COMMUNICATION CONFLICTS IN NGO: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

Solidarity is more than just a feeling of compassion and suffering. On the contrary, it is the firm and unshakeable conviction of the need to make an effort for the common good. It arises out of the conviction that all men are equal and although it is clearly the case that an emotional appeal has to exist for supportive action to be brought about, it is not alone enough to turn sporadic aid into a stable line of conduct. We believe that it is necessary for there to be an effective evolution of the communication practices of NGOs, especially in the case of advertising, so as to base it on more rational and positive arguments that highlight the way the organization stands out, the effectiveness of its methods of action and the transparency of its management.

Keywords

Non-Governmental Organisations, non-profit organisations, persuasive communication, communication of solidarity, donors' behaviour, social causes advertising.

Introduction

The media and NGOs, moved by their enthusiasm for raising awareness among public opinion, often show dramatic images of the consequences of underdevelopment. These have two opposing effects on their audience. On the one hand there is the immediate inclination to do something and make an emotional and financial commitment to the people affected. On the other, there is a gradual loss of interest brought about by saturation of information about this type of situation. Almost always, whenever information is given about underdevelopment it is done negatively, following the rule that only extraordinary events are newsworthy. There has never been so strong a call for solidarity or so much display of unacceptable realities accompanied by reproving language. But, this frenzy of solidarity is a skin-deep, flimsy, one-off phenomenon; it is a rootless, restrained and partial commitment which keeps its distance (López Mañero, 1998, pages 56-57).

The way in which the catastrophe is presented often causes concern and can help swell the number and size of private donations, but its repetition can cause a certain reluctance to think and reflect about events, giving rise to what has come to be known as "compassion fatigue" (Moeller, 1999). The form this fatigue takes is that guilty feelings are generated in the audience, thus making citizens ill-disposed towards a stable commitment. This results in a numbing of the conscience through over-familiarity with dramatic situations. The suffering of others is less and less able to move as it becomes something normal, turning the "emergency" into "ordinary administration". We believe there are two reasons for this: a) the continual impact of dramatic images; b) the presentation of a reality which neither improves nor changes. And the effects of this are: 1) tiredness or immunity against genuinely serious situations; 2) confusion and perplexity when faced with events, as their causes are not explained; 3) passivity and indifference: it is not worth giving aid because it doesn't make any difference; 4) the message is avoided in irritation: <u>why are they trying to make me feel guilty if I didn't cause it and can't do anything to put it right?</u> (La Porte, 2000).

This is a danger in which we have as yet not become fully immersed, or at least, not to the extreme described above, but it is a real risk if the type of communication used to date continues to be used. It is therefore possible to question the real comprehension of the situation by public opinion, the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, and the impact of individual contributions to solving global problems. Events are presented in a way that is fragmented and out of context, as if they were the pieces of a complex jigsaw puzzle –to use Professor Sánchez Tabernero's metaphor (1990, pages 579-589)– of which we can only know where to put the pieces if we have seen the complete image beforehand. If we put the pieces together arbitrarily, without any guiding principles, we discover that not only do we not complete the puzzle, but it looks ever more incomprehensible.

Social agents helping disadvantaged communities are just a catalyst, they do not replace the beneficiary, but guide and facilitate the process of self-development. This scheme of work is a differentiating aspect in the method of intervention with respect to that used by official institutions, and a key to its success and acceptance as a fundamental actor in international aid processes[1]. This means that it would be logical for it to be passed on as faithfully as possible to public opinion, in both its awareness raising and pure advertising activities. Setting up the beneficiary community as a victim takes from it the ability and power to transform itself (Correa, 1999. Page 46), and puts forward a paternalistic and aid-oriented model of development which in no way matches the habitual practices of NGOs. In this way, the media and NGOs should make an effort to put their information in context, appeal to reason more than sentiment, and make the beneficiary the protagonist of his story.

It is our belief that there should be an evolution in the communication strategy of agents who, in one way or another, are responsible for information about situations of underdevelopment, particularly in the case of NGOs. The style of the communication should be conditioned by the contents of the communication, i.e. how it is done should depend on what information is being transmitted, to whom and why. In the case with which we are concerned here, the aim of the task of informing is to generate solidarity. In the media this is presented as a simple feeling of compassion for the misfortunes and sufferings of others, these sufferings being ascribed to chance causes. They therefore invite us to act to resolve their immediate needs and not the causes. Therefore the ethical value of solidarity disappears and is reduced to a fashion or a purely superficial ethic (Zurbano, 1998. Page 121).

