireland's independence, an admirer of Catalonia and an old, personal friend of Francesc Macià, the first president of the Generalitat of Catalonia, which was re-established in 1931.

Personally, I feel very closely involved in the process of the following and the reception of the MacBride Report in Catalonia. My work as a communication researcher was marked by the period in which the sharpest crisis in Unesco's history broke out. The years ranging from the 19th General Conference in Nairobi (1976) to the 21st Conference in Belgrade (1980), where the MacBride Report was definitively approved, and through to 1983, when the

Reagan administration decided to force the US's withdrawal from Unesco, corresponded to the years I was preparing my doctoral thesis (*Sistema i polítiques de la comunicació a Catalunya*, Barcelona. L'Avenç, 1983). The aim of my work was to apply to Catalonia one of the strong points of international debate, i.e., the idea of national communication policies, singularly promoted from Latin America. It was a local problem that nonetheless related to the general debate and major global challenges that the MacBride Report pointed out and was an issue I tackled in a later, general report (*El debate internacional de la comunicació*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1986).

The vast majority of the questions that the MacBride Report attempted to answer were of interest to the political and cultural elite of Catalonia in 1980, who were emerging from the struggle and resistance against the Francoist dictatorship. However, I think I can say that the impact of the debate on communication within Unesco had little repercussion on the Catalan public or political class. Why? A first hypothesis would be that the Catalan political class and intellectual elite, like those of the rest of Spain, were fully concentrated on the internal process of building the new Spanish democracy. A second and no less plausible hypothesis would be that Catalonia as such did not have any type of official or officious representation in Unesco or the UN. A third hypothesis could be formulated as a question: Could Catalonia be interested in a debate and proposals on communication that did not take into account the peculiar situation of stateless nations? This question emphasises two considerations: on the one hand, the condition of a Catalonia which, although having rejected having its own state when it accepted the agreements of the Spanish transition, did not reject declaring itself as a nation or part of a nation that was different from the other nations on the Iberian Peninsula; and, on the other hand, the proven

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fact that the MacBride Report did not take into consideration the existence and specific needs of stateless nations.

In any case, it was only after the beginning of the 1980s that Unesco's debate on communication and the MacBride Report began to have any impact in Catalonia, although in very particular sectors. I would like to venture that the principal merit of the timid impact that the MacBride spirit had on part of the Catalan intelligentsia could be attributed to university research centres and in particular, the centres of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, especially gathered together in what was then known as the Department of Communication Theory within the Faculty of Information Sciences. From the department, we followed the development of the international debate and the orientations of the Commission's works with growing interest. In that sense, and with the perspective of 25 years, I believe I can say that the department, under the leadership of Miquel de Moragas, played an important role in at least three directions, which I will outline briefly.

Firstly, the connection of Catalan researchers with international research and communication problems, and in particular with the debates in Unesco and the IAMCR/AIERI/AIECS (International Association of Social Communication Studies). Participation since 1976 in the Association's biannual congresses culminated in the agreement to hold the 16th Congress in Barcelona in 1988, coordinated by Professor Manuel Parés. It also contributed to making international communication a specific research goal that led to Catalan researches going abroad and particularly to Barcelona inviting renowned international communication researchers to visit (Schiller, Mattelart, Martín Barbero, Pasquali, Cayrol, Richeri, etc.).

Secondly, the reception and dissemination within Catalonia and Spain of the international debate about communication and the MacBride Report itself. Apart from personal contributions in different fields made by some professors (especially Miquel de Moragas, Marcial Murciano and myself), the department created the journal *Anàlisi* in 1980, which helped disseminate research works also in fields related to those tackled by the MacBride Report (especially issues 5 and 6 of 1982 on communication policies in Catalonia and issue 10/11 of 1987 on international communication).

Thirdly, the effort of introducing into and applying within

Catalonia research work aimed at supporting national communication policies. This warrants a particular and more extensive consideration. I would just like to mention some of the activities that show how researchers were keen to have an impact on the new historical opportunities for the reestablishment and promotion of the Catalan communication system in the new phase of the deployment of democracy, self-government and linguistic and cultural standardization.

In this regard, I would like to highlight some activities from the early 1980s that connected more or less directly with the concerns of the MacBride spirit with respect to the role of the media and new technologies in the processes of national and cultural reconstruction. It was not the politicians or the big media who applied this line of action and intervention. However, decisions such as the one to create the Catalan Radio and Television Corporation (CCRTV) with two private stations after 1983 (TV3 and Catalunya Ràdio), which the Catalan Parliament and Government adopted in 1981, responded to this 'spirit'. Attention and concern for the Catalan language and culture through the new cultural policies of Catalonia also connected with the orientations of the MacBride Report. For example, initiatives from the Department of Culture, such as the Critical Reflections on Catalan Culture that were held twice (1983 and 1986) and the proposal for the "Culture Agreement" (1985) were part of this way of thinking. The celebration in 1986 of the 2nd International Congress on the Catalan Language included a section of work dedicated to the media and new technologies, and incorporated as one of the conclusions the establishment of a Catalan communication space that would comprise both territories of Catalan language. This strategic line of rebuilding communication in the Catalan cultural space had been, in fact, one of the conclusions of the prospective study that I led, thanks to the promotion of the Institute of Catalan Studies in full harmony with the MacBride spirit (J. Gifreu (ed.), *Comunicació, llengua i cultura a Catalunya: Horitzó 1990*. Barcelona, Institute of Catalan Studies, 1986). The public projection in Catalonia of this line of communication research led, in 1986, to the Generalitat's Department of Culture appointing me to open the 2nd Critical Reflections on Catalan Culture, with a conference entitled "Culture, Communication and Dependency".

Over the final years of the '80s, the general impact of the MacBride spirit, mostly on communication research in Catalonia, manifested itself in the fact of including communication studies as a crucial part of the processes of national, cultural and linguistic (re)construction. And if people then began to talk about a 'Catalan school' of communication research, it was largely due to the special awareness that Catalan researchers had about closely relating communication, cultural and linguistic policies. An

awareness that, after 20 years, brings us to the heart of the new concerns both in European cultural policy and critical international communication. With this I would like to state that Catalan communication research is today in full harmony with the so-called 'cultural exception' as a strategy and guarantee for affirming cultural differences in a new and globalised world, which, under the dictates of the World Trade Organization, runs the risk of disappearing by way of the markets.