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Address To the First General Assembly
On Behalf of UNESCO

by

Alan Hancock
Address to the First General Assembly on behalf of UNESCO
By Mr. ALAN HANCOCK, Regional Broadcasting Planning Adviser for Asia

Often on occasions such as this, representatives from UNESCO and the other specialised agencies extend 'fraternal greetings.' Without wishing to do anything quite so formal, I would certainly like to pass on UNESCO's best wishes - and especially those of the Department of Mass Communication in UNESCO, which has the closest connections with this Centre. This is the first General Assembly of a new and important organization; in my personal capacity as a member, and in an official capacity as a UNESCO observer, it does give me considerable pleasure to be represented here. We have been associated with Amic from its beginnings; we have been associated with Amic's Secretary-General for much longer than that, as an old member of the House; we recognise that the concerns of Amic are very much our concerns.

The Secretary-General's report emphasises that Amic is generally recognised as a main Communication Research Documentation Centre for Asia - part of a growing world network which includes centres in Leicester, England; Stockholm; Strasbourg and Quito in Ecuador - as well as, of course, the University of the Philippines, an old friend of UNESCO.

This network - small as it is - is very much needed. After an occupational lull in mass communication research, at a time when the researchers were not too sure which route to take next, there has been, in recent years, a remarkable upsurge in the communication field. It has been very much the concern of the UN agencies, who have taken note of the fact that accelerated development depends, to a great extent, upon the freedom and clarity of communication channels. There is a growing amount of communication activity, a growing amount of data and information, a growing amount of research - and still relatively few places in which to store it all, collate it, cross-reference it, retrieve it and to offer it for distribution.

This is Amic's province; and it is encouraging to see how much Amic is concerned to work together with other clearing houses and agencies, and to co-ordinate with agreed international strategies. One good example is the meeting of documentalists in Paris next week, which Amic will be attending, as it has attended earlier meetings. It is gratifying to see, in the Secretary-General's report, that Amic has delayed finalising its own procedures for documentation, in spite of an accumulated backlog of materials, in order to take note of the standardised procedures for classifying communications data which are being evolved.
Standardisation of data storage is certainly important in this field of communication, which is so interdisciplinary – the normal library procedures which divide material into subordinate subject areas, are certainly unsuitable, as they often obscure rather than illuminate connections.

A meeting held in Paris on the compilation of research findings – convened by UNESCO in May 1970 – emphasised this point. It talked of evolving what it called a 'dynamic thesaurus' – a growing, evolving reference book for communication, rather than a simple classification system, or some system based on an uncontrolled vocabulary; and it envisaged a phased action-research programme, which would be 'problem and policy oriented' – and which would help to discipline the enormous amount of data available and develop new research programmes along practical lines, inside a framework of regional and area documentation centres. In other words, as far as possible, both research work and documentation would be geared towards life problems, with the maximum amount of coordination and exchange taking place. Like so many other areas, communication research is bedevilled by duplication, sheer ignorance of what is going on elsewhere, and incompatibility of research designs and hence research data.

There has been, as you are certainly aware, a succession of international meetings on communication research and on documentation problems. You may recall UNESCO meetings in Montreal, in June 1969; in Paris in May 1970; in Paris in April 1971, and now again in Paris in December 1971. The meetings are getting closer together; this should be a sign that more priority is being given to the field, and hopefully that the meetings are becoming more and more productive. A large number of agencies, many of them outside the immediate communication sector, are realising that their activities are being hindered because of the lack of tabulation and interpretation of data, the almost total absence of data in many critical areas, and consequently the lack of tested models to put into practice. Probably the most useful recent document to which I should draw your attention is the report from UNESCO: 'Proposals for an International Programme of Communication Research', which came out of the Paris meeting earlier this year, and which was published and distributed in September. This paper reviews the whole field of communication research, its philosophical base, and especially its relationship to the development process, and it makes a number of practical proposals for action, including an inventory of the basic data required for mass communication enquiries.
I would like this morning, however, to take the question a stage further, in the light of UNESCO’s own philosophy and plans in the communication sphere. You are aware, I am sure, that a number of communication developments have been or are at present being assisted by UNESCO in the Asian region. I can refer, as examples, to broadcasting training and development activities in India and Malaysia (including the development of a regional broadcasting training institute in Malaysia); to book production activities in Pakistan; mass communication research in the Philippines; to broadcasting development in the Pacific; to the use of media in family planning; to educational broadcasting projects in Malaysia, Singapore, Afghanistan. These are growing areas of activity, and they are not just random in their growth. They are part of a general strategy which is linked to, indeed arises from, the approach to communication research as an orderly, practical and integrated process with which you are already familiar. They are part, in fact, of an attempt to develop a concept of communication planning, as a dynamic exercise which has the same comprehensiveness as planning in the economic or educational sectors.

The work of the Department of Mass Communication in UNESCO rests on the assumption that, in modern societies, mass media industries take up resources – human, financial and material – which can be a most important part of the economic and social infrastructure of a country. For this reason, we would argue that each country needs to assess the character and capacity of its communication networks, and to evolve a ‘communication policy’ – a set of norms designed to guide the behaviour of communication institutions. These policies have, naturally, to be based upon research which covers all aspects of the communication process as a total process, looking at media in the wider political, social and economic setting. It is important that, in such a process, the media are seen as a composite and inter-connected whole – whether they are newspapers, periodicals, books, cinema, radio, television or any other medium.

