Dominant objects and methods in communication for development and social change in Spanish PhD theses and research projects (2007-2013)

Alejandro Barranquero Carretero [CV] [ ] [ ] Professor and researcher. Universidad Carlos III de Madrid / Carlos III University of Madrid. abarranq@hum.uc3m.es

Nieves Limón Serrano [CV] [ ] Professor and researcher. Universidad Carlos III de Madrid / Carlos III University of Madrid. nlimon@hum.uc3m.es

Abstracts
Introduction: Based on the incipient interest that communication for development and social change has progressively acquired in Spain, the objective of this article is to evaluate the state of the art in research in this field through the content analysis of the PhD theses and R&D projects developed between 2007 and 2013 in the 56 public and private Spanish universities that offer communication degrees. **Methods and discussion**: After defining the discipline and setting its theoretical boundaries, the article describes the main analytical categories of the sample of PhD theses and R&D projects, which delve into their identifying dimensions – like authorship, university affiliation and year of publication - and their dominant research objects, perspectives and methods. **Results and conclusions:** The results point to the progressive consolidation of a field whose thematic diversity is related to milestones in contemporary history and certain influence coming from the Latin American school of thought.

Keywords
Communication for development; communication for social change; content analysis; meta-research.

Contents

Translation by **CA Martínez-Arcos**
(PhD in Communication from the University of London, UK)

1. Introduction

This article aims to evaluate the state of the art of doctoral theses and research projects carried out in Spain in the field of communication for development and social change (hence, CFSC). In line with previous meta-theoretical works (e.g. Marí Sáez, 2013, 2016), the study is based on the analysis of the content, physiognomy and basic features (authorship, institutional affiliation, themes, methods, etc.) of almost one hundred doctoral theses defended between 2007 and 2013 in the 56 public and private universities that offer communication degrees in Spain. The study is also based on the analysis of the dominant objects and methods of national publicly-funded R&D projects, based on the premise that both samples of study (theses and projects) are significant indicators of the state of the art in research on the subject under analysis. According to these objectives, the selected samples will be analysed to test the following hypotheses:

> H1: CFSC has an incipient development in our country and its evolution is marked by the historical interest of the academic community in the inherent topics of the Spanish tradition such as local media of proximity and the awareness campaigns of NGOS and social movements.

> H2: Due to linguistic and cultural proximity, these research works received a significant influence from Latin American research, which has a long tradition in CFSC and has made important contributions for reflection and action in this field.

> H3: Doctoral theses and R&D projects are mostly carried out in the public universities that have researchers and research groups specialised in the field, and in schools that receive a significant number of Latin American students.

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1.1. State of the art in research on communication for social change

Bibliometric and metatheoretical studies on dominant academic trends is a symptom of scientific maturity for any discipline (López and Vicente, 2011, p. 665). In the Spanish context, progress in the construction of national cartographies began to be made in the 1990's by pioneers like Daniel E. Jones (1998), although the most significant advance was made in 2010 (Castillo and Carretón, 2010; Castillo, Rubio and Almansa, 2012; López Rabadán and Vicente-Marino, 2011; Martínez Nicolás, 2008; Martínez Nicolás and Saperas, 2011; Piñuel, 2011).

In this period, there were developments also in the systematisation of regional research (e.g. Masip and Fernández Quijada, 2011), as well as in the different sub-disciplines that make up the field, some of which are related with CFSC, such as: political economy (Almiron and Reig, 2007), political communication (Casado and Fernández Quijada, 2013) and environmental communication (Barranquero and Marín, 2013). In recent years, we have also witnessed the appearance of the first

research projects on the state of the art of research in communication in Spain. Such is the case of the aforementioned project, MapCom, and the R&D project titled "25 years of communication research in Spain (1990-2015). Scientific production, academic community and institutional context" (CSO2013-40684-P), which has been coordinated by Manuel Martínez Nicolás.

The subject matter of this work, CFSC, is a discipline with over fifty years of history, with a very significant development in countries such as the USA and in regions that have traditionally been the subject of cooperation and development policies: Latin America, Asia and Africa. Within these, Latin America has stood out since the 1960's due to its pioneering character in the development of a more participatory and dialogical paradigm in relation to the approaches of research in the USA, which were criticised for their economistic, colonial, persuasive and exogenous character (Gumucio and Tufte, 2006). In fact, the revisionism of Latin American authors like Beltrán, Freire and Díaz Bordenave was crucial for the formation of the new paradigm of communication for social change, which, since the late 1990s, has been defined as a "process of public and private dialogue through which people themselves define who they are, what they need and how to get what they need in order to improve their own lives" (Gumucio and Tufte, 2006: xix).

The 2000s decade represented a major breakthrough in the international legitimation and visibility of the discipline and is marked by milestones such as the publication of the first anthologies of theories and experiences (Gumucio, 2001; Gumucio and Tufte, 2006), to which we should add compilations and readers in alternative communication and social movement communications (Atton, 2015, Downing, 2010; Coyer, Dowmunt and Fountain, 2007), and the large volume of literature on cyber-activism and the emancipatory uses of the Internet and social networks (e.g. Harvey, 2014). In recent years, we have also witnessed the first efforts to systematise the characteristics of research on CFSC, including the meta-research works of the Americans Jo Ellen Fair, Hemant Shah and Christine L. Ogan based on the analysis of articles published in the main English-language journals between 1958 and 2007 (Fair, 1988; Fair and Shah, 1997; Shah, 2010; Ogan *et al.,* 2009). Meanwhile, Latin America scholars produced the first systematisation of articles in high impact journals, which show the vitality of a field in which classic perspectives - modernisation and participation - coexist with innovative approaches such as good living and the relationship between social movements and social media (Angel and Barranquero, 2016; Barranquero and Angel, 2015).

In this period, Spain saw the pioneering works of Barranquero and Sáez (2010), which examined in depth the "invisibility" of alternative communication in the academic context. For her part, Ana Fernández Viso (2012) tracked the epistemological matrices of research and teaching in CFSC, which was described as an "unfinished journey" based on the late reception of the discipline in Spain. Meanwhile, Víctor Marí Sáez (2013) confirmed the emerging institutionalisation of a discipline that is characterised by the dispersion of its theoretical references, describing the past years in terms of "implosion". This work was followed by a bibliometric study of the articles published in ten Spanish communication journals of importance between 2000 and 2012 (Marí Sáez y Ceballos, 2016; Marí Sáez, 2016). Finally, Barranquero and Rosique (2014) reviewed the state of the art of graduate and postgraduate studies in CFSC and communication/education, trying to build bridges between both sub-disciplines.

