

Bolivian Radios Building Citizenship

In a new book: "Popular Radio in the construction of citizenship", Carlos Camacho explores the experience of the Bolivian Association of Educational Radio (ERBOL) and the role of radio in democracy, education and citizen participation.

The book details how globalisation in politics, economics, culture and technology brings a promising and challenging, if unexpected, multiplication of the areas in which citizenship is exercised. In this framework, and with a backdrop of democracies in the process of definition, Media assume powerful roles in social change. In the case of Latin American nations, where poverty persists as a predominant characteristic, a large part of what people experience in their immediate reality and know of distant environments comes from the media however only elite sectors have access, use and control over these advanced resources of the so-called digital revolution.

Not only that, but citizens find themselves disorientated, under-represented and with have great difficulties presenting and managing their legitimate demands. Democracy, reduced to an occasional electoral ritual, still owes a lot to the only objective that gives it any meaning, that of achieving dignity and freedom for all. Citizenship, understood as being the relationship of the people with power and in terms of rights and obligations, is one of the pillars of a construction that is still waiting to be built: a society for justice, development and participation.

This truly subversive project, aspiring not only to renovate institutions and their work but to overcome inequalities and deep barriers, cannot be conceived or realised without the inclusion of the media as promoters and supervisors of the citizenship which is where this will happen. In Bolivia the struggle for the rights of citizenship included the miners union radios 50 years ago, being pioneers in this field and then later peasant farmer, factory worker, church and community radios.

Radio, in a country of oral culture and memory, with a low-income population affected by educational, cultural and social exclusions and lacking in basic infrastructure, has become not only the favourite of audiences but a privileged forum, school and window to the world. WACC has supported Carlos Camacho's research.

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