Book review


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This book provides a valuable contribution to the field of communication for development and social change. Drawing from a Latin American postcolonial perspective and a de-colonial epistemology, it focuses on everyday communication practices of resistance. The chapters discuss and analyse different ways to understand, examine and confront key concepts such as development, culture, community, participation and empowerment. They also provide a variety of methodological approaches to alternative and community experiences and practices. Overall, the book shows diverse ways to catalyse social transformation, pursue social justice, promote participation, empower citizens, appropriate digital technologies and communication tools, strengthen capacities and develop networks. It emphasises a historical perspective to understand the changes of the discipline and a critical understanding of the ever-changing media environment, particularly the digital one.

The book is part of a series on Latin American communication published by the Spanish publishing house Gedisa. This series has made Latin American scholarship on communication available to the Spanish-speaking market in Europe, the United States and major Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires, Santiago and Mexico. The publication is the outcome of a research working group that fosters academic dialogue between the Global South and the European South (mainly Spain). The dialogues are focused on experiences, mobilisations, uses of technologies and communication tools, and the ways in which they can be understood from a Latin American and de-colonial perspective.

Comunicación y Desarrollo has a transdisciplinary focus, and is organised into three major sections. The first is devoted to an epistemological discussion, which examines three schools of thought that have mapped the field of communication for social change (chapter by Tufte) and problematises key concepts such as development and culture. The notion of development is reviewed from two contrasting points of view – modernisation and emancipation (chapters by Gumucio and del Valle), or as a contradictory Westernised mode of intervention (chapter by Cimadevilla). César Siqueira offers a valuable revision of the concept of culture in the work of Brazilian scholar Celso Furtado, arguing that, from a critical political economy perspective, culture can be understood as a form of struggle against dependency, and hence as a way to emancipation. The authors in this section also stress the shortcomings that need to be faced. Gumucio underlines that long-term processes have to be privileged over project-oriented initiatives. Tufte highlights the need to construct new theoretical frameworks to understand the challenges the discipline is facing with current uses of Information and communication
technologies for citizen participation, such as those that led to the Arab Spring. Finally, Carlos del Valle reflects upon the contributions Latin American scholars are offering from academic programs, institutions, networks, publications, methodologies and scopes.

The second part of *Comunicación y Desarrollo* presents methodological approaches to analyse and implement projects that foster social change. Francisco Sierra uses actor network theory and network analysis to examine the interplay between new ICTs and local public policies geared towards development. Marcelo Martínez, on the other hand, discusses cities’ film commissions to understand the role of cinema in local development. He claims that public administration can invigorate audio-visual practices and culture at local and regional levels. Lucía Benítez looks at the contributions of gender as an analytical perspective for discussing issues such as development and equality, and as a methodological tool that shapes project design, and multidimensional methodologies that take into consideration contexts, interaction, dialogue, emotions and experiences.

The final section of the book is named ‘Best Practices’, and it presents an array of experiences from Latin America and Spain. Authors in this section describe and discuss community radio, environmental policies, edu-communication, alternative press, digital media and social movements, and communication for peace. Community radio (urban, youth, rural, indigenous) are examined as political communicative projects anchored in community values and practices, while at the same time fostering strategic networks (chapter by Cadavid). Community media are also understood as strategic tools that embody communicative practices. For Mayugo, these practices (and their media outlets) must respond to the interests, needs and expectations of society. Looking at Brazilian alternative press, Cicilia Krohling reflects on the intersections between community, popular and alternative media from an historical perspective, and concludes that the contemporary alternative press in Brazil uses different digital media (outlets and strategies) to challenge the status quo and struggle for social justice. The ‘good practices’ in this section stress the relevance of participation for empowerment and transformations, related either to environmental policies to achieve sustainable development (chapter by Herrero) or to the use of digital social networks by the 15M movement in Spain (chapter by Barranquero). They also understand communication strategies as key elements for transformation. Ana Fernández problematises the work of NGOs focused on peace construction and proposes that communicative process should be used to transform violent conflicts while addressing the structural elements of conflict and not only their manifestations.

*Comunicación y Desarrollo* is written from an academic perspective. It combines research papers and essays, and provides sufficient background to newcomers to the field of communication for development and social change. Researchers, scholars and students in the fields of communications, journalism, social movements, and development studies will find the book appealing and useful. Moreover, readers will have the opportunity to understand communication practices from a Latin American perspective and to become familiar with an epistemology from the South.