

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVES

This first part of the literature review will provide an overview of the major theories of alternative communication. Community communication will be treated as a subgroup of the alternative communication arena. As unconventional forms of communication, they are both characterized by their critiques of the mainstream media. They tend to follow different approaches, alternative communications places stress on radical form of communication, e.g. graffiti. Whilst community communication tends to focus on the participatory approach and the empowerment process of individuals, organization and community, e.g. community radio.

1.1 Democratization of communication: the alternative communication debate

In the 1960s a new form of democracy entered western society: ‘participatory democracy’. Beneath this new concept lay the hope of a broader and more direct participation of the people in the political system. Within the domain of the civil society, community based activities became the preconditions for the realization of this idea.

The participatory model was also extended to other sectors of society, such as economics, medicine, and education. When applied to the communication field it questioned the traditional structures and processes of the mass communication studies. It stressed the importance of people participation, not only within democratic institutions but also within the media ones (Vatikiotis, 2004).

This debate has initiated research into the field of alternative communication.

Alternative communication scholars tried to advocate alternative media as an opposition to the main stream ones. These new channels, which promoted a greater form of participation of the people, were conceived as a facilitator of social change (Hamilton, 2000: 357). With the intent of actively involving people as subjects, alternative media prioritized a horizontal and bottom up flow of communication.

The first debates on a more democratic communication system took place during one of the forums promoted by the United Nations Economic and Social Organization (UNESCO) in 1976. During this forum, several ideas in favor of the democratization of communication were discussed. The debate can be summarized in four main points:

- broader access of the people to the communication system through the right to reply and criticize and through regular contact between communicators and the people;
- non-professionals participation in media programs;
- development of ‘alternative forms of communication’;
- participation in local media decision making and management (MacBride, 2004: 169).

After this forum, scholars began to conceptualize the notion of alternative communication. The following thirty years of research brought interesting developments

and insights into this field. However the literature is still in some way confused since scholars' definitions often overlap or contradict. Using Hallett's (2008) words:

The term 'alternative media' covers a tremendous range of activities and technologies. Sometimes referred to as community, or participatory media, it is also a somewhat flexible phrase, having a variety of meanings, depending upon the geographical and socio-economic context within which it is employed. (p. 107)

In the following I will provide an overview of the definitions of alternative media offered by scholars in these last few decades.

1.1.1 Alternative versus mass media

Haas (2004) offered a definition of alternative communication as an opposition to the main stream media: "alternative media could be defined as media devoted to providing representations of issues and events which oppose those offered in the mainstream media and to advocating social and political reform" (p. 115). Created as an alternative to the main stream media, these channels aim to offer unconventional information, which goes beyond the contents covered by mass communication.

Alternative media can be conceptualized in different forms. Radical media constitute a "counter-information institution" which facilitates the social change (Vatikiotis, 2004: 11). They offer a space for alternative discourse in public debate and strongly oppose the agents of power. Participatory media focus on the bottom-up,

horizontal flow of communication. Their main purpose is to overcome the inequalities in communication power through the direct participation and access of the individuals in the media institutions. Community media, based on the principle of people access and participation, are created as a “communication tool for special interest groups” (Vatikiotis, 2004: 15). New media projects, are based on the principle of people access and participation in public spaces. They focus on the use of new technologies and electronic devices, such as the Internet. The Internet, especially in its revolutionary form of Web 2.0 (a second-generation internet service that let people collaborate and share information online), has become an easy to access platform for individuals and social groups.

Alternative media were conceptualized in terms of ‘deprofessionalization’, ‘decapitalization’ and ‘deinstitutionalization’, they were conceived as a way to overthrow the barriers created by the mass media structures (Vatikiotis, 2004: 9). Indeed, they facilitate people’s participation and access. For this reason alternative media often emerge as small scale forms of communication.

All the aforementioned points can be summarized into the model of alternative communication offered by Atton (2000). According to Atton, several factors have to be considered in order to define a media device as alternative. They are content (politically, socially or culturally radical), form (graphics, visual language, presentations), reprographic innovations and adaptations (use of mimeographs, IBM typesetting, photocopiers), distribution (alternative distributive channels), transformed social relations roles and responsibilities (de-professionalization, collective organization), and

transformed communication process (networks, horizontal communication). The author also emphasized the importance of a high interactivity between audience and creators, and the necessity to meet the needs of ordinary people when creating information and dealing with emerging issues (Atton, 2000).

1.1.2 Alternative communication and their audience

In an environment which promotes horizontal communication, de-professionalization and people participation, the audience acquires greater significance and power within the media institutions.

Through direct participation in communication channels, the audience can affect the production and distribution of media messages, can criticize them and can choose the relevant programs (Berrigan, 1979). Audience and media projects are related to each other: the first provides opportunities for the media consumption and the second offers material for the discussion of radical and different ideas.

