#### How to Cite:

Incio, F. A. R., Navarro, E. R., Arellano, E. G. R., & Meléndez, L. V. (2021). Participatory communication as a key strategy in the construction of citizenship. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 5(S1), 890-900. https://doi.org/10.37028/lingcure.v5nS1.1473

# Participatory Communication as a Key Strategy in the Construction of Citizenship

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**Abstract**---This research set out to analyze the importance of participatory communication as a critical strategy in the construction of citizenship through an exhaustive review of the specialized literature; whose purpose was to update the knowledge related to citizenship and its structure, participatory communication and its contribution to the construction of citizenship, as well as updated approaches to participatory communication. The scientific information supporting the study results was fundamentally extracted from scientific journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, Scielo, Redalyc, and Dialnet. All citations and bibliographic references were managed using Mendeley. As preliminary results, it is found that participatory communication facilitates the integration and cohesion of the communities, based on joint projects, decision-making, participation, and actions that benefit citizens. It is concluded that citizenship is in constant change depending on the citizen; also, that it is essential to recover the relationship between citizenship and participation in pursuit of socio-cultural development; likewise, that community participation must be legitimate, holistic, and inclusive; also, that the contribution of communication lies in the dynamization of social actors; finally, that participatory communication approaches make it possible to dynamize the determining social behaviors to achieve social empowerment.

**Keywords**---building citizenship, citizenship, communication, participatory communication, social communication.

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Manuscript submitted: 18 May 2021, Manuscript revised: 27 August 2021, Accepted for publication: 09 Sept 2021 890

#### Introduction

Currently, communication presupposes the subjects' active participation in the interaction process, which goes from the personal and individual to the collective. Participatory communication then becomes an instrument that facilitates the integration and cohesion of communities, based on joint projects, decision-making, participation, and actions that benefit all citizens, thus contributing to building a better society (Ponte, 2004). The main intention of participatory communication is to mobilize social actors against the established powers, all this from the dynamization of their groups (López Rojas, 2012). The organization for mobilization purposes recognizes the active participation of social actors within the community, whose primary goal is to train citizenship.

This work addresses the need to generate new knowledge that helps to improve relations between citizens, based on the theory of participatory communication. In this sense, various theorists have focused on studying communication as a fundamental process in constructing citizenship in societies (Coleman, & Borman, 2000; Yildirim, 2014). Therefore, a conceptual journey was developed about the multiple notions of citizenship, understanding that this is not a new topic but an ancient concept that emerged as the city's emergence in Classical Greece. At that time, citizens met to talk and discuss issues of socio-cultural relevance, especially to seek the good of their fellow citizens and their city (Quiroz Gómez, 2018). Indeed, the concept of citizenship is not current. However, we can see that its purpose has not changed at all; today, what is sought with good citizen practices is the common good of the social actors within the system where they are unwrapped.

We can make an initial sketch of the relationship between the concepts of communication and citizenship, when it is indicated that the life of the human being is not possible without the relationship in society, which cannot be developed without communication and, in the same sense, nor can current democracy create without citizenship processes (Sánchez & Guido, 2015). This position, a priori, establishes a relationship between communication and citizens based on their influence on society, without neglecting that the concept of citizenship mentions belonging and participation in a democratic state (Ceballos, 2015). The definition of citizenship does not have to be restricted only to political involvement, especially in electoral processes, but must see citizenship as more comprehensive and holistic (Arce Ramírez, 2019). We consider that participatory communication appears as a critical factor in that holistic integration that is sought in society.

As a consequence of the above, the following questions are posed: what is the contribution of participatory communication as a critical strategy in the construction of citizenship? Likewise, what is the conceptualization according to theorists about citizenship and its construction? What are the participatory communication approaches? And how is participatory communication related to the construction of citizenship? (Korkmaz & Arpacı, 2009; Mason, 2007), For to answer the research questions proposed in the article, the general objective is to analyze the contribution of participatory communication as a critical strategy in the construction of citizenship and, as specific objectives; determine the concepts

of citizenship and its construction, know the participatory communication approaches, and argue the relationship between participatory communication and citizenship construction; from the study of the concepts of communication, participatory communication, citizenship and construction of citizenship, considering that communication is essential in the development processes of communities, mainly because it lays the foundations for establishing relationships between social actors. Likewise, describe the role of participatory communication as a critical strategy in the construction of citizenship (Koroliova et al., 2021; Telep et al., 2021).

