Mobile Voices: projecting the voices of immigrant workers by appropriating mobile phones for popular communication

By the VozMob project*

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   Mobile Voices, also known as VozMob (www.vozmob.net), is a digital storytelling platform for first-generation, low-wage immigrants in Los Angeles to create and publish stories about their communities, directly from cell phones. The project is a partnership between the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California (USC) and the Institute of Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA), a nonprofit that organizes low-income immigrants in Los Angeles. Founded in 1984, IDEPSCA's programs are focused on education, economic development, health access and reform, popular communication, and worker rights. Currently IDEPSCA runs six day laborer and household worker centers and two day laborer corners where workers look for jobs in a more humane and dignified way while learning about their rights and gaining valuable leadership skills.

   The Annenberg School for Communication (the research partner) and IDEPSCA (the community partner) came together around the shared goal of designing communication systems and processes that promote media justice and help those without computer access gain greater participation in the digital public sphere. This chapter is a reflection on popular communication, participatory design, and community-based multimedia practice from the Mobile Voices project team. It was collaboratively written by 13 members of the project and includes a project overview and an exploration of themes including the pedagogy of popular communication, participatory technology design, and the dynamics

of power-sharing and accountability in university-community partnerships. The chapter ends with reflections by members of the Popular Communication Team.

I. Project Overview

Immigrant workers in Los Angeles have little access to digital channels of communication and very limited control over how they are represented in the media. Except in special circumstances, such as the May 2006 immigrant rights mobilizations, low-wage immigrant workers are mostly invisible in English language broadcast media. When they do appear, they are often criminalized or, at best, represented as an aggregate problem to be solved through immigration policy reform. Commercial Spanish language radio, print, and television stations do consider low-wage immigrant workers to be part of their audience but rarely give them direct voice or report on their organizing efforts. This group also has very little visibility online, which is unsurprising considering that low-income Spanish-speaking households have the lowest levels of computer, internet, and broadband access of any group in California. A June 2009 statewide survey of 2,502 California residents by the Public Policy Institute of California (2009) found that "just over half of Latinos (52%) say they have home computers, far lower than the percentage of Asians (89%), whites (87%), and blacks (75%) who do." Among Latino households, homes where Spanish is spoken also have the lowest levels of Internet access (31% compared to 83% in English-language Latino households) and broadband adoption (17% compared with 68%) (Ibid.)

At the same time, Los Angeles is the site of some of the most innovative organizing models in the country. It is home to a rich field of social movement organizations, including a number of independent worker centers that for decades have been organizing new immigrant workers that form the backbone of construction, service, light manufacturing, and garment work in the Los Angeles region (Milkman, 2006; Pulido, 2006). Many of these organizations and networks have developed sophisticated strategies for getting their voices heard in the media. Some have developed popular communication approaches to build their members' ability to advocate on their own behalf. Most are currently struggling, with varying degrees of success, to integrate the internet and digital media into their communications strategies and practices (Costanza-Chock, 2008). In 2006, a Small Collaborative Grant from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) helped support the beginnings of a partnership between scholars from the University of Southern California and immigrant worker organizations in Los Angeles to research the creation of media controlled by low-wage immigrant workers. That process grew into VozMob, a formal partnership between IDEPSCA and USC. The following year SSRC supported the VozMob project to begin a series of workshops in which we could learn how to appropriate mobile

phones for popular communication.

II. The Mobile Voices approach: Popular communication, participatory design, and power sharing

Popular Communication

IDEPSCA's story is one of struggle. The genesis of its popular education practice goes back to the early 1980s when members were part of an organization of Latino immigrant and Chicano parents, teachers, and youth involved in public education and affordable housing development in the city of Pasadena, California. One of the lessons learned through that experience was, as Paulo Freire (1970) once said, that oppressed individuals carry inside themselves their oppressor and reproduce oppression against others. Through this experience, IDEPSCA learned that popular education "is a process of critical reflection of the experiences of impoverished organized groups struggling to transform our society in order to make it just and democratic for the interests of the oppressed" (IDEPSCA, 1997). IDEPSCA has thus been practicing popular education for the last 28 years. Responding to an unjust system in public education and labor exploitation, the organization's popular education methodology has given the most disenfranchised and exploited workers the methods, tools, and values to understand the root causes of their socio-political, economic, and linguistic reality. IDEPSCA's experience is like a double helix of DNA where one helix represents its members' individual subjective stories and the other helix represents group objective formation; both held together by collective actions rooted in values such as dignity, courage, solidarity, humility, and love. IDEPSCA's growth responds to the endless needs of immigrant day laborers, household workers, parents, and youth who come to the United States to seek employment, often displaced from their countries by corporations with unrestrained power authorized by free trade agreements. Yet, once here, millions of immigrants live in fear, economically segregated, in a system of ever-increasing 'social apartheid' (Chossudovsky, 2003). The values that have held IDEPSCA's helix together include not only moral human values, such as human dignity, but also structural change. IDEPSCA works to humanize every process of learning and teaching. Its core values are also about treating everyone as subjects of their own lives rather than objects of oppression. IDEPSCA friend and colleague Michael James has often said that the most radical practice of our society is "to practice democratic processes with oppressed groups in the heart of a capitalist system." IDEPSCA tries to do exactly this, and this approach has become a pillar of the

