

Caravana Ciudadana: lessons learned from participatory communication

At Calandria we understand **citizen participation** as actions that people make daily and voluntarily, in an individual way or in a community, looking for having an influence on decisions-makers.

Citizens participate, for example, when they get and demand information what is happening in their cities or countries, when they are well-informed with different opinions, and they have their own views and express them freely. When, in that way, they participate in public debate about an issue that concerns everybody, when they join political groups, when they analyse political manifestos before voting, when they join demonstrations or social vigilance of authorities and public services.

However, even though every citizen has the same rights and responsibilities to influence planners or decision-makers, not everybody does it with the same intensity, attitude or ability.

Calandria is involved in various approaches to communication. Participation by leaders and organisations is very important and we promote them actively, but we also place much importance on opinions expressed by street people, in line with the concept of citizenship. People are usually treated by politicians and the mass media as mere spectators, observers and passive consumers. They are treated as citizens who are worth only by their collective weight but not on an individual basis. So, we must create communication initiatives for people to stand up from their seats and stand up at the public stage as protagonists of their own opinions and initiatives. An ordinary citizen expressing himself or herself in public is really valuable. The challenge is to make their voices and images as having an influence on decision makers. In that sense, Calandria has designed and implemented communication methodologies to contribute to that process whereby citizens put in practice their attitudes and abilities to participate, by using their own meeting sites: streets, public squares and market places.

Communicators' Role

Calandria does not see communication as a one-way process, but as going beyond information spread or simply transmission. Communication involves generating dialogues between people (individually or collectively), in a mutually influencing and learning environment.

Communicators are not only journalists and scriptwriters, there can be also powerful local communicators such as activist leaders, among others. They have an important role: to build bridges mediating between various social sectors, contributing to make absent actors visible in public, creating messages that lead people to imagine changes and showing them that change is possible through dialogue and sharing experiences.

The challenge is to increase citizens' interest in participating actively. Communicators can educate and inform, but they can also generate debate and channel citizens' participation so as to influence decision makers or authorities.

The Caravana Ciudadana (or Citizens' Caravan)

It is a communication methodology that aims to encourage learning and participatory experiences by ordinary citizens.

It is a travelling participatory show, which makes best use of ordinary places –such as streets, public squares and markets. It consists of organizing interactive and innovative activities that change these places into places where they can find quality information, spaces to encourage public expression and debate, strengthening citizens' self-esteem, with a perspective to developing peoples' opinions and initiatives, which can be useful as instruments to influence decision makers or authorities.

The **Caravana Ciudadana** arrives at each square after a promotion campaign that seeks to encourage conversation among individuals and debate, thus becoming a learning show (banners are placed in corners, happy messages are broadcast by loudspeakers and leaflets are handed announcing the event).

The show starts at the beginning of the afternoon, when the colourful truck arrives at the square. The event presenters, who encourage people to participate, get off and walk around calling people's attention. In the meantime, a big scenography with warm colours is assembled: a big video screen is installed and participatory methodologies are developed through consultative approaches, such as rajecabina, grafichanga, macroánforas and various interactive games.

The **Caravana Ciudadana** aims at collecting in each square expressions made by people using different means about some key issue at a time (which can be for example: political participation by women, the

general election process, the role of legislators, citizen's monitoring of the mass media, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV, among others).

We collect peoples' critical views about a topic or specific situation, their future expectations and their own individual initiatives.

The communication proposal of Caravana Ciudadana has 4 approaches:

APPROACH 1 IS: TO PROMOTE FREE, DIVERSE AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION. By using:

The Citizen Consultation Package:

It is an open site where people can express freely and spontaneously their perceptions and feelings about various topics. This methodology offers them an opportunity to express themselves by whatever means they choose: orally, in writing or by drawing. So they can use grafichanga, mochilánforas and rajecabina. I am going to explain each concept.

The Grafichanga (Pichanga gráfica) promotes free, public and anonymous citizen expression. We put up a big graffiti wall in a visible part of the square where people can make drawings and write ideas that they perceive that emerge from a specific question, such as:

- If you were HIV positive, how would you like to be treated by other people?
- How do you imagine a Parliament with more women?
- How would the television of your dreams be?
- How do you imagine your future in Perú?

The Mochilánforas. They are portable ballot boxes, like backpacks. A team of facilitators walk around wearing mochilánforas to collect those peoples' opinions and initiatives that have been written in ballots with questions, such as:

- What can you do as television viewer to get quality television programmes?
- What makes you think that a person is HIV positive? Why?
- What should the government do with HIV positive people?
- What must we do to make an MP (Minister of Parliament) do what he promised, to work hard and to be honest?

The Rajecabina (the Confidential Box). It is a big and colourful cabin a person enters to say what he or she thinks when nobody can listen. Opinions are being recorded (there is a microphone inside). There is a curtain that covers the entrance, with a question written on it to provoke honest opinions, such as:

- What do you feel for an HIV positive person?
- What bothers you about living in your city?
- What do you think about women who are involved in politics?
- What do you hate about reality shows?

APPROACH 2 IS: TO PROVIDE USEFUL AND PRACTICAL INFORMATION: about a specific issue, using information stands, printed material and big size materials to explain concepts (such as a magnified ballot to explain to people how to vote).

We use playful and informative printed material with useful information explained in a simple way, and if it is possible with humor that makes easy reading but contains the necessary information.

APPROACH 3 IS: TO ENCOURAGE REFLECTION AND LEARNING IN AN ENTERTAINING WAY with interactive games, street theatre, musical shows and video debates using a big screen.

