OPORTUNIDADES Y DESAFÍOS RELEVANTES DE LA EDUCACIÓN PARA LA COMUNICACIÓN CIUDADANA COMO CONCRECIÓN DE UNA AGENDA DE DESARROLLO LOCAL SOSTENIBLE

🆔 **María Elena López León.** *Universidad de la Habana, Cuba.*

Manuel Paulino Linares Herrera. *Academia de ciencias de Cuba, Cuba.*

Felisa Junco Martínez. *Universidad de la Habana, Cuba.*

RESUMEN

La concepción del uso de las TIC con el propósito de formar sujetos capaces de interactuar con ellas para el ejercicio de la crítica, la creatividad y la responsabilidad social. El empleo de La Educación para la Comunicación como principio rector, para comprender la relación entre los actores del proceso de comunicación (relación entre los productores, el proceso productivo, su producto y la recepción de los mensajes en circularidad constante), así como en el campo pedagógico, el asumido por los programas de formación de receptores autónomos y críticos frente a los medios digitales. El estudio del uso de las TIC desde un enfoque humanista sustentado en la teoría de las mediaciones sociales, como modelo de aprendizaje que sitúa al sujeto como centro del proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje (PEA), permitiendo lograr una formación cultural-cívico-pedagógico concebida a partir del principio de contribuir a la formación de un individuo con capacidades para transformar las estructuras y sistemas de comunicación en la sociedad. Es la razón de ser de presente artículo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: educación para la comunicación; mediaciones; comunicación para el cambio social; TIC.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 2004 and 2018, different international and national authors have contributed to substantiating the importance of EPC (Education for Citizen Communication) in citizen empowerment. They have critiqued dominant conceptions of citizen participation, assuming an understanding of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as socio-technical platforms integrated into their political, economic, and socio-cultural environment. Extensionist projects such as Alma Mater and Escaramujo in Cuba, as well as the case study of the Ómnia-Barrio el Raval Community in Barcelona in 2007, serve as precedents for the research on Education for Citizen Communication mediated by ICT. The proposal of the EPCc (Education for Citizen Communication) model is presented as a contribution to local development.

In Cuba, there is a limited development of institutional experiences in the use of ICTs with a humanistic approach aimed at forming individuals capable of interacting and utilizing communication resources through the exercise of critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility.

The lack of formal policies oriented towards educational work with digital media has led to experiences in Communication Education that are more aligned with the interests of the entities that conceive or implement them, rather than the needs of the individuals. As a result, there is a predominant institutional mediation in the conception and implementation of such experiences, which hampers the active participation of the recipients/users.

The lack of systematicity in the experiences of Education for Citizen Communication within *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica*, as a mediating entity in the use of ICTs for individuals from socially vulnerable communities, has resulted in practices that lack evaluation and analysis. This absence hinders the understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, main contributions, and particularities.

Furthermore, the absence of methodological strategies that contribute to the development of Education for Communication in individuals from vulnerable communities within an institution *like Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica,* which focuses on educational work through digital media, further underscores the need for the proposed research. This research aims to address these challenges and investigate the development of effective strategies for communication education in vulnerable communities.

This would involve a socio-educational proposal, based on the principles of a transformative culture[1,] which according to Ibáñez (2004), acts as a catalyst in the process of citizen empowerment, contributing to developing levels of understanding of the reality in which they participate. It fosters critical action to overcome levels of poverty and inequality, leveraging their lived experience to creatively contribute to alternative solutions.

For this purpose, support in the use of ICT is essential, based on a developmental learning approach[2], (Castellanos, Reinoso, & García, 2000), Information and communication technologies would be used as mediation in a non-formal educational context such as the *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica*, following Martínez de Toda's (1998) proposal, to help shape individuals who are media-literate, conscious, active, critical, social, and creative. This would contribute to Cuba's desire to play an important role in the field of human and social communication, while enhancing its image as a nation with ample capacity for the development and use of information and communication technologies, in pursuit of a prosperous and sustainable society.

---

[1] That culture which helps to understand and act critically in the current context, to overcome inequality and domination, as a result of lived experience, a transforming culture as a link resulting from the union of utopia with the concrete reality in need of being overcome, an operation which favours the participation of those who most feel the social reality, which would serve as a point of connection between educational action and social action.

[2] Learning that guarantees in the individual the active and creative appropriation of culture, favouring the development of constant self-perfection and autonomy, in intimate connection with the necessary processes of socialisation, commitment and social responsibility.

2. OBJECTIVES

To explore, describe, and analyze the impact of using ICT within a developmental employment approach on the integration of individuals from vulnerable communities into society, through a conscious and planned Education for Citizen Communication process mediated by the *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica.*

3. METHODOLOGY

From the perspective of communication for social change, education for communication as a practice within the *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica* program could significantly contribute to citizen empowerment, participatory construction of communicative ecosystems, increased involvement of local actors to enhance their community engagement, and the inclusion of these sectors in local development.

