Chapter 13

Communication, Information and Sustainability:
A Geographical Perspective on Regional Communication Policies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter, recognizing that the main communication concepts are deeply geographical in their inner nature, has the intent of introducing an analysis of the connection there should be between geography, communication, organization and sustainability. The author will use the geography of information as the main framework to detect these links and to present the analysis of a regional communication infrastructure to understand how the Internet can be pivotal to communication and local development strategies. The analysis will present regional communication policies, projects and practices to understand if these are positive or negative forces for a regional sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional world of information has been completely transformed since the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have pervaded the whole society. This 'revolution' has produced adjustments and changes in political, economic, financial and social terms, from the local to the global scale of analysis, changing the way information itself is considered and used in society.

There is neither a linear nor a causal correlation between development, technological dissemination, and social changes, but there is rather a multitude of complex connections between each element of the analysis.

The territorial and spatial effects produced by new technologies have also been studied by geographical sciences. Beyond the cultural tradition in which each work can be filed, and the different theoretical perspectives and methodologies adopted by each researcher, there should be a research for the identification of a common thread, language, structure, framework or paradigm that will link together various works. In general, a common thread should be the recognition of the analyzed reality's complexity that makes it difficult to simplify differ-

ent and various concepts in a very extreme way and leads to inter- and multi-discipline. Since communication issues present many geographical aspects and concepts (space/place, distance/proximity, inclusion/exclusion, local/global), the main aim of the chapter is to introduce a different theoretical structure which develops in a new light the dialectical interpretations of previous concepts with the intention of proposing a different point of view to scholars of many fields, first of all to organizational communication researchers.

In the following paragraphs, I will try to introduce and trace the recent development in the field of geography of information (or Information Society) and its multi-discipline aspects. Using the main concepts, theories, approaches of this field of research, it should be possible to make different social sciences 'communicate' to have a more complete view of the analyzed reality, especially from the perspective of sustainable communication and development.

In the second section I will define what geography of information is, and how it can be useful in studying communication processes and phenomena. I will introduce the main framework of analysis and present three spatial concepts used in the following example (networks, flows, and information).

In the third section I will introduce the analysis of a regional communication system. The focus is on the organization based on the Internet and the main applications used to develop the basic infrastructure of future communication and information projects. Then I will analyze the communication policies and initiatives of the regional government to understand: how they use the network (the Internet) to mould regional and local organizational structures; how and if regional communicational policies are coordinated with local ones; what kind of communication means local places have to boost their local development. I finally highlight the existing difficulties in coordinating different scales of governance, especially if investments

are driven from the top to develop only new technological infrastructures, without any initiative to spread the knowledge and culture of communication and information processes to local stages of government.

A GEOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The main idea of this chapter is to present and use the geography of information as the main framework to link together and read in a different perspective the three main concepts of the book: sustainable development (sustainability), communication (organization) and flows (mobility of people, information, etc.).

In fact, the topic is strictly connected to the objectives of geography of information, which is related to the analysis of relationships between receivers and senders, flows, infrastructures, technology and networks (Bakis & Vidal 2007; Graham & Marvin, 1996; Kellerman, 1993, 2000, 2002; Kellerman & Paradiso, 2007; Paradiso, 2003a, 2003b; Paradiso & Wilson, 2006; Zook, 2000a, 200b, 2001). Since communication is today more than ever central to the social, economic and political developments of a community at different scales (local, regional, national, meso, international and global), geography should be of interest for other disciplines to read similar events from a different point of view.

Communication is strictly connected to geography, even if it refers to the most immaterial network we know – the Internet, since it is embedded in territories and involves people from different cultures and places, who use the same technologies starting from and depending on different levels of economic growth (Castells, 2000). This means that communication depends on the territories where senders, receivers and technical equipments are located and on how the actors connect and use the technology to communicate and create new paths of local development.

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