Our hypothesis is that communication by NGOs always has two inseparable dimensions: all the actions carried out in this field must serve simultaneously to raise awareness and achieve stable support, independent of their informative or persuasive nature. Failure to match the reality of what the NGO does –on the assumption that it is difficult to transmit and complex to accept– with the aim of mobilizing the audience more quickly and to stimulate one-off involvement in the form of a donation, may have negative repercussions on the educational work to promote solidarity being carried out by these institutions.

Governmental Independence

We use the term Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to refer to those private non-profit-making entities whose mission focuses on aiding the development of disadvantaged communities and raising the awareness of public opinion with respect to the causes and consequences of the problems which are the object of its actions[2].

In the proposed definition two elements are isolated which are basic for the purpose of our work. These will therefore be explained at some length. In the first place, the private character of NGO ownership. The State does not have, or should not have, any direct link with these initiatives. From the theoretical point of view this matter seems to have been resolved. Indeed, according to Weisbord (1977, 1988), these organizations have arisen as an alternative to the State for the provision of public goods. The state is swayed by the interests of the majority, thus leaving population groups that are under-supplied or unsatisfied with the services it provides, indirectly causing them to organize themselves around intermediary entities to cover their needs. This mobilization of civil society is the basis on which the NGOs rely in order to differentiate themselves, as they find a space in the public sphere in which to articulate values and advance their interests in a way that is genuinely independent from government (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Indeed the term “non-governmental” was coined intentionally to draw a distinction from what had been the traditional form of international cooperation: namely official aid.

But in practice this independence is not so clear cut, at least in the case of Spain. If we analyse the sources of resources of Spanish NGOs we see that there is a very high degree of dependence on public funds. According to the latest yearbook published by the coordinator of ONGDE (CONGD, 1998, Page 297), in 1997 60.9% of the funds that these entities mobilized came from some sort of official institution (the European Union, Central Government, Autonomous Regions, Councils). Since 1991 this tendency has become more marked to the extent that it is not entirely out of place to question their effective independence.

According to Mintzberg, when a source of revenue has a powerful negotiating position thanks to the financial concentration represented by its contributions to the receiving NGO, an induction phenomenon may appear: <u>pay them so that they behave properly</u> (Mintzberg, 1992. Page 717), i.e. so that their action –in the case of government dependency– is in line with political goals[3]. One form of alleviating this situation is to resort to individual donations, thus encouraging fund-raising campaigns which legitimise the civil nature of the organization and allow the desired diversification – taking it to the point of atomisation– minimizing the power of induction (Froelich, 1999). These campaigns to capture resources involve significant generation of advertising material, and in order to be effective, this needs to reach a broad and potentially receptive audience. The creativity, repute and visibility of the supporting advertising campaign should be compatible with justifiable persuasive content, the achievement of awareness-raising purposes and education in the values promoted by the NGO.

Information and Persuasion

We will therefore look at the second component of the definition which we wish to discuss in more detail. The diffusion of messages by the NGO pursues two basic purposes: to inform and to persuade. Inform as to the situation of disadvantaged communities in order to achieve awareness-raising goals –an explicit part of its mission– and persuade so as to obtain the support needed –both financial and human– in order to be able to provide the service the community needs and to which it has made a commitment. Informing means giving news about something, whether this is an opinion, a fact, a judgement or an idea (Nieto, 1998. Page 12). Persuading means using reasons to induce or move someone to believe something or perform some action. Our aim through persuasive communication is that the receiver act; whereas information pursues a more neutral goal: making something known. But, to the extent to which it is the same target audience which is exposed to both types of communication, the diffusion of one or other type of message must be compatible and coherent, as both will be used by the audience as inputs with which to form a judgement on the appropriateness of getting involved –to a greater or lesser extent– with those in need. Information and persuasion (and not seduction and suggestion) are therefore combined in the task of communication[4]. We base ourselves here on Fiorentini (1997) and Milanese (1998) in order to identify the objectives of the actions of NGOs in “countries of the North”: a) make the organization known: its projects and what differentiates it; b) create, maintain and improve its image: credibility, transparency and achievements: c) to access sources of resources: d) recruit volunteers; e) raise awareness and f) promote a change of habits and values. In order to obtain these goals a variety of instruments are brought together –ranging from advertising to the writing of reports and press releases– which are the vehicle for the transmission of the central message the NGO is trying to promote: solidarity.