This report, resulting from a communication-based research, approaches the object of study, education for citizen communication mediated by ICT, from an interpretative epistemological perspective. It is embraced due to its capacity to understand reality as dynamic and diverse, with a keen interest in the meaning of human actions and social practice. It is characterized by a researcher-subject relationship, democratic and communicative participation between the researcher and the subjects under investigation. The study employs techniques such as interviews and systematic observation for empirical data collection in a case study as the primary method of information analysis.

The research design corresponds to a unique global descriptive case study, as it is pertinent for deepening the understanding of communicative processes and competency-building in a vulnerable environment and obtaining relevant information to support the proposal. The case selection was the result of analysis and discussion with specialists from the Provincial Directorate of *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica* in Havana, who deemed it appropriate to work at the Central Computing Palace: an institution located in the Centro Habana municipality of the capital. This institution serves as a testing ground for any strategy to be implemented by the National Directorate, and it has the infrastructure to support any actions carried out during the research.

The research rationale was informed by the Historical-Logical thinking method for systematizing the theoretical-referential foundations of the main conceptual nuclei of the investigation. The Analysis-Synthesis method was used to understand phenomena and elements related to the problem, determine their dimensions and indicators, and process the results based on the application of instruments. The Inductive-Deductive method was employed to achieve necessary abstractions and generalizations that reveal the observances and discrepancies of the education for communication process at international and national levels, while unifying criteria regarding its potential to impact local development. It also helps identify points of rupture and continuity between the existing Cuban model and the model under construction.

4. DISCUSSION

It is the political will of Cuba to develop the computerization of society, a reality that is currently evident in concrete advancements. This process, which permeates ideological, economic, and social transformations, is an unquestionable principle of the Government, whose main priority is to ensure access to information and communication technologies for the population, to put the Internet at the service of all, and to achieve an effective and genuine integration of Cubans in that space.

The development of a comprehensive policy for the improvement of the computerization process of society, approved by the Council of Ministers on February 28, 2017, has become a weapon to defend this national will, as a set of aspects have become the *raison d'être* and priority of the Cuban government, namely: guaranteeing cybersecurity against risks and threats of all kinds; ensuring technological sustainability and sovereignty; enhancing citizens' access to the use of ICT; developing tangible resources; expanding and modernizing all spheres of society in support of the country's priorities; and integrating research, development, and innovation with the production and commercialization of products and services.

To achieve and maintain these results, it is necessary to implement and execute a series of actions aimed at preserving the development of the policy of computerization of Cuban society.

Hence, the research aims to demonstrate how the educational virtuality that digital media possess facilitates the development of communicative and participatory competences that individuals and vulnerable groups are especially in need of, which are an essential part of development, provided that there are institutional strategies and practices that enhance them.

The proposal aims to explore information and communication technologies, leveraging their potential through a specific educational-cultural alternative: transformative education (TE), understood as an education focused on the individual's learning through problematic situations that generate the capacity for the development of skills enabling them to identify and solve practical life situations (Castellanos, 2000). In this sense, it is not only about how to use ICT in an educational way or how to adapt to new sociocultural realities, but also about turning *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica* into active and transformative cultural agents by engaging in existing social networks, including local and virtual ones, and critical social movements as a contribution to citizen empowerment that supports the process of computerization of Cuban society.

By assuming Education for Citizen Communication as a practice and educational process aimed at enabling community members to participate creatively and critically in the use of technological and traditional tools, with the goal of contributing to the formation of an engaged individual with the ability to transform their reality, identified with humanistic values and ethical behaviors, social equity, and social justice that contribute to local development (López, 2016a), and contextualizing it within the Cuban model, it can be observed that:

- Cuba has early recognized the convenience and necessity of mastering and integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into social practice and achieving a digital culture as an essential characteristic of the "new man," which would bring our society closer to the goal of sustainable development.
- A development project that is based on social justice, popular participation, equity, and solidarity has designed and implemented strategies to transform knowledge and ICTs into instruments for revolutionary advancement and profound transformations.
- A model of conceptualizing economic development that acknowledges and promotes the implementation of policies for the country's infotechnological development.
- The existence of a policy for the computerization of Cuban society that supports structured transformation for development.
- The existence of a communication policy that recognizes Social Communication as an important component of the economic and social development process, serving as a strategic resource for the State, Government, institutions, companies, political organizations, and media.
- The strategic work of the JCCE in the process of society's computerization.
- The Central Palace of Computing as a space for convergence with a structure and infrastructure suitable for creating a comfort zone within its social objective in the municipal and neighborhood context, building on the institution's experience in community engagement.
- The *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica* provides IT support for the development of other social and cultural programs.
- Preparing the younger generations in the use of ICTs and employing them to enhance the quality of the educational process are elements aimed at securing the country's future.