The audiences are not just simply consumers of media, they also have the opportunity to partake in its production (Vatikiotis, 2004). As a consequence, alternative media contents must “speak the readers’ language” and must address readers’ realities (Dominelli, 2006: 98).

1.2 Alternative communication within the community

Amongst all the aforementioned scholars, Atton (2000) provided the most comprehensive model of alternative media. However, despite his definition, this did not explain important concepts such as cooperation, integration and community. His radical approach avoided any form of authority and control from above, and refused any integration and cooperation with the dominant groups. Developments in the research enabled scholars to categorize a subgroup within the alternative communication: the community communication.

Most of the scholars cited before considered alternative media primarily in their oppositional and radical aspect. However other researchers, such as Berrigan (1979), interested in community communication and emphasized the importance of the interplay between non-mediated (interpersonal) and mediated communication practices. They also researched the fact that both senders and receivers belong to the same social system or community (Hollander et al., 2002: 20). In other words:

[...] this perspective of community communication, which goes beyond a linear conceptualization of the communication process as it has been constituted along with the central role of media in mass communication, evaluates the social aspects of the communication process in terms of the context, the 'community', in which 'experience' is communicated, and collectivized. Therefore the communication process is not conceptualized here exclusively along the lines of transmission and reception, but also within a specific social setting in relation to its own structure – the structure of relevance (both in community and individual

level), and the interplay between mediated and non-mediated forms of communication. (Vatikiotis, 2004: 8)

We have to date back to the 1970s in Canada and America if we want to pinpoint when and where the notion of community media began to be used. During this time the appearance of small scale electronic media brought scholars attention to an area previously neglected. The study of communication, beneath the perspective of a community (Hollander et al, 2002: 19). This new field of study spread to Europe and gradually to the rest of the world (Fuller, 2007).

1.2.1 Community belonging and exclusion

To clearly understand the concept of community media, it is necessary to first address the concept of community.

Community can provide different meanings, dependent on whether it is related to a geographic locality, to a local social system or to an interest group. In its first acceptation it is identified with a “relatively limited geographical region”, for example a neighborhood, a village, a town or a city. As a local social system it consists of a group which shares the same cultural, social and political interests (Jankowski, 2002: 5). In its third acceptation it refers to a group whose members share the same specific interests’ (Jankowski, 2002). Thus, community always implies a sense of belonging or membership.

Within each society, there is a co-existence of several groups. A few might be more powerful, e.g. ethnic majorities, thus they are privileged. Others might be less powerful, such as handicapped, ethnic minorities and women. Less powerful groups are often under-represented within the society because they are not taken into consideration by the government and traditional media institutions. Thus, inequalities and exclusion emerge. Inequalities are determined by an unbalanced relation between subject and object. With the subject imposing its own views of the world and the object accepting it without any possibility of change (Dominelli, 2006: 32).

Community media aim to re-establish the balance between groups in society. Promoting the principles of access and participation they help unrepresented groups and minorities to express themselves (Vatikiotis, 2004).

1.2.2 Community communication features

It was only in the 1980s that concepts such as access and participation were conceptualized within the community media studies. The work conducted by Berrigan. offered the first model of what is conceived as community media.

Berrigan (1979) did not base her model on the medium or communication channel. Indeed, she focused on the level of participation the individual could reach within the community. She called community communications all those “uses of communications media which include two way communication” (Berrigan, 1979: 7). They have been used

to identify programs designed for special interest groups and communities, such as ethnic minorities, women or handicapped. According to the author's definition:

Community media are adaptations of media for use by the community, for whatever purposes the community decides. They are media to which members of the community have access, for information, education, entertainment, when they want to access. They are media in which the community participates, as planners, producers, performers. They are the means of expression of the community, rather than for the community. Community communications describe an exchange of views and news, not a transmission from one source to another.
(Berrigan, 1979: 7-8)

The effectiveness of this typology of media lies in how far the concepts of access and participation are implemented within the community group.

As cited in Schulman (1992), Singh brought together three aspects of communication that were previously considered separate: media, organizational communication and interpersonal communication. She lauded 'horizontal communication' processes and 'bottom-up' approaches as methods which could help to achieve a more democratic communication flow and to favor the community media growth.

Hollander and colleagues (2002) related community communication to the idea of a public sphere, a social arena where "public opinion is forged, identities are made, and consensus is reached". They focused on the concept of "making public and creating public" and described community communication as a "fundamental human activity

which transforms private individual experience into public collective experience” within the context of the community (Hollander et al., 2002: 26). Within the concept of the public sphere, community implies the existence of “interdependent active citizens” able to communicate with each other and to participate actively in the decision making of their own group (Sthapitanonda and Thirapantu, 2007).