Solidarity

Solidarity is born out of the awareness that all men are equal and that, therefore, a person with a problem placing him in inferior conditions cannot be left to tackle it alone[5]. Solidarity is prior to sociability. Men do not show solidarity because they are sociable, but are sociable because of their solidarity. "In each of us there is a basic altruism that makes us a nativitate open to the other, the alter as such" (Ortega y Gasset, 1967. Pages 14-21). Solidarity is not a superficial sentiment arising out of the ills of so many persons, near or far. On the contrary, it is the firm and unshakeable conviction of the need to make an effort for the common good.

As Zurbano notes[6], three fundamental concepts may be identified in the notion of solidarity: compassion –the feeling of fraternity, whereby one feels affected by the sufferings and needs of others as if they were one's own–, recognition of the dignity of the other –solidarity has a face: those affected are other people, with the same dignity as myself, who call out to me from their needs; and universality, –taking in all humanity, without political, ethnic, religious or economic boundaries–. Similarly, Ortega, Minguez and Gil (1996, page 96) demonstrate how in the case of education in solidarity it is necessary to travel a route which takes in recognition of the dignity of the person, identification of the causes and consequences of marginalisation, making the global nature of the problems understood, and inducing concern with active and stable involvement in their solution.

In effect, solidarity, although it can be promoted by suffering, is not guided by it; if we compare it with the sense of piety, which is one of its components, it can appear cold and abstract, but needs to be so if we want it to be global in reach. As it does not feel excessively, and keeps its distance, as far as feelings are concerned, it can take in the multitude. Compassion does not look with the same eyes on good and bad fortune, the powerful and the weak; without the presence of misfortune, compassion would not exist, but solidarity would. Strictly speaking, solidarity is a principle which can inspire and guide action (Arendt, 1967. Pages 97-98). What is specifically human is its capacity to behave in accordance with what is known in the abstract (rationally) in order to place an emotional value on it, that is to feel it (Pérez-López, 1998. Page 27). In this sense, Giddens (1999) provides us with a good example of the rational –and therefore abstract– sense of solidarity. According to this author what makes us concern ourselves about hunger and the needs of others is that they reveal the inequality between equals. Prior to the compassion at the suffering of others is the recognition in the other of the alter-ego. To show solidarity means to have known how to look beyond what we see as evident, searching (and finding) the true cause and dimensions of social problems and why these call out to our conscience.

Every man is at once both equal to and different from all other men. Consideration of the human being who tries to do justice to the person should take into account the fact that human plurality has the double nature of equality and difference. If men were not equal it would not even make sense to talk of plurality, and consequently no kind of anthropological science would be possible: men would not be able to understand one another, would not be able to explain to others their reasons, their conduct, their projects, with any expectation of being understood. But if men were not different, it would make no sense to talk of the absolute dignity of the person: it would be enough to talk of individuals, that is to say, of particular instances of humanity (Ruiz Retegui, 1987. Page 36). Solidarity also participates in this dual dimension: it requires us to realize the plural condition of man -such that our will feels itself to be called to help "another like myself" who suffers, and simultaneously, demands that this aid be personal, i.e. not directed at an individual considered as a being indistinguishable from and interchangeable with, a multitude, but as a particular unique and unrepeatable human being. Therefore, the identification of solidarity with a state of mind afflicted by a sad and painful event would be a dangerous reduction: it would degenerate into a com-passion by definition contrary to action. It is not by chance that Aristotle, in his Rhetoric[7], openly criticized the abuse of compassion as a persuasive technique. According to Aristotle, appealing to grief at the appearance of an ill which brings destruction and pain upon those who do not deserve it –and which it is possible for me to suffer, as I am no different from the person in that situation– as a means of generating catharsis in the spectator of the drama causes an emotional state which distances him from control over human actions.