# Methodology

This work to review the scientific literature was based on searching and selecting information material under an exploratory design. This methodology is applied when the purpose is to examine a topic little addressed in the scientific literature (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). It is carried out to detail existing knowledge about a specific concept, theme, or problem in particular about contextualizing the investigative state, thus favoring decision-making (Jiménez & Aldana, 2020). Therefore, we are facing a systematization of information expressed through recovery, analysis, selection, and orderly and coherent communication of information, knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge in general that results from scientific production to date (Lemus et al., 2016). These review processes allow obtaining updated information, then systematizing and structuring it to present the most relevant knowledge found to the scientific community (Gómez-Luna et al., 2014; Ponte, 2004). The scientific information that supports the present investigation was extracted fundamentally from scientific journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, Scielo, Redalyc, Dialnet, and others. The search strategy was focused on the keywords. All citations and references were managed through the Mendeley web application, which allows the storage of files from the computer's hard drive and the web simultaneously, helping to organize the primary data of the references found in the search for information. The systematization of knowledge was carried out through the signing technique related to the research method and the research profile as a whole (Rojas Crotte, 2011).

#### **Results and Discussion**

# Citizenship and its construction

The conception of citizenship begins in classical Greece (Quiroz Gómez, 2018), a context where the social apparatus is related to the community in a democratic state. Through it, some social, political, and legal ties have been generated that move away from class differences, which were manifested in the obligations and rights that become laws for the community. One cannot speak of citizenship without referring to the British sociologist Thomas H. Marshall (1893-1981), who makes a distinction between three types of citizenship: civil, political, and social citizenship; relating through his postulate, the stages that we find in the development of Modern Europe with the rights that link individuals with society and the state (Marshall, 1950). However, there is a criticism of the definition that

Marshall described for the United Kingdom and other very widespread observers from Western Europe and North America.

Citizenship is defined as inclusion, desegmentation, and reduction of inequalities (Andrenacci, 2019). The concept of citizenship is closely linked to freedom and other values that seek the good of the community. The citizen is that subject whose attitudes and behaviors are adjusted to liberty, equality, respect, dialogue, participation, as well as the fulfillment of their social and family obligations, self-realization, help towards the other, and the sustainable care of the environment surrounding environment (Lizcano Fernández, 2012). Today, the initial and primary conceptual dimensions on which citizenship is supported as the political, social, and civil dimensions are limited for socio-cultural analysis. We understand the citizen as a social actor capable of putting into practice during his life a series of skills and abilities that undoubtedly exceed the classic definition of Marshall.

The concept of citizenship has changed based on what is understood today by the citizen, an idea that has changed: it went from being considered a subject with rights and responsibilities to being a subject full of civic virtues, which ceases to be private to become public. Thus, the concept of citizenship constitutes the universal space of the city, where the diversity of the actors converges, and they become the general and common interest of society (Mora Velázquez, 2009). Researchers argue that it is necessary to speak of a double responsibility of the citizen; In the first place, conceiving it as the subject who has rights and responsibilities, this is very similar to the initial conception of citizenship and is immersed within the individual plane; and, secondly, to act as a citizen at the collective level, this is more similar to the current conception that we have as citizenship (Estupiñán Villanueva et al., 2016). Accordingly, a good citizen recognizes that they possess a sum of prosperous skills, knowledge, dispositions, and attitudes for the development of society that benefit their participation and contribution in the construction of citizenship (Mockus, 2004).

Logically, the concept of citizenship has evolved; At first, it was based only on granting people political and social rights; however, it currently refers to other public issues, primarily related to the collective and common good of fellow citizens (Díaz-Perdomo & Rojas-Suárez, 2017). In today's societies, new ways of conceptualizing citizenship are emerging. These changes were already being noticed since the beginning of this century with greater force; cosmopolitan, responsible, critical, active, global, social citizenship with its intercultural components (Rodríguez, 2002), began to have a more accentuated role. Consequently, the citizen is no longer the subject who only casts his vote in electoral processes or gives his opinion in polls. He has become a social actor who exposes his comments, needs, and feelings, waiting for a response from the authorities for which they bet to govern them (Urbina, 2020). Citizenship is currently a fundamental and current element in Western democracies, allowing societies to feel protagonists in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres. Citizenship is not limited only to the political sphere but to the various areas of life in which subjects develop, and for all this, communication plays a fundamental role (Sánchez Castiblanco, 2017).