VozMob partnership.

IDEPSCA's motto is "reading reality to write history," and in an age when reality is increasingly shaped by and mediated through digital networks it is crucial that our communities develop critical multimedia literacy. Popular educators have a long history of popular communication: building the capacity of oppressed groups to speak for themselves in the key media platforms of the historical moment. Popular communicators in the past focused on community controlled radio, as in Bolivian miner's radio (O'Connor, 2004), on social movement newspapers (Vidal-Beneyto, 1979), or later on video, as in the Videazimut network of the late 1980s (Halleck, 2002). Communication scholar Jesus Martin-Barbero (1998) became known for developing the theory of popular communication in the Latin American context, emphasizing that people have the necessary tools to become agents of change, that they can resist the messages of the mass media and create their own media. For IDEPSCA's Popular Communication Team (PCT), popular communication is horizontal; that is, it involves the community documenting, analyzing, and discussing its own struggles, demands, victories, and failures. IDEPSCA's popular communication practice has included a number of print, radio, photography, and video projects in the past. Now, the internet is increasingly the key media platform, but right-wing hate groups have moved quickly to create negative representations of the immigrant community. For example, a Google search for the term "day laborer" reveals a site called daylaborers.org as the top result. This site is an immigrant-bashing collection of unflattering photos of some day laborers. The site creators gather these photos by going to day labor corners and yelling racist insults; when day laborers respond, the provocateurs snap photos and later post them to the web. Against the flood of negative representations of the day-laborer community in the Anglo print, TV, radio, and online media, we see the need to develop and adapt our popular communication practice to appropriate the new tools and platforms of digital production and distribution.

Mobile phones

When the mobile phone began its global diffusion in earnest at the turn of the new millennium, researchers examined the way this small "personal, portable, pedestrian" device quickly became linked to modes of self presentation and sociability among middle-class youth populations in Japan, western and northern Europe, and the U.S. (Aakhus & Katz, 2002; Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda, 2005; Ling, 2004). Other scholars investigated how mobile phones, often in coordination with the Internet, were beginning to play an important role in collective political mobilization, from the anti-WTO protests in Seattle in

1999, to the "People Power II" demonstrations to overthrow Philippine President Joseph Estrada in January 2001 (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey, 2007; Rafael, 2003). With the advent of camera phones, it became increasingly common to find personal visual archives made up of spontaneously snapped shots of everyday life that were stored in the phone (Okabe & Ito, 2006). Phone pictures of catastrophic events, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, also made their way to the mainstream news, serving as a form of amateur or "citizen journalism" and playing a role in mobilizing relief efforts (Koskinen, 2008). Nearly a decade into the widespread diffusion of mobile phones, their relative ease of use, multi-functionality, and falling costs have enabled a much larger segment of society to use them to achieve personal goals. In Los Angeles, mobile devices have been more broadly adopted by low-wage, Spanish-speaking, first generation immigrant households and communities than any other networked communication technology (Modarres, 2006). They thus have the potential to become a key content production and distribution tool for immigrant workers.