1.2. The difficulty to draw a cartography of the discipline

Despite the long tradition of reflection and practices on CFSC, the epistemological status of the field is still controversial and problematic, especially due to a set of determinants that are summarised below:

1. The "located" character of the research, which implies that different geographical and temporal contexts have offered very different approaches to phenomena such as alternative communication and interrelationship between communication and development. In other words, academic reflection depends on the spatio-temporal context in which the practices emerge and this dispersion is evident in the more than 50 labels that exist to refer to this field of communication: alternative, participatory, popular, citizen, radical, for example (Ferron, 2012).

2. The practical and applied nature of knowledge, given that the area is not limited to the reflection on the relationship between the processes of communication and transformation, and its ultimate objective is in fact to intervene in the real world to improve it. This means, moreover, that the diversity of experiences on the ground quickly exceeds and invalidates what has been theorised, so it is necessary to build new theoretical constructs, especially when certain concepts of the critical tradition (participation, empowerment, journalism citizen, etc.) are co-opted to work with purposes other than what they were conceived for.

3. The absence of universal models of development and CFSC, especially in the southern countries of the planet, which since the 1960s (e.g. theories of dependency and theories derived of cultural imperialism) have claimed that political and cooperation plans must emerge from the ancestral knowledge and cultural practices of the populations that are the object of development, and not vice versa, so that this endogenous approach turns them into active subjects of their own development (Gumucio and Tufte, 2006).

4. The trend towards an excessively normative research that is more concerned with the "must be" of the communication than with the current state of the media and the cultural industries. This fact has sometimes caused reality to be confused with desires, and for this reason CFSC is commonly criticised for its tendency to idealism and ethical reflection, rather than actual empirical reflection (e.g. Carniglia, 2014).

In relation to the previous, it should be noted that there are very few academic works that aim to define the epistemological boundaries of the field and avoid conceptual dispersion, laying the basis of what the objects and perspectives of CFSC are or should be. Recently, in the English-speaking context, Lie and Servaes (2015) have tried to refine the sub-disciplines that make up the field, distinguishing between theoretical disciplines (e.g. strategic or crisis communication) and thematic or theoretical-applied disciplines, which include rural communication, health communication and environmental communication (Servaes and Lie, 2015: 244-245). In the Spanish context, and based on a process of collective reflection, the founding document of the Working Group in Communication and Citizenship of the Spanish Association of Communication Research (AE-IC), which inspired some of the categories of this study, has identified ten lines of research in CFSC

which can be investigated from historical, theoretical-conceptual, educational and applied perspectives (Barranquero Reguero, Villanueva and Meda, 2015).

According to these premises, and inspired by the aforementioned literature (e.g. Fernández Viso, 2012; Marí Sáez, 2013), the study is guided by the hypothesis that CFSC in Spain has adopted a set of interests and concerns that are derived from the historical context of the last decades. This is determined, among other milestones, by:

1. An incomplete process of transition towards democracy during periods of Socialist Governments (1982-1996; 2004-2011) in which advances in the fields of education, health and civil rights coexisted with the promotion of a depoliticised and consensus culture, or a "transition culture" (Martínez, 2014). This was opposed by social movements that emerged at the end of the 20th century (neighbourhood associations, rebellious groups, Christian groups, communism and anarchism, pacifism, environmentalism and feminism) and during the first decades of the 21st (anti-globalisation movements, anti-austerity protests, waves of people demanding housing, etc.).

2. The popularisation of non-governmental organisations since the mid-1980s, with the turning point with 0.7% campaign (1994) in which these entities acquired a growing informational role and become consolidated as an academic object (Marí Sáez, 2013). To this we must add the creation of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) in 1988 and a set of regional and local agencies that have been the engine and economic boost of some projects for cooperation and research in the area.

3. The emergence, since the beginning of the transition, of a wide range of practices and free, alternative and community media which, facing the progressive degradation of public and commercial media, advocated for citizens' right to communication in a framework of lawlessness and enormous difficulties, and which are organised since the mid-2000s in such entities such as the Network of Community Media (CTMIR). In addition, there was the emergence of local audiovisual media of municipal ownership driven by successive legal frameworks since the mid-1980s. While not all municipal media promote the development, regulation encourages the incorporation of the participation of nearby communities, similarly to the model guiding university radio, which, even without legislation, spread after the 2000s decade, grouped in the Spanish Association of University Radio Stations (ARU) (2011).

4. The reactivation of the social movements since 2000, with milestones such as the movement of resistance to globalisation and, more recently, the 15M and surrounding groups, like Mareas and Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH). These movements have given a new impulse to reflection and action on the relationship between social movements and technologies, including groups in pro of cyber-activism, hacking, transparency and the defence of the commons (Tascón and Quintana, 2012).

According to these historical determinants, and on the basis of a preliminary review of the body of analysis, a set of predominant themes have been outlined in research on CFSC in Spain, which is understood as the discipline responsible for studying in depth the relationship between communication processes and social change from theoretical, methodological and/or procedural perspectives. Among the objects of the Spanish tradition the following stand out:

1. Alternative and Third Sector Media, a category that includes works on history, legal framework, operation and content of community, free, non-profit, educational/university, cooperative media and other variants: prisons' media, cultural non-profit media, etc.

2. Alternative Audiovisual Media. Related to the previous object, this category includes works on audiovisual practices with emancipatory content such as cinema and political documentary, cinema and participatory and community video, and other audiovisual contents that emerge as strategies of resistance and promotion of critical thinking.

3. Local and Proximity Media, which covers studies on the historical development, structure and functions of local private or municipal broadcasters, understanding that not all local is synonymous with development, so certain precautions are taken in their incorporation to the study.

4. Social Movements and ICT, which covers research on social movements' use of emerging technologies (Internet, blogs, social networks, mobile telephony, etc.) as repertoires of collective action for their strategies for local and global visibility, information and interconnection. This section also includes theses and projects related to cyber-activism, free software, peer to peer file sharing, internet neutrality and promotion of the commons.

5. Communication and NGOS. Constitutes an important area of work from the pioneering studies of Javier Erro and other authors, and focuses on objects as diverse as social marketing, promotional and awareness campaigns of NGO, social advertising and PR of these entities, and participatory projects promoted by non-profits associations (neighbourhood, cultural, etc.) and organisations.

