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## **A research proposal about International Assistance and the Communication Field in Latin America**

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The paper will examine the influence and impact of foreign aid on communication and media practice, research, education and policies in Latin America since the 1970s. In so doing, it aims at developing a research agenda to examine issues and problems arising from the intersection between communication, foreign aid and foreign policy in historical and current contexts.

This research addresses to cover a vacancy in the regional communication studies: the material foundations of the Latin American communication field. Despite the relevance of international development assistance in this field, there are extremely few researches and publications concerning this issue. It is a subject that we don't speak about, not only because talking about financing in general uses to be a taboo, but also because there are suspicions about the donors' interests and the beneficiaries' assignments.

The questions this research agenda will approach to are:

- What has been the role of foreign aid in shaping practices of popular communication and community media; in communication approaches of research and education; and in communication policies in Latin America?
- What are the consequences? Which communication approaches and practices has international cooperation fostered or inhibited?
- What are the similarities and differences in the direct and indirect impacts of development assistance of communication from different donors?
- Which are the interests of the donors and those of the beneficiaries? How did they negotiate them?
- What are the continuities and discontinuities concerning the impact of development assistance on communication and media practice, research, education and policies in the post-Cold War era?

In order to answer these questions, first, I will analyze the organizations, subjects, context and consequences of foreign aid in communication and media field in the period between the 1970s and 1980s. Then, I will examine the continuities and discontinuities since 1990s until today. Finally, I will summarize the main conclusions.

### **1. 1970s-1980s: mobilization and formation<sup>1</sup>**

During the 70s and the 80s, the international assistance was crucial to develop the communication field in the region, especially in popular communication and academic institutions.

In the 70s, most Latin American countries were under dictatorships. There was a lot of political and social mobilization, including guerrillas. In the following decade, our countries were in transition to democracy with precarious economic situations signed by huge external debts.

Meanwhile, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries boosted the New World Economic Order in the international debate, connected to the demand of free and balanced flow of communication. The request of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) found reception in UNESCO that propelled the MacBride Commission, which final Report was approved in 1980. During those years, UNESCO promoted and financed a lot of initiatives of education, research and publication about communication, in particular to foster National Communication Policies (PNC for its acronym in Spanish).

Besides, during the Cold War, northern countries were interested in stopping the advance of Marxist parties, guerrillas and movements in our region. At that time, “German foreign aid organizations were the ones that more money invested in communication in Latin America” (Uranga, 2017). Among them, there were organizations linked to the two principal political parties and others connected to Catholic Church.

The Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church but also the Protestant ones, with a strong presence of the Liberation Theology in the region, gave great support to experiences with popular populations. Besides, they accompanied the international debates about the NWICO. The discussion about the relevance of communication was expressed in the document

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the information of this section was provided by Washington Uranga, except those that have another reference.

“Audiovisuales y Evangelización” published in 1978. So, the catholic foreign aid organizations also helped Latin American experiences. They were grouped in the Catholic Media Council (CAMECO) -which headquarter was situated in Aachen, Germany-, that managed their money.

### **1.1. Popular communication practices**

What has been the role of foreign aid in shaping communication practices of popular communication and community media in Latin America and what are the consequences?

Foreign agencies linked to political parties and Christian churches from Germany, Nederland, Italy, Sweden, Canada and other countries, as well as the United Nations, financed experiences of community radios, popular videos, publications, trainings, meetings, publications, etc.

Among the catholic agencies grouped in CAMECO, Adveniat (Essen, Germany) assisted community radios and catholic organizations of communication such as the Argentinean *Centro de Comunicación Educativa La Cruzía* –that have a specialized editorial-, since the middle 70s. The German Misereor also helped community radios and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) linked to the catholic churches that worked with rural, indigenous and popular urban populations.

The public channel Deutsche Welle financed communication initiatives, too. And Radio Nederland had a Training Center, first located in Dominican Republic associated to *Radio Santa María*, and then in Costa Rica since middle 70s to middle 90s. After that, Radio Nederland continued supporting communication and development practices but with significant less money until 2005.

The UNESCO financed PNC (*Políticas Nacionales de Comunicación*) experiences in Bogotá during the second middle of the 70s, in Quito until the last 80s, and after in La Paz when the Bolivian Luis Ramiro Beltrán was the director of PNC for Latin America in these three places<sup>2</sup>. The PNC was linked to the political decisions of the states. So, first, the organizations had to present projects that were elected by the governments according with their own economic and technological interests. Then, it was transformed in a fund with other logic.