And, on occasions, one forgets that the sine qua non for solidarity is freedom. If people are "obliged" to give help, if they are mobilized by an appeal to their feelings, the results of the action may well be the same as if it performed voluntarily, but all personal responsibility will vanish. It makes helping disagreeable, and once the person in need's problem has been solved, I am freed from the obligation. What motivates me therefore is to obtain a state in which these situations forcing my mobilization do not arise again. But these situations are not resolved, but appear more and more often and with ever greater intensity. I therefore despair and disconnect: exhaustion drives me to "compassion fatigue". This is not the path to true solidarity, where, by contrast, the more I help, the more I want to help, provided I have a free choice about helping or not. But to achieve this "virtuous circle" I need to appeal to individual freedom and move the will by reason. The news tries to show history on the move, bringing events to us live as they happen. It is as though the ultimate aim of the information is not to make the citizen understand the scope of the events that are being communicated, but simply look at them, establishing the illusion that seeing is understanding (Sáez, 1999. Page 107). According to Aznar (1999, page 169), it has been verified that, much more than the emotions, it is reflection and real understanding of these problems which encourages people to take action in a conscious, constant and committed way. We believe that this real understanding of problems, must lead to making explicit the causes of a situation of suffering, the consequences these situations have for people (not for the individual), the means it is necessary to put into play to alleviate it, and the expected results of the aid action.

The image unlinked from its objective referent and the truth adorned with a dose of emotion may encourage greater mobilization of donations than reasoned information. If the aim were solely to obtain as much information as possible, rational inference or even moral sincerity should have a minimal role. But it should not be overlooked that the aim is to achieve a dual goal: to raise awareness and to mobilize committed and stable action. These are two mutually reinforcing dimensions of solidarity which cannot be understood in isolation from one another. The aim of the NGO is, basically, to help in the development of disadvantaged communities through the strengthening of local civil society, so as to enable it to solve its own problems autonomously and independently. This strengthening involves providing stable resources and promoting a change in beneficiaries' attitudes and abilities, such that the results are not reversible. In order to be able to achieve this, development of a permanent supportive awareness is needed between the public in the so-called "countries of the North", where the sources of revenue are based. In order for solidarity not to be a passing fashion requires continual stimulation through campaigns laden with a powerful emotional content. This means it is necessary to present this in perspective in a way that gives reasons to the adopter to maintain his support over time, independently from the presentation of suffering in the community he intends to serve. Note that what we have been arguing is that in order to make the aid more substantial and more stable, it is necessary for the supportive attitude of those possessing the resources to be equally stable and substantial.

We wish to draw attention to the intrinsic connection existing between information and persuasion in the case of the communication of solidarity. The nature of the value to transmit makes reasoning at once necessary and insufficient. Rational arguments are not sufficient to spur decisions, it is necessary that the emotions come into play in order to initiate action. The emotions must necessarily be touched in order for a person listening with intellectual interest to decide to act. Nevertheless, the easy route is to go directly to the emotions. But this means of persuasion has a substantive deficit: the absence of minimum information; and this is where demagogy begins. The receiver is not allowed to rationalize his action: thus removing from him the opportunity to reflect, he is confused with an amalgam of emotions. Persuasion which is technically effective and respects human dignity should eschew the exclusive use of intellectual argument –which may be valid as a way of convincing, but is insufficient to move the will of anybody– and from a demagogic sentimentalism that pits instinct against reason (Coll, 1990. Pages 451-456). Therefore, it is not a question of asking whether it is appropriate or not to use more or less information or persuasion, but how to balance these so that communication of solidarity is more effective. And this effectiveness involves the achievement of an education in the values of solidarity, manifested in a permanent linking of the adopter with the institutions promoting it. In this regard Qualter's affirmation is particularly to the point (1994, page 126): In practice it is a mistake to consider information and persuasion as two separate categories, as a message may be emotionally persuasive whilst it is also informative. The nature of solidarity and the need for it to be manifest in stable behaviours demands that more attention be given to arguments than the emotions. But, we should underline, resolving this question is not a merely aesthetic matter, but an ethical one. Presenting a cause to public opinion should eschew any artificial distinction between what is said and the way in which it is said, as if style were separable from substance. If we were to admit this separation, the appropriate mode of expression of the densest and richest truths could be applied to much more superficial concepts or realities (Ruiz Retegui, 1998. Pages 42-48), and vice versa. Indeed, when solidarity appears presented in the form of something purely emotional, reducing compassion to a mere feeling, it is being dressed in discourses that are not its own and do not do justice to its true nature.

Some Suggestions

Having established the objectives of the NGO's communication, and bearing in mind the nature of the "product" it aims to promote, we can establish a number of practical criteria for the preparation of advertising messages relating to social causes.