6. Communication and Development Projects. This category includes very different objects that connect the most "institutionalist" tradition with CFSC at the global scale and integrates development campaigns of public bodies, cooperation agencies and foundations, either more vertical and persuasive (diffusionism, social marketing, edutainment, etc.) or horizontal and participatory (participatory research- action).

7. Media education (also known as media literacy). There is an important line of work related to the relations between communication and education to promote media literacy and, in particular, the creative use of audiovisual technologies by communities (students, elders, etc.). However, although not all pedagogical projects can be analysed within CFSC, this study only takes into account those research works that are focused in the dimension of "communicative production" and transcend the dimensions of "access and use" and "critical understanding" of media education/literacy (Buckingham, 2003).

8. Alternative Media Components. In addition to the aforementioned third sector media, in Spain there is an absolute historic predominance of public and, above all, private-commercial media, so this category serves to study research that address the possibility of building community, critical or emancipatory spaces within these media, or from citizens' critical appropriations of the content of the mass media to ridicule and subvert it (e.g. guerrilla communication, counter-propaganda, subverting, etc.).

9. External auditing of the media. Related to the previous, this category considers that CFSC not only includes the promotion of solidarity campaigns or Third Sector media, but also involves carrying out media reform actions from citizen institutions that monitor the content and activity of the mass media and propose strategies for their improvement: media observatories, unions and guilds, associations of consumers and viewers, etc.

10. Digital Divide. Connected with the tradition of studies of CFSC based on the hypothesis of the knowledge gap of Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, a themed category has been dedicated to framing research on gaps (gender, ethnic, geographical, class, etc.) in relation to citizen access and appropriation of technologies such as Internet or mobile telephony.

In addition to these ten objects/topics, there are other two of a transversal nature, which are not thematic but address aspects of CFSC from strictly historical and/or theoretical-conceptual and methodological perspectives. These additional objects are:

11. History. A category created for works related to the biography of communication professionals - journalists, filmmakers, etc. – whose informative or fiction production is committed with objectives of social change. It also serves for framing theses and R&D works that analyse the role of the media in the Civil War (1936-1939), post-war and dictatorship (1939-1975) as well as the transition as engines of democratisation and from reflections related to the recovery of the historical memory.

12. Theory. This category includes strictly conceptual, meta-theoretical and methodological theses on CFSC and around notions that have had or are having an important development in the Spanish context, such as: local and proximity communication, democracy and public service, citizen journalism, audiovisual diversity, etc.

From a broad perspective, the analysis includes theses and R&D projects that explore the relationship between communication and social change, regardless of whether they are or not part of this tradition. Nevertheless, and in order to define the boundaries of the field, we dismissed those projects that are related to the subject matter but already have a specialised section and working groups dedicated to them in the Spanish Association of Communication Research (AE-IC) and the main communication research associations worldwide (IAMCR, ICA, ECREA, ALAIC, etc.), including:

1. Discourse and content analysis, for example, of social representations of vulnerable and minority groups in conventional media; 2. Studies of reception and media consumption; 3. Political economy and communication policies; 4. Environmental, risk and climate change communication; 5. Intercultural communication; 6. Communication and education (from uncritical nor non-participatory perspectives); 7. Communication and health; 8. Ethics of communication and problems related with the "internal" control of the media based on self-regulation codes, books of style and deontological manuals.

2. Methods

The analytical framework and the categories that are described next are closely related with the route taken and progress made in the R&D project MapCom, of which this research is part. The theses and

projects that explore the relationship between communication processes and social change has been taken from a larger body of theses and R&D projects in communication selected by the members of the MapCom project. The identification of the samples was carried out through a search in the database, based on keywords related to the field, including: development, social change, participation, alternative, community, local, education, gap, NGOS, social movements, etc.

The final sample is composed of 84 doctoral theses on CFSC (taken from the global census of 979 theses defended in the 2007-2013 period) and 19 of the 143 R&D projects on communication in a broad sense. Once the sample was selected, physical and/or digital copies of all the theses and projects were selected. Finally, a protocol for content analysis was developed to obtain significant data about the state of the art in CFSC, which consists of three parts:

1. Identifying dimensions of the theses: title, university affiliation, gender of authors and year of defence.

2.   Dominant objects and techniques, according to the following variables:

2.1. Main objective: the purpose of each thesis, distinguishing between: describe (catalogue, classify, define, etc.), explain (delve into the causes and whys of phenomena related to CFSC), evaluate (evaluate and validate existing research, applications, etc.), and intervene (applied proposals to change conduct and behaviour patterns, research projects, etc.).

2.2. Dominant type of communication to which the object of study belongs: offline or online interpersonal communication; offline or online group communication; offline or online organisational communication; conventional or online mass communication; others.

2.3 Employed samples: probability sample (calculated based on the studied universe), purposive sample (selection based on criteria established and explained by the researcher), stratified sample (chosen according to the variables of the object of study), structural sample (selected according to certain organisation of variables or categories derived of their relations and positions within the universe); no sample (the whole universe or a case study are explored); undisclosed.

2.4. Dominant techniques: observation techniques (systematic, participant or non-participant, etc.), conversation techniques (interviews, group discussions or dynamics, etc.), surveys, experiments, content and variant analysis, undisclosed.

3. Main themes, population of study and geographic areas in connection with CFSC:

3.1. Themes: the categories mentioned and explained in the previous section: Alternative and Third Sector Media, Alternative Audiovisual Media, Local and Proximity Media, Social Movements and ICT, Communication and NGOS, Communication and Development Projects, Media education, Alternative Media Components, External audit, Digital divide, History, and Theory.

3.2. Population of analysis: Women; Childhood; Teens and Young People; Migrants and Ethnic Groups; LGBTI, Senior Citizens; Poverty (or social class based discrimination); Rural Population (or vulnerability based on rural origin/residence); Disability and Mental Health; Without a Particular Population, and Other Populations.

3.3. Geographic area on which the research focuses: Spain; Europe; Latin America; Spanish Local and/or Regional areas; Other (sub)continents (Asia, USA, Africa, etc.); World (two or more countries from different continents); and without a predominant geographical area.