All of the above leads us to reconsider the possible challenges for the local context:

- Positioning Education for Communication as a fundamental tool to achieve collective awareness as a contribution to social change.
- Increasing the number of institutional experiences in the use of ICT to achieve the formation of individuals capable of interacting and using communication resources through critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility.
- Achieving coordination among the actors involved in the computerization process of Cuban society (Education, Culture, Government, and JCCE).
- Incorporating essential social communication content in the curriculum at different educational levels and in cadre training.
- Ensuring decision-makers understand communication as a cross-cutting axis of development, not just as dissemination.
- Raising the visibility of JCCE as a fundamental social actor in the process of social change, serving as a mediator in citizen empowerment through its position as a means of communication.
- Achieving a communicational culture that facilitates possibilities for citizen empowerment, contributing to a higher quality of life.
- Establishing mechanisms for interaction between the Government, other social actors, and citizens.

The reference to a community in conditions of social vulnerability necessarily calls for the integration of all socially vulnerable sectors that form said community, including older adults, children, people with disabilities, school dropouts, migrants, among others. This is why this analysis leads us to create mechanisms of regulation and control that allow us to face the challenges and opportunities in the field of education for communication, which, from a model of Education for Citizen Communication[3], foresees the integration of all local actors in function.

Therefore, the education of a citizen based on the proposal of Martínez de Toda (1998) is necessary to help shape a subject who is media literate, conscious, active, critical, social, and creative. This would contribute to the development of the Cuban will to play an important role in the field of human and social communication, while also contributing to the improvement of its image as a nation with broad capacity for the development and use of information and communication technologies, towards a prosperous and sustainable society.

It is appropriate to express that the *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica* constitutes an alternative adopted as support for the computerization of Cuban society, due to their condition as spaces of free access to new information and communication technologies. Given their acceptance and the preponderant role they assume as mediators in this educational process, with a significant impact on reducing the digital divide, they have become the computer for the Cuban family. From this perspective, it is decided to analyze, review, and systematically observe the contribution of this organization to the formation of a citizen capable of interacting with these technological resources, to be used in the exercise of criticism, participation, and creativity as a contribution to citizen empowerment.

Since its inception, the program has maintained a firm mission to provide computer literacy to the community, with priority given to children and young people, playing an active, creative, and value-forming role in the process of computerizing Cuban society.

Based on the defining principles of:
- Universalization
- Shared responsibility
- Participation
- Transversality
- Social inclusion

It has been established as an institution based on three specific lines of action, aimed at achieving the objectives set according to the principles listed above. These lines of action are:

Social and Employment Insertion Line: It provides the population with a set of useful information resources for job search and integration into the labor market. Additionally, one of the courses offered by this institution is recognized by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security to guarantee access to certain job opportunities (Microcomputer Operator Course).

---

[3] Research carried out by the author in option to the scientific degree of Doctor in Communication Sciences December 2018 at the University of Havana.

Community Use Line: This line characterizes the institution's work philosophy the most. It offers spaces and accessibility support for individuals, entities, groups, and communities.

Training Line: This line is transversal to the other two lines, providing them with support and consistency. It offers medium-term and short-term courses, workshops, interest circles, postgraduate courses, among others, that allow for broader and more flexible training itineraries suitable for the reality and demand of individuals and the community.

As an organization, it works towards greater access to ICT based on the socialization of computer equipment, information exchange, the generalization of positive experiences, and total accessibility. It promotes the social, massive, and inclusive use of computing and the Internet, placing it above the market-driven and individual use of these technologies. This experience allows more Cubans to access this space to expand their knowledge and culture.

The development achieved by the *Joven Club de Computación y Electrónica* in terms of connectivity, the high level of preparation of their technicians and specialists, the extensive experience in providing computer services to the Cuban population, the distribution of their facilities throughout the national territory, and the scope of their data transmission network are key factors that facilitate the structuring of mass access services for Cuban society to the Cuban Network. Through this program, with thirty years of experience in community work, the mediation forms are objictified through the use of ICT in Education for Communication, contributing to the formation of an active, critical, committed, media-literate subject identified with humanistic values and behaviors that contribute to local development based on its principles and lines of action. In other words, educommunicative practices from the perspective of Community Informatics.

Proposal for an educommunicative model for the local environment through the mediation of *Joven Club*.