Fuller (2007), on the basis of Maslog analysis, identified a few basic characteristics of community communication. These are people ownership and control, small scale and often low cost media, interactive two-way communication, non-profit aim, limited coverage, use of alternative resources and materials, community needs focused, and community development orientation. As previously mentioned alternative media and community media are characterized by a close inter-relationship between senders, audience and messages. Senders identify with the audience, as they both share the same concerns and interests (Hollander et al., 2002: 23).

1.2.3 Jankowski’s model of community communication

A detailed description of community communications features was offered by Jankowski. According to the author, community or citizen media include different typologies of mediated forms of communication such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines and electronic networks. These small-scale media facilitate community participation and give voice to those groups who are marginalized and unrepresented (Jankowski, 2002: 6). He proposed the following model:

- *Objectives: to provide news and information relevant to the needs of community members, to engage these members in public communication via the community medium; to ‘empower’ the politically disenfranchised;*
 - *Ownership and control: often shared by community residents, local government, and community-based organizations;*
 - *Content: locally oriented and produced;*
 - *Media production: involving non-professional and volunteers;*
 - *Distribution: via the ether, cable television infrastructure, or other electronic network;*
 - *Audience: predominantly located within a relatively small, clearly defined geographic region, although some community networks attract large and physically dispersed audience;*
 - *Financing: essentially non-commercial, although the overall budget may involve corporate sponsorship, advertising, and government subsidies.*
- (Jankowski, 2002: 7-8)

We can better understand community communication if we compare Jankowski’s model with Atton’s. The two patterns they provide differ from each other in some points.

While Atton places emphasis on the content (radical) and on the change of social relations (de-professionalization, collective organization). Jankowski in contrast does not place any stress on the overthrow of the social order. Indeed, his model accepts public institutions collaboration (both at financing and ownership level), and distribution via traditional channels (cable TV). The significance of community media is placed on the “empowerment of the politically disenfranchised” rather than in the overthrow of the existing social order.

Jankowski's model missed an important point: the non mediated forms of communication. Thus, his model needs to be integrated with the other communication techniques which are not expressly based on a medium. As Berrigan (1979) said:

Community communications are an approach or a technique; they are not limited to particular types of media, to particular types of communication, to particular uses. (p. 25)

1.3 The community communication in practice

According to O'Donnell and colleagues (2007), alternative media usage within the community should range from the most modern technologies to the most traditional ones. Modern technology includes Internet (web-sites, emails, blogs, mailing lists, web-TV and radio, video conferencing), mobile phones (short message service, multimedia messaging service), video and audio media (CD ROMs, video and audio cassettes). Whilst more traditional methods include radio and television, landline (fax, telephone conversation, hot lines), and print media (flyers, pamphlets, books and journals).

The authors investigated which typologies of community media were preferred by community organizations in Canada. The results of the investigation are shown in the two following tables. Table 1 includes the media extensively used by the community organizations. Table 2 shows the media that was introduced later and not yet effectively developed by the communities.

As we can see from this study, traditional technologies (such as print media and telephone communication) have not been completely replaced by new technologies. New technologies are often employed inconsistently because of a lack of people with technical skills and of funds to update the systems (O'Donnell et al., 2007). This means that traditional technologies still gain great importance in the community organization arena.

Table 1: Media and technologies that are easy for the organization to use (O'Donnell et al., 2007: 10).

Media and Technologies	Uses
Brochures – paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminate community resource information • Disseminate information about programs and services
Camera – digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produced images used in brochures • Produce images for community newspapers
FAX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmit information and reports to external organizations • Exchange information about programs with other organizations
Newspaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish community newspaper
Postal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange formal documents • Exchange professional correspondence • Exchange social correspondence, such as holiday cards
Web – search engines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate potential funding sources • Gather domain-specific information, including labor market, educational, health resources and so on • Gather information about external organizations • Gather information for grant proposal writing

Table 2: Media and technologies that are more challenging for the organization to use (O'Donnell et al., 2007: 10).

Media and Technologies	Uses
Camcorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record presentations for disseminations Make collaborative videos about programs
E-mail – attachments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exchange documents with external organizations Send information to board members
E-mail – interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate with community members Intra-organizational communication Inter-organizational communications
E-mail – lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exchange newsletters with external organizations Transmit newsletters and information to community members Exchange information with other community organizations and coalitions
Telephony – basic (digital switchboard)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff-staff and community member-staff communications Communicate with external organizations Network with external organizations Communication with political representatives Fund raisings
Telephony – mobile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific needs for a staff in a mobile job functions, such as: bus drivers, staff who make home visits, outreach workers, and community gardeners
Telephony – voice mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate asynchronously with community members Receive information from community members and external organizations
Website – organizations'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate information about the organization's programs and services

Alternative media could be employed not only by the organization but also by and for its community of interest. The following will provide practical examples of how alternative media can be applied to the community.