In order for the communication to be effective it is logical that we ask ourselves about the reasons (explicit or otherwise) behind all contributions: study the contributor's behaviour in relation to his commitment to solidarity. On the basis of this knowledge we can derive the guidelines for the preparation of advertising messages to help achieve both tactical objectives (resources) and strategic ones (education on values). As a first approximation it may be useful to consider the conclusions of the report produced by the National Commission on Philanthropy and Civil Renewal in 1997. According to the study's authors, there are four reasons why a person may become involved with a non-profit-making entity:

1. Self-interest, i.e. they expect to receive something tangible in return for their collaboration.

2. Self-satisfaction or self-gratification: the act of making a donation in itself brings satisfaction to the person making it. The statement made by Jeffrey D. Jacobs, president of Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Entertaiment Group and one of the main donors to child protection organizations in the United States may serve as an example: "when you sign the cheque, you feel you have the power to change things."[8]

3. Altruism: the good I do for the person I help is agreeable to me. This is why Catherine S. Muther, Vice-President of Cisco Systems Inc. donated three million dollars to a foundation devoted to promoting women's careers: "I am interested in doing something to help women and young people improve their level of well-being".

4. Commitment and conviction: the donation is made simply because the donor thinks it should be. This seems to have been James D. Watkins's thinking when in 1996 he gave away ten million dollars to various works of charity: "nobody in my family ever had enough money to go about giving it away. Now that I enjoy a magnificent economic situation, I feel that I am obliged to return to society the help that it gave me to get here by supporting others so they can get ahead."

If we were to think that everybody responds positively to the same stimuli we could waste a great deal of effort which could have borne fruit with a minimum of investigation into donor behaviour. The aforementioned motivations do not arise in isolation but support one another and are mutually reinforcing. The executive president of the Fundación Carvajal -one of the main Colombian institutions supporting community development- justifies the strong commitment that is implied by the financial provision to the foundation of nearly 50% of the after-tax profits of the holding company Carvajal, S.A. as follows: "We are concerned about the social situation in our country and the large differences existing between the rich and the poor. But if I said that this was the our only motivation I would be lying. We are also concerned about the

growth of our business group, and if we do not do something to improve the purchasing power of our fellow citizens -who are our potential customers- we have only limited possibilities of expansion. As to which is most important, that varies from day to day."[9]
In fact, identifying reasons that may motivate a potential donor to link himself to social causes can help establish better arguments in the advertising carried out: getting to know their interests, know what they want from the institution to which they give their financial support. A number of common traits are shown by persons displaying solidarity (Greenfield, 1994. Pages 5-23; Greenlee and Gordon, 1998; Markham et al, 1999). These can be summed up in two points:

1) The donor prefers to give his money to organizations focusing on specific, tangible targets, well-defined projects, with a direct impact on beneficiaries.

2) Donors look for organizations focusing on fulfilling their mission, which have the elements and evaluation criteria in line with their objectives and the institution's mission. They want that dispersion be avoided. They like to know what happens to their money: how much is spent on maintaining the structure and how much reaches beneficiaries.

It is also a good thing to get an advance idea of the possible circumstances surrounding the potential donor and which may influence the size of his donation and his degree of involvement: Can the mechanism by which donations are made affect their size? Do donations decrease if commercial activities increase, if alternative sources of funding are developed? Is there competition with other causes, i.e. does the donor give to other institutions? What is the relationship between the donor's values and his donation? Doing all this implies personal follow-up, devoting time and attention to donors, so as to guarantee the successful achievement of the aim of generating a sense of belonging. As Ryan (1999) has noted, non-profit-making institutions distinguish themselves from other initiatives by the fact that they provide an additional benefit: that of seeking to ensure citizens' active participation in achieving the progress of the community. If it is certain that the number of donations captured and volunteers recruited is a good measure of the degree of acceptance of the values that all NGOs try to transmit to society, this is not what their persuasive communication campaigns seek exclusively or as a priority. Rather, they set out to strengthen their relationship with all their members, such that the resources come in as a consequence of this treatment: the supporter becomes a donor. Specifically, this framework allows us to put forward four systems which are the outcome of applying a new logic and that can help us keep our bearings: the logic of relational marketing.

1. Bring the Donor Closer to the Institution

Reduce the distance between the donor and the NGO. This process of getting closer can take place via a three-stage process:

I.. Encourage them to share in the inspiring principles.
II. Encourage them to share in the NGO's activities.
III. Give them real possibilities of access to these activities.