In order to better understand how to integrate mobile phones into IDEPSCA's popular communication approach, in the spring of 2008 the VozMob team conducted a survey of communication practices among 58 workers at five day laborer centers. The survey included questions on participants' access to mobile phones and computers, actual and desired uses of these technologies, and monthly expenditure on services. Findings about communication practices helped VozMob's initial development by describing day laborers' usage patterns and their ideas on how mobile phones can be effective tools. We found that most workers (78%) own mobile phones, and out of these 31% use their phone 1 to 5 times a day, 36% use it 5 to 10 times a day, and 25% use it more than 10 times a day. A majority of the workers reported using their phones primarily for work purposes and also to contact friends and family in other countries. The workers' phone models and plans varied greatly, as did their use of specific phone features such as text, video, and photos. About a third of the workers had pre-paid plans, and monthly costs of all phone plans ranged from $20 to $180. Only four workers knew for sure that their phone plan included SMS (text messaging), and we found that most were hesitant to text due to uncertainty about the cost. Overage charges, unclear billing, and unexpected rate changes were cited as reasons for leaving monthly phone contracts. When asked how they used their phones, many workers said they knew how to take photos with their camera phones but did not know how to transfer this content to a computer or send it to another phone. This was often a source of frustration because the phone's memory would fill up quickly, forcing them to delete photos in order to free up more space. The majority of the workers expressed an interest in learning more about their phone's capabilities so that they could take full advantage of available features.

The survey of communication practices was also designed to better understand the workers' access to

and experience with computers. An overwhelming 98% of the workers said they would like to learn more about how to use a computer. Less than one-third (23%) owned a computer and half had never used a computer before. For those who did use computers regularly, they usually accessed them at a library or cybercafe to surf the Internet and send email. One worker described how language can be a barrier to using a computer, since the interfaces are mostly in English only.

Some of the most useful findings from the survey were the anecdotal accounts of how workers used their phones in different ways, such as to document completed jobs or to visually explain a plumbing problem through photos. Many workers mentioned that they would like to have additional features on their phones but without extra costs. One worker in particular expressed the desire to send email from his phone to his family back home so that he could always be connected to them. Overall we found an expressed interest in learning more about mobile phones and their features in order to fully take advantage of this accessible and affordable communication tool. For example, 93% said they would be interested in receiving SMS job announcements, and 80% said they would be interested in participating in a mobile phone workshop. These findings reinforced our belief in the potential of cell phones as tools for information distribution, media creation, and self-representation, and gave us ideas about possible paths forward for the project. Our goal became to collaboratively design a system that would work with low-cost, pre-paid mobile phones (as opposed to a system dependent upon costly smartphones with expensive data plans), and to maximize accessibility, security and customizability for the low-wage immigrant community.

Toward Participatory Design

Most technological systems are designed by those with power and large amounts of capital, even if users constantly push back by modifying, reworking, and appropriating technologies for their own ends. VozMob strives to involve multiple stakeholders in shaping the platform's technology and applications from the beginning. All members of our team participate in the design of the system through feature brainstorming, testing, and feedback. Our emphasis on participatory design draws on popular education methods (Freire, 1970) as well as technology appropriation theories (Bar, Pisani, & Weber, 2007).

Participatory design practices directly involve users in technology development to increase the technology's effectiveness while democratizing the design process and empowering users (Asaro, 2000; Spinuzzi, 2005; Byrne & Alexander, 2006). The aim is to address issues of power inherent in any technology design process, through participation and co-determination of design by stakeholders in an

iterative, dialogic, and humanistic fashion (see Byrne & Alexander, 2006). Challenges of using a participatory process include the need to develop users' technological literacy and capacities to participate in technology design (Luke et al., 2004), and the fact that participatory approaches often require more time and effort to build consensus throughout the process.

VozMob started with an open mind about how best to structure the project's participatory design process, with hopes that the process itself could also emerge from participatory practices. The core component of the VozMob process is a weekly workshop where we share and analyze stories, test mobile tools (how they can be used and how they should be improved), brainstorm desired features, and discuss overall system design and architecture (e.g. privacy issues, free software). Together we discuss these issues as we work hands-on with the phones and online blogging platform. The team tracks features and bugs that come out of the workshops through an online issue tracking system (dev.vozmob.net) and a dedicated Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel (irc://freenode.net/vozmob), which off-site software developers use for meetings. Developers also participate in a weekly conference call, and periodic face-to-face meetings and intensive coding sessions.

Outside the workshops, we meet in a weekly seminar to discuss project developments and explore theories and relevant research. Additionally, the developers have led free software workshops and have presented at conferences alongside other project participants. These various channels have allowed developers and other VozMob actors to interact, even though the developers are based offsite in San Francisco and Uruguay. However, physical distance does limit direct collaboration and interaction.