1.3.1 The Internet

Community organizations have integrated the Internet into a broad range of media activities because of the new possibilities and opportunities it offers. Using De La Piscina

(2007) words “the Internet has been their [social movements] launching platform, their natural environment, the global speaker of their demands” (p. 72).

According to Andy Kao (2005) the Internet is necessary to build networks, extend the scope of the services provided, reach new beneficiaries, make the service more convenient, improve cooperation and training, engage in online advocacy activities, share information, promote volunteering, and to facilitate case management. At the individual level, the Internet is a channel which lets people express and share their opinions, interests and preferences through online discussions, blogs, and emails (Harris, 2007).

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the digital platforms developed by the Association for the Promotion of Cross Strait Marriage Harmonization (*Zhonghua Liang'an Huyin Xietiao Cujinhui*, 中華兩岸婚姻協調促進會). The platforms were created in 2001 with the purpose of promoting the harmonization of cross strait marriages. They have been accessed mainly by Chinese women and their Taiwanese spouses. Users can find information about activities related to Chinese spouses, life in Taiwan and any matter concerned with cross strait marriages. In addition they can also engage in forums and chats with other users. This platform has favored Chinese spouses' empowerment through exchange of information and public discussions of problems (Zhang, 2004).

It is important to note that in some cases the Internet can constitute a barrier in the democratization of communication. Due to inadequacy of structures and facilities, the Internet is not accessible to all those who need it, for example women and rural dwellers.

In this case the Internet can facilitate public sphere fragmentation, it can widen class, gender and generational gaps (Harris, 2007; MacBride, 2004).

1.3.2 Video and audio media

Through audio and video media, people can become involved in self-managed and community projects. These technologies are not necessarily related to broadcast programs. For example in the 1970s in Guatemala, a series of cassette recordings were placed and played in an area where village women met together to do the laundry. These cassettes contained medical information, dramatized stories on health education, interviews with doctors. Findings showed that the project had a great impact on villagers, which started to follow the suggestions given by doctors on a more balanced diet (Berrigan, 1979).

Radio, in the forms of community/micro radio and pirate radio, can be a successful device in promoting participation. These typologies of radio use low power transmitters, thus they only reach a limited audience located in a specific geographical area (Atton, 2004).

The Fijian organization femLINKPACIFIC offers an interesting example. Since 2001 the feminist organization has created its own community radio station, femTALK 89.2 FM. This so called “radio in a suitcase” directly reaches women in their homes and offers them free space to talk and to express themselves. The pre-recorded interviews are

carried directly to villages, recorded and then broadcasted on the radio. This project has received positive feedback from all over the country (Rolls, 2007).

1.3.3 Telephone

Despite the several ICT technologies, telephone remains an extensively used channel of communication. Widely used by social service organizations, it is a great facilitator of individual self expression.

In this regard, counseling hotlines were proved effective in helping people with personal or family problems. In 1992 the Women's Hotline was set up in Beijing with the purpose of offering a counseling service to women in need of help. According to Palmer (1997) women from all over China appreciated this new form of communication and employed it for advice on seeking marriage, love and health. In a society which has faced many changes (economic, social, and legal), women found this hotline a trustworthy channel to express themselves and their fears without being ashamed of speaking out about their problems (Palmer, 1997).

1.3.4 Print media

Print media are a tool widely employed by communities. Examples are the community newspapers, pamphlets and booklets which are published and distributed locally.

The book *Don't Call Me a Foreign Bride* (*Buyao Jiao Wo Waiji Xinni*ang, 不要叫我外籍新娘) (Hsia, 2005), published in 2005 by the Trans-Asia Sisters Association of Taiwan (*Nanyang Taiwan Zizihui*) constitutes an example. The book is divided into three main parts: a brief introduction of the progress of the foreign spouses' movement in Taiwan; a collection of writings, paintings and pictures of immigrant women; and a debate on the problems encountered by the spouses. The main purpose of this project is to give voice to foreign spouses. In addition, it aims to improve the public's perception and to sensitize Taiwanese society about the issue of foreign spouses.

1.3.5 Non mediated communication

As previously mentioned, community communication also includes non mediated forms of communication. Such as, face to face dialogues, group discussions and technical skills training. Non mediated forms of communication entail an educational, informational and entertaining value which aims to facilitate the individual empowerment and liberation (Vatikiotis, 2004: 10).

According to Tinker (1999), group chats, idea exchanges, and activities which favor the free expression of the individual, are important for women groups. "Just hearing about new ideas, knowing that their problems are not theirs alone, discussing alternative approaches to addressing their problems is provocative and stimulating" (p. 18). These activities are referred to by Papa and colleagues (2000) as "social learning through communicative interactions". According to the authors, dialogue opens the doors to self-reflection, self-knowledge, and liberation from disempowering thoughts. As a

consequence individuals are encouraged to learn from each other, to accept diversity, to trust and understand each other.