The analysis protocol was eventually composed by the following elements:

Table 1. Protocol of analysis for theses on CFSC

Category	Variables	Values
Identification data	Title of thesis	
	University affiliation	
	Name and gender of authors	
	Year of Defence	
Research objects and techniques	Objective	Describe Explain Evaluate Intervene
	Type of communication	Face-to-face Interpersonal Online Interpersonal Face-to-face Group Online Group Face-to-face Organisational Online Organisation Conventional mass Online Mass Other
	Samples	Probability Purposive Stratified Structural No sample Undisclosed
	Techniques	Observation Conversation Surveys Experiments Analysis of content and variants Undisclosed
Themes, population and geographical areas in CFSC	Themes	Alternative media Alternative audiovisual Local and proximity media Social movements and ICT Communication and NGOS Communication and development projects

		Media education
		Alternative media components
		External audit
		Digital divide
		History
		Theory
	Population of study	Women
		Childhood
		Teens and young people
		Migrants and ethnic groups
		LGBTI
		Elders
		Poor people
		Rural population
		Disabled/dysfunctional people
		Other populations (specify)
		Not a specific population
	Geographical areas	Spain
		Europe
		Latin America
		Local and Regional areas
		Other (sub)continents
		World
		None (non-predominant)

Source: Authors' own creation.

The extraction of identification data, and research objects and techniques was performed with a form that contained all the variables and fields described and answered by the MapCom research team, using the *E-encuesta* tool, which facilitates data coding and processing. This stage was followed by the extraction of information relating to the third part of the protocol concerning CFSC - dominant theme, population of study and geographical area-, which was added to the *Excel* spreadsheet generated by *E-encuesta*.

3. Research results and discussion of data
3.1. Identification data of the theses on CFSC

The implementation of the described protocol provided revealing data to verify the research hypotheses and to understand the features and structure of CFSC in Spain. With regards to the identification data, theses have been mostly defended in universities with a significant volume of undergraduate and graduate students: the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (17 theses) and, to a lesser extent, the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (9). Accordingly, the autonomous communities of Madrid and Catalonia are the ones that have produced the largest number of doctoral works, over half of the total (47 of 84). On the other hand, public universities are the most committed to research in this field, as they have produced the majority of these works (85.7% or 72 of 84), followed, at a great distance, by private centres (only 14.2%). Although far behind the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, in the ranking also stand out

the University of Malaga, with 6 theses, and the Universidad Pompeu Fabra, the Universidad Ramón Llull, the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos and the Universidad del País Vasco, with 4 theses, respectively. The following table shows the detailed breakdown of the data:

Table 2. Distribution of theses on CFSC from Spanish universities

University	Number of theses on CFSC
Universidad Complutense	17
Universitat Autónoma de Barcelona	9
Universidad de Málaga	6
Universitat Pompeu Fabra	4
Universitat Ramon Llull	4
Universidad del País Vasco	4
Universidad de Sevilla	4
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos	4
Universitat Jaume I	3
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela	3
Universidad Católica de Murcia	2
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	2
Universitat Politècnica de València	2
Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera	2
Universidad de Navarra	2
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid	2
Universidade de Vigo	2
Universitat de València	2
Universitat de Girona	1
Universitat de les Illes Balears	1
Universidad San Pablo CEU	1
Universidad de La Laguna	1
Universitat de Vic	1
Universitat de Lleida	1
Universidad de Salamanca	1

Source: Authors' own creation.

Focusing on the years of defence during the period of analysis (2007-2013), there has been a fairly regular production, which nonetheless has been higher in 2011 and 2012 and lower in 2007, as shown in table 3. Data on gender is neither especially significant, given the relative parity: of the 84 theses 39 were written by women and 45 by men.

**Table 3. Distribution of theses on CFSC by year of defence**

Year of defence	Number of theses on CFSC
2007	6
2008	12
2009	10
2010	7
2011	17
2012	18
2013	14

Source: Authors' own creation.

3.2. Research objects and techniques of the theses on CFSC

In relation to the dominant objectives, Figure 1 shows the clear dominance of one of the four coded objectives: the description of the practices of CFSC, in 45 of the 84 theses (53.5%). Followed at some distance, we found 26 theses (30.9%) oriented to the explanation of practices in CFSC, which indicates that the objective of almost one-third of the sample is to explain the causes, effects, and evolution of the object of study, using for this purpose theoretical and/or empirical approaches developed prior to these works. The number of theses dedicated to test, compare, or validate methodological or theoretical models of CFSC is significantly lower: only 7% (or 6) of the 84 theses. There is a similar share of theses seeking to intervene in the real world, for example, through regulatory proposals, actions to change behaviours and processes of CFSC: 7 of 84 (8.3%). These data demonstrate a clear disconnection between theory and praxis in a discipline that is supposed to be applied, oriented to public service and the psychological, social and environmental transformation, as pointed out in the theoretical framework section.

Figure 1. Distribution of theses on CFSC by research objectives
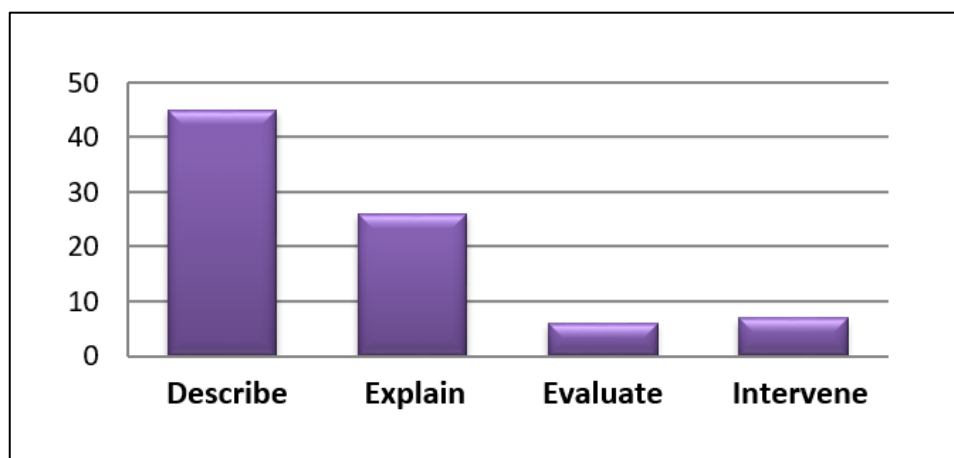
Source: Authors' own creation.

Taking as reference the predominant type of communication, 47 of the 84 analysed theses (55.9%) focus on objects associated with the mass media: 32 on offline media (analogue radio and television, print press, etc.) and 15 on online media. An important placed is also occupied, albeit at considerable distance, by theses focused on face-to-face and online organisational communication (11.9% and 7.1%, respectively). The presence of works focused on group or interpersonal communication practices is minor: only 8 of the 84 theses (9.5%) in both cases. In line with previous studies (Piñuel, 2011; Martínez Nicolás and Saperas, 2011), the following table shows how the mass media are still the dominant objects of study in communication research and in CFSC in Spain, way ahead of the organisational communication and, above all interpersonal communication.