The main tool that we have developed through this process is a customized version of the free and open content management software Drupal that allows users to take photographs, record audio or video, attach descriptions, and send them to the site (vozmob.net) directly from their phone via multimedia messaging (MMS). Once their stories have been posted, users can log in to edit them. We have taken precautions to ensure anonymity of all users who upload to the blog; for example, we randomize default usernames and mask identifying information inserted by the phone companies. Those users who wish to do so can register an account in whatever name they choose. We are also now developing the technical capacity to send stories from the site directly to phones and to groups of phones, and for editorial functions to be distributed via phone. A full description of the software functionality we have developed is available at http://wiki.vozmob.net. Learning to use these tools has involved an extensive co-learning process, which we have documented in order to develop a toolkit to share with others. Our experience thus far has been that the participatory elements of the design process have had a critical impact on the system design, which we seek to continually improve.

Power-sharing and accountability

To implement our joint commitment to social justice and critical analysis, all partners in VozMob are committed to power-sharing and accountability, guided by a set of shared principles articulated in a code of conduct. However, despite these common visions, university-community partnerships are always challenging. While they have many potential benefits and productive outcomes, they are also often characterized by distrust, lack of understanding of each party's needs, and power imbalances that leave participants feeling marginalized, exploited, or simply misunderstood. Those who work in the academy and those who answer to community organizations often view the research process and its desired outcomes in different ways (Nyden & Weiwel, 1992). Academic research questions are often driven by current debates in the field, and successful publication in a peer-reviewed academic journal requires making a contribution to these theoretical debates. However, the questions of relevance to the scholarly community may not always be those that are most immediately useful or relevant to the community organization. Inversely, community action must follow organizational or political imperatives that may hold up field research and slow down a research project. These differences can at times lead each party to hold different priorities or expectations of the research, which can potentially lead to conflict.

The key to a solid collaboration is for both parties to understand as much as possible the motivations and constraints of the other, to be mindful not to use their expertise or position to dominate the project, and to maximize knowledge and skill sharing in both directions. There must also ultimately be a recognition of privilege: not only the privilege to be part of a wonderful experiment, but also the privilege that this society grants to academics and denies to low-wage and no wage immigrant workers from the Global South.

The challenge before us has been to develop a collaborative partnership that allows us to work together towards our common goals while also taking into account the different realities in which we work. One key to a strong partnership is clear expectations and accountability. While every individual involved may have different goals or aspirations for the project, we have struggled to create mechanisms to ensure that VozMob remains accountable to low-wage immigrant workers. At the beginning of the project, we attempted to put a formal structure in place through a shared written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that laid out our governance structure and expectations for all project participants. Formally, the project is governed by the Mobile Voices Community Board, which includes two worker delegates, two IDEPSCA staff delegates, and two delegates from USC. The Board is responsible for all key decisions, including budget approval, appointment of staff positions, addition

of new organizational partners, approval of grant applications, and involvement in new research initiatives. Our MOU stipulates that for all major research efforts related to the project (including formulation of research questions and hypotheses, data gathering, analysis, project evaluation, and presentation of findings), a collaborative decision be made beforehand regarding how and when community partners will be involved.

Day-to-day, the project also strives to share power among participants. We try to encourage all partners to articulate issues as they arise, to participate in shaping discussions, and to remain informed of aspects of the project they may not directly be part of. For example, agendas are shared in advance and reviewed at the beginning of meetings and workshops so that everyone has an opportunity to bring up topics. We alternate responsibility for facilitating and for taking notes during meetings, and notes are posted on shared web spaces. To the extent practical and appropriate, all project work is conducted in the open, on publically accessible wikis and blogs, so that all project participants can keep abreast of any aspect and so that others can learn from our process.

To democratize non-democratic systems is not an easy task to accomplish. Our accountability mechanisms and power-sharing practices sound wonderful on paper, but we often struggle with them in our daily practice. Class, gender, race, and educational privilege are deeply entrenched structural inequalities that operate not only on the macro level to shape our life chances, but also on the personal level to influence the way we think and interact with others around us. All of us are committed to the core ideas that every human being has something to learn, and something to teach, but institutionalized structures of privilege constantly militate against true power sharing practices and towards reinscribing expert knowledge systems. For example, we need to strengthen our Community Board so that it is able to play its role as an effective accountability mechanism. The top-down model of the Academy as the site of knowledge and the community as the site of information to be gathered exerts a powerful pull, even among a group that is intellectually committed to alternative models of participatory community-based research. The reward structure of the Academy, where single or primary authorship of peer-reviewed publications is the key yardstick for measuring success, also exerts constant pressure against broadly collaborative research that may produce other important forms of codified knowledge. To take another example, most academic grantmakers require individual "Principal Investigators" be named even in university-community collaborative research projects.