The work of the Department of Mass Communication in UNESCO, therefore, embraces three activities: the analysis and planning of communication strategies, the development of adequate systems and institutions to serve these strategies, and the application of a variety of media and media techniques to development needs.
It has been proposed (at the meeting already mentioned of communication research specialists organised by UNESCO in 1971) that Governments should consider setting up National Communication Policy Councils, representing leaders in the fields of politics, planning and administration, media workers and communication research scientists, which might take on the responsibility of developing coherent policies at the national level; certainly it is doubtful whether co-ordinated planning can be carried out without creating bodies specifically earmarked for the purpose. Ultimately, it is envisaged that within each country, a fulltime Communication Planning Unit will be established (on similar lines to existing economic or educational planning cells).

An important preliminary to this exercise for UNESCO is the setting up of communication planning missions which can carry out, for Member States, some of the basic work required. Such missions would visit countries, on request, to examine the current state of the media and draw up proposals for future development which would make the most efficient use of available resources; they would be made up of a variety of specialists, in such fields as media planning, the economics of communication, educational technology, communication research, telecommunications engineering, media management, production and distribution. On the basis of this detailed study of a country's needs, they would put forward proposals for action and forward planning, particularly in relation to approved national development plans.

The teams would naturally draw on a good deal of outside expertise. Other sectors of UNESCO would be involved in specialist areas (such as the use of instructional media within the formal educational system), and other agencies, such as the ITU or DSCS, would also participate. This is a long-term exercise, however, which has to be approached cautiously; communication planning has often to create its own tools as it goes along, and it cannot afford to tamper too much with existing or engrained patterns within countries, except when these are generally agreed to be obsolete and inefficient. At the same time, we must remember that the objective of any planning exercise is concrete development and application.
UNESCO is in the business of sponsoring results in development, and the Department of Mass Communication has divisions of Development and Applications as well as of Planning and Research. Indeed, UNESCO deals most of the time with institutions on the ground. These institutions may well be different in each country; they may include a university, a training or research institution, a media centre, a broadcasting system. It seems clear, though, that the concentration of resources on identifiable centres at the national level will help the planning process to cohere, and such centres may well be called centres of communication development.

The centres should have two functions - national and a wider extra-national or regional role. One the one hand, a deepening of effort at the national level is required, to consolidate and integrate communication strategies, but in the longer term a regional overspill is also likely to help spread the experience of the national experiment.

At the national level, it is possible to use such centres as models or prototypes for development in all areas of communication activity: as centres for the development of communication planning; as supports for experimental programmes in the applied fields of family planning, literacy, industrial education etc.; as centres for training and experiment in media techniques. The intention in all this is not to confine communication development to a single centre within each country; in most societies this could not be considered, and would certainly not be desirable. However, many activities should gain from the support which might be found if they were anchored to a single, viable institution; a single expert working in an area such as the use of media in family planning might be unable to make headway because of lack of resources, whereas if he were operating within a wider framework, in an institution with broader responsibilities on whose services he might call when necessary, his programme might be more likely to succeed. At the same time, there is a need within most societies (particularly if planned communication policies become the norm) for key institutions which can undertake the task of coordinating communication development according to an agreed strategy.

At the extra-national or regional level, such centres can take advantage of the pooling of resources to offer advice, training and technical assistance to senior personnel from adjacent countries, with that cost-effectiveness which can only proceed from a multi-national base.
It must be recognized that regional or inter-country programmes have their problems; even though they appear attractive on theoretical grounds, they cannot survive without a genuine interest in regional collaboration. It is true, nevertheless, that at an advanced level of professional training, resources and expertise are often needed which cannot be economically provided within each country. Professional training for broadcasters and engineers is a case in point; in order to train senior engineers, producers and managers, facilities and equipment are required which are in themselves costly, and the widest possible use for such resources is needed.

Resources at the inter-country level are limited, and opportunities have to be taken as they arise. The pattern of regional development is unlikely to be highly structured; at the same time, some regional activity ought to be possible in each of the major continents of the developing world. Some development in Asia, Africa and Latin America is certainly foreseen, and UNESCO is working on regional programmes in each of these continents.

A Final Note

I have talked a good deal in all this of the Department of Mass Communication in UNESCO. In a sense, that department has an overview of the communication process - it is interested in all forms of communication, traditional and innovative. Its interests run from interpersonal exchanges to print and electric technology, from data storage and retrieval to satellite systems.

But it is the essence of communication planning that a very large number of agencies and specialists have to be involved, if the planning is to be practical and successful. Other sectors of UNESCO, other UN agencies, other government, private and public agencies have an interest and specialised contributions to make. We are beginning a dialogue with all of these in an attempt to get a coordinated programme of development moving, which can really pull together the sectoral interests involved.

This meeting can be seen as one such occasion. There is no need to elaborate on the connection between research and practice, or between documentation and practical applications. Research sets up models for testing, assesses the results, analyses the successes and failures, draws up frameworks for expansion and transfer. For the research to be useful and transferable,
the documentation also has to be precise, flexible – even creative. It is not enough for documentation merely to provide storage capacity; if it is handled well, it suggests lines of thought, comparison and enquiry, and becomes a development tool in its own right. Asia must in fact be looking as much to Amic – if the idea of Amic works in the long haul – as to production and training institutions, in its continuing development drive.