

Reflections on Foreign Aid, Philanthropy and Change in Media Systems

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The impact of foreign aid in Latin American popular communication

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The paper will examine the influence and impact of international assistance on popular, community and alternative media in Latin America.

In the digital age, community broadcasting is still important in a region with growing levels of internet access¹ and affordability², but with persistent great inequalities in access according to the geographical location and socio-economic situation of the population³. Therefore, there still are important groups of illiterate people⁴. Therefore, broadcasting access is free and anonymous while internet is paid and both the transmitter and the receiver can be known.

Popular radios and televisions are a relevant part of the media landscape in the region since the 1940s. They are connected to myriad social movements and organizations of workers, peasants

¹ Access: 54.4% of the inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean used the Internet in 2015, 20 percentage points more than in 2010, and the households connected to the Internet in Latin America and the Caribbean reached 43.4% by 2015, almost doubling that of 2010 (CEPAL, 2016).

² Affordability: while in 2010 the cost of contracting a fixed broadband service of 1Mbps was around 18% of average monthly revenues, in early 2016 it dropped to 2% (CEPAL, 2016).

³ There is a difference of up to 41 percentage points in Internet penetration between urban and rural areas in the country that shows the largest gap in the region. In terms of income, access expansion has concentrated on the richest quintiles, widening the gap with the poorest quintiles. (CEPAL, 2016)

⁴ In terms of absolute illiterate: More than 40 million adults declare that they do not know how to read and write in the Surveys of Household in the 19 countries of Latin America for which information is available updated. Indeed, by the end of the 2000s, 8% of those aged 15 or over declare themselves unable to read and to write a message, and 7% of them are under 25 years old. Moreover, in terms of functional illiterate: 8% of adolescents and young people under 25 years, 14% of adults between 25 and 34 years, and 35% of the elderly of 35 years did not manage to complete at least four years of basic school. (UNESCO, 2013)

and farmers, miners, indigenous peoples, human rights groups, unions, local churches, neighborhood associations, and the urban poor. They are conceived as channels for the public expression of ordinary citizens and the affirmation of social demands. By rejecting the propaganda principles of state-run media as well as the profit-seeking goals of the private media, they have sought to expand communicative spaces by giving access to alternative issues and perspectives generally ignored by the mainstream media. Despite widespread and longstanding presence linked to social movements and local activism, they have survived in clandestine and precarious conditions. In most countries they were considered illegal or have important restrictions until the last years when many broadcasting acts were modified. Because they operated without licenses, they have been frequent targets of judicial persecution as well as police raids and closures. They have chronically operated on shoestring budgets. Because they existed outside legal frameworks, they could not have access to many funds, which perpetuated economic difficulties. One of the most important financiers of community, alternative and popular media were –and, in some few cases, still are- the foreign aid. (Linares y otras, 2016)

Despite the relevance of international development assistance for a vibrant part of regional media systems, there are extremely few researches and publications concerning this issue.

My theoretical approach recognizes the unequal positions of power and the relations of dominance and dependence, but also assumes that even the more disempowered actors can make the difference in diverse levels of specific historical junctures. Thus, they can negotiate, fight, resist, re-signify, use the external assistance for different purposes and in distinctive ways. At the same time, it considers that not every foreign aid promotes the same ideology neither absolute control the applications that the local organizations make of their money.

Community media, in particular, are key to guarantee communication rights in democratic societies in two ways. On the one hand, its presence contributes to the establishment of more pluralistic and diverse media systems. On the other hand, they are scenarios of citizen participation that allow the emergence of subjects, topics and perspectives that usually have no place in private-commercial or state media. For these reasons, they require legal recognition by the State (UN, OAS, OSCE and CADHP, 2007; European Parliament Culture and Education Commission, 2008; OAS, 2010).

The questions that we will approach to are:

- 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? Which communication approaches and practices has international cooperation fostered or inhibited in these radios and televisions?
- Which are the interests of donors and those of beneficiaries? How did they negotiate them?
- What are the continuities and discontinuities concerning the impact of development assistance on popular communication practice in the post-Cold War era?

