

Communications theories in Spain

GARCÍA JIMÉNEZ, L. *Las teorías de la comunicación en España: un mapa sobre el territorio de nuestra investigación (1980-2006)*. (Communication theories in Spain: a map of the territory of our research). Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 2007. 311 p.

ISBN: 978-84-309-4654-9

By Miquel Rodrigo Alsina, professor of Communication Theory at the Pompeu Fabra University.

A little over a quarter of a century ago, communication studies achieved university rank in Spain, specifically in the 1971-1972 academic year. Since then, and especially as from the nineties, doctoral theses and specialist publications have proliferated spectacularly, especially in university centres. That's why, today, we can state that there is enough critical mass for communication research to start to demand to be included within social sciences and humanities. When we talk of critical mass, perhaps it would be clearer to employ a metaphor other than the usual one, different from that of physics, as it is not a question of achieving a nuclear chain reaction. Critical mass might be the demonstrations held by cyclists in order to claim a greater presence of bicycles in towns and cities (social sciences and humanities). In view of the dominance on the road of motor vehicles (sociology, history, economics, etc.), cyclists band together to take over the streets. This sense of critical mass was coined in the nineties by the North American George Bliss, to name a phenomenon he had observed in China. There, at crossroads without any traffic lights, cyclists gradually gather until there are enough of them to cross without risk. In this respect, the volume of research per se is significant, and perhaps the time has come for communication researchers to unite and act in order to take over the streets from social sciences and humanities.

So, beyond the mistrust that can still be seen today in other social sciences, communication sciences in Spain have reached adulthood. However, to acquire public visibility, these lists of major events need some milestones. The work of Dr. Leonarda García Jiménez *Las teorías de la comunicación en España: un mapa sobre el territorio de nuestra investigación (1980-2006)* undoubtedly fulfils this function in the history of Spanish research, because it holds

up a mirror to us and makes us aware of who we are and what we are like. This detailed and in-depth research is an undeniable opportunity.

Any reader who wishes to know the status of communication research in Spain can find their answer in this book. One of its key characteristics, as you will observe, is the thoroughness of the author's work. So the first part of the book, entitled "Epistemological and contextual keys to communication theories" presents to the reader, exhaustively, all the steps necessary to define the discipline. In the first chapter, which corresponds to this part, the object of study of communication research is defined, already is a considerable ontological challenge in itself. In the second chapter, the author provides her epistemological choice, in favour of communicology. Although this concept is not defended in the book (which, we must say in passing, has not had the success it deserves), the disciplinary order of communication theories is proposed. To end this first part, the third chapter contextualises communication within the characteristics of today's society. I would like to focus briefly on this chapter, because I believe it is of singular importance. The contextualisation of the social reality in which research is framed is fundamental, which basically gives meaning to communication studies. The importance of communication and information has never been as widely accepted as it is today. As highlighted in this chapter, the centrality of media communication in our society is unquestionable. There is great social consensus that we live in a society of communication and information. But the importance of this reality does not have, as its logical correlation, the prioritisation in research programmes to develop and innovate this object of study. This contradiction is one of the difficulties that communication research must face.

In the second part of this book, the question of "Communication theories in Spain: who we are, where we come from and where we are going" is tackled. The title cannot be more explicit. In this part, first I would like to highlight the large amount of information the author has processed, ordered and systemised. Secondly, we must recognise that this classification provides us with a highly complete map of Spanish research. This proposed classification is minutely detailed in the fourth chapter. Chapter five explains the results of the aforementioned classification: an X-ray of Spanish research, the most exact that has been carried out

to date. So we discover not only the main trends but also the most notorious weaknesses, such as the little international presence of Spanish research. The last chapter in this second part has the added value of asking the authors of Spanish research about their perception of the state of affairs for their own activity. So, via the Delphi method, a selection of researchers are consulted concerning the situation of Spanish research. This self-recognition is fundamental in order for the discipline to achieve scientific recognition. There seems to be agreement that communication studies have become institutionalised and that this has consolidated the field of research. The existence of communication faculties, a large number of research studies, plus publication of work on the subject, etc. leads us to think that enough critical mass has been produced to demand greater recognition among social sciences and humanities. Although we must accept that, for this reason, we must continue working and at an even better standard, and particularly publish in those media with greater international impact. Undoubtedly it is not a question of propitiating a confrontation between disciplines, but rather of claiming a space next to other disciplines of social sciences, such as political science, sociology, etc. and human sciences (history, anthropology, etc.).

To do so, two of the endogenous problems of the discipline in Spain must be overcome: the lack of a well-defined identity and little reflection on the current state of affairs. The first task (which, as I have pointed, is also tackled by this book) makes consensus necessary of the epistemic community of communication sciences, while the second already has an inevitable milestone in the work by Dr. Leonarda García Jiménez. So, the first step has already been taken: it's a question of continuing to encourage high quality research and to continue critically analysing such production. Another of the milestones that must be taken into account is the setting up of the Spanish Association of Communication Researchers at a recent congress at the start of 2008. So the epistemic community is starting to organise itself.

It is very probable that, if communication sciences manage to overcome their own internal deficiencies (definition of identity, more exchange, encouraging collective efforts, etc.) they will be able to project the results obtained. In other words, by overcoming their own limitations, they will be recognised by other disciplines. There is no doubt that this

last step must be preceded by dialogue with the rest of the social sciences, which is a new challenge that communication sciences must conquer. One last note concerning this aspect: the recognition of communication as a science is not for the sake of purely vain self-admiration but the conviction underlying this initiative, namely that the advancement of scientific knowledge is accumulative and that this advancement comes about by confronting old and new contributions. And the history of science has shown us that these initiatives to accumulate, to confront, to exchange, principally occur via shared platforms, via a common space that, in our case, is personified in communication theories. That is why we need to know where we are starting from and what we are like, and hence the importance of this book.