The long history of objectification of poor people and communities of color by a research apparatus geared towards extracting knowledge in order to better control and subjugate them does not magically disappear when we utter the word "participatory." At the same time, even justifiably guarded reactions to academics can lead to mutual distrust and undermine progress towards project goals that are truly

shared. Building a healthy relationship of trust between university researchers and the IDEPSCA community may be the one of the biggest challenges faced by the VozMob project, but it is also potentially one of the most powerful and transformative outcomes.

While there are many project participants, the voices of the immigrant workers who volunteer as part of the Popular Communication Team, who help design the VozMob system and produce stories and news about their communities, are particularly crucial. In the spirit of privileging community-based knowledge, we conclude this chapter not with an expert analysis of our key findings, but with reflections by the PCT about their participation in the VozMob project, what it has meant to them, and what they see as the next steps.

III. Popular Communication Team Reflections

When we arrive in the United States to live, we face many battles. We hear that immigrants are a calamity for the nation, that we take away jobs and services, that we have no education, that we are ignorant, that we do not have aspirations, that we do not want to integrate ourselves, that we do not want to learn English, and that they (anti-immigrants) must save the nation from the terrible tide of "illegals." Such attacks make us ill and are one of the key reasons for Mobile Voices to exist. It is worthwhile to meditate on the fact that VozMob's goal is to create consciousness in our communities. We are struggling tirelessly to form a base for our future, so that new generations can use popular communication to be able to tell their own stories. Thus, the silence that invaded our ancestors and our present ceases to exist, as we speak for social justice and demand our rights as individuals and human beings.

In the following pages you can read some of our individual reflections on this process.

María de Lourdes González Reyes

We have done some of the work of modern storytellers sharing different stories of the common and community immigrant life, especially Hispanics. How do they work, how do they do it, how do they face challenges each day, for example: "Tamales and atole," "Jacqueline," "One more," "Ana Pinto," and "Teresa" are real testimonials, not fictional even though they could seem so. And I have saved many more that I consider authentic treasures, with respect to those who told us about the situation in which they live.

Mobile Voices is: A window of universal knowledge that connects the world of those who are silent with others who have the opportunity to introduce themselves to the cybernetic universe. The technological development that allows human stories to be told, stories of happiness for life, of each person's struggle as they cross borders for a better life, but stories that have remained silent due to historic conditions. They are focused on satisfying the basic necessities of living beings. In general they do so with enthusiasm, visualizing the following generations, giving one more step towards material and intellectual improvement.

Human stories, of daily struggles, but in the certainty that tomorrow will be better, since today they work hard and twice as much to demonstrate the invincible spirit to together achieve: A better life!

Storytelling is a responsibility to those who generously yield: a fragment of their life to be exposed to public opinion, where information can be used and may affect their personal life, but.... Our Community, always generous!

An example is the story "One more:" I held back from asking more questions about her entry and routine treatment by prison policies. She says it when she tells of the shame she feels, something she never imagined she would experience. "I really wanted to scream to the world that I did not deserve to experience this horror." I did not ask for a name and did not take a personal photo, I only photographed her left foot. Too much has happened already for me to expose her physically. There are policies, in the media, in which the authorities can intervene if they please. It never hurts to be prudent to protect those who express their stories.

Knowledge is power, knowledge is understanding and knowing ourselves. This provides greater understanding of our world and our human essence. I am absolutely a woman of faith in ourselves, and in human greatness.

The personal story of María de Lourdes González Reyes in Mobile Voices.

Originally from Mexico, D. F., (no one chooses where to be born.) A lover of knowledge and knowing. I am currently taking courses to obtain a High School Diploma. Besides volunteering at IDEPSCA, I'm mother of Alejandra, Gabriela, Miguel Ángel, and Luis Alberto; Grandmother of:

Valeria, Gabriel, Sabina, Fernanda, Nuria, Sofía, Jerónimo, Adriana, Paola, and Octavio.

I arrived at IDEPSCA for a place to work as a volunteer, and I have been volunteering ever since doing a variety of activities and tasks. However, one of the most important experiences has been La Jornada XXII, our community newspaper. The work was arduous and required working long hours after the regular workday. The process of producing this edition was enriching, with the exchange of the different expertise of each member: writing, reading collectively, accepting comments, rewriting, rereading collectively, and finalizing the writtings in Spanish was an amazing experience. University of Santa Cruz interns then translated it to English and they sent the final version to the printer. It was exciting to participate in the launch of the newspaper written by us with the support of IDEPSCA, in front of the mass media (TV channel 34 Univision, 62, 54 Azteca America), exciting because it was the great opportunity to show a different image of immigrants, an image different from the one they have implanted in the minds of many: "immigrants are not good."