If we follow the sequence from I to III, the message is to make them see how, in a specific case, one can "live solidarity". If we follow the sequence from III to I we suggest that they ask themselves the question: what is behind all of this? The intention is to arouse healthy curiosity in the donor so as to facilitate the required process of bringing him closer. Both in one case and the other, as well as bringing the donor closer to the organization, this helps improve the "quality" of the motives for collaboration with the institution, something which we have seen is proper to all NGOs: that they are linked by ever more transcendental motives, generating in society a broad interest group which is committed (not just involved) to the work that is being carried out within the non-governmental organization. The aim is to ensure that the motives underlying the altruistic behaviour are more a response to a free personal commitment than a search for self-satisfaction. This builds up a base of people with a preference for our organization and that today provide money, tomorrow help with promotional tasks and the next day facilitate access to new people and relationships.

2. Building the Loyalty of Donors

Thanks to the fact that we maintain contact and concern ourselves with having a solid and stable relationship with donors we are in a position to make the donors' commitment to the NGO more intensive and, moreover, to do this in a gradual way. This is the true interest of any fund-raising campaign (from whence its name). It is not a question of raising money but of initiating a process of developing resources that stabilizes over time and makes it possible to ensure the future of the institution benefiting from this aid. The loyalty of the persons making up an NGO's interest group is, in itself, a gift, i.e. a different form of donation and, therefore, something that cannot be bought. Loyalty is granted by donors: you cannot go out and get it (David, 1997). In order for the relationship to be beneficial over the long term, the donor, volunteer or supporter must form an active part of the bonding process. Any campaign or promotion must evolve towards loyalty building. Only implementing one-off initiatives intended to cover a specific extraordinary need justify the isolated donation. We are not saying that all donors, from the outset, must be active partners in the NGO, but that they must take advantage of this one-off involvement to start a relationship that should be built up over time (Newman, 1998; Sprinkel, 1997).

3. Accountability

Donors should be treated as investors in social causes. They do not give money, but invest in society through the NGO in order to generate a social benefit: the ability to express the results of the institution's actions in terms of the "social dividend": what quantity of good has been done by each monetary unit contributed.

Accountability implies giving information about what the NGO does and how it does it. This information, provided year after year, will talk of its trajectory and evolution. And those who know the history of the NGO understand its needs. In this way bringing the donor close has also been made a reality. Without doubt the institution is not, and does not identify exclusively with, the information it provides to the outside world. There are characteristics (probably the most important ones) that cannot be expressed quantitatively (Forbes, 1998). Experience, nevertheless, shows us that behind this quantitative information are hidden events and facts that, although they do not completely reveal the essence of the institution, can approach its threshold if interpreted appropriately. We will not tire of underlining the importance of the mission as an orientating criterion for the organization, but a fruitless mission, one with no results, cannot be considered as such. We shall not enter into the question of what should be understood to be results. This reflection corresponds to each institution, and will depend on many variables, all of which will be closely linked to its effectiveness (Herman and Renz, 1999). But what it is more interesting to underline here is that the organization should offer information about the results, as these are going to constitute an important test of the degree of fulfilment of the mission, and that focusing on the mission constitutes the most effective vaccine against the disease of voluntarism (going no further than good intentions).

4. Focusing on the Beneficiary

The beneficiary should not only perform a central role in the action of the NGO but also in its communication. It should not be overlooked that the organization is no more than a catalyst for the development of the people it serves, and is a bridge between two distanced publics: donors and users/beneficiaries. An essential part of its mission is to facilitate understanding between these two worlds that need one another. Bringing each out of his isolation, opening him up to the problems of others. In this way the abyss of inter-subjectivity, which separates men more than it unites them, is overcome.

The object of the NGO's action is the person in need. Its task is to provide the means to promote his self-development: helping those who help themselves. As the organization does not seek to substitute efforts, but facilitate and guide the development process, its identity tends to be confused with that of its beneficiaries. Transmitting to the audience the singularity of its action should lead it to try to communicate -if one can speak this way of an organization- its personality: to go from what the NGO is to who it is, who it serves, so as to encourage possibilities of interrelation. If people are what is really important, the form of communication should not leave them out. Making use of Ruiz Retegui's considerations (1987, pages 36-37), we can say that the "what it is" responds to an enumeration of universal qualities or properties; the "who it is" refers to the unrepeatable personal reality. The human person cannot be known adequately through universal properties because these properties are necessarily part, and the person transcends in its unity the sum of these parts. The person may be known either through personal acquaintance or through the narration of stories. Objective reports say both too much and too little: they say too much about what it is but never who it is. For this reason, people feel violated -and in fact they are- when general laws are automatically applied to them; on the other hand all woes can be borne if we put them in a story or tell a story about them.

