

Conciencia TV. A new way of television making in Venezuela using Televisión Digital Abierta (Open Digital Television). Social inclusion makes a new understanding of science

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Abstract

This research article analyzes how Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution through the National Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation 2005-2030 and Ley Orgánica de Ciencia y Tecnología (LOCTI) created Conciencia TV which is a new way of television making in Venezuela using TDA and it highlights the relevance of having Science Divulcation and Social Inclusion incorporated and displayed on the screen through the TV programs, series and documentaries in order to make a new understanding of science.

Introduction

Conciencia TV is a thematic television channel devoted to Science, Technology and Innovation in Venezuela. The channel was launched on April 12, 2013 by the Bolivarian Revolution, but the idea was previously conceived by Hugo Chávez and his team. The establishment of this TV channel represents the significance of having a public communicational platform on which to promote the achievements of the government's National Program in matters of science. Conciencia TV is a new way of television making in Venezuela. It strives to replace the traditional conception of Science, Technology and Innovation that is attached to mercantilism, profitable businesses and academic privileges in order to establish alternative ideas, methods, and more altruistic objectives. As television makers, we believe that it is extremely relevant to bring into being a scientific experience that can be divulged in harmony: the integration of academic research and popular and ancestral knowledge. The relationship between different forms of knowledge give us the opportunity to share several types of scientific content that are not excluded from each other. The Venezuelan's vision of science has been created to generate and encourage freedom,

transformation, participation, egalitarianism and solidarity, and also to acknowledge popular innovation. These principles did not exist before 1999 in Venezuela because the concept of science and technology was mostly an academic matter.

When Hugo Chávez took power and the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution was approved everything began to change. Article 110 states the following: “The state shall recognize the public interest in science, technology knowledge, innovation, applications and information services that are needed for basic tools for economic, social and political development as well as national security and sovereignty. For the promotion and development of these activities the state will allocate sufficient resources and create a national system of science and technology in accordance with the law. The private sector will contribute with the same objectives. The State ensures compliance with legal and ethical principles governing the activities of scientific, humanistic and technological research” (P. 98).

Consequently, each institution was analyzed and revised in order to restructure the concept of social inclusion. In collaboration between the Minister for the People's Science, Technology and Innovation, workers of its ascribed institutions, a group of experts, professional academics pro inclusion, technicians, students, popular technologists, researchers, citizens and professors, the *National Plan for Science, Technology, and Innovation 2005-2030 Designing a sustainable future* was conceived. The creation of this plan is the beginning of a new era in Venezuela.

The Plan consists of ideas, strategies and objectives to be developed over a twenty-five year period. Considering that daily life changes so fast and abruptly, the plan is open to modifications or contributions every year. According to Marlene Córdova, the way in which the idea of the Plan was elaborated represents an innovation in policy-making in Latin America. The sum of all of these ideas is that society has started to show more interest in taking part in the groups that constantly meet to work on the National Plan. In order to ensure that people can benefit from the ideas designed by the government, an organic law was established.

The *Ley Orgánica para la Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación* (LOCTI) offers to the people the opportunity to develop a technological project to study and analyze particular phenomena. The government tends to support agricultural processes and development, manufacturing, oil production, environmental studies, and hundreds of proposals from

Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas (Venezuelan Institution for Scientific Investigations).

What is the relationship between science and development? This was the question the participants asked when they discussed the strategies to be applied to the direction of the National Plan by 2005. After acknowledging thousands of restrictions and configuring the scheme of what would have to be transformed, the goal became the promotion of values, participation, and models of action that consider the importance of a “pertinent” form of science, technology and innovation. Such a form should be integrated into collective production and devoted to social inclusion and the preservation of life on Earth. Hugo Chávez was clear about this when he gave a speech during the Sexagesima Assembly of the United Nations in 2006. He stated: “... esas transformaciones, a las que desde Venezuela nos referimos al mundo, tienen para nosotros, desde nuestro punto de vista, dos tiempos: el inmediato, el de ahora mismo, y el de los sueños, el de la utopía. El primero está marcado por los acuerdos lastrados por el viejo esquema, no le rehuimos, y traemos incluso, propuestas concretas dentro de ese modelo en el corto plazo. Pero el sueño de esa paz mundial, el sueño de un nosotros que no avergüence por el hambre, la enfermedad, el analfabetismo, la necesidad extrema, necesita – además de raíces - alas para volar”. (These transformations, which we refer from Venezuela to the world, have for us, from our point of view, two stages: the immediate, the same now, and that of the dreams, that of the utopia. The first is marked by agreements burdened by the old system, we don't run away from them, and in fact we bring concrete proposals into that model in the short term. But the dream of the global peace, the dream of us that is not ashamed by hunger, disease, illiteracy, extreme necessity, need – besides roots - wings to fly).