Table 4. Distribution of theses on CFSC by object of study

Object of study	Number of theses on CFSC
Conventional mass communication	32
Online Mass communication	15
Offline organisational communication	10
Offline interpersonal communication	6
Online organisational communication	6
Offline group communication	4
Online group communication	4
Other	5
Online interpersonal communication	2

Source: Authors' own creation.

Theses often use a specific type of sample. As Figure 2 shows, in almost half of the analysed theses (41 of 84), the sample was selected and justified based on previously established and explained purposive criteria. Fairly behind, 10 of the 84 theses (11.9%) examined the full universe or dealt with case studies, or with no sample at all. Moreover, 7 theses (8.3%) used probability samples and other 7 (8.3%) were based on significant samples, by segmenting the universe into relevant and specific variables of the object of study. Finally, 14 of the 84 theses had no sample or a sampling method, and most of them correspond to eminently theoretical theses, as addressed later (16.6%).

Figure 2. Distribution of theses on CFSC by sample type
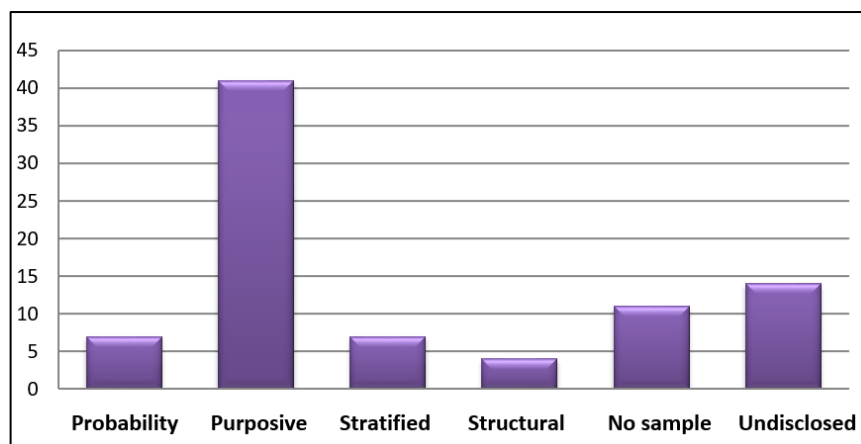
Source: Authors' own creation

The research techniques also reflect significant differences. Almost half of the analysed works (47.6%, or 40 theses) used the analysis of content, discourse or documents to test their hypothesis, despite the fact theses based on discourse analysis (for example, representations of vulnerable or minority groups) were not included within CFSC, as explained in section 3. Qualitative techniques had a much less prominent role in CFSC: 16 theses (19%) are supported by observation and 13 (15.4%) by conversation techniques, like interviews, focus groups, Phillips 66, problem tree analysis, etc.

Figure 3. Distribution of theses on CFSC by research techniques
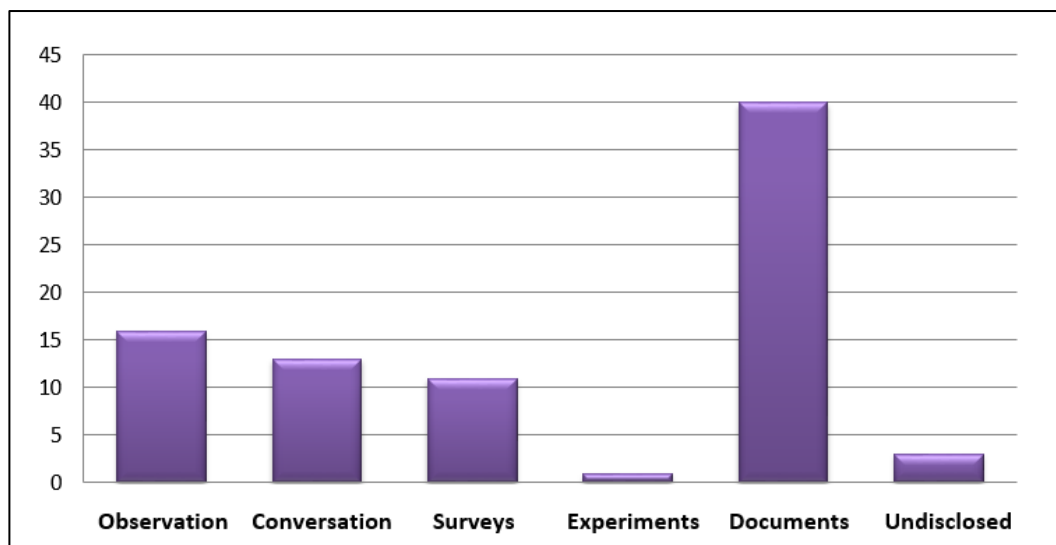
Source: Authors' own creation.

The following research technique with the largest presence is the quantitative survey: in 11 of the 84 theses (13%). Meanwhile, the presence of experimental approaches is negligible: 1 case. Finally, it is important to note that the protocol of MapCom did not contemplate a category for participatory action research, which is common in critical approaches in CFSC (Servaes, Jacobson & White, 2008). However, and in a review carried out after the sample, it did not appear as a dominant research technique in any of the analysed theses.

### 3.3. Themes, population and geographical areas of the theses on CFSC

The previous section has helped us to learn significant facts about the research objects and techniques of the theses that compose the body of study and helps us to frame the systematisation of the data on the specific fields of CFSC.

With regards to the themes, most of the theses examine topics that are characteristic of the Spanish perspective in CFSC as alternative components of the mass media (16.6%), and awareness campaigns of NGO and organised groups (14.2%), which confirms the first research hypothesis (H1). Studies on communication and development projects account for almost 9.5% (8) of the theses. The shares of theses focused on local and proximity media, alternative and third sector media, and

what we have called alternative audiovisual media, do not reach 10% of the body of theses: 8.3%, 7 theses on all cases. There is a striking scarcity of works (5.9%, 5 theses) on the use of emerging technologies by social movements (category Social movements and ICT). This fact explains, perhaps, why the theses on the 15M and the recent mobilisations (Mareas, PAH, Occupy Congress, etc.) were not completed by the time the body of analysis (2013) was compiled.

 For its part, the transversal category focused on theoretical studies of CFSC - strictly conceptual, meta-theoretical or methodological research works - accounts for 10.7% of theses (9), followed by theses on historical studies (5.9%, less than 5 theses). Finally, there are some works devoted to the creative and production components of Media education (6 theses), external auditing of the media (2) and the digital divide, with only one thesis.