The “Chinese literacy program for foreign brides” constitutes an example of non mediated form of community communication. This project was launched in 1995 by the Meinung People’s Association in the town of Meinung, Gaoxiong (Taiwan). The aim of the project was to help immigrant women transform themselves from isolated and silent individuals to publicly engaged people through the acquisition of Chinese language competences. The association, with the help of Professor Hsia, applied the concept of Freire’s theater of the oppressed, to the foreign brides literacy program. It was used as a way to help women develop the ability to express themselves and to build trust among the group (Hsia, 2006). Aside from the initial problems that were encountered (because of the women susceptibilities and their families resistance), the project was a success. Women changed in three aspects. Firstly they improved their language abilities. Secondly they developed self-confidence and self-esteem. And finally they expanded their social network and improved communication with their families (Hsia, 2006).

1.3.6 The funding issue

However it is not always plain sailing, alternative media also face problems. As an independent body they often suffer the consequences of a lack of capital, participation and general commitment (Hamilton, 2000: 370). The same can also be noted about community communication. Communities are “extremely fragile entities” which face enormous obstacles because of a lack of resources and funds (Dreier, 1996: 127). As

Harcup (2003) stressed, these problems can easily lead to a lack of continuity of projects and publications.

Aside from private donations, the government also plays an important role in supporting and encouraging grass-root activities. Its help can come from different avenues, such as operations funding, training, free access to public information (Dreier, 1996).

1.4 The significance of community media

The importance of community communication lies in the achievement of the concepts of empowerment and participation. According to Milan (2008), community media is about “access to information”, “voice to marginalized groups”, and “people participation” (p. 26). Thus empowerment as a process and participation as an approach, gives significance to all forms of community communication. That is up to the point that “the practice of community communications will depend upon how far the notions of access and participation are accepted within particular socio-political contexts” (Berrigan, 1979: 18).

1.4.1 Participation

As previously mentioned, the concept of participation finds its roots in the idea of ‘participatory democracy’ which was developed in the 1960s. Participatory democracy emphasized the direct participation of the people to the political system (Hagen, 1992). According to Stapitanonda and Thirapantu (2007), participation implies that

interdependent active citizens participate and communicate with each other in order to make collective decisions. Community based activities become the preconditions for the realization of this idea.

In more general terms, participation refers to “a set of practices working for the liberation of the individual and collective subject” (Riaño, 1994: 22). This is based on a more balanced relationship between actors (experts, agents, communities, individuals). Participation needs to be implemented through a “democratic, collaborative, and open” dialogue and communication (Waters, 2000: 91). When applied to the communication field it stresses the importance of active participation of ordinary people in media and democratic institutions (Vatikiotis, 2004).

1.4.1.1 Participatory communication

White (1999) analyzed the concept of participation in its two forms of ‘participatory action research’ and ‘participatory communication’. Participatory action research consists of people’s ability to change their status after a process of awareness and confidence gaining (Servaes and Arnst, 1999). This process includes three main steps: collective definition and investigation of a problem, group discussion of the issue and group action to solve the problem (Servaes and Arnst, 1999).

Participatory communication consists of a series of communication practices which aim to reflect people’s thoughts and expectations. Small scale media, horizontal

communication, self-governance, activism, two-way and dialogic communication process are fundamental features of participatory communication (White, 1999).

In the 1990s Servaes developed the 'participatory communication model'. This model emphasized the importance of cultural identity for the community and of participation of the single individuals within the media institutions (Vatikiotis, 2004). This model found its roots in the debate on alternative media and participation which took place during a forum organized by UNESCO in Belgrade at the end of the 1970s.

Participants defined the process of participation within the alternative media in terms of 'access', 'participation' and 'self-management'.

Access by the public can be reached through two means. Firstly, through choice, that is the right of listening and viewing desired programs, of choosing amongst a wide range of materials and of requesting the desired materials. Secondly, through feedback, that is the right of interacting with media producers, of participating during program transmission, of commenting and criticizing, and of keeping in touch with media producers. Participation implies the involvement of the public in the production process. It can be obtained at the production level (opportunities for the public to produce programs and of having access to technical facilities). At the decision making level (right to participate in the definition of programs content and scheduling, and to the media organization management). Finally, at the planning level (right to participate in the formulation of plans and policies for media communications at national, local and

regional level). Self-management is related to the participation of the public in the decision making of the media enterprise. It also involves the formulation of communication policies and plans (Berrigan, 1979: 18-19).

According to Harris (2007), participatory communication facilitates people production and distribution of contents. Since their focus is on people's needs and interests, participatory media are "people-centered, process-oriented, and contextualized in a local setting" (p. 30).