The hypothesis is that between the 70s and the 90s, the international assistance was crucial to develop the popular communication in the region. Foreign agencies linked to political parties and Christian churches from European countries and UN financed practices –such as community radios, popular videos, publications, trainings, meetings, etc.- and also institutions that shaped the regional communication field -like ALER and AMARC-ALC-. Since the 1990s, during the closure of the debates about the New World Information and Communication Order and the end of the Cold War, even if most of the cooperation agencies redirect their funds to other parts of the world and other subjects, most of these institutions and media continued functioning in the region and expand their objectives.

1. 1970s-1980s

1.1. Context and interests

¿Which was the relation between foreign aid and foreign policy in this historical context? Why central countries financed communication programs in Latin America?

In the 60s and 70s, most Latin American countries fell under dictatorships or have civil wars. 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.

In those years, community media were prohibited in every Latin American country. During the dictatorships they were extremely persecuted and their members were kidnapped, tortured, murdered, and/or exiled. It was a time without internet, the international phone-calls were

expensive, so to meeting was necessary to travel. Therefore, the main media were the analogical newspapers, radios and televisions.

Meanwhile, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries boosted the New World Economic Order in the international debate, connected to the demand of not only free but also 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). (Uranga, 2017; Cortés, 2017; Lamas, 2017)

Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church but also the Protestant ones, with a strong presence of the Liberation Theology and its “option for the poor” in the region, gave great support to experiences with popular populations. Moreover, they accompanied the international debates about the NWICO. The discussion about the relevance of communication was expressed in the document “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. (Uranga, 2017; Cortés, 2017)

Therefore, during the Cold War, northern countries were interested in stopping the advance of communist parties, unions, guerrillas and movements in our region. In addition, in many European countries there were democratic and center-left governments from liberals and social-democrats parties who were very active in development cooperation (Cortés, 2017). Besides political reasons, there was an economic one: generate welfare to have good buyers for their products (Cortés, 2017).

In addition, in some of central countries there was a significant concentration of Latin American political exiles with very progressive visions of development in the region (Cortés, 2017). Besides, “a lot of supporters have been part of community media and/or have lived in the region, so they understand the field and they like to participate thinking how to solve problems, not only giving money” (Lamas, 2017).

Meanwhile, in Latin America, there was a very important group of intellectuals and activists in communication who made internationally recognized theoretical-political contributions on

communication policies and on communication, education and popular culture in a society project (Mattelart, 2004; Cortés, 2017). Moreover, “it was an era of international optimism and idealism in the non-profit organizations field. There was a powerful volunteering movement in the 70s and 80s.” (Cortés, 2017)

United Nations Organization recommended that the 0.11 percent of international of gross income in wealth countries should be destined to international cooperation funds (Cortés, 2017).

1.2. Donors and implementers

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 Germany⁵, Nederland⁶, 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 Crujía* –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. In the same way, the public radio station, Radio Nederland had a Latin American Training Center for four decades in the region. It was first associated to CIESPAL in Quito, then it was located in Dominican Republic linked to *Radio Santa María*, and then in Costa Rica related to UNESCO Agriculture Center. Since 1990s, Radio Nederland continued supporting communication and development practices but with significant less money and in alliance with another supporting organizations until 2008. (Uranga, 2017; Cortés, 2017; Prieto Castillo, 2008)

⁵ 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.

⁶ In 1980s and 1990s, Nederland was the only one country that fulfilled the commitment of 0.11 percent of the gross income destined to international cooperation for development recommended by United Nations (Cortés, 2017).

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, and then Alejandro Alfonso, were the heads of UNESCO Regional counseling for Latin America. “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” (Uranga, 2017).

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, the ancient popular communication national network of the region, was supported by *Misereor* and *Adveniat*, too. It was one of the organizations that more money received in the region in those years.

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.

2. 1990s-today

2.1. Context and interests

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 after the strong opposition of United Kingdom and United States in UNESCO, and the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new unipolar world, 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. (Uranga, 2017) The PNCs were dying in UNESCO in the 90s. Since 1984, when United States and United Kingdom leaved UNESCO, its funds decreased. So, the Latin American office “moved a lot of projects very well managed with little money” (Cortés, 2017). The agencies linked to political parties have also started to think that they have to privilege the political space since the 80s. The funds from churches agencies decreased in the same period, too.