The essence of citizenship, interpreted from the reality of the social actor regardless of their role- must generate a living environment where people do not feel superior to others; all have the same constitutional rights and are before the law. This need is usually not reflected in current societies, where social gaps and inequalities limit people's harmonious social and cultural development (Weaver et al., 2019; Lim, 2008). To restrict these gaps within a legal framework, it must recognize that citizenship is an institution in a constant redefinition, education, and social awareness where the citizen is an active and permanent protagonist. Aligned with this idea, the fundamental traits that define the ideal citizen are the integrity that they show in society, the recognition by the state of a series of rights as a result of their membership in the community, and fundamentally, an ideal citizen who fulfills with their civic duty and maintains close ties with the public, participating in matters that concern them (Benedict, 2016).

Citizenship is not born with people. It is a process that is built (Vergara & Villamizar, 2019). Under this logic, by not being taken with citizen exercise, it corresponds to acquire them in the space of socio-cultural interaction that demands social responsibility and moral commitment; therefore, institutions such as the family, the community, the school, the media, among others; they are determining elements in this process (Díaz Gómez & González Rey, 2005); (Portillo, 2015). However, there is talk of building citizenships from various spheres, on which a generalized consensus of the term has developed. However, multiple ways of conceiving citizenship are hidden from other forms of thinking about citizens (Landau, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness that citizenship develops from the fulfillment of political and historical conditions, were in a society in constant political, economic and social changes that stimulate the discussion on central concepts (Díaz, 2011), from a Complex conception that presents the concept of citizenship as a transversal process to life in which all social, socio-affective, cultural, participatory and educational factors intervene.

For a practical construction of citizenship, it is imperative to begin by improving the education provided to the child sector so that they are full citizens aware and aware of their rights, obligations and all the political and legal culture that is actively exercising citizenship implies (Graziella Reyes & Rivera Pagola, 2018). However, education for citizenship should not only occur in the primary education stage but must reach the university stage, where a series of training processes must be consolidated, related to democratic participation, strengthening of diversity, values, and respect to human rights; all this because young people build citizen and civic experiences in the spaces of their daily life (Valverde & Vargas, 2015; Delanty, 2003; Yates, 2015). In summary, building citizenship also means guaranteeing greater and better levels of equality in citizens that allow them to be more accessible and participatory, promoting the freedom to participate in civic activities, in which the citizen shows and feels like a social actor who owns a moral dimension, taking into account that the construction of citizenship is not based solely on the learning of legal, legal and political norms or access to education, but what reflects citizenship is an effective coexistence in society (Giraldo-Zuluaga, 2015), is reflected in the communication processes in which all the actors are immersed in their immediate socio-cultural space.

# Participatory communication: contribution to the construction of citizenship

The construction of citizenship is reflected in the structure of a society in which its members are an active part, without delegating responsibilities only to their leaders. It is essential to recover the relationship between citizenship and participation (Landau, 2012). A consulted study affirms that citizen participation in practice does not exist, arguing that only a small group of people have economic and ideological control of nations (Vélez Medina, 2016)). The logic of this statement lies in the fact that, especially in Latin America, societies that call themselves democratic coexist; however, they do not provide adequate spaces for communication to citizens, and therefore, people have limited participation in making decisions for the excellent common; the communication and participation spaces being limited to cyclical activities such as voting.

This reality leads to a reflection where citizenship symbolizes a social construction that feeds on various representations, customs, and daily habits that energize and legitimize the community (Vergara & Villamizar, 2019). Based on the previous arguments, citizenship is configured through a social integration that defines and empowers societies, fundamental in democracies. It is there where communication gains value as a process that seeks interaction in all representations of life, serving as an instrument to articulate citizenship, communication, leadership, and social empowerment.

