

## Theoretical and methodological approaches between Folkcommunication and Communication for Development (C4D)

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### Abstract

Conceived in the 1960s, a period of great economic and social transformations in Brazil, Folkcommunication was born with the aim of overcoming Communication problems by seeing and understanding the reactions of a people who lived on the margins, without any engagement with the media. In this same period, the coupling of “communication” and “development” seeks a public atmosphere favorable to social transformation in Latin America. Considering that the two theoretical

approaches complement each other, this work proposes a crossing between Folkcommunication and Communication for Development (C4D), based on a literature review. The contribution of this research is based on the recognition of folkcommunication within the perspective of social development and on the appreciation of the dialogue between the two aspects.

**Keywords:** Communication for Development (C4D). Folkcommunication. Developmentalism. Luiz Beltrão.

## Introduction

Among the main foundations of research in communication already conceived, there is the recognition of the power relations of the media when it comes to mass society. The principle of finding out how and by whom such articulations of influence and dominance are built and what is the responsibility of the media communication process – issues that are greatly reinforced by the line of ideas established by the Frankfurt School, both in Europe and in the United States of America (USA) –, was, for a long time, integrated into the perspectives delimiting analysis of the field of study itself.

On the other hand, as illustrated by Umberto Eco (1984), in his well-known work *Apocalyptic and Integrated*, empiricism showed that the various possibilities of construction and dissemination of information, the capacity for dialogue and exchanges between social individuals and institutions, characteristics of the territory and access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), among other issues, place communication as a key process for any form of social organization.

In Latin America, especially, the term Communication for Development (C4D) emerged in the 1960s as a possibility to articulate strategies for engaging social groups in a situation of marginalization in education, economics and politics. It is understood that the means go hand in hand with the processes of social change, especially when these become the basis of developmental projects applied in underdeveloped countries – or in what refers today to those that continue to develop. Consequently, it would be a method of proposing participation, since most of these societies still did not have effective methods to meet a global technological demand.

In fact, on the continent, as highlighted by Omar Rincón (2018, p. 66-67, our translation), communication has always been thought of from its own concepts, processes and rhythms, taking into account people's participation, development and liberation. “[...] a matter not only of means or technologies, but of processes, practices and experiences of culture [...] a communication freed from the media”. In this sense, the pioneering studies by Wilbur Schramm, Daniel Lerner and Everett Rogers, in the 1960s, as well as more recent ones, such as Jan Servaes, in the early 2000s, and Emily McAnany, in the 2010s, are illustrative. Therefore, communication is configured as a basic instrument of transformation with a view to reducing social distinctions.

In Brazil, Luiz Beltrão (1980, 2014), considered a pioneer of Communication Sciences, synthesized different theories and approaches to his reality to propose Folkcommunication as the study of artisanal manifestations of information, opinions, ideas and attitudes of marginalized groups in a period constant political, economic, cultural and social transformations. Among the main contributions of the theory, we highlight the reinterpretation of Paul Lazarsfeld's perspective of opinion leader to the Brazilian reality, the demonstration of the ineffectiveness of the social communication media and the existence of a popular communication system specific to individuals in situations of marginality.

If, on the one hand, Folkcommunication reveals the lack of knowledge and the importance of investigating the artisanal manifestations of communication of the people, on the other hand, it reflects on the obstacle in the sending and circulation of information in society from the media. The research by Flávio Santana (2020) points out a strong relationship between Folkcommunication and the proposal of C4D, in addition to evidence that Beltran's theory was thought of from the perspective of developmentalism, as pointed out by Isabel Amphilo (2010) and Iuri Parente Aragão (2017).

Thus, based on a bibliographic research, this study proposes a cross between Folkcommunication theory and C4D. For the construction of the methodological design, it was necessary to choose the procedures for classifying the material and the researched content. Then, the thematic parameter was defined, whose proposal is based on selecting works that bring ideas and representative concepts according to the themes related to the approaches in this study, without a time frame.

The relevance of this study starts from recognizing Beltrão's pioneering spirit, valuing the dialogue between the two theoretical strands and highlighting that Folkcommunication can be thought of within the perspective of social development.