1.4.2 Empowerment

The concept of empowerment can be understood by considering the opposite concepts of power and powerlessness.

Power is manifested in the capacity of a subject to produce intended effects on others (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989). Powerlessness refers to the expectation of a subject that he/she is unable to influence the outcome of life events (Keiffer, cited in Lord and Hutchinson, 1993). Powerlessness can be a result of social isolation, inappropriate services and systems, poverty and abuse (Lord and Hutchinson, 1993).

The transition from the state of powerlessness to the one of power is called empowerment.

1.4.2.1 The three levels of empowerment

Studies on empowerment were first developed by the psychological and educational fields during the 1970s (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). They defined empowerment as:

[...] an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989: 2)

The study of empowerment was subsequently extended also to the communication field. Empowerment was conceived as a communicative process centered on human interactions and collective actions (Papa et al., 2000: 91).

Empowerment can occur at the micro or at the macro level. In the first case it consists in the development of self-esteem and in the increase of control over one's own life. When it occurs at the macro level, it consists in the development of social collective action and of political power (Pardasani, 2005: 117).

This concept was better explained by Zimmerman (1995). The author identified three subjects which could become empowered: the individual, the organization and the community. Which Pardasani (2005) defined as interpersonal, group and institutional and social levels of empowerment.

Empowering processes for individuals (also called psychological empowerment) might be based on participation within the community organizations and it includes “perception of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of a sociopolitical environment” (Zimmerman, 1995: 581). At this level people develop a “sense of identity and self worth” which gives them the ability to regulate events of their life (Pardasani, 2005: 122).

Whilst empowering processes for organizations might be based on shared leadership and collective decision making, they facilitate the enhancement of members’ skills, provide them with support to implement changes and act for the organization they belong to (Zimmerman, 1995: 581-582). This stage involves the development of group consciousness and understanding of how political structures can affect the group and its members. It comes as a consequence of the recognition of the importance of collective action by the members of a group (Pardasani, 2005: 122). At this stage individuals cooperate to organize themselves: they might talk together, network, work together on issues, and share responsibilities (Papa et al., 2000: 92).

Empowerment processes for the community might be based on collective action and access to government and community resources. This involves individuals working together to improve the quality of their society or to change the social order (Zimmerman, 1995: 582). The two main goals of community empowerment are “equity and distributive justice” in the society (Pardasani, 2005: 122). They can be achieved through group lobbying, advocacy activities, participation in national and regional forums and meetings.

At this level emphasis is placed on the individual identification in a group and on the recognition of the “collective bargaining power of the group” (Pardasani, 2005: 122).

1.4.2.2 Empowering processes

It is difficult to clearly separate the three levels of empowerment conceptualized by Zimmerman. Indeed individual empowerment can lead to empowerment of the organization and of the community, and in the mean time group empowerment can enhance individual consciousness. This is because the three are interlinked and are dependent upon each other (Pardasani, 2005).

The process of individual empowerment is often an unconscious decision which leads individuals to two important changes. That is, they become aware of their own capacities and they develop “new directions” for themselves (Lord and Hutchinson, 1993: 10). A study conducted by Lord and Hutchinson (1993) showed that four main causes can affect the initial stage of empowerment: life crisis, prolonged experience of frustration, access to information, and personal characteristics development (for example determination, self-confidence, help).

Lyons and colleagues (2001) considered individual empowerment as an “increase in influence and control through an acquisition of knowledge and skills” (p. 1235). These skills can belong to the personal, managerial and technical sphere. Social skills include the abilities of negotiation and conflict resolution. Managerial skills enable an individual

to be suitable for specific jobs. Whilst technical skills are acquired through training and courses, such as computer proficiency or public speaking (Lyons et al., 2001).

According to Tomlinson and Eagan (2002), empowerment manifests in the capacity of individuals to self-organize and become involved in the activities of their community. They carried out a study on organizations providing employment-related services to UK-based refugees. The scholars showed that in a country in which refugees are construed as a problem for the society they experience difficulties in establishing a positive identity within the local community and their empowerment is manifested in their participation in the community activities. The result is the creation of a self-sufficient and self-help community in which members construct their identity and power within the group.

1.4.2.3 Gender empowerment

It is necessary to study gender empowerment as a separate field as female status within society is different to that of men. This is because the concept of gender refers to a “structural or social relationship in which economic, political, and cultural resources and power are distributed unequally” (Lorber, cited in Moghadam and Senftova, 2005: 390).

Rolls (2007) noted that female participation and access in the decision making process of organizations and media institutions is still low if compared to that of males. This consideration can be extended to the society as a whole, where the perpetuation of old patterns dominated by men is maintained. Women’s empowerment is conceptualized

in terms of their achievement of basic capabilities of legal rights, and of their participation in key social, economic and political domain (Moghadam and Senftova, 2005).

