



FROM LOS BAÑOS TO ISTANBUL

Oscar Hemer



Networks and networking are challenging and replacing former hierarchical power structures and modes of organization on a worldwide scale. This fundamental aspect of the sometimes celebrated but more often demonized global transformational processes does of course have implications in the area of research and practice known as *communication for development, development communication* or *communication for social change*.

In September 2005, in Los Baños, the Philippines, two new global networks were formally established under the aegis of the Communication for Social Change Consortium: one for practitioners, one for faculty and graduate students. It may sound solemn, but I am confident that I speak on behalf of all participants when I say that we felt that we were making history. The *Los Baños University Network Statement* drafted at the closure of one of the two meetings held, to be ratified by the twelve participating universities, surely marks a crucial moment in the development of this still young and emerging discipline -or, as I prefer to regard it, this by definition interdisciplinary field of study and practice.

The field has undergone many changes through its short history and is now at a crossroads. After a period of threatening stagnation, we now experience a dynamic phase of renewal, both in terms of theoretical approaches and means of communication. Poverty persists, and some of the global divides of different kinds even tend to widen. But there is undoubtedly a growing awareness among development cooperation agencies -multilateral and bilateral- and the multitude of non-governmental and civil society organizations and initiatives, that media and communication are indispensable for all development policies that aim at democratic participation, inclusion and lasting social change. Yet, as James Deane notes in his analysis of the present predicament of communication for social change, “the increasingly strong rhetoric and strategic dialogue on concepts of participation, voice and inclusion... is rarely matched with the application of those principles in practical development programming”. Deane even suggests that “the institutional impediments to concerted implementation of good communication for development programming are becoming more, not less severe”.

This third issue of *Globala Tider* –soon to be reborn as *Glocal Times*– aims at inventorying the field at the present crossroads, with a focus on

ISSUE 3
February 2006

teaching and learning communication for development. In that spirit, we look into Canada and the Philippines, two countries with rich but quite diverse yet corresponding experiences in this area.

We are especially happy and honored to present a contribution by Nora Cruz Quebral, one of the founding mothers of *devcom* –as it is called in the Philippines. Nora Quebral started her career in the mid 1950s at the Office of Extension and Publications at the then University of the Philippines College of Agriculture, which under her direction would evolve into an academic department and eventually today's full-fledged College of Development Communication. In her reexamining of development communication both as a concept and as a curriculum, developed shortly after September 11, 2001, she lucidly describes the communication challenges of the vulnerable, borderless world of globalization. "The irony of September 11", she says, "is that it succeeded in shoving in our face the harsh proof of our interconnectedness as no treatise or street protest ever could".

Interconnectedness does not necessarily enhance understanding. On the contrary, it seems that the closer we get, the more important it becomes to manifest differing identities. This apparently paradoxical logic of simultaneous globalization and localization – *glocalization*, as Roland Robertson coined it– certainly implies a key role for intercultural and transcultural communication in the urgent call for global change and development. Yet, as James Deane notes, the value and importance of communication remain largely unrecognized, and its status is consequently marginal within most development agencies.

The inspiring challenge for teachers, researchers and practitioners in this dynamic field is to move communication for development and social change to the centre of development thinking and practice. And I would add, to the centre of the contemporary cultural debate. One of the significant recent tendencies in the field is the interest in art and artistic means of communication, an area where theory and practice enter in dialogue and where potentially innovative research is only beginning to take place.

In October 2005, in Istanbul, Turkey, another memorable event illustrated a fruitful convergence of art and academic research: the combined workshop and seminar "Towards a New Balkan Cultural Studies", which formed part of Malmö University's Master program in Communication for Development. Andrew Finkel, a British journalist based in Istanbul, gives us a report of the event –where *truth* and *remembrance* were key concepts.

In the spirit of networking for the advancement of communication for development and social change, this issue of *Globala Tider* makes the symbolic journey from Los Baños, the Philippines, to Istanbul, Turkey. In our September 2006 issue, we shall extend the journey to Durban, South Africa, in accordance with the aims of the newly born Communication for Social Change and Development University Network to "support the strengthening of this interdisciplinary field throughout the world". There,

between November 16 and 20, a combined seminar and workshop will take place as part of the on-going project “Memories of Modernity”, in collaboration between Malmö University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This project, involving ComDev students and artists from Sweden and South Africa, will also result in art exhibitions in Durban and Malmö in 2007. But for now, enjoy the outcomes of Los Baños and Istanbul!

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SUBMITTED BY: FLORENCIA ENGHEL

2006-02-02

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FLORENGHEL(AT)GMAIL.COM
ISSN 1654-7985