Figure 4. Distribution of theses on CFSC by theme
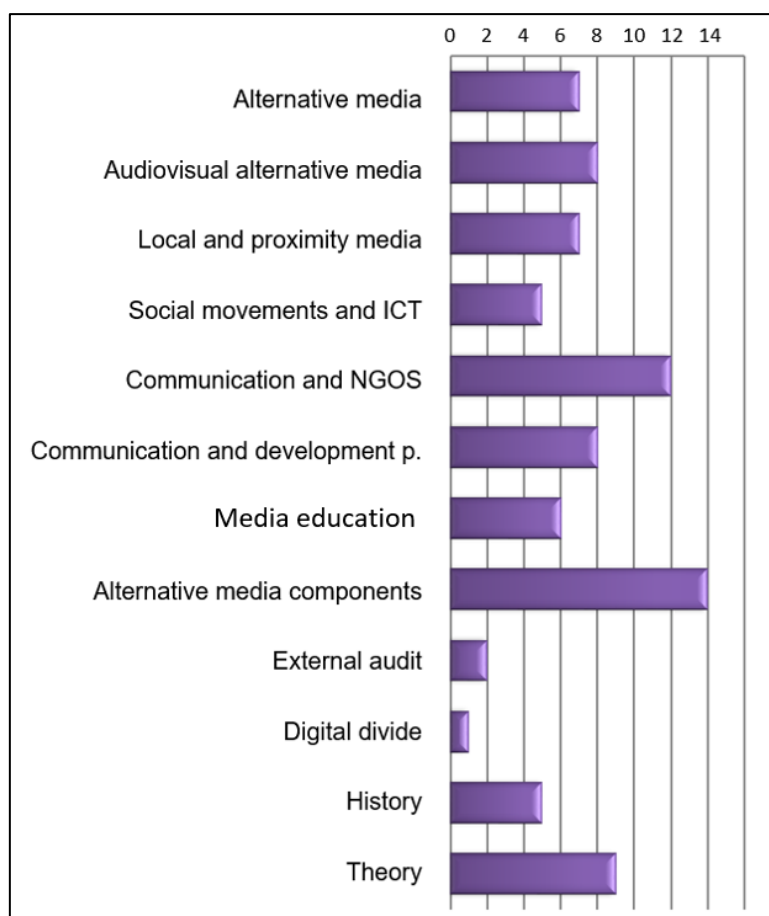
Source: Authors' own creation.

With regards to the main population of study, most theses do not focus on any of the population categories under analysis (85.7%, 72 theses). Figure 5 shows the predominant populations in the analysis: studies on teens and young people (5 theses, 5.9%), disabled/dysfunctional people and mental health groups (3 theses, 3.5%), migrants (3 theses, 3.5%) and indigenous people (1 thesis).

Figure 5. Distribution of theses on CFSC by research population
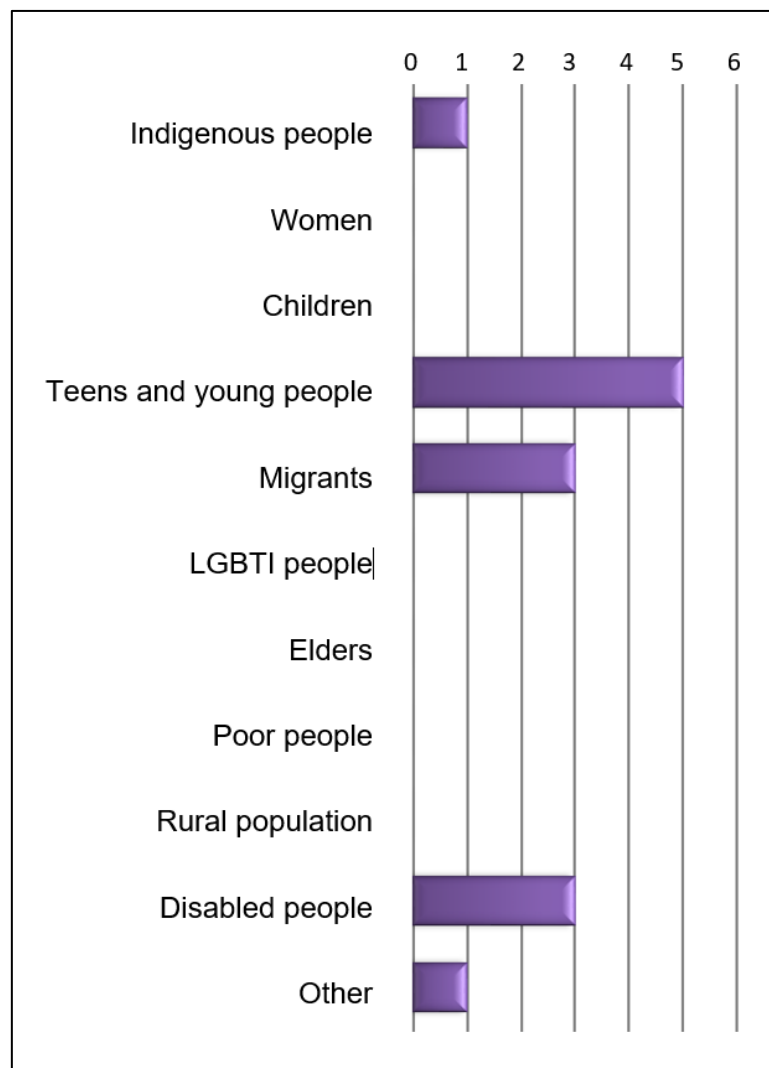
Source: Authors' own creation.

Finally, it is worth examining the results of the dominant geographic areas because they are directly connected to some of the features explained when we defined the discipline. As outlined in the first hypothesis (H1), CFSC in Spain is marked by the historical interest of the academic community for its own themes and, we should add here, by close geographical areas, a fact that is demonstrated in the 21 theses dealing with the Spanish context (25%) or its local and regional areas (18 theses, 21.4%). In the same way, we argued that that linguistic and cultural proximity of Spain to Latin America determines close bonds with its research (H2). In fact, 14 of the 84 analysed theses (a revealing 16.6%) has a subcontinent as their priority geographic area. To this last piece of information, we should add some of the research classified under the "World" category (10 theses, 11.9%), which, in most cases, combines the study of cases in Spain and, at least, a Latin American country. Finally, the previously discussed high number of theoretical and conceptual theses can explain the fact that in 15 of the 84 doctoral theses (17.8%) it is not possible to prescribe the preferred geographic area.