The following are some of the principles followed by the Venezuelan National Plan:

- 1.- Endogenous sustainability to establish practices of science that contribute to the development of the country through public policies.
- 2.- Wide participation and diversification of communities including its popular sectors such as children, teenagers, adults and indigenous population.
- 3.- To promote social responsibility in order to practice a “pertinent science” so that the most important problems of the country can be resolved.

4.- To encourage collaboration and alliances between people and communities to create scientific and technological projects that involve common interests in order to meet the needs of the people (P. 5).

Scientific Divuligation

Conciencia TV's goal is to share content that is co-produced with independence producers. This also means social inclusion and we will see why. Our TV channel is focusing on science divulgation with several documentary series that highlight the importance of nature and how scientists and researchers are approaching the phenomena that involves the main features of Venezuelan ecosystem, climate and fauna. The following are three examples of the vast material that we have:

1.- *Ciencia para todos*: is a biology program that shows the progress that scientists and researchers are currently making in Venezuela regarding the behavior of existing and endangered animal species that live in the water, jungles, mountains, and llanos (plans). Knowledge leads to light, sensitivity, care and preservation. The Venezuelan government is involved with the project finance that is devoted to these subjects together with some private companies. The aim is that Venezuelans get to know the geography of the country and the species of animals that inhabit it, as well as those species that visit us in an entertaining way.

2.- *Venezuela Infinita*: is a documentary series that show a specialist who is astonished by the Venezuelan biodiversity. Through his explorations he invites us to share in his adventures around the country by showing us several kinds of plants, trees, lagoons, snakes, birds, insects and animals that inhabit the jungles, plans (llanos), mountains, deserts, lakes, and beaches. He explains what they are, how they live and reproduce, and how important it is to keep protecting these animal species. He also warns us about how harmful it will be for humans if the animals disappear. Finally, he explains the main characteristics of the Venezuelan climate, what the Venezuelan geography is like, and how the animals have adapted and reproduced in the tropics.

Furthermore, the country also has the necessity of encouraging research and development in order to achieve the objectives included in the National Plan about manufacturing and technological independence. During the last years some programs have been applied so that popular technologists may propose projects that contribute to solving some of the country's problems.

3.- *Independencia Tecnológica* is a documentary series that explores the latest developments and technological innovations that have been created by various scientific researchers and technicians from different institutes, from the armed forces, and from popular and innovative technologists around the country. The idea is to promote all initiatives and projects and provide a space in television programming in which to expose and explain both the principles and techniques applied to their purposes as the implementation of its results. *Technological Independence* seeks to promote research and development in science, technology and innovation. The objective is to project these messages to all areas of the country in order to stimulate and encourage those who also have proposals. The following are some of the projects that Conciencia TV has undertaken through its program shows: solar energy projects applied to food preparation, glass recycling to be used in kitchens and dining rooms of Venezuelan households, machines for plastics processing, recycling solid waste and other artifacts, machines that facilitate the process of seed selection, artifacts for processing milk and livestock grazing, among many others. The main idea is that there be no discrimination between academic and popular knowledge.

Social Inclusion

Following the goals and some of the principles mentioned and the Venezuelan Constitution, Conciencia TV supports and sponsors film and television-makers who work independently to produce documentaries, short-films, series, and some biographies (biopic) of popular technologists and scientists of Venezuela. This is what we call co-production. The job of these producers is to design projects and proposals related to science, technology and innovation when Conciencia TV calls for proposals. After they submit them, the jury will choose and approve those proposals that fit best with the objectives established before the contest. This exemplifies social inclusion because all students and professionals of filmmaking are taken into consideration so that they may also participate.

I would like to mention some of the aspects of social inclusion that the Venezuelan Government is promoting through *Así se hace*, a television program that promotes the participation of society in socio-productive projects. It highlights how various institutions of technical education work with many teens and adults who are seeking technical training in order to develop productive projects. These types of programs are important because they

promote participation and knowledge and encourage young people to prepare for life by acquiring educational tools for their independence.