"Jornada XXII, Written in Day Laborer ink," said the reporter, while showing the newspaper. The most exciting dawn of my life as an Angelena. The lack of economic resources left Jornada XXII on hold and a multi-media edition was to come a year later. I was emotionally united with Mobile Voices. And work, Just for the love of humanity to which I belong.

Since the invention of the cell phone I said: I would not succumb to being a consumer of this service, I remain faithful to not buy it (the project gave me a cell phone). In the beginning it was a fierce battle with the cell phone; it was difficult to handle this new tool. Slowly I became familiar and eventually got it and started my work with the people I meet on the street, on the bus, at events where I go... today with the certainty that I can use the phone to capture a segment of life, by pressing a button. And I say segment as there are no absolute truths. (Each event is like a sphere that can have many points of view, and provide different readings, considering the social historical context of each reader).

Participating in Mobile Voices has been an excellent opportunity to work with young people who begin their life by developing the skills acquired in their academic experience. I attended some of the research classes, and it's something I never imagined. I felt like a fish in water and despite the language barrier, there is always someone to translate. Being a grandmother already, I fully enjoy feeling mentally young by collectively exercising ideas, thoughts, and different points of view. I also have participated in Mobile Voices presentations and I was invited to speak; an absolutely magical

experience. There, I addressed a large group of academics, showing my work in Spanish, my native language, speaking for thousands of silent people, expressing our thoughts, feelings, and desires.

In our PCT meetings we practice collective reading and what is called content analysis of some stories. Each of us chooses which story, then divided into groups, we read and question the content of the story. Each team reviews the story of another member. We take into account: the elements of the story; does it have a local, state, national, or universal focus? What aspects of social life are mentioned? Are they economic, legal, educational, psychological, what type? What kind of relationship is established between the interviewee and interviewer? The same exercise was done for this chapter.

I must say there are many knowledgeable people that are not recognized here and they adapt to the new process of life, just as those who tell their stories, who face life with courage, with pride. I say that I have limitations with the English language but ... How many have them with the language of Cervantes and lack the ability of Spanish? And in this case is the correspondence of knowing what we know and ignoring what is ignored. Nobody knows everything; it is impossible.

I am grateful for my life and for every one of those involved in this wonderful cybernetic event, but especially to my brothers in life who share their emotions, their expectations and wishes for: a better life. Some would say that the planets aligned to give me a great opportunity to serve others. Mobile Voices is a fantastic and unexpected project that has been part of my life. It's like being back in my enjoyable time of life, to be a link in this technological and cybernetic Odyssey that has crossed borders and can go beyond, with time. For this it is imperative that: decision makers are consistent with the principles and values that are printed on paper and say as a discursive formula, but that background is another matter.

Among the wonderful findings: There is a W O M A N who says: "A community leader lives *for* the cause, does not live *from* the cause."

Manuel Mancia

Personally, collaborating in this far-reaching project has been very important for me as an individual. Our investigation has followed the pace of our focus as correspondents, trying to find the right mechanism to reach our community using a new method of information with popular education, having

our community as a base, or in this case with the participation of the people. It is worth pointing out that our tools are new mechanisms that we are using, based on a different method of community communication. One example is our cellular telephone, which serves as our most immediate, principal tool for transmitting information. This is what makes us different from the traditional media, reaching people in different ways, with the happenings, news, and events in our community, and allowing the participation of people who travel by bus, in supermarkets, in the streets, and in every place that is frequented. Today, we as a team at VozMob feel proud to serve and at the same time continue collaborating with other organizations. Our effort is and will always be to educate through popular communication.

Many years ago, our community leaders came to people, bringing them together in large numbers to promote mechanisms of assistance that might offer support and eradicate slavery and politicians' disagreements with reference to the poorest people. But these events did not become more than an incomplete news story in the traditional media, which has only focused on reporting what is in their interests, or on news where profits are the fundamental base, making the silence of those who cannot speak even greater. That is why nowadays, we broadcast and we arrive at the truth and when people need to know what is happening around them from the residents in their city. Our people might not have remained silent, nor will they ever be quiet because wherever a citizen finds himself, he will have the adequate mechanism to be able to discover every abuse by those who want to maintain uneasiness and injustice in our world. That is our reflection on the collaboration, the participative integration of the neighborhood, by means of communication based on popular education, with mechanisms to continue using our technology.

