

Broadening our perspectives in communication and in development

By Karin Gwinn Wilkins¹

As *Glocal Times* celebrates its tenth year of publication, I applaud the contributions of this journal to ongoing dialogue on communication and development within academic and professional communities. Oscar Hemer and Florencia Enghel have championed an inclusive, interdisciplinary approach to considering the key critical questions that matter to our field. Their explicit attention to integrating research with practice signifies an open framework that includes varied experiences in published conversations, distributed through open access digital formats that strengthen their appeal to broad global constituencies.

As an academic field, communication for development has been broadening its scope in terms of the types of strategic engagement considered as well as the ways in which communication has been conceptualized (Wilkins, 2014). Building on historical critiques of dominant development industries and assertions of dialogic processes, in this most recent decade we are exploring social movements and political protests as integral ways in which groups mobilize to engage strategically in transition (Wilkins, 2015). Social change then is more connected with the social and cultural contexts in which people determine how to argue and intervene. While modernization approaches to development have been critiqued within the academic community in light of participatory and dialogic communication ideals, we are only beginning to take politics seriously as an explicit dimension to our field of inquiry.

What we have achieved thus far is a recognition of the ideological foundations through which development interventions are conceptualized and funded. Articulating the implications of neoliberal ideologies to the practice of development has been central to current critiques questioning how significant resources are allocated within global capitalist conditions (Wilkins & Enghel, 2013). We need to elaborate further in our academic work, considering politics not only in terms of assertion of hegemonic control but also as potential for supporting advocacy and resistance. The role of politics in our interventions requires more comprehension of the fluid nature of agents and agencies, in order to advocate the most effective and ethical use of potential resources.

Recently I collaborated with Florencia Enghel on editing a special issue of this journal asking a central critical question: Who benefits from ComDev? Through a critical lens of communication, we encouraged our contributors to consider the implicit benefits and limitations of institutional missions and programs. In this way we sought to articulate dimensions of power more directly, through considerations of experiences among those involved in programs, events, and research.

Explicating politics in our conceptualization of communication as well as of development means broadening our perspectives, not only of our theoretical frameworks but also of our analytic lens. If donors are incorporating the rhetoric of participation, of sustainability, or any other theme resonant with global development discourse, we need to explore potential shifts in praxis as well as in potential cooptation over time. Those of us working in the academic

world have a responsibility to ask the hard questions, about how resources support or undermine social change, what actually happens through the process of intervention, and what we as a community can do to contribute to meaningful change.

References

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