The answer to the question "who are you?" demands we tell our story: if the entity wants to make itself known to public opinion, the best way of doing it is ensuring the dissemination of narrated stories of real people who thanks to the NGO have been able to grow and improve their lives. The fact of telling a story reveals meaning without making the mistake of defining it. The Florida project, promoted by the Fundación Carvajal, can serve as an example to give a practical illustration of this change of perspective about which we have been talking in this last point.

On 31 January 1994 an avalanche of mud from the river Frayle in the town of la Florida, Columbia, occurred, leaving hundreds of families without a home. The offices of the mayor and the bishopric mobilized to set up a consortium of institutions in order to rehabilitate the area and provide new homes for the affected population. The consortium consisted of Fundación FES, Fundación Corona, Fundación Restrepo Barco, Corporación Antioquia Presente, Fundación Holguines, the council, the bishopric and Fundación Carvajal. They divided the community into four groups each of which was assigned to a different entity.

Fundación Carvajal, true to its philosophy, was clear from the outset that "it was not a matter of simply putting a roof over the heads of those who had lost their homes, but setting in motion a community to build its district with an identity of its own." To this end, they selected a group of families- "they asked us: and you, how are you going to select them? And we answered that we would take the poorest, most marginalized…"- And they proposed that they construct their own home. The Foundation limited itself to proposing its self-building methodology, enabling the group to take on an active role from the start and channeling the efforts of the beneficiaries: "go to the people, live with them, learn from them, start with what they already have and know… when the work is finished and the task completed people will say: we did that ourselves." During the design phase for the homes Carvajal noted a certain degree of rejection of the architectural solution proposed and, consistent with its approach whereby it adapts itself to the needs and characteristics of the community, redesigned the homes on the basis of the group's suggestions.

The rest of the organizations in the consortium taking part in the project limited themselves to building and handing over homes to the victims. What were the results?

Antioquía Presente: homes of 39 square metres. Execution in 8 months. Price per square metre: 84 pesos. Fundación Holguines: homes of 39 square metres. Execution in 4 months. Price per square metre: 84 pesos. Construction company contracted by the Council: homes of 39 square metres. Execution in 12 months. Price per square metre: 84 pesos. Fundación Carvajal: homes of 48 square metres. Execution in 45 days. Price per square metre: 67 pesos, with better objective quality: foundations, coffer work, pillars.

These are the cold, objective data. These are the figures that are usually given by institutions when evaluating a project and when putting their results before public opinion. But what does not show on the surface is precisely what is most important. Fundación Carvajal's success was not that it built homes at lower cost, in a shorter time and with better quality. All these results, without underestimating them, were the result of a methodology which starts out from considering the receiver of the aid as the subject responsible for searching for solutions for his problems. Looking at the results, Carvajal took first place in terms of its beneficiaries' self-esteem, starting with giving incentives to the efforts of the community. It is fundamental to realize that the final outcome of an effective action is not simply to resolve a problem but, in parallel, to enable the people involved to develop and gain dignity. It is not a matter of commonplaces about focusing on beneficiaries. When we take on social problems there is no difference between "products" and "clients" because the "final product" consists of transforming the beneficiary from a passive subject into the protagonist of his own development.[10] We believe that this is what should be reflected, as one of its main components, in the execution of the advertising strategy of non-governmental organizations.

Conclusions

Let us go back to the advice of one of the past masters of advertising. Back in 1923 Hopkins recommended avoiding negative advertising: Always present the positive and not the offensive side of the subject. Do not present or describe what is bad about it. The people you are trying to attract already have enough of that. Show and highlight the happy results obtained thanks to your methods. Explain what the results of good methods are and not what happens with the bad ones (…). Do not show the wrinkles you want to get rid of, but the face as it will be afterwards. Compare the results of two advertisements, one shows the dark side and the other the bright side. One is warning, the other is inviting. You will be surprised at the results. You will find that the positive advertisement is four times more effective than the other (Hopkins, 1991).

As is so often the case with classics, many of the arguments are still valid. It should not be overlooked that the mission society entrusts to NGOs is to give active and positive aid to change the lives of their beneficiaries. When an organization intervenes in a disadvantaged community there is -or should always be- a before and after. This is what should appear in the messages promoting social causes.