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<sup>2</sup> In most of the cases, the personal connections were crucial to get the foreign funds. “The personal contact facilitated the agreements. Most of the financing was decided based on the trust in someone. After that, we designed the projects” (Uranga, 2017).

The Brazilian radios received a lot of international support, too. They were financed through INTERCOM (*Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação*), UCBC (*União Cristã Brasileira de Comunicação*) that grouped catholic and protestant Christians, and UNDA-Brasil (*Associação Católica para o Rádio e Televisão do Brasil*) that coordinated a network of more than 150 catholic radios. They were also helped by the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC), a protestant organization with headquarter in London. The contact there was Carlos Valle, pastor of the Methodist Church who first was president of WACC-Latin America and the Caribbean, and then, general secretary of WACC.

Foreign aid supported not only practices, but also many institutions that shaped the regional communication field like ALER, the ancient regional association of community radios.

ALER was funded by the German *Misereor* and *Adveniat*, the Dutch CEBEMO, the Belgian and also catholic *Broederlij Delem*. The last one also conducted money from the European Economic Community to ALER. This last connection was facilitated by an Argentinean with Belgian ancestors, Meis Bockaert, who worked in the international cooperation agency for development of Belgian Catholic Church (that managed its own funds and also funds from Belgian government and European Community), and by the general secretary of ALER, Humberto van den Bulke, who was a Belgian priest.

ERBOL, the national Bolivian community radio association, was supported by *Misereor* and *Adveniat*, too. It was one of the organizations that more money received in the region in those years.

Other financier for popular communication practices in that period was the agency of the Canadian Parliament.

## **1.2. Educative institutions and publications**

What has been the role of development assistance in shaping communication approaches in Latin American research and education through the regional academic institutions?

Other institutions promoted by foreign funds that were also critical to design the communication field in Latin America were the academic ones: the regional association of communication faculties: FELAFCS, the regional association of communication researchers, ALAIC, and institutes of research and education such as CIESPAL in Ecuador, ILET in México, ININCO in Venezuela, CENECA in Chile and IPAL in Perú.

In the 70s, the German Social-Christianity agency Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) well financed FELAFACS. FELAFACS was created in 1979. Its first president was a Colombian Jesuit priest called Joaquín Sánchez. In that time, FELAFACS made a relevant job of promoting the creation of national associations of university communication careers. It had an important regional journal with a wide distribution by post mail. It also encouraged and funded innumerable post-graduate studies (when they were extremely unusual in our countries), libraries, researches, seminars, conferences all over the sub-continent. It was the moment of splendor of FELAFACS (Puebla, 2017). Konrad stopped funding FELAFACS in the last 90s. “The agency has been concerned with teaching to walk, now you can do it alone”, said the KAS representative when she announced the end of their aid (Cimadevilla, 2017).

During the same years, the German Social-Democratic agency, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) supported CIESPAL. CIESPAL have been founded in 1959 by the X General Conference of UNESCO and it was the first scientific institution created in the region. The director of CIESPAL during the 70s was the German Peter Schenkel who also was the economic representative of FES.

Besides, in those years emerged a lot of national institutes for research communication problems, educate and produce media content. Most of them had international assistance. The Mexican ILET functioned since 1976 with the Argentinean and some Chilean exiles during the dictatorships (Héctor Schmucler, Alcira Argumedo, Juan Somavía, Fernando Reyes Mata), with funds of Mexican government and Swedish agencies. The following year, some of ILET’s members (Reyes Mata and others) founded a similar institute in Chile: CENECA. After the ILET closed in the earlies 80s, Rafael Roncagliolo and Regina Festa created IPAL in Peru. IPAL was financed by catholic organizations, specially the Italian catholic agency *Aiuto alla Chiesa che Soffre*, to produce community videos and to collaborate with popular communication research with the videos.

During those years, UNESCO promoted and financed a lot of initiatives of education, research and publication about communication. ALAIC was created in 1978 in Caracas, Venezuela, by initiative of a group of intellectuals from different countries and diverse institutions like CIESPAL, ININCO and ILET. At the beginning, they had UNESCO support for research projects, although not for institutional management. One of those researchers –Alejandro

Alfonso- also worked at UNESCO. In the 1980s, without international aid and with very difficult political and economic situations in each country, ALAIC weakened.<sup>3</sup> (Cimadevilla, 2017)

WACC (World Association of Christian Communication) also funded publications such as the collection of books that *La Crujía* edited with San Pablo editorial in the 80s.

## **2. 1990s-today: communication policies<sup>4</sup>**

What are the continuities and discontinuities concerning the impact of development assistance on communication practice, research and education in the post-Cold War era?