Mechanisms and Conditions	Expected results	Operating Strategies
Offering complementary training for the development of basic skills for better educational and social performance.	. Subjects with the capacity to exercise citizenship belonging to any age group. . Subjects with some kind of physical or cognitive disability. . State and private organisations	Validation and regular application of complementary training spaces and programmes and/or training in the use of ICTs for citizen empowerment.
Community agenda for safe environments for the coexistence of children, adolescents and young people, with intergenerational participation.	Context of operation of the model with conditions for the coexistence and recreation of children, adolescents and young people, adults and older adults.	Sensitisation and mobilisation of local actors for the design and implementation of a community agenda for the improvement of security and prevention of violence in the community environment, with intergenerational participation through the use of ICTs.
Space in which to operate the model	Space properly equipped with infrastructure for creative and constructive interaction of the population.	Fitting out local infrastructure for social interaction.
Operational management structure responsible for the proper implementation of the intervention mechanisms and the achievement of the agreed goals.	Effective and efficient implementation of the model in all its components.	Formation, training, accompaniment and supervision of the human and technical resources that make up the model's operational management structure.
System for monitoring and evaluation of results and impact, to determine the contribution of the Model in its various elements, in local development.	Identification and substantiation of the results and impact of the application of the model in the local context.	Implementation of systematic strategies for evaluation and accountability to local actors.
Strategic Management Platform from the Local Government, with the participation of local actors for the sustainable operation of the Model.	Publicly-formed Strategic Management Platform that guarantees the resources and assumptions of success of the Model.	Identification and mobilisation of the municipality and other key local actors in the consolidation of a strategic management platform for the resources and actions required by the Model for its effectiveness and sustainability.

The working conception of this institution fully coincides with the dimensions of EPC (Education for Communication), as stated by Martínez de Toda and assumed by the author as conditioning factors for EPCc work. However, these dimensions are unknown to the specialists at Joven Club, which diminishes the quality of their services, as they are planned spontaneously in compliance with directives issued by the higher authority.

A proper education in communication, aimed at developing analysis of media and new communication technologies, should, contrary to those who see them as didactic solutions in schools and sources of entertainment in families, address the following: problematize the content of the media to distance oneself from the naturalized conception

> they present of themselves; de-ideologize their messages, which tend to legitimize and reinforce "certain" attitudes, behaviors, and ideas about the world; highlight the interconnections between the media and commercial, business, financial, and political frameworks to reveal their supposed "independence" and "neutrality" (García, 2010).

EPC would greatly contribute to alleviating situations such as those mentioned before, fostering in young people attitudes and stereotypes that align with the customs and idiosyncrasies of the country, rather than with the models dictated by mass media.

5. CONCLUSIONS- RESULTS

The role of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) in local democracy can be the driving force behind innovative forms of participation and governance that favor diversity and the quality of community work within the framework of local development.

The process of computerization of society becomes an alternative for social inclusion. These experiences operate according to local culture and community needs.

Joven Club constitutes an alternative that supports the computerization process of society. It was created to provide computer literacy to the community, with a priority focus on children and young people, playing a creative role in the formation of values.

Education for Communication, within the framework of quality education, has as its fundamental function the formation of critical awareness and the development of active and creative attitudes in individuals to understand and comprehend the enveloping communication processes of today's society.

Education for Citizen Communication constitutes a practice and educational process aimed at allowing community members to participate creatively and critically in the use of technological and traditional tools, in order to contribute to the formation of committed individuals who possess the abilities to transform their reality, identify with humanistic values and behaviors, and promote social equity and justice, thus contributing to local development.

The Cuban model of EPC is expressed through local actors recognized throughout the country. It consists of national, provincial, municipal, and neighborhood-level structures that adapt to the context in which the experience takes place and respond to decision-makers. Each of these actors is characterized by how, where, with whom, and for whom the process is developed, which highlights the lack of a unified structure. Its implementation often depends on empirical and spontaneous actions.

Research on the behavior of EPC practices in Cuba as part of a universal citizen empowerment process allows us to affirm that the Cuban experience lacks integration and is characterized by dispersion and intermittence in its development. Among the most critical aspects, we can mention the lack of clarity in long-term objectives, limited sustainability, and the absence of a strategic line that provides coherence and a comprehensive vision. By identifying the potential of this communication field and its direct influence on local development, a rupture can be established between the current acting model and the proposed model for the use of Joven Club, which can contribute to transforming individuals at risk of social vulnerability into agents of local development.

The process of EPCc, based on the dimensions that cut across it and with a participatory approach in the transformation processes of the community, appropriately channeled through the implementation of the municipal development strategy, can be a powerful tool for consolidating citizen participation. By achieving its intentions, it can foster more conscious, active, critical, social, and creative individuals who can influence the sociocultural transformation of the locality, thus becoming a driving force behind communication processes for social change.

In the current Cuban context, EPCc must be able to recognize both communication and social changes and, based on its flexibility, act as a catalyst in the transformation process of individuals as a condition to embrace changes and participate in the local scenario by implementing actions in favor of development.