According to Moghadam and Senftova's (2005) framework for measuring gender empowerment, the following indicators have to be taken into consideration: socio demographic indicators, body integrity and health, literacy and educational attainment, economic participation and rights, political participation and rights, cultural participation and rights. In other words, female empowerment means enabling women to have both personal and social abilities which let them control their own life.

This pattern conceptualizes female empowerment in terms of the realization of basic human and developmental rights. Therefore, it is more suitable for the investigation of women empowerment as a category, rather than as single individuals or part of a small community. Indeed it focuses on the social relations between women and men and on the presence of unbalanced relations between these two groups within societies. We have to refer to Zimmerman's model (1995) if we want to focus on the empowerment of the individual and his/her community.

However we have to recognize that the concept of empowerment, when studying gender, has to take into consideration three important aspects. Buzzanelli refers to this as cooperative enactment, integrative thinking, and connectedness (cited in Papa et al., 2000: 95). Cooperative enactment refers to women's capacity of working together to achieve

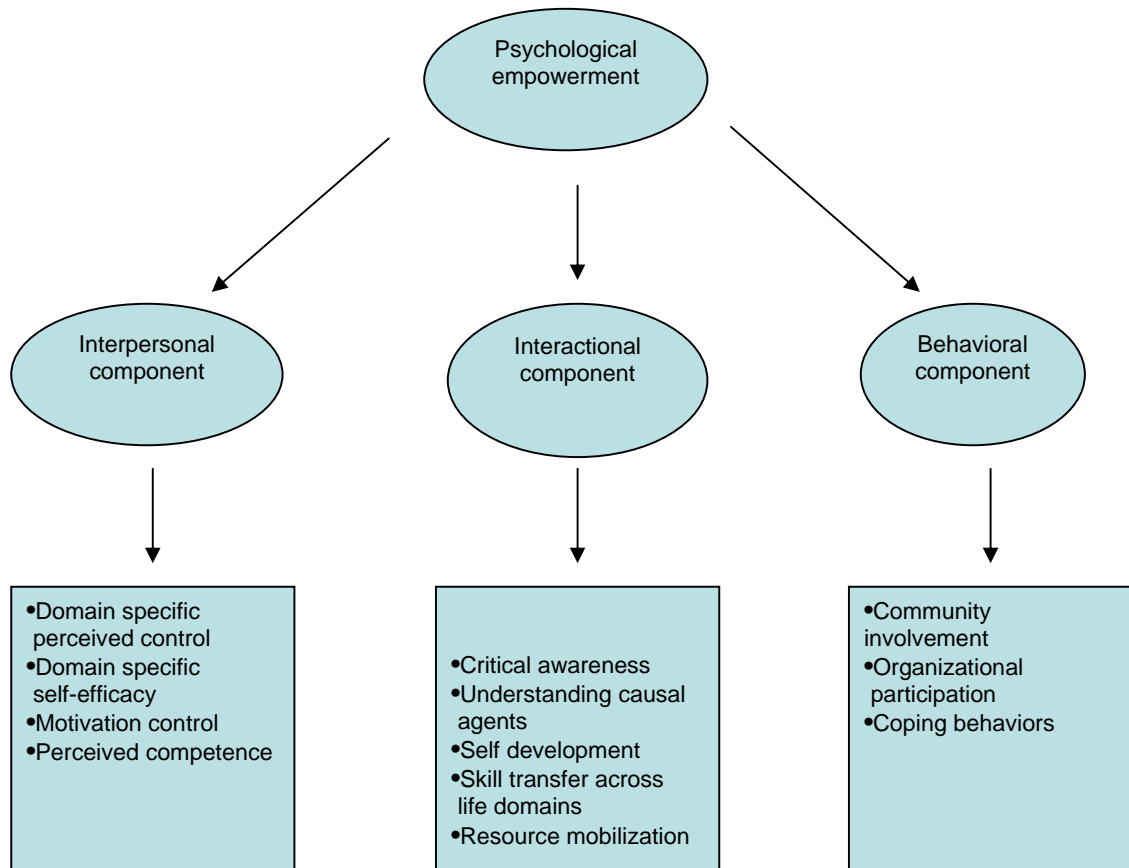
individual and collective goals rather than opposing each other. This can be reached mainly through dialogue. Integrative thinking refers to the inclination of women to consider how a specific action and its impacts can influence all the spheres of her life, for example, her family. Connectedness is related to “the attempt to integrate the mind, body, and emotions in making sense of the world around us” (cited in Papa et al., 2000: 96). This means that women’s actions can not be viewed only in their absolute empowering or disempowering value, but also need to take into consideration the reasons for and the context in which the individual acted in that specific way (Papa et al., 2000).