It is important to highlight that Conciencia TV, through the program *Así se hace*, promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities to work in agricultural nurseries. In these kinds of environmental schools people learn about the characteristics and properties of the soil for planting plants and trees. In this particular case, students learn about the types of crops that can be developed according to weather features, to contribute to environmental awareness, and to improve the conditions of the cities in Venezuela. Their example should be followed.

Saber para liberar is a six-part documentary series that examines popular and ancient wisdom. We explored remote villages that have a rich cultural past that have made many contributions to the country. These unique people are heirs to traditions of a very particular world. They are indigenous ethnic groups that have their own appropriate technological developments according to the necessities of their life. The program is part of the dialogue of knowledge that has been proposed in the National Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation. The idea is that Venezuelans become familiar with the diversity that exists within the country and realize that technological developments are not necessarily linked to what is commonly observed in large cities and metropolises. In *Saber para Liberar* we observe the technologies used by the locals for making musical instruments, for preparing fish and cassava, the use of salt for food preservation, and techniques used to build typical indigenous homes and media river transport.

It is worth highlighting that the Venezuelan State established in 2007 a law in which 5% of the total payroll of a public or private enterprise should be designated for people with disabilities. Each company must comply with the appropriate job training that every employee will receive. This is another resource that has been created to ensure social inclusion

Historias Comunes: is a documentary series of twelve chapters that addresses several cases of people with disabilities. As a public television channel, Conciencia TV prefers participation and social inclusion. People with disabilities should be taken into account in the decisions of public bodies that make up the Venezuelan state. Consequently, the restructuring of the city is necessary and architectural proposals should develop a city that people in wheelchairs and the blind can safely explore. Universities should establish mechanisms for lessons for people with disabilities of any kind. *Historias Comunes* chronicles the lives of the

disabled and their daily routines in different popular neighborhoods of the country. The idea is to raise awareness in order to champion non-discrimination. At the same time, the series offers relevant scientific and medical information about the various difficulties that these people have. *Historias Comunes* combines education and audiovisual art in the scientific process of people with disabilities and offers the social inclusion of science.

Wayuuwa: el ser Wayuu: is also a ten chapter documentary that contributes to Social Inclusion in Venezuela. It displays the more relevant aspects of the Wayuu indigenous community located far west of Venezuela in the Guajira Peninsula. The documentay highlights ancestral traditions as “*el encierro*” (the confinement) in which a designated expert woman prepares the teenagers who are going to get married soon. It is a necessary preparation according to the Wayuu community. In addition, music and instruments are also highlighted. They represent a cosmological vision of the world and it is a complementary activity that helps them worship their gods and be grateful for the harvest of the year. Some dancing and games are also part of their lives. They have a specific meaning that people from the cities or other regions do not know. This documentary series play an important part in increasing knowledge and initiating dialogue in Venezuela right now.

All what we have mentioned is part of the social inclusion TV programs Conciencia TV has contributed to develop. It is important to know that plenty of other projects are taking place in this moment.

Equally important is the fact that the TDA (Open Digital Television) platform that has been established in the country helps Conciencia TV and other TV channels increase science communication for people from remote areas. Thanks to an agreement with Argentina, a kit with an antenna, a decoder, and a remote control are given to people for free so that they can watch television with high quality. At this moment, 19 of 24 states have received the service of TDA. Although only one year has passed since the program began, 325,000 Venezuelans have received the kit. The two major goals are that by 2015 every home receives one kit, and that by 2019 all TV channels will switch to Digital television.

Conciencia TV is the first TV channel designed from the very beginning for TDA in Venezuela. This is important because we are pioneers in the concept of technological advancements made to contribute to social inclusion. During one year huge steps have been taken. The round table for telecommunications keeps working hard to ensure that these public policies continue and that all objectives are reached.

Finally, it must be said that the elements we mentioned should contribute to new and different conceptions of science, technology and innovation in Venezuela. We hope that other countries continue their job of including those who have been excluded for years. The countries and governments that are still considering or having problems with this issue must look for different ways to apply more inclusive policies. It is time to stop the discrimination and segregation of human beings. Considering we are coping with so many difficulties to achieve our goals, it is important to highlight that science must get closer to people so that their needs will be met. Profits and business are not the only aspirations. Not only human but also environmental problems are demanding more attention from scientists and from everyone who is involved with science. We should create opportunities for social inclusion. Without these, science will continue to be removed from people's reality. This is why we believe that social inclusion leads to a new understanding of science.

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