Figure 6. Distribution of theses on CFSC by geographical area
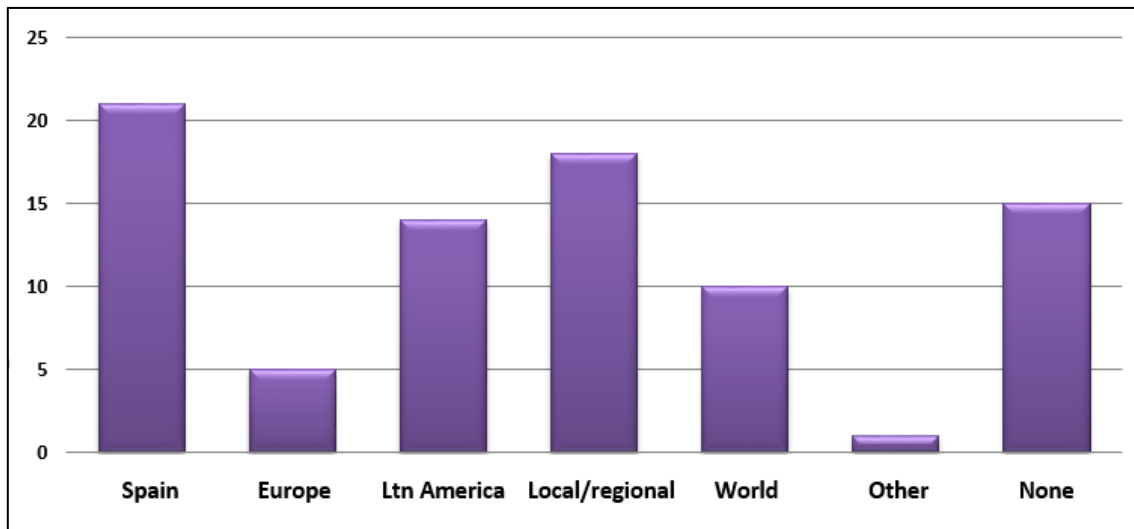
Source: Authors' own creation.

3.4. Brief approach to R&D projects

The interest of the research projects under analysis is diversified across the different research themes, particularly on the digital divide (3 R&D), Media education (3) and communication in ONGs (2). However, as shown in table 5, there are six projects that stand out as they are dedicated to interpreting the relationship between social movements and new information technologies from the perspective of cyber-feminism (1), the moral sensitivity of social movements (1), technological appropriation by local communities (1), and the techno-political strategies (1), discursive strategies (1) and mobilisation strategies (1) of activist and youth groups, particularly, during the mobilisations that started in 2011.

It is also important to note that some projects have been followed up throughout the years, like those dedicated to evaluate the persuasive effectiveness of NGOs (2); to develop mechanisms for citizens' control of local governments (2); and to explore strategies for collaborative learning in secondary education with new media tools and ICT (2). Finally, the R&D projects directed by Salvador Alsius and Francisco García García are married as they seek, among other objectives, to implement strategies of citizen's control of the media system, with emphasis on the new possibilities of the digital environment and open data.

On the other hand, the dominance of the universities of the Community of Madrid (particularly, the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos) and Catalonia, particularly the Universidades of Lleida, Ramon Llull and, to a lesser extent, and Barcelona's Universidad Pompeu Fabra and Autonomous Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona.

Table 5. Research projects related to CFSC

Title of the project	Researcher	University and acronym	Dominant theme
Development of a model of effective persuasive communication for the Third Sector in social networks	ARROYO ALMARAZ, Isidoro	Rey Juan Carlos (URJC)	Communication and NGOS
Strengthening of the communication departments of NGOs in Cordoba through advice and the creation of an efficient persuasive communication	ARROYO ALMARAZ, Isidoro & TARICCO, José Luis	Rey Juan Carlos (URJC)	Communication and NGOS
Virtual communities and feminist praxis online: the political use of the Internet in activism against violence against women	NUÑEZ PUENTE, Sonia	Rey Juan Carlos (URJC)	Social movements and ICT
Techno-political practices and profiles. Emerging notions of citizenship (PPTNECD)	SAMPEDRO BLANCO, Víctor	Rey Juan Carlos (URJC)	Social movements and ICT
New information technologies and citizen participation. Forms of local mediation and community development in the digital citizenry	SIERRA CABALLER, Francisco	Sevilla (US)	Social movements and ICT
Communication flows in political mobilisation processes: media, blogs, and opinion leaders (MEDIAFLOWS)	LÓPEZ GARCÍA, Guillermo	Santiago de Compostela (USC)	Social movements and ICT
The 'outraged' generation. Space, power and culture in youth movements of 2011: a transnational perspective (GENIND)	FEIXA PÀMPOLS, Carles	Lleida (UDL)	Social movements and ICT
Evaluation and indicators of moral sensibility in the current communication of social movements	NOS ALDÁS, Eloísa	Jaume I (UJI)	Social movements and ICT
Radio and local television in Andalusia: current situation and social impact	CHAPARRO ESCUDERO, Málaga	Málaga (UMA)	Local and proximity media
Use of ICTS and digital divide between	BUSQUET DURAN,	Ramon Llull	Digital divide

adults and adolescents. Agreements and disagreements at school and home (AUSTICA)	Jordi	(URL)	
The generation digital divide. Potential conflicts between adults and teens at home (DIGECON)	BUSQUET DURAN, Jordi	Ramón Llull (URL)	Digital divide
The information society and regional development. Application of methods of e-inclusion and territorial marketing	FERRAS SEXTO, Carlos	Santiago de Compostela (USC)	Digital divide
Public communication, transparency, accountability and participation in local government (GlobalCom)	MANFREDI SÁNCHEZ, Juan Luis	Castilla La Mancha (UCLM)	Communication & development projects
Communication and journalism for citizen participation in the monitoring and evaluation of local government management	MORENO SARDÁ, Amparo	Autónoma de Barcelona (UAB)	Communication & development projects
Digital citizenship and open data access: citizen empowerment through social media in the digital environment	GARCÍA GARCÍA, Francisco	Universidad Complutense de Madrid	Media education & external auditing
Creativity and collaborative learning using Web 2.0 tools: longitudinal study about the psychological processes involved in its teaching and learning in high school (CreativeMind2.0)	PIFARRÉ TURMO, Manuela	Lleida (UDL)	Media education
Study of the cognitive and social processes involved in the educational use of the Web 2.0 in secondary education: analysis of its impact on learning	PIFARRÉ TURMO, Manuela	Lleida (UDL)	Media education
Competences in audiovisual communication in a digital environment. Diagnosis of needs in three social areas: Professional, university and compulsory education	GARCÍA MATILLA, Agustín	Valladolid (UVa)	Media education
Transparency and accountability in journalistic information (TRIP)	ALSIUS CLAVERA, Salvador	Pompeu Fabra (UPF)	External auditing

