

Editorial

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Reimagining Communication in World-Making

Reimaginando a comunicação na criação de mundos possíveis

Reimaginando la comunicación en la creación de mundos

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& Thomas Tufte*

This issue of *Mediaciones* celebrates the 30th anniversary of the Faculty of Communication and UNIMINUTO, and it takes this opportunity to shed light on the current state of the field of research and practice into communication and social change. This is a field that for several reasons finds itself at a crossroads. This is reflected in this issue that is diverse and global, with 15 articles covering studies from 9 countries from across both Asia, Africa, Latin America and USA.

Three features in particular are significant to inquire into if we wish to understand the nature of the crossroads in which the field encounters itself, and if we wish to re-imagine the role of communication in articulating novel visions of and pathways for the future. Firstly, a range of new approaches are emerging, moving us beyond just critiques of previous dominant paradigms, but offering a dialogue of knowledges and tapping into indigenous knowledge systems. Secondly a growing critique of the injustices of development and the role of communication in countering these processes. Thirdly, we see new spaces and actors of change and transformation, which emerge from the heart of communities and organizations, rather than changes that are imposed by authorities or only by the instances of economic and political powers. This force that arises from below is also articulated with those purposes of change that are generally registered in public policy, to make them associate through innovative formats of governance and governability to achieve urgent and





desired changes.

Emerging approaches

Regarding the first point, emerging approaches, what we are seeing is a process of epistemic opening and increased recognition of other knowledge systems. It is impacting how we understand, define and speak about communication, and it reflects other ontologies and other visions of the future. While we for long have critiqued past paradigms, the emerging approaches are not only critiquing these but differing fundamentally from these early approaches that focused on growth and modernization (see Peruzzo 2022, Herrera-Huerfano 2023,). Today's proposals are inclusive of the diversity in production of knowledge and in a growing recognition of other epistemologies. This is widely influencing the field and is seen, for example, in indigenous knowledge systems gaining greater visibility across Latin America (see for example Suzina 2021), in the parallel African debates (Teer-Tomaselli, Dyll and Govender 2021). It is also seen in the theoretical advances linking decolonial thought to the field of communication (Tufte 2024a) and we see it in the growing South-South dialogues around communication for social change and the broadening of citizenships (Tufte 2024b). These knowledge dialogues are key to developing new visions and pathways of development. However, they don't emerge uncontested.

There are obviously constants in the field, carrying the legacy from the Freire-inspired and bottom-up focused traditions of communication for social change, emphasizing participation and community media, and suggesting methodological approaches like qualitative inquiry, knowledge dialogues and participatory action research. However, we are also seeing novel and innovative approaches by addressing the conceptualization and use of new technology as AI, the pluriversality of knowledge systems, in particular the manifold ways whereby indigenous knowledge system are gaining visibility and forcing research and practice to confront their own dogmas. We hope this special issue contributes to these inquiries and debates.

Planetary Justice

Secondly, we live in a time of great challenges in capitalist development, where the social cost of systemic injustices is increasingly evident and disturbing, and where challenges to development are posed by climate change, wars, mass migrations, multiple exclusions and technological advances. The role of communication in addressing these social and political challenges is complex and requires in-depth analysis. We must understand they are not only the material injustices, but systemic injustices, incurred by neoliberal economic policies and practices, but also by the anthropocentric development models. The redefinition and expansion of justice to be not only about legal issues, but also about ethical, social, cultural and environmental aspects, and coming together around a fundamentally different way of conceiving science and social change is central to understanding what planetary justice is about and how it can be enhanced with



communication.

New Spaces and Actors of Social Change

Thirdly, the actors involved in communication for social change are increasingly diverse. Civil organizations and social movements in all their variety, which engage with communication for social change, have become visible and gained momentum in the constitution of civilizational changes at the global level. Analysing the breadth and impact of these civil society actors is key to understanding the role of this field in practice. In this lies also a rearticulation of the importance of collective change as a core aspect of how change occurs.

It is in this context that this issue of *Mediaciones* emerges.