In 2000, United Nations established the Millennium Development Goals: 8 human development goals, which the 189 member countries of the United Nations agreed to achieve by the year 2015. These objectives addressed daily life problems that are considered serious. In 2015 progress has been evaluated and the list of aims, now called sustainable development objectives, has been extended. “These goals were a universal reference. They recognized the mutual interests and responsibilities of countries in a global world”. (Cortés, 2017)

Since the 90s, the advance of right-wing, nationalist governments in Europe also reduced the foreign aid. They promoted "Europe for Europeans". Their geopolitical concerns were also moved to other continents. Therefore, after the economic crisis and great recession of 2008, some central countries stopped seeing Latin American countries as fragile states and began to consider them as potential business partners. (Cortés, 2017).

In the 90s, most of our governments implemented neoliberal policies following the Thatcher's and Reagan's model. In those years, some governments reach to stabilize the national economies and there is a relative improvement in our countries in comparison with other regions of the world. Thus, international cooperation agencies considered that if there is economic growth, the development must be assumed by people. (Cortés, 2017)

Nevertheless, the growth was extremely unequal and, as consequence of neoliberal policies, in the late 90s and early 2000s there were broad economic, political and social crisis in countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina and Uruguay. After that, the 2000s were signed by the turn to the left of most of our governments and states gave more attention to poor populations. This was another reason for the withdrawal of international funds.

Most of these governments propelled media policy reforms to limit market interests in media systems and legalize and promote community media. These new media policies were an achievement of a long time struggle of media movements, specially popular radios networks (Segura & Waisbord, 2016). Their advocacy work was funded by international assistance. At the same time, the expansion of internet makes possible another kind of personal communication as well as media production and business.

Moreover, “since the 90s, new generations do not have the same ideals of their ancestors, they are not as much available to volunteering work and they ask for a payment. Non-profit organizations had a lot of difficulties in a commercial world” (Cortés, 2017).

2.2. Donors and implementers

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, Nederland, Canada and other countries, as well as different areas of United Nations are the contemporary donors. The most relevant novelty is the presence of big companies and wealthy people foundations of philanthropy, and that USA and UK governments invest more money in the region. These are also secular organizations.(Segura & Waisbord, 2016)

Despite the radical decreasing of international funding, most of academic and popular communication institutions and community media created in the previous period and financed by ancient donors continued functioning and, in some cases, they still received funding for specific activities⁷. 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

⁷ Since 1990s there has been more funding support for NGOs focused on limiting the discretionary power of governments on public communication, that promote independent and investigative 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. (Segura & Waisbord, 2016)

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. (Segura & Waisbord, 2016)

Nonetheless, some institutions linked to popular media movement received important amounts of foreign aid in this period. That was the case of AMARC-ALC (the Spanish acronym for World Association of Community Communication-Latin America and Caribbean) that was created in 1990. It received foreign aid since 1992 to 2002 when the office was in Quito, and since 2003 to 2011 when it was moved to Buenos Aires. Their biggest project was Ritmo Sur: it received 1 million dollars during 5 years to work in every country of the region, and their smaller project was the journalistic coverage of the World Social Forum during three days that cost 5 thousand dollars. The Legislations Program was financed to investigate, advocate and lobby to improve the broadcasting acts in many countries. (Lamas, 2017)

Conclusion

In the 70s and the 80s, during the transnational debates about the NWICO, the international assistance was crucial to develop the community communication experiences, theories and networks 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 and AMARC-ALC and the national ones such as Erbol in Bolivia.

Since the 1990s, during the closure of the debates about the NWICO and the end of the Cold War, and since 2008 after the international economic crisis, 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 even expand their aims to advocate for new media legislations that legalize and promote them. And another kind of international support from foundations linked to political parties or leaders, and big companies or

owners, finance non-profit organizations that emerged in those years working on communication rights and advocacy to impact on the reform of communication and media policies.

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