## **Communication and Development**

Thinking about communication from the perspective of development requires, above all, understanding that developmentalism has different conceptions based on historical periods. For a long time, this notion was related to evolution, considering the level of primitivity and misery, without further questioning how nations would achieve this progress, since only a few countries, North American and European, followed in such a state (BELTRAN, 2006).

It was only after the Second World War that development came to be seen as economic growth, based on technological support. The US intervention stimulated this model with programs aimed at promoting socio-economic development through "assistance" to underdeveloped countries in Latin America, given their independence from European metropolises. According to Celso Furtado (1978, p. 36-37, our translation), "[...] the objective of US policy is to keep its sphere of influence integrated and that the development of this or that country must be considered as a means to this end", which directly affected political and social decision-making.

It should be noted that in Brazil, the press, radio, cinema and, later, television, were supplied with the economic standards of reality (MARQUES DE MELO, 1975). They also served as mechanisms of political domination, regulated to stop the control of the functioning of the State apparatus, prepared to shape a “way of life” focused on capitalist ideology, and its social organization (WERNECK-SODRÉ, 2010). In other words, historically, media played a very important role in the developmental process of developed countries and followed the same logic in dependent countries.

During a historical evolution, development went through three phases, distinct and dependent on each other, classified by Servaes (2004) from some strands and currents that appeared in parallel in different social contexts: (i) economic, related to the theory of modernization; (ii) social and cultural, established by the dependency theory; and (iii) sustainable, recent and contemporary vision. Each of these phases caused a transformation in the concept of the term and implied changes in the ways of governing the previous practice (PERUZZO, 2014; ESCUDERO, 2018).

Despite living through different phases, the understanding of development aimed at progress has remained timeless, since the economic factor – attributed only to increases in the level of income as a necessary condition for progress – has always been seen and understood as one of the main conditions for its reach, and, in most aspects, as development itself.

However, with the maturation of capitalism, in which the income gap deliberated poor and rich countries, even within the so-called industrialized societies themselves, the economic condition of a country or region began to be questioned as insufficient to explain the level of advancement of a population. The United Nations Charter raised important development issues in April 1945, during the San Francisco Conference. It proposed an agreement between nations with measures, in order to avoid threats to international peace and security, to establish better relations between nations and international cooperation – in search of the enhancement of development in every way, whether in the economic, social, cultural or humanitarian sphere – and the promotion of human rights and individual freedoms without distinction of any kind. Since then, the United Nations (UN) has remained committed to the proposals and principles of the charter, considering the concept and the skillful means to achieve development.

In the same period, the political and social demands of Latin America boosted the field of scientific research in Communication, since the strong “signs structural dependence, which evokes a culture of silence and submission, but also of resistance and struggle, are the background of the quest to understand what was happening with communication and demarcates the borders of the emerging field of study” (BERGER, 2001, p. 241, our translation). A context in which the debate about communication within the scope of development arises, when the use of social media, interpersonal or mixed, in economic and social development projects began to be thought.

In spite of it, only in the 1960s did the first theoretical formulations appear in the Communication bias, designed for implementation in development programs in

underdeveloped countries – today understood as nations that are undergoing a process of development. Among the pioneers in this aspect, the studies by Schramm (1976), Lerner (1973) and Rogers (2003) stand out.

Servaes (2004) classifies the CD4 pathway into two major models: the diffusionist and the participatory one. These relate to certain historical periods, in attention to the needs of the time. First, it is important to highlight that the diffusionist model starts from thinking about creating a public atmosphere favorable to transformation through mass media, with the objective of “achieving the modernization of traditional societies through technological advancement, economic growth and progress”. material” (BELTRÁN, 2006, p. 59, our translation).

Thus, the diffusionist model, allied to the Modernization paradigm, contributed to the increase in the flow of information at an international level, from the USA and Europe, based on ideological policies, which spread a pattern of society from these centers. dominant. According to Cicilia Peruzzo (2014, p. 180, our translation), it is from then on that:

The use of mass and interpersonal communication is advocated as vectors for the diffusion of innovations with a view to modernizing societies considered backward, such as the inclusion of technologies and changes in cultural habits in agricultural cultivation, food, consumer products, etc. The use of radio and television was seen as important in spreading new patterns of behavior. These communication vehicles helped, for example, to publicize the idea of the need for birth control, that industrialized milk powder was better for children’s health, car consumption, the use of plastic instead of products based on sisal, smoking adherence by women, among others.