Since the second half of the 1990s, during the closure of the debates about the New World Information and Communication Order and the end of the Cold War, the approach of popular and community communication, and the region stopped being a priority for foreign aid. Most of the cooperation agencies redirected their funds to other subjects and different parts of the world, especially to East European countries. The agencies linked to political parties have started to think that they have to privilege the political space since the 80s. The PNCs were also dying in UNESCO in the 90s. The funds from churches agencies decreased, too.

Nonetheless, most of academic and popular communication institutions and community media created in the previous period and financed by ancient donors continued functioning. Many of them also expand their aims to include advocacy to propel reforms of communication policies and regulations. In particular, associations of community media are part of broad coalitions in each country and in regional and international networks with demands of restricting the domination of private corporations in media systems. They aimed at limiting media concentration, legalize and promote community and indigenous media, and foster national, local and independent production. They are based on the conclusion that the unmatched power of market forces have in terms of ownership, funding and content is the key problem of public communication in the sub-continent. These grassroots movements, the oldest media movements in the region, have had impact on the 11 new broadcasting and telecommunication laws passed during the last 15 years in Latin American countries.

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<sup>3</sup> It was re-founded in 1989 with strong support of Brazilian researchers and academic institutions. Nowadays, ALAIC is supported by the membership fees and received occasional foreign financing for specific projects as the launch of the journal in English.

<sup>4</sup> Most of this section is based on the Chapter 6 “Why transnational activism matters” of the book *Media movements. Civil society and media policy reform in Latin America*, authored by Silvio Waisbord and María Soledad Segura.

Besides, since the last 1990s, another kind of international support from foundations linked not only to political parties or leaders, but also to big companies and/or its owners from United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Canada and other countries, as well as different areas of United Nations are the contemporary donors.

They finance a new kind of non-governmental organizations that emerged in those years also working on communication rights and advocacy to impact on the reform of communication and media policies, but with another group of demands. These NGOs are focused on limiting the discretionary power of governments on public information and the opacity of official decisions regarding the media. They emphasize the way states make decisions, especially the Executive, on issues affecting public expression and information. They pursue the regulation of access to public information, official advertising, and public media, and the repeal of gag press laws. These organizations are NGOs staffed by technical experts (lawyers, journalists, scholars), journalistic and human rights associations that were founded in the transition and the consolidation of democracy in the 1980s and 1990s. They are non-profit organizations mostly funded by foreign donors. They have had impact on the 18 new public information access laws passed in the Latin American countries, and in the repealing of insult laws or removing of criminal penalties for defamation during the last 20 years in the region.

Even if the first group was privileged by foreign donors during the 1970s and 80s and it also receives funding for specific activities, since 1990s there has been more funding support for the promotion of independent journalism, the elimination of libel laws, the regulation of official advertising, and public access to government information than for tackling market concentration or the legalization of community media

In the context of international media assistance and media development programs, most of the organizations pushing to limit state power are financially dependent on grants, consultancies, and other forms of funding offered by international donors. Typically, funding is available for specific projects rather than for institutional expenses. International funding is particularly significant considering that local funds -whether from governments or philanthropic institutions- are limited for initiatives related to media policies and freedom of speech. Also, many organizations have been reluctant to rely on official funding for their activities to preserve autonomy.

One challenge for local activists is the influence of donors' priorities on their work. Donors don't have similar levels of interest across issues and countries, and their priorities are subject to

changes. At times, dependence on foreign funding creates problems. The volatility of donors' priorities change has tremendous impact on the financial situation and the survival of local organizations. Because donor programs are generally focused on specific issues, opportunities for addressing various problems of public communication widely vary.

## **Conclusions**

During the 70s and the 80s, during the transnational debates about the NWICO, the international assistance was crucial to develop the communication field in the region. Foreign agencies linked to political parties and Christian churches from Germany, Nederland, Italy, Canada and other countries, as well as United Nations financed community radios, popular videos, publications, trainings, meetings, etc. They also supported many regional institutions that shaped the Latin American communication field like ALER, FELAFCS, ALAIC, CIESPAL and other institutes.

Since the 1990s, during the closure of the debates about the NWICO and the end of the Cold War, most of the cooperation agencies redirect their funds to other subjects and different parts of the world. Nevertheless, most of those institutions and media continued functioning in the region. And another kind of international support from foundations linked to political parties or leaders, and big companies or owners, finance a new kind of NGOs that emerged in those years working on communication rights and advocacy to impact on the reform of communication and media policies. They have already had impact on the new broadcasting and telecommunication laws, access to public information laws, the repealing of gag laws and de de-criminalization of speech.

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