The effect that we have created has been very important in terms of the results that we have obtained concerning our community, since during the process more organizations have become interested. While participating, I have involved youth in the VozMob project, and in that respect, we believe that the results have had a positive effect reaching our community. Our reality has been seen in advance because of the fact that our information is transmitted based in popular education. Our fight and sacrifice are arduous and constant in the creation of new ways to reach our community, a community that has been forgotten because of the demagoguery of a system of traditional communication that only makes its objective marketing, in that way forgetting about the people who have been oppressed by governments without a conscience. By means of the organization and popular communication, we have created a very large effect in our communities, understanding in that way the reality of our objective. Being a member of the project VozMob has been a very important experience for me since I have learned to develop my skills to transmit my ideas and points of view through the most immediate tool,

in this case the cell phone, using it as the most advanced technology. And helping in this case to teach others a new form of community communication. Our focus will continue to be to create a positive and effective focus among our people so that we no longer live in silence. As for our future, it is very important because using our mechanism, tools, and knowledge, we will reach every community in the world, involving youth and adults who want to be part of this new method of communication based on popular education. The most important factor at this moment is the technology for transmitting the reports with which we reach people without using so many machines or high-cost cameras. That is our advantage, and in that way, we will reach every corner of the world. That will be our objective.

Adolfo O. Cisneros

 I am pleased to be part of IDEPSCA and Mobile Voices specially because I can speak and express ideas that may be unknown, and also because it is necessary for people to understand the situation of all the day laborers and household workers that are found throughout the city. The day laborer centers are full of uncertainty since there are many people and jobs are raffled off (Valenzuela Jr., et. al., 2006). We do not know if there is going to be a job today, tomorrow, or in three days. Mobile Voices is the window to our world and for people to watch our way of life.

 I was invited to work on IDEPSCA's first newspaper, Jornaleros (Day Laborers), a project that was not easy but that has survived as an important tool to express day laborer and household worker ideas.

 I am delighted to continue participating in the Mobile Voices project because I feel that I am representing my *compañeros* and *compañeras** from the day laborer centers and continue supporting the cause of their own existence and that of their families. Survival is not easy anywhere, but with Mobile Voices, the opportunity has arisen to show oneself to the world and to express oneself about situations and mistakes that must be corrected. Poor people have mistakenly been singled out by prejudiced capitalism as people with no will to progress. This is not correct because day laborers are motivated, have high self esteem, participate in classes of different matters that IDEPSCA and community workers provide. Mobile Voices provides a very effective opportunity for anyone to express any worries they might have on any subject, because the Internet is a very effective tool in this contemporary era.

 In our PCT meetings we always have innovative and very effective ideas to help things be more efficient. In our technical training, from construction workers to household workers and even students have demonstrated great skill in absorbing the learning period. Some of us could send a text, some could not, but our eagerness demonstrated quick learning.

Although the system involves much detail, it has many windows that allow anyone with or without much practice with the Internet or with computer skills to be part of this project. Using tools such as the phones, the keypad, memory, icons, the construction and sending of a text or multimedia message, we began to put the project into practice – in my case, in the IDEPSCA centers, specifically in the Hollywood Community Center while also covering sporting and social events from other centers such as West L.A. and Downtown. People in the centers responded with a lot of excitement. The electronic portal is a tool that is not seen as a luxury, but rather as a necessity for survival. The idea is to talk with people and have them talk about their experiences or about topics of general interest. We see Mobile Voices as a way to promote the center and provide an opportunity for employers to find workers who can help in their needs.

It is the text and the sound of their voices expressing ideas that for them have a lot of meaning because it is about their development as people. Builders and household workers have participated in the project, showing us their willpower to survive, which has shown the effectiveness of Mobile Voices on a large scale.

My experience in this project has been satisfying since we mutually help each other and that is already an enormous advancement. It is also pleasing to hear both day laborers and the communities around the centers speak enthusiastically, since they count on yet another tool in their efforts to find work and watch people's histories. I am very interested in people's opinions of this project and therefore I am always exposing it to the people.

Crispin Jimenez

For me, IDEPSCA is a support structure to help me feel more confident when I go to work. I belong to the West L.A. Day Labor Center. Besides that, some employers feel more confident seeking a day laborer who comes from a day labor center. IDEPSCA has been for me a site of Education that has helped me to educate myself and move forward with more confidence and knowledge of the cause that we are fighting for.