The communication-citizenship relationship arises because communication is recognized as a fundamental basis of citizenship, weighing the community's interests, needs and proposals. Participatory communication consists of the use of communication tools that, through the active involvement of citizens, authorities, external, theoretical, technical organizations, among others, can facilitate and support the dynamics of local development; taking into consideration that this entire participatory process starts from understanding that civic attitudes and people's willingness to participate do not come about by itself; they are built throughout life (Hatzfeld, 2007). Consequently, participation summarizes vast learning, which begins with affirming the disparity of social actors and their relationship with communication processes, which help establish horizontal relationships between people, giving alternatives for everyone to contribute to based on their experiences and knowledge. In summary, communication conceptualizes development with an openness to the entire communicative process relevant to human interactions (Elgueta, 2006). Therefore, participatory communication involves the organization and community members, who design communication strategies and plans (González & López, 2019).

#### Participatory communication approaches

There are theoretical divergences to address the terms of widespread communication or participatory communication. In Latin America, the conception of these terms and their practice have been occurring for more than half a century, when the United States of America deployed the first development programs based on communication strategies (Carretero, 2019). At first, these strategies were purely propagandistic. However, based on the contributions of

prominent authors in this field of study, development began to be forged from a much more participatory perspective (Kaplún, 2010; Bordenave, 2016; Freire, 1968; Beltrán, 1979). However, there are currently two approaches to participatory communication. The first is Freire, and the second was raised in the UNESCO debates in the 70s (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005).

Likewise, it can be found that specific approaches are associated with participatory communication; they compose it from its historical development and evolution. Thus they have also been studied from the perspective of great Latin American communication theorists. Among the most prominent approaches, we have Communication for Development, Alternative Communication, Popular Communication for Social Change, and Communication (López Rojas, 2012). It is essential to specify that citizens' communicative experiences in Latin America have shown how important communication can become in searching for civic empowerment (Cerbino & Belotti, 2016). Participatory communication is the basis for development, social change, and peace; without participation, there could not be an actual sociocultural change (Sánchez Castiblanco, 2017). This becomes, without a doubt, a key factor for the construction of citizenship since participatory communication is based on a structural discussion: the model of democracy that we currently know and the diversity of experiences. In this way, the concept of participation in the field of development is reflected from an aspirational model that involves the problem of power, the recovery of self-organizing capacities, and cultural dynamics.

There is a relationship between communication and citizenship, studied from the Communication in Latin America that has been approached from three emphases: in the urban, in the media, and the relationship with democracy and politics; it is here where relevant studies on communication and citizenship they put greater interest in the relationship with democracy and politics, finding a direct connection (Larsen Gunnarsson-Östling, 2009; Johnson. Communication ceases to be a means in politics to become the fundamental model for the community's existence. The substantial contribution of participatory communication focuses on stimulating social behaviors so that the participation of its actors develops in a natural and active space in the most diverse way possible. This diversity does not prioritize the number of participants but rather the set of visions and proposals (Allegretti et al., 2011).

Finally, from the figure of Habermas on the construction of citizenship; In addition to the political conception where it belongs to a state, citizens have a sum of rights and duties. Citizenship is an active process characterized mainly by participation and communication, where spaces for dialogue are found as the basis of citizen construction (Habermas, 1998). This proposed approach is appreciable from participatory communication as a critical factor in the construction of citizenship. On the one hand, in this model of participation, discourses are mediated in intertwined networks that come to be configured as the general framework for citizenship. On the other, the communication associated with involvement takes on a social and political dimension that poses the actors social the requirement of duty, but above all the right to participate, to be interlocutors in their community; overcoming the attitude of mere reception of

messages shielded in authoritarian and vertical attitudes that threaten citizenship (Chan & Lai, 2017; Hawthorne et al., 2015).

#### Conclusion

Citizenship is constantly changing depending on how he develops in society and how he learns to live in it throughout life. For this reason, social institutions are fundamental in the process of seeking the common good. Likewise, it is essential to recover the citizenship-participation relationship since the construction of citizenship manifests in the active participation of citizens in search of the development of their communities, in which communication is recognized as a fundamental principle. Participation must be natural, holistic, and inclusive and be a protagonist in different spaces where citizens develop, empowering societies from social . integration. Therefore, the contribution of participatory communication as a critical strategy in the construction of citizenship lies in the dynamization of social actors in communities. Finally, participatory communication approaches allow dynamizing social behaviors based on social empowerment where citizens go from being simple recipients of messages to being generators of spaces for dialogue.

#### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors do not declare conflicts of interest.

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