This issue of the journal *Mediaciones* is based on an open call, which provided different contributions from different regions and countries, with the aim of bringing together articles that reflect on the legacy of the field of Communication for Social Change, from theoretical discussions, so that they offer critical analyses on the original conceptual approaches, as well as pointing out scenarios for the future, to analysis of contemporary experiences. We believe that the objective was contemplated, as can be seen from the set of articles published here, around three basic axes.

The first axis is composed of four articles that discuss the concepts of *development and communication for social change* and that advance by proposing changes in traditional concepts. The first is by Jharna Brahma entitled “Beyond the Wounds of the Fall: Exploring New Positions of Communication for Social Change through disciplinary disruptions”. Brahma’s article explores alternative epistemological perspectives in the context of Communication for Social Change (CfSC), drawing from ethnographic research findings on Jana Sanskriti’s ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ practice in West Bengal, India. It challenges conventional approaches to development and social justice, aligning with the radical ideas pushing for social justice through cognitive justice. A departure from reactive stances is advocated in the article, and an epistemological shift is called for to foster a holistic understanding of development and social change. The article also highlights some overlooked aspects in the field of communication for social change, emphasising the need to identify and explore potential blind spots that may have been neglected but play a significant role in the social change processes.

The second article in this batch is by Eric Ewoh Opu, and it entitled ‘Citizen Spaces as Communicative Arenas for Environmental Justice in Climate Change Governance: The Case of the Ngoyla-Mintom Projects in Cameroon’. Opu’s article examines the nature and role of organic citizen-led spaces as communicative spaces of change in climate-change related so-called natural resource management. Drawing from a case study, the Ngoyla-Mintom sustainable forest management projects in the East of Cameroon, Opu examines how deliberative communicative practices stemming from organic spaces created by local communities and NGOs enabled policy advocacy through “the mobilization of

dissent” in the projects. Opu’s article highlights a growing trend in communication for social change in which ordinary citizens are becoming more adept at articulating their preferences from within self-organized spaces both offline and online. The evidence indicates that “invited spaces” implicit in the participation paradigm in development communication no longer seem to be the arenas where social change trajectories are crafted through “dialogue” and “consensus” as has been hitherto implied. Rather, social change trajectories are increasingly influenced and shaped, sometimes vigorously, by mobilized citizens from within created/organic spaces outside the traditional invited spaces. Such conclusions are significant for how we conceptualize the role of spaces in communication for social change.

The sequence further includes the text “Comunicação para o desenvolvimento sustentável: dimensões, características e unidades de análise”, authored by Clovis Reis, Regina Hostin and Patricia Pêcego, from Brazil. These authors review the historical trajectory of communication for development approaches and suggest applying the criteria of sustainable development to the field of communication for development and social change. That is, from the harmony with each local reality, respecting the social ecosystem and the solidarity management of resources, and incorporating the economic, ecological, spatial and cultural dimensions, progress is made in the direction of a Communication for Sustainable Development based on the principles of Participatory Communication and other concepts such as empowerment, equity, social inclusion and human rights.

Karina Herrera Miller provides a truly profound reflection in her article “Comunicación y cambio social: territorios de sentido en disputa”, on the process of how the concepts of “communication and social change” appear in history and on the map detached from the initial field of “communication”. She, who represents a Latin American thinker with a long career alongside scholars such as Luis Ramiro Beltrán, in a careful, detailed and step-by-step way, provides a text that collects with depth and lucidity this process of great value for academia. On her way, she listens to and considers the criticisms and debates that have taken place around the emergence of the field and she includes them in an enriching way. Surely this text will be part of the bibliographies in our courses on theories of communication and Communication, Development and Social Change.