From a cultural point of view, Nelson Werneck-Sodré (2010) points out the changes in Brazilian culture when European influences prior to World War II give way to North American ones. The development of culture, perpetuated in rural areas, starts to be seen as a threat to the so-called modern forms that were inserted in the country, since they implemented and reinforced a policy of submission. Brazilian identity, in this bias, is continuously disfigured, when the “popular” is related to the subaltern classes, the one in which individuals without training and unassisted by developmental practices (ORTIZ, 1985).

Almost all Latin American criticisms developed around the 1970s explain vertical communication as dominant, manipulative, imposing, and, as it is characterized this way, there is no way to think of it outside of economic, political and cultural power (BELTRÁN, 2019; PERUZZO, 2014). Luis Ramiro Beltrán (2006) points out that Juan Díaz Bordenave proposed democratic socialism as an alternative development mode, designed for the community, self-managed and participatory. This perspective consists of transforming vertical communication into horizontal, with the objective of providing opportunities for individuals to send messages (BELTRÁN, 2019) and, thus, promoting interaction, equality

and the maintenance of control between individuals in society, in favor of conscience criticism of the population (BORDENAVE, 1994).

In this same period, the right to communication, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, gained recognition for also establishing a relationship with freedom and equality. Faced with the low rate of communication vehicles in underdeveloped countries, the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) mobilized to stimulate the implementation of communication networks with the aim of promoting changes in socioeconomic structures (MARQUES DE MELO, 1976). The main premise for the effectiveness of communication as a tool for development is based on freedom of expression and the mechanisms of freedom of the ideological modes disseminated by the State and the bourgeoisie, historically formed as a political and hegemonic force.

The right to communication came from the debates conducted by UNESCO, around 1970. Precisely in 1977, an international commission proposed strategies and changes for the redistribution of information flows between developed and underdeveloped countries, in a project called the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Three years later, UNESCO launched the MacBride Report, known as “Many Voices, One world”, based on the discussions of a commission led by Irishman Sean McBride, with the aim of organizing a mapping of the media reality around the world, with reference to in the conceptualization of the notion of the right to communication.

From then on, the theme “communication for development” gains new insights and approaches. The participatory model is no longer just a theoretical approach and starts to be developed in social practices, focusing on “proposals for local development, sustainable development and human development” (PERUZZO, 2014, p. 180, our translation) and the transformation of power structures from the dialogicity proposed by Paulo Freire.

In this sense, it is illustrative the perspective pointed out by McAnany (2012), which emphasizes in his studies on C4D the difference between institutional efforts (development) and permanent and significant changes brought to people from the union between communication, technology, financing, innovation and social organization as strategies carried out from the efforts of local communities to solve their own problems. “This indicates an important distinction [...] between what is done by and for people across institutions and what people do for themselves” (McANANY, 2012, p. 3-4).

As Peruzzo (2014) points out, based on NWICO, the propositions of communication aimed at social transformation have debated the need for national communication policies that favor the needs of peoples. Although, in rural contexts, C4D has been supported by government public policies, alternatives independent of government actions have since then achieved relevance in social development.

It is from this perspective that José Marques de Melo (1976) proposes that governmental priorities should value investments in communication concentrated in unconventional channels, which emphasize utilitarian content, as is the case of Beltrão’s

(2014) proposal in valuing traditional vehicles. of Folkcommunication as mechanisms that can serve as guidance in the mobilization of development, since it is through it that not only the transfer of knowledge is achieved, but also the meaning of its meanings, without being exempt from sociocultural conditioning.

