



THE "DEVELOPMENT" TURN

Oscar Hemer



The rise of the rest was the witty title of a book by political economist Alice Amsden that already in 2001 –and before 9/11– described the imminent emergence of a handful of countries outside the West (or more precisely, outside the North Atlantic) as increasingly determinant players in the world economy. Amsden mentioned most notably China and India, but also for example Turkey and Brazil. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, one of the keynote speakers at the **International Association for Media and Communication Research** (IAMCR) congress held in Stockholm in July 2008, took the rising rest as the starting point for his reflections on the congress theme “Media and the Global Divides” and discussed Western media’s reaction to the changing world order.

According to Pieterse, there are three forms of response: to ignore it, to represent it as a threat, and to celebrate it as a triumph of the marketplace.

The first form is still the dominant one. Western media coverage remains unashamedly Eurocentric. The third is the liberal response, represented by for example Thomas L. Friedman¹ and his much-acclaimed “Flat world” theory. An optimistic pro-globalization response, according to which the expanding world market in the long run will bring prosperity to us all, Friedman's theory misses Amsden's point. Namely, that the key element in the emerging new economies is the strong state and government intervention, which marks a rupture with the neoliberal paradigm that has been dominating world affairs for the last two or three decades.

In fact, the “Flat world” theory is being proved wrong, according to Pieterse. What we are witnessing now is the implosion of the neoliberal Anglo-American model and the return of the development state (and not necessarily a democratic one). Pieterse even suggested 2008, when the financial crisis in the USA has propelled calls for state and government intervention in the heart of the world capitalist system, as a historical U-turn. (In view of what has happened since his presentation at the IAMCR congress, his prognosis seems like an already fulfilled prophecy.)

Structurally, the ongoing transformation resembles the post-war period. The global South is moving up fast, while the North (West) is facing marginalization. Former winners are becoming losers. As a consequence, opinions towards globalization are turning tables: It is the North that

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suddenly thinks that globalization goes too fast and calls for protectionist measures. The rise of the rest is increasingly represented as a threat in the Western media, with "China bashing" as a symptomatic phenomenon.

If we accept Pieterse's and Amsden's general analysis, we should note that it may have significant implications for international development cooperation and the field of communication for development. "Development" has been dismissed by neo-liberals and anti-globalization activists alike. Deregulation and structural adjustment are the only requirements for economic growth -which equals development, according to the neoliberal credo-, and special development policies will most probably obstruct the wealth-producing market mechanisms. The "post-development" school of the '90s objected to development as such, since it was seen to perpetuate ruthless exploitation and colonial power relations. Post-development ideas were quite influential in the reorientation of communication for development towards a focus on local communities and empowerment. As compared to the early development communication efforts, mainly as agriculture extension, there has been a clear gradual shift in emphasis from development to communication. Communication, regarded not merely as a means but as a process, has become an end in itself, while the compromised development has tended to be reformulated as individual (behavioral) or social "change".

Now it seems that development is coming back –and with a vengeance. The bilateral and multilateral development industry is largely dominated by the West, but its model for social and economic development is losing legitimacy. The new success model that poor countries aspire to is East Asia. Western efforts to develop Africa have overall been a giant failure, due to the legacy of colonialism that still marks Euro-African relations. Lately, countries like Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana and Zambia, are in a positive moment and seem likely to break the vicious circle of aid dependency, thanks to Asian investors who see Africa not as a miserable recipient of charity, but as the last frontier. South-South partnerships are reshaping the world, while "the West vs. the Rest" mindset prevails in the North, especially after 9/11, which Pieterse describes as a Western *cul de sac*.

Perhaps we are witnessing a "development turn" in communication for development, too. [Wendy Quarry and Ricardo Ramirez](#), well known to the readers of *Glocal Times*, presented findings at the IAMCR congress that potentially "turn decades of communication advocacy on its head". Why is it that participatory communication practices have not been widely adopted, in spite of all the evidence of their virtues?

According to Quarry and Ramirez, it is not that donors don't understand the value of participation; it's simply that they don't want it, because it threatens to disturb their plans. This seemingly discouraging conclusion lead Quarry and Ramírez to further analyze the context within which development initiatives take place, leading them to the revealing assumption that we, communication for development trainers and practitioners, have been looking at the wrong end of the stick: *It is not*

good communication that makes good development; it is good development that breeds good communication. Inspired by Malcolm Gladwell's theory of "the tipping point", Quarry and Ramírez stress the importance of champions –individuals or organizations– that are unusually committed in one place over long time. When champions make change happen, communication flowers.

This should however not be interpreted as a dismissal of the importance of communication, or a call for abandoning the participatory ideal. Communication can certainly help create the conditions for change. But, say Quarry and Ramirez, we first need a compelling case for healthy development programs, projects and organizations. Communication will only sprout when the conditions are right.

Then, of course, the sequel question immediately arises: What is good development? Think about that!

¹ An American journalist, he is an op-ed contributor to "The New York Times" whose column mainly addresses topics on foreign affairs.



SUBMITTED BY: FLORENCIA ENGHEL

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