In the second axis, we bring together the articles that *also offer a theoretical discussion, but distance themselves from the underlying theme*, that is, they address the question of social mobilization and the issue of decoloniality. The first is the work of Juan Camilo Jaramillo, “Movilizar es convocar, convocar comunicar” a powerful story carefully unravels the concept of social mobilization from its origins to place it in the context of political communication. From there, it brings it closer to key factors such as the fact that it is a phenomenon that only occurs in social relations, in conditions of trust, dialogue and argumentation and that it builds a story closer to the popular than to any other, because it is not unique or homogeneous but more oral and expresses the knowledge and imaginaries of the people. He does not mention the term “communication for social change”, but he builds the entire argument to generate an inescapable



relationship between these two concepts.

The next article, entitled “An Autoethnographic Reflection on the Verb “To Decolonize” in Sociological Knowledge Production”, is by Leonardo Custodio and addresses decolonization by conducting an auto-ethnography. While decolonization according to Custodio has become a buzzword in academia, the debate about what it means in relation to individual, collective, institutional and structural changes in academia remains under-discussed. Inspired by Tuck and Yang (2012), Custodio, who is himself a descendent of enslaved people a former Portuguese colony (Brazil), reflects on his own relationship with coloniality and what “to decolonize” means in his own scholarly trajectory. The goal of the essay is to reflect about a researcher’s own epistemological choices and power positions in an unequal and hierarchical academia.

Next, in axis three, are the eight works that *present the results of empirical research*, whether from analyses of community media such as radio, television and documentaries, but also broader approaches to citizen participation, popular struggles in favor of agroecology, training of women for media appropriation and the issue of gender and age as struggles for the expansion of citizenship. In this axis we have the commented works to follow. Orley Reinaldo Durán Gutiérrez participates with the article “Ordenar el río y el territorio. La experiencia participativa del Plan de Ordenación Pesquera del Bajo río Sogamoso, Colombia desde el enfoque de la Comunicación para el Cambio Social”, in which he analyzes the results of an empirical research on forms and processes of communication in a fishing community which has suffered radical transformation in their aquatic world of. survival The role of art and culture as expressions of codes and deep representations from communication is emphasized, and the importance of popular participation in decision-making about territories.

Rodrigo Rossi Morelato then shares the results of a research carried out in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, synthesized in the article “Rede Carioca de Agricultura Urbana (Rede CAU): mudança social, comunicação e cidadania”. It is a study on the dynamics of popular organization in the context of agroecological social movements in favor of agricultural cultivation in the middle of the urban area, in the context of favelas, in whose processes participatory community communication is central to the mobilization and for the construction of common agendas of struggles for rights related to self-sustainability. by corresponding laws and public policies and by rights to the city, without distinction in living and planting. The author shows that the process of local mobilization is dynamic and growing, so that they even constituted a network of social movements (Rede CAU) that for more than 15 years have developed collective actions of political advocacy in favor of the collective, through the coordination of actions and autonomous forms of governance mediated by communication. which involves media and channels of dissemination, but is essentially a face-to-face and group communicability.

From Latin America we move on to the African continent, with the article by Emmanuel Essel and Eliza Govender on “Access, participation and social capital as intangible results of the practice of community radio in Ghana”. The authors demonstrate that access to freedom of expression is still a battle in the context of popular resistance

and that community radio plays a relevant role in the process of communication for social change in Ghana because by enabling community members' access to mass media, it helps to develop social capital among community members and favors active citizen participation in social media, public speeches. Community members participate directly in the programming as well as series producers and presenters of content of public interest and thus strengthen identities and appreciation of the local language and cultures.

The article on "Género, tecnología e innovación social" by Lucía Benítez Eyzaguirre, carried out in Morocco and Tunisia, presents a key case study to observe how the use of technology as empowerment constitutes a factor of development and transformation, especially in vulnerable groups such as women. And at the same time, it takes a step forward in communication studies for social change towards the immediate future, leaving a mark on one of the strategic lines that is most requiring reflection.

"PhillyCAM: A Hub for Media Makers on Ransstead Street" by Clemencia Rodríguez is a story with a very personal imprint, which tells with care and delicacy an ethnographic study carried out in Philadelphia on a particular case, which collects and evidences community television processes that emerged in many places in the United States. The narrative format in which it is written stands out, which has a local origin, but a universal projection pointing out what is substantial to citizen media, in this case, a television experience such as PhillyCAM. This story characterizes the fundamental aspects of this topic, collects and presents in a very inspiring way scholars of this subject and ethnographers of communication in search of transformative methodological horizons.