Finally, in view of the propositions presented, the expression “communication for social change” has become an alternative to C4D, with regard to the possibilities for communication to serve as a mechanism for social engagement and participation, in addition to reaffirming the relevance of working with development within the perspective of Communication. This proposition is based on the advancement of global network communication, based on technological convergence, and on the promises of the information society to serve the most varied social groups in the production of knowledge in order to ensure greater engagement and dissemination of information in an environment less centralized (PERUZZO, 2014).

## Folkcommunication and developmentalism

It was in the 1950s that Luiz Beltrão began to record his first scientific writings on the teaching of journalism and to act as a professor in a journalism course<sup>1</sup>, which precede a career of almost 30 years in journalism in Pernambuco. Two years later, the researcher from Pernambuco created the journalism course at the Catholic University of Pernambuco (Unicap) and established greater engagement with teaching and research in Communication (BENJAMIN, 2017).

The first concerns were better evidenced in the book *Iniciação à Filosofia do Jornalismo* (Initiation to the Philosophy of Journalism), released in 1959, in which he raised questions about the devaluation of the ruling elites about the profession, freedom of the press and the social function of journalism, in a period that little was known talked about academic training and its importance for an ethical and responsible practice. For Beltrão (1960), journalistic activity should stand out for carrying out the practice of communication and meeting the needs of the public, taking into account the survival and improvement of peoples, whose elements provide them with the means to invent, produce, modify, structure, print in their subjective a culture, which consequently gains a symbolic dimension to acquire different meanings.

In 1959, UNESCO created the Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina (Ciespal) – founded with the aim of improving the means for carrying out social programs and orienting the population towards development<sup>2</sup>. There, four years later, Beltrão taught one of the modules of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Course for Improvement in Information Sciences, at the invitation of Professor Gonzalo Córdova, and

1 In 1959, Luiz Beltrão began teaching as a professor of journalism at the Faculty of Philosophy N. S. de Lourdes, in João Pessoa-PB (Brazil) (BENJAMIN, 2017).

2 Although the purpose was social development, the scope of Latin America was still in its infancy, strongly supported by the hegemonic North American thought (ARAGÃO, 2017; BERGER, 2001).

published the work *Métodos de enseñanza de la técnica del periodismo* (Methods of teaching the technique of journalism). In the late 1960s, he also published a booklet on Communication Theory (ARAGÃO, 2017).

The experiences cited and, above all, the publication (BELTRÃO, 1960) were essential for Beltrão (2014) to (i) highlight the professional devaluation of journalism and the lack of assistance and technological support “so that messages could be transmitted to places beyond closer social circles”, since these messages “did not pay attention to freedom of the press” (ARAGÃO, 2017, p. 27, our translation), and (ii) question:

How did the rude and tardy populations of the interior of our continental country get information? By what means, through which vehicles did they express their thoughts, their opinions? What kind of journalism, what form – or forms – would meet their vital need for communication? Would this kind of exchange of information and ideas have something in common with journalism, which I have come to classify as “orthodox”? And would it not be a threat to national unity, to developmental programs, to our political ideals and to the very survival of the Brazilian man, as a defined social type, the aloofness in which we, journalists, and our rulers kept ourselves in the face of this enigmatic reality, which is the surreptitious communication of a few million citizens alienated from the thinking of the ruling elites? (BELTRÃO, 2014, p. 74, our translation).

Beltrão (2014), supported by the unequal developmental process and the ideals of communication aimed at valuing economically, politically, socially and culturally invisible individuals, there were communicational disparities, mainly in the Northeast of Brazil, equivalent to a ruling elite that disregarded the alternatives of people’s organization. Communication would be, then, the main problem of contemporary society and, from there, it was possible to observe the existence of two Brazils, one in full development and the other marginalized.

[...] the opposition between State and Nation, between the ruling elites and the urban and rural masses, between the habitual recipients of messages conveyed by conventional means, notably those of mass, and audiences who are blind and deaf to such channels and, apparently, mute and inoperative (BELTRÃO, 1980, p. 15, our translation).