That is: better treatment for workers, better salaries, and that the employers see us with respect. Also it has helped me personally to develop myself and better understand the problematic of the day laborer and the immigrant. Through IDEPSCA I was invited to participate in a project called VozMob. I agreed to take part, and here I am developing part of the project, cooperating with a group of *compañeros* and *compañeras*, so that VozMob will be a successful project through popular communication. Using, to that end, the telephone and its diverse techniques so that we are able to communicate ourselves better

and more rapidly, although no other medium exists. I feel very proud to belong to VozMob, and we will all continue to participate so that this project moves forward. Thank you for the invitation and onward we go.

Marcos Rodriguez

Every man, every woman, each individual regardless of his/her gender, race, or nationality is born free and will have to continue being free through the rest of life itself. In that same way, with my understanding based on that freedom, I know that no one can silence anyone, and that everyone must be listened to. Even if absurd to some, every opinion is valid. Ideas can be given about any subject but they cannot be imposed. Hierarchies exist, but unfortunately those who are on top and who fear being supplanted react with distrust, and they become arrogant believing that they have acquired a limitless power.

In some countries the presidential term is four years, some re-elect themselves, some terms are six years and there is no re-election, some become dictators, power makes them sick and they do not want to leave their posts. Some are so skillful that no one complains about his/her frauds or various crimes. There is some sort of immunity, people get used to thinking "this is just politics, I do not understand the legal bureaucracy." There is no follow-up to punish them with all the weight of the laws, and this is the reason why non-profit organizations are born and characterized by individuals who are hungry for social justice. On the other hand, there are other organizations that deep inside only do it to make a profit and it depends on the activities they perform. I, personally, love being a day laborer, and during the time I spent looking for jobs on corners I always wanted to know what I could do to change the image of day laborers.

For me, a permanent job means hierarchies; rules: "don't be late, if you are late next time you will be fired." I like being a day laborer because you get to know different people, different races, and different ideologies. I retired for a bit from being a day laborer. I worked as a Los Angeles taxi driver but later on I came back to the corners, and when I went back I was amazed. "Someone had chosen a worker center in my favorite corner, in the corner of my many experiences as a day laborer. Yes, a true miracle."

IDEPSCA, yes, but I asked myself what idoes IDEPSCA mean?

Oh, yes, Institute of Popular Education of Southern California. And I asked myself, who is behind all of this? Are they using us to become rich? Could it be a good cause? But I began to repeat the same thing. This is a true miracle. As day laborers we carry the stigma of being lazy, or that we do not

represent anything in the social sphere and that apparently we are not worth anything.

However, I know that we are valuable, and we even begin to understand how the bad employers act and that to educate them no one goes to work for him. After I joined IDEPSCA's day laborer program, I was participating in many workshops that the organization develops for the community. Among them are the health workshops, and health and occupational safety. All of them are very important and very valuable, and in sequence Mobile Voices arrives.

This program is truly marvelous and its reach is limitless. It gathers people from all walks of life: students, day laborers, household workers, and even professors. People from all social levels can become part of VozMob. This is the type of opening that exists within IDEPSCA. There is no discrimination. It is for everyone. This is why, you who are reading these lines, you are welcome to become part of VozMob because there is freedom of expression, liberty, that I love so much, that I would give my life to preserve. Well, I may be exaggerating, but that is how I feel.

Children, ladies, day laborers, many of us have cell phones; VozMob arrives to reform freedom of expression and it is not commercial. I emphasize that we have the cell phone to enhance our communication, but do we use it in an appropriate way? Do we understand the icons that we see on our screen? Text messages, Internet, the last weather news and the works, but as the commercial TV says it, do you drive or are you driven? The news is given to us as the mass media wants since it is controlled by the ruling government, especially when there is a political problem or the country is in war. But what if you make your own stories and your own interviews? What if you give your own opinion? Well, that is what VozMob is for me, the gate to the world of interaction of many worlds. To define all the windows that exist today with the technology that is available to us and that perhaps we do not perceive. Depending on how we take advantage of it, dare to succeed. Join VoMob and spread the word.

NOTES

* Additional information about this stage of research, including a summary of the context and conditions for low-wage immigrant workers in LA, is available from the SSRC's Media Research Hub. See http://mediaresearchhub.ssrc.org/grants/default-research-bounties/migrant-voices-applying-communication-for-social-change-methodology.

* Conversations with Michael D. James, a popular educator who has lived and worked in the San Francisco area of California. The phrase "structural dignity" also comes from Michael D. James.

* *Compañero* and *compañera* mean friend, comrade, or companion in Spanish. Spanish is a gendered language, and we always use both forms of this and other gendered terms to reflect the fact that we are both genders.

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