The next article, by Ana Fernández Viso, is entitled "Cuestionar y enfrentar el edadismo hacia las personas mayores desde la comunicación. El caso del movimiento asociativo de personas mayores en El Salvador". The article deals with the issue ageism, and how it, through stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, constitutes a human rights problem known as ageism. Ageism manifests itself at three levels: institutional, interpersonal and self-inflicted, and explicitly or implicitly, when it has become normalized and forms part of a society's cultural frame of reference. Fernandez-Viso explores these complexities by unpacking a case from El Salvador in which the elders for almost 2 decades have been organized and have mobilized to claim their right to a dignified old age. Since 2017 they have engaged in communication for social change as a key element in their strategy to fight against ageism. Fernandez-Viso's article describes and analyses their communicative strategy and offers insights into some of the achievements.

Hazeena T, in her article 'Wildlife in the Backyard: Contemplating on Human-Wildlife Interactions by Community Radio in South India' explores the role of media in the escalating scale human-wildlife interactions, interaction that increasingly turn into conflicts. The current scholarship connecting media and human-wildlife interactions predominantly deals with media representation of conflicts. Furthermore, the literature lacks research insights into how community media engage with human-wildlife interactions, even though such media has extensive experience of engaging with



environmental matters in many parts of the world. Addressing this gap, Hazeena's article explores a community media case study from the Southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Radio Kotagiri. Utilising qualitative data along with publicly available media content of the radio Hazeena examines the engagements of community media concerning human-wildlife interactions. The analysis reveals the dimensions of efforts by community radio in pursuing conversations on coexistence at the grassroots level, and its contribution to magnifying the realities of ordinary people concerning human-wildlife interactions in the region. Ultimately, it aspires to be a platform capable of centring the socio-ecological matrix at work in narratives.

Frederico Augusto dos Santos Ângelo, analyzes in his article "Bombozila e o Projeto Tambor: todos na fila do SUS", through a case, the struggle for the right to health during the Covid 19 pandemic. This was documented by independent audiovisual collectives as a way of denouncing, resisting and recording the memory of the popular struggles of citizens. The study concludes that the use of the Bomboliza streaming platform and the audiovisual record itself demonstrate the contemporary possibility that enables new insertions in the visible world and allows minority groups, historically excluded, to take a look at their needs and self-knowledge, at the same time to give visibility to their demands.

Concluding

What this celebratory edition of the 30th anniversary of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, and in turn, the 25th anniversary of the publication itself, collects and captures is a broad set of articles that were submitted, reviewed and accepted, freely inspired by the call and that point to the agenda and current path of communication for development and social change research and practice across four continents.

A first aspect is the way in which this edition shows that although theoretical reflections continue to be a key activity in the field of Communication for Development and Social Change, it also shows that its insights arise from the case studies. Here we find both formats and investigative narratives. Reflections and debates on the founding concepts of the field are maintained and their connections between them are deepened.

In terms of themes, we see how the interest and action of citizen media continues while also including new aspects and actors. And the issues that seem to mark the future of the field are emerging strongly, such as the role of technologies in the changes of key sectors, the centrality of environmental justice not only in rural sectors; attention to new social actors (beyond the issue of women, childhood and gender) who had not been protagonists of studies from the Communication for Development and Social Change perspective. And the methodological approaches that increasingly specify the participatory aspects and dialogue of knowledge.

Finally, a door remains open to the new trends that have been emerging from

international development agencies such as UNICEF, which traditionally has made valuable contributions to the field, concretizing Communication for Development and Social Change “CforD” and now suggesting a paradigm shift that is beginning to emerge from this field, and which today they call *social and behavioral* change. While the international development agencies have been key actors in the field we are now witnessing the emergence of new paradigms, some of which we are dealing with in this edition.

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