One of the interactive games that we have is *Tumbacorruptión* (Down With Corruption). It was used during Regional Elections as one of the activities of Calandrias' Campaign. Through this we seek to show people how prepared we should be to be able to detect or eradicate corruption from our society not only avoiding damage to our institutions, but instead strengthening them. This game becomes an excuse to encourage peoples' discussion and reflection on their own prejudices and 'little sins', in order to make them aware of the importance of individual values that make up collective responsibility.

The video debate. Starts with a video projection (either fiction or report) shown on a big screen that encourages people to talk and discuss. After that, two presenters lead the debate, identifying various points of view and asking the public some questions. The event ends with the conclusions that have arisen from the debate. The whole debate is also projected on the big screen.

APPROACH 4: TO PRODUCE RESOURCES TO IMPACT POLITICALLY AND PUBLICLY. The Caravana Ciudadana collects a lot of information about citizens' feelings, opinions and initiatives. Once the caravan

tour has come to an end, we edit a video about what people have expressed and also publish a report which systematize in numbers and graphics the results of the consultation process. For example, the information collected in the citizen consultation 'You are in control' (which was a campaign to promote social monitoring of the media), that we organized last year, became the basis of a book (HECHA LA TRAMPA HAY QUE INSTAURAR LA LEY) presented to MPs and broadcasters.

Lessons learned

- The Caravana Ciudadana is a methodology that is part of a bigger initiative. In Calandria it has always been a very important part of a campaign, which involves different institutions throughout the country (NGOs, government institutions and the media). This campaign also includes training workshops, meeting with leaders or politicians, public opinion surveys, production of media material, relation with media, caravanas ciudadanas and citizens' consultation.

1. How to encourage peoples' free and creative opinion.

- People are not used to being asked their opinion in squares or to watching a video and then talking in public. The first time Caravana Ciudadana arrived at Parque Universitario (a square in Lima town) people were shocked. Their first reaction was to throw empty plastic bottles and to hiss and boo; until they realized that some people could manage to speak in front of our camera, lights and microphones, and they could see themselves on the big screen. It is our view that every person has a way of expressing themselves and need particular conditions to do so. That is why we offer people different ways of giving their opinions, by designing participatory methodologies which are more private and anonymous (like rajecabina, grafichanga and mochilanforas) and others which are more public (like video-debate). We want citizens to express themselves without feeling afraid and choosing the best way of doing it: it can be by writing initiatives on a card and putting them in a ballot box, drawing on big flip charts or talking through the microphone.
- To encourage people to express what they think and feel in a public place is necessary to consider what they are looking for when they participate, for example:
 - To gain anything. A person measures the time invested relating it with what he or she is going to obtain through participation, like a prize, knowledge or useful information. That is why we offer information material after each person participates and t-shirts and pens with the campaign motto.
 - To feel appreciated. Being accepted, feeling part of the community, finding people like yourself, listening to a story like yours, being listened to. We do that with a big screen where people can see themselves.
 - For having fun. People want to have a good time, to enjoy seeing or listening to something, and also through the contact they have with others. We adapt Caravana to the characteristics of each square and group of people, using their music and street actors.
- To lead the public debate well is really important. To make people sensitive to some issues it is necessary to create realistic characters and stories. Our presenters are always a man and a woman, have specific characters, provoke the discussion and make evident peoples' agreements, disagreements and prejudice. They have clear guidelines for guiding the process. We try to show with examples that changes in people and real life are possible, facing skepticism, indifference and conformism that everybody has inside. We try to ensure that different points of view are expressed and to encourage people to express their own ideas and to listen to others with respect, to stress mutual learning and reflection.

2. The importance of entertaining to learn and reflect.

- We manage the tension that exists between the issue and the show. While people are having fun there is something cooking inside them. The process encourages them to participate, clarify their ideas and take a position in the discussion.
- Through their participation in interactive games people get surprised and surprise others, they play, give opinions, reflect and have fun all at the same time. Marcapresión is a game that presents different kinds of situations drawn on a panel. For example, an MP receiving money under the table... another one shows a well-informed citizen; a citizen who shows no interest in what is happening in his/her city. So people describe what they see and they must explain if they want to combat or support what they see (and why). After that, they throw a ball through the hole of their choice.

3. Streets and public squares as a space to encourage debate among people

- Using streets or squares is necessary if what we want is to encourage participation of ordinary citizens who don't participate in any organization, those who have fewer opportunities of their voices being listened to. Caravana ciudadana, festivals and street theatre encourages people to get together,

strengthen their community feeling, inform them and enables them to learn and debate at the same time as having fun. It can also be a good opportunity for authorities to talk to people and to get closer to them.

- We adapt Caravana Ciudadana to the specific characteristics of each square. We normally identify an important meeting place in a district or city. Each square has a different audience which does different things according to the time and day. We do basic **research** about the square, by observing who are the usual people around it, and what kind of activities do in different days and hours, what kind of promotion media exist, among others. ***
- The Caravana is adapted to the precise characteristics of the audiences and issues. This methodology is very **flexible** and **adaptable**. Calandria has successfully implemented it during communication campaigns, for example to encourage the political participation of women, to ensure that people are informed about the voting mechanism and the content of the political options in the general election process, demanding political accountability from the authority (the message was: VOTE NOW BUT KEEP VIGILANT AFTERWARDS) and peoples' monitoring of the media, among others
- The processes whereby we collect opinion and initiatives from people make for more realistic responses. This helps us understand peoples' real opinion about some sensitive issues, such as views on those living with HIV. We think that the methodology enables us to identify the prejudice and discrimination that exist among the audience.
- The systematized information obtained during the Caravana Ciudadana can also help us to advocate for peoples' initiatives when dealing with authorities.
- Since we understand communication as dialogue and relation with people, our communication model is based on a permanent search to identify, value and understand their feelings, thinking and acting; this is so because we believe that people are not empty **receptacles** which need to be filled with information or different values. When we communicate, we learn and influence mutually.

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