Source: Authors' own creation.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight the presence of a group of R&D projects that have been excluded from this study (and from the previous table) but explore the relationship between communication and social change, as well as some of the debates and concepts that we had included within CFSC, although within a much broader framework of objectives:

1. Two projects that examine environmental communication through content analysis, and incorporate, respectively, the alternative discourse of young people against climate change and the participation of social organisations in the energy conflict in Spain [1].

2. Two R&D projects coordinated by Margarita Ledo and focused on the problems of the alternative audiovisual media based on the analysis of minority-language cinemas in Galicia [2].

3. Two historical projects: "Humour versus power: the monarchy, the military and the Church through satirical communication in contemporary Spanish history", directed by Josep Lluis Gómez Mompart; and "The role of the press in the democratic transition. News coverage and political behaviour of newspapers and journalists", directed by Jaume Guillamet.

4. Three research works examining the increasing interactivity of the audience with the mass media and, particularly, the digital media [3].

5. Finally, the research project "Cultural and Audiovisual Diversity: Good Practices and Indicators", directed by Luis Albornoz, which also develops a catalogue of alternative audiovisual practices which is related to CFSC, and in turn with another research conceived from the economy of political communication: "Pluralism and contents in the new Spanish regulation of audiovisual markets", directed by Andrés Boix Palol.

4. Conclusions

This article has analysed the physiognomy and basic characteristics of research in CFSC carried out in Spain based on two indicators: doctoral theses and R&D projects. In general terms, the three research hypotheses were confirmed since the study detected a regular line research works that, regardless of whether they are self-ascribed to the discipline, are diversified around a wide variety of topics on communication and social change/development.

First, many of these studies are distanced from the dominant institutionalist perspectives of CFSC in English-language research, as for example, the analysis of the communication for development programmes of large cooperation agencies and agencies (FAO, WORLD BANK, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, etc.). Instead, most research works deal with themes that are characteristic of the Spanish tradition, such as the awareness campaigns of NGOS – which is the dominant theme in the articles reviewed between 2000 and 2012 by Marí Sáez and Ceballos (2015) - and community, university and proximity media. On the other hand, the emergence of these doctoral works has to do, without a doubt, with the existence of professors and research groups that have become consolidated in different areas of knowledge throughout the Spanish geography [4].

Secondly, there is an outstanding shortage of doctoral theses dedicated to the technological strategies of social movements, in comparison to the variety of R&D projects focused on this area, a fact that should be contrasted with research works published in journals or delivered in conferences during the same period (2007-2013), and even with works published in Spanish journals specialised in the subject: *Commons. Revista de Comunicación y Ciudadanía Digital* (University of Cádiz); *Redes.com. Revista de estudios para el Desarrollo Social de la Comunicación* (University of Seville) and *Revista Internacional de Comunicación y Desarrollo (RICD)* (University of Santiago de Compostela). On the other hand, this fact is related to the growing interest of the academic community on the use of the Internet, social networks, and mobile technology by the civil society since 2011 and it can be expected that this issue will have a greater presence on the doctoral theses passed from 2014 onwards.

Thirdly, in relation with the hypothesis of Víctor Marí Sáez (2013), CFSC is living a moment of "implosion", given the progressive interest that it generates contrasts with the absence of common theoretical references for a research trend that tends to ignore the long historical tradition of CFSC. Thus, for example, the use of qualitative methods (e.g., participatory action research) is limited while interpretative and descriptive research abounds. In contrast, there are hardly any theses and R&D projects oriented to intervene in the real world or to evaluate theoretical and methodological models, which are the objectives suggested by the theoretical compendium that is marking the evolution of the field (e.g. Gumucio and Tufte, 2006).

Fourth, the study confirmed the close ties between Spanish and Latin America research, especially in the public universities that have research groups that have adopted the Latin American perspective and, coincidentally, receive a greater volume of foreign students. However, the concern with national, regional and local issues, and the study of media dominates over other objects such as interpersonal, group and corporate communication, which is evident in the theses that dealt with the alternative universe (community, educational and municipal media) and those that examine the need to reform the mass media, either by activating mechanisms of citizen participation from within or the external monitoring of contents or activities. Finally, in the comparison of theses and R&D projects, there is a striking absence of projects devoted to the study of alternative media, and an abundance of works that are oriented to the analysis of social movements, the digital divide, and even those that develop useful indicators for further research or innovative media-based learning strategies.

5. Notes

[1] We refer particularly to: "Hegemonic discourse about 'Climate Change' in the media context of the society of risk, knowledge and innovation, and its experimental contrast with other models of alternative discourse among young people" (coordinated by Jose Luis Piñuel) and "Analysis of the

news treatment of energy policies in Spain, reception and participation processes in social organisations" (coordinated by Maria Teresa Mercado).

[2] The projects are "Film, diversity and networks" and "Towards the European Digital Space: the role of the small cinemas in original version films".

[3] We refer to: "Active audiences and journalism: analysis of the quality and regulation of user generated contents", directed by Koldobika Meso Ayerdi; "Journalism and sources of political information in Spain: relations and communication dynamics", directed by Andréu Casero Ripollés; and "Survival of journalism in the post-digital era. Content production in emerging media, consequences of citizen participation and evolution of audiences", coordinated by Concha Edo.

[4] We refer, for example, to the *ComPolíticas* (Communication policies) group of the University of Seville (www.compoliticas.org), led by Francisco Sierra; *Comandalucía* of the University of Malaga (https://com-andalucia.org), directed by Manuel Chaparro; and the works developed around the Doctoral degree programme in Sociology VI of the Complutense University of Madrid; among others. Some of the most relevant professors who have promoted this perspective in Spain are Víctor Marí Sáez (UCA), Agustín García Matilla (UVA), Marcelo Martínez (US), Javier Erro (UPV), Eloísa Nos (UJI), Teresa Velázquez (UAB), Olga del Río (UDG) and Víctor Sampedro (URJC).

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