In other words, if in collective communication, the communicative agent carries out the sending of messages, his return is not necessarily a “dialogue”, since there is not a discussion, but an action. “[...] if the people do not react to the suggestions made to them, there are two possibilities: they did not understand the message and therefore did not react, or the message does not meet their needs and demands” (AMPHILO, 2010, p. 70, our translation). Thus,

it is understood that folklore began to play a fundamental role in popular culture that, in addition to being committed to preserving traditional practices, was configured as a form of representation and communicative expression of the people and for the people, faced by their social conditions and possibilities to create, reproduce and contest stereotypes and hierarchies transmitted by mass communication.

According to the 1960 Brazilian Demographic Census, only 35.18% of the population had access to radio and 4.30% to television. Of these, only 7.33% of those who had access to the radio lived in rural areas. In addition, an even more critical situation in terms of access to television: only 0.15% of the rural population owned this device. Furthermore, access to the media was among the factors, but it was not the only problem faced by the Brazilian reality. The lack of basic sanitation meant a serious problem that affected a large part of this population (ARAGÃO, 2017).

Amphilo (2010) points out that Folkcommunication walked in parallel with the development process in Brazil, with the aim of bringing artifices for national integration along with the implementation of public policies. From this point of view, the media could be used as mechanisms for social transformation, since they would have different tools that could bring different groups in society closer together, in consideration of a democratic communication system that is the basis for achieving the developmental projects of the government.

At the same time, research in Latin America through Ciespal was linked to the North American models developed by Mass Communication Research (MCR), in which one of the research interests was based on the effects of the media – personal influence and communicative effectiveness was one of their main concerns (ARAGÃO, 2017). This perspective, led by Paul Lazarsfeld (1964), noted the participation of opinion leaders in electoral decisions. The theories of communication flow in two (two step) or in multiple stages (multistep)<sup>3</sup> started from the understanding of the public's decision making, that is, informal and interpersonal communication was often more influential than exposure to radio or newspaper.

From the perspective of Folkcommunication, Beltrão (2014) pointed out that it was not taken into account that intercommunication employed effective instruments that persisted in other flows, still within the communication process, through a social subject who acted as a representative of a certain group. This leadership, referred to as an indirect influence of the mass media, was constituted as an individual of the same social level who, more likely to receive information from the mass culture, reinterprets the messages in a language closer to the group in a condition of marginalization.

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<sup>3</sup> The theory emerged from understandings about decision-making during a presidential election campaign. Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet understood that informal, personal communication was often more influential than exposure to mass media. Initially, the research considered the existence of mediation by an opinion leader between reception and the media (two-step flow of communication). Next, in consideration of Wilbur Schramm's notes, it was admitted that opinion leaders are gatekeepers and often act in the mediation of information to other leaders, that is, a multi-step communication process (multi-step flow of communication).

According to Aragão (2017, p. 175, our translation), the idea of an opinion leader is strongly related to C4D research, since one of Schramm's proposals "was to find effective people and means for information from campaigns to reach to the receivers". That is, as in Folkcommunication (BELTRÃO, 2014), developmental thinking viewed leaders as translators and figures of relevance in the groups in which they worked. Considering that Folkcommunication emerged in the context of MCR and developmentalism and was strongly influenced by Ciespal, Aragão (2017, p. 180, our translation) concludes that the theory is aligned "with the developmental action defended from the ideas of UNESCO" and approaches the American research for "seeking to understand the effects of communication, making use of the opinion leader idea and proposing methodologies, such as content analysis".

One issue that deserves attention, however, is that there is a tension in Folkcommunication that has not yet been resolved. In the same way that Beltrão (1980, 2014) points out that ruling elites ignore groups that do not integrate into developmental projects, marginalized classes criticize, refuse, contest and resist the imposition of foreign cultures (AMPHILO, 2010; ARAGÃO, 2017; SANTANA, 2020).

In this regard, on the one hand, it is evident that the traditional means of communication fill the space of the absence of mass communication and can be used by the ruling class for the purpose of bringing the people closer, according to Marques de Melo (1976) in alignment with the diffusionist model from C4D. On the other hand, it is suggested to use sociocultural conditioning to enable an effective dialogue through popular communication channels in an educational process, similar to interpersonal communication, as pointed out by Paulo Freire (1983), according to Antônio Hohlfeldt (2012, p. 55, our translation) justifies:

[...] the proximity, trust and identity between sender(s) and receiver(s) is such that it is as if they were just two people, one on each side of the communication process. [...] it is a horizontal process, in which sender and receiver are on the same level, precisely that claim that Paulo Freire had when it came to a true learning process characterized by communication.