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Footnotes

[1] According to Knapp (1996, pages 166-186), the effectiveness of NGOs is, among other factors, that they start out from the perspective of the user when deploying their actions. This entails shifting the centre of authority from outside to the beneficiary him/herself, reducing decision costs and strengthening civil cohesion. The protagonism achieved by the NGOs is partly based on the symbolic function that their legal status gives them. When an NGO takes over an intervention program it is assumed that its status as an NGO will cover social needs, confusing the container (the organization) with the content (the programme) (Comas, 1999. Pages 62-74). Nevertheless, what determines the disappearance or continued existence of a given social institution is its ability to resolve people's problems (Cabrillo, 1999. Page 94), and it would seem that there is a greater chance of doing so when you take into account who is suffering than when you do not.

[2] We have studied, following Drucker's criteria (1992, pages 11-15) the missions of 41 Spanish NGOs working on development cooperation. These missions have been obtained from corporate presentation documentation published by the institutions considered. In 61% of cases it is explicitly stated that the following two objectives are sought: direct action and awareness raising. For a detailed analysis of the concept of the non-governmental organization and its mission see the book *La imagen de las ONG de desarrollo* (The image of development NGOs) (Martínez, 1998a).

[3] There is a close relationship between the fulfilment of an institutional mission and the financing systems. The mission is not a mere declaration of intentions, but is the start of an action that informs the insitution. It influences, and is influenced by, the procedures used to capture resources and by the way in which they are structured. The dependency on a sole source of resources may give rise to a situation in which this conditions its economic support on a particular ideological approach. If, moreover, this source is public, the problems may be worsened and may bring into question the legitimacy of its non-governmental character. To the extent to which the public sector maintains a powerful position as a provider of resources, these institutions find themselves in a position of dependency and financial uncertainty. This, according to Sajardo (1996), will tend to reduce their ability to produce social well-being. Economic independence should provide the financial flexibility enabling the essential ideological and administrative independence needed to guarantee the fulfilment of the mission. To achieve this flexibility and independence the not-for-profit entity must *diversify its sources of resources.* Moreover, the actions of organizations in the Third Sector -particularly those devoted to social work- are on the road to being able to meet their needs from the community on a permanent basis, linking themselves to the beneficiary population over a sufficient period to guarantee irreversible results. The need to work continuously -until the community is autonomous with respect to the solution of particular problems- and to avoid interruptions, slow-downs, and abandonment of projects, leads them to seek to escape shortfalls in their financing and to guarantee the *stability of their sources of resources.* Together with the mission of collaborating actively in development education, we find in these principles the justification of the need to intensify the campaigns presenting NGOs to public opinion as the means to improve sources of finance and achieve civil support.

[4] We think that it is necessary to distinguish information and persuasion from both advertising and non-advertising communication and from rational and emotional arguments. These three pairs of concepts must be considered independently as they are not naturally linked to one another. Communication may be, from the point of view of performance, either connotative or denotative (Davis et al, 1991; Alfaro, 1992). Denotation appeals to the understanding and provides evidence facilitating access to the understanding of the cause put forward; connotation appeals to the emotions, sentiments and feelings. It seeks to move the spirit by an impression on the senses (Martínez, 1998b). Advertising differs from non-advertising communication in that although both make the other a participant in what one has, the former is paid for, and thus designed and produced by, the broadcasting agent, whereas the second is not. Thus, an advertising communication may be informative by using an emotional tone in its execution (the campaigns carried out by the Ministry of Health on the consequences of tobacco consumption on health are a good example of this case), or may be non-advertising but persuasive and rational (*telethons* may serve as an example, although they combine both rational and emotional elements).

[5] The term solidarity derives from the latin expression *in solidum*, a legal term referring to a relationship in law in which there is a mutual obligation. It expresses two things simultaneously: the union between people and mutual, individual and personal responsibility between each and every one within the whole.

[6] Op. cit.

[7] Aristotle, "Rhetoric". Book II-8, 1385b 15-30. We have used the edition published by Biblioteca Clásica Gredos, Madrid 1990. Pages 353-366.

[8] Statements by Jeffrey D. Jacobs, Catherine S. Muther and James D. Watkins, obtained from Business Week/ October 6, 1997. Pages 38-40.

[9] From the author's interview with Luis Fernando Cruz, Executive President of Fundación Carvajal, in Cali (Colombia), July 1995.

[10] Taken from the talk by Javier Martín Cavanna at the "Primer Encuentro de Entidades sin Ánimo de Lucro" (First Meeting of Non-Profit-Making Institutions). IESE. Madrid, March 1997. Unpublished document.