This perspective was one of the bases of Roberto Benjamin's (2000) research in Folkcommunication and local development, by proposing to see popular expressions as mechanisms that facilitate the understanding of the local reality, essential in the learning process and in the insertion of efficient public policies. In the same way, Betânia Maciel (2012) proposes to see cultural mediations as a mechanism for local development, together with actors in a situation of marginalization. Thus, the regimentation of potential, through cultural policies, would boost the development and use of capabilities, once

in order to be really well structured and sustainable, the development process must result in incisive consequences that increase the level of social opportunities and

the possibilities of action and competition with other centers of the local economy, increasing income and diversifying the forms of wealth and the possibilities of improving the quality of life, as well as ensuring means of conserving natural resources (MACIEL, 2012, p. 45, our translation).

Both perspectives are visualized in C4D, however, as previously stated, the naive view that diffusionism would contribute to development through its techniques of reaching the masses has been overcome, since contemporary research starts from thinking of a participatory model with the rebirth of multilateral communication practices with a view to social transformation (TUFTE, 2013).

In any case, even if Folkcommunication still presents some limiting factors in its studies, one cannot fail to consider its theoretical-methodological advance and its ability to reach the most diverse objects of study in the mediatized society, and its dialogic capacity with the transformation society for different societies. Hohlfeldt (2012, p. 55, our translation) highlights that

[Folkcommunication] makes it possible to study the communication systems not only of industrialized societies, but of all the others, the same ones in which the different stages of development and industrialization allow the survival of archaic systems - not outdated - coexisting with highly technological systems.

Therefore, Folkcommunication is observed as one of the mechanisms that supply the CD4 field, with regard to the methods of recognition and cultural valorization of peoples in circumstances of communicational invisibility. In it, the mechanisms of artisanal communication are understood as providers of access to information and possibilities for public interaction in decision-making in the political and social sphere. So to speak, the theory starts from the objective of thinking about its own methodologies aimed at understanding the demands of regionalities in the dissemination of information, in the orientation of public opinion and in the promotion of the common good.

## **Final considerations**

The reflections presented here reaffirm that Beltran's theory started from thinking about culture in the context of development, since in the Brazilian social context the manifestations of the people were disregarded by the ruling elite and in Latin America it was open to discussions that sought to value different cultures. In this aspect, it is understood that the questioning of Folkcommunication, regarding communicational exclusion, aims to suppress communicational problems between individuals in society. For this, governmental priorities

must invest in the valorization of traditional Folkcommunication vehicles in the orientation and mobilization of development.

It is believed that the notions of C4D allied to Folkcommunication contribute to the critical perception of the communication process and its effects on society, mainly because it is about not only understanding social relations, but also understanding sociopolitical and socioeconomic aspects. Thus, the discussion between the perspectives demonstrates that communication goes hand in hand with the processes of social change and both perspectives can play a representative role in development policies, either through the diffusionist or through the participatory model.

It is inferred that the aspects, on the one hand, started from thinking about actions that propose voice and participation to citizens, especially to social groups that were on the sidelines. Through principles and practices interpenetrated in the dynamics of media communication, institutions have become important spaces for development and social transformation. On the other hand, the importance of transforming vertical communication into horizontal communication was demonstrated to promote social participation.

Among Beltrão's main contributions (1980; 2014), the importance of the Brazilian experience in relation to studies in Latin America stands out. It is recognized that, in fact, there is a possible dialogue between the two aspects and that both complement each other and seek the same end: to demonstrate the relevance of communication as a tool for social organization, dialogue and participation, reflecting on a dialogic communication as method of promoting structural change in society.

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### **Authors' contribution**

Santana, F.: conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review e editing; Escudero, C.: writing – original draft, writing – review e editing; Fernandes G. M.: writing – original draft, writing – review e editing.

### **Data availability**

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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