1.4.2.4 Empowerment evaluations

Whilst it is unlikely that a universal measurement of empowerment will fit all the individuals, Zimmerman (1995) offered a general model for the evaluation of the process. According to the author, the evaluation of psychological empowerment is fundamental to understand the next two stages of organizational and community empowerment. Indeed psychological empowerment already includes community change, capacity building and collectivity (Zimmerman, 1995).

As we can see from figure 1, psychological empowerment is based on three main components: interpersonal, interactional, and behavioral elements (Zimmerman, 1995).

Figure 1: Normological network for psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995: 588).



The interpersonal component is related to how people think about themselves. It includes the ability to extend control to several spheres of an individual's own life, self-efficacy, perception of competence and ability, and the capability of achieving goals. The interactional component is influenced by the understanding that people have of their community and of the related socio-political issues. This means critical awareness of issues, knowledge of how to reach determined goals, problem solving, and decision making abilities. The behavioral component refers to the ability of taking actions to

influence a result, for example, looking for employment, managing stressful situations, adapting to new environments (Zimmerman, 1995).

Speer and Hughey (1995) also tried to offer an evaluation model for the individual empowerment. They considered three main levels: social power access, social networks extension, and action-reflection practice. The first level refers to the individual participation in the public sphere, such as the membership to a social group. The second level can be implemented through confrontation and discussion with other people and the development of interpersonal relations. The third level refers to the understanding of organizing principles and can be implemented through one-on-one conversations, researching issues, and public speaking.

Whilst Speer and Hughey placed emphasis only on the social achievements as a measure to evaluate individual empowerment, Zimmerman also considered the interpersonal component. This consists of the ability of an individual to control his/her own life. Without perception of self-efficacy, many individuals will not be able to enhance their social networks and abilities. As Speer and Hughey' model oversees this important point, I will follow Zimmerman's pattern for the purpose of my investigation. In addition Zimmerman's model takes into account also the active engagement in one's community and the understanding of one's sociopolitical environment. In this way stress will be placed not only on the individual but also to the organizational and community levels of empowerment.

1.5 Overview

As we can see in this first part of the literature review, in the 1970s community communication entered scholars debate as a subgroup of the alternative communication practices. Emphasis was placed on the non mediated forms of communication, and on the participation and empowerment of the individual. Community became the structure of relevance where communication practices gained significance (Vatikiotis, 2004).

Community communication entails interaction with the audience and is concerned with the everyday life of ordinary people. Thus it has a social building aim. The literature review showed evidence that community media can become a successful and resourceful tool for the activities of civil society groups. Feminist media academics have emphasized the importance of the alternative media practices in the process of women empowerment. These media are a way to promote feminist ideas and to counteract the misrepresentation of women in society (Mitchell, 2002).

An important feature of community communication is that a certain level of participation of the single individuals is through the communication activities and projects. This concept was developed during one of UNESCO's forums in Belgrade in 1979. Participatory communication involved three main areas: closer contact to the communication system, involvement of the public to the production process and participation in the decision making of the communication organization. This approach would lead to the empowerment of the individuals, the communities and the organizations.

Empowerment can be explained as a transition from a state of powerlessness to one of power, through an increase of control and influence in a person's own life. Despite the difficulties of using a universal measurement of empowerment, Zimmerman offered a general and exhaustive model for the evaluation of the process of psychological empowerment.

Following this discussion on community media-participation-empowerment, I will try to investigate the employment of community communication within the group of Chinese spouses who have joined CARES in Taipei. This case study's aim is to analyze whether and how Chinese spouses become empowered once they have joined the organization.

The under-privileged and discriminated status of Chinese spouses in Taiwan constitutes one of the main reasons why I decided to direct my research at their empowerment. In the next part of the literature review, I will offer an overview of the phenomenon of international and cross-strait marriage in Taiwan.

I would like to emphasize the fact that the expression 'Chinese spouses' includes both brides and grooms from Mainland China who are married to a Taiwanese partner. Despite the fact that the participants of this thesis are all females, I will address them also with the more general term of spouses.

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

The phenomenon of international marriage is not limited only to Taiwan. It is an issue widely discussed all over Asia and also in other Western countries. Studies carried out in Britain between 1860 and 1914 showed that emigration was used as a means of escape. Many women experienced difficulties in their marital situation and were vulnerable to impoverishment and marginalization. They used emigration as a way to enhance their status and to achieve the goal of marriage abroad (Swaisland, cited in Buijjs, 1993). According to other studies carried out in Africa, it seems that when there is a general dissatisfaction with marriage prospects in their native villages, young women will migrate. They hope that this will provide an improvement to their status (Thadani and Todaro, 1984). Marriage, especially for lower class women, can be used as a strategy by which “women in disadvantaged positions move to more desirable locations where they may achieve social and economic mobility” (Fan and Huang, 1998: 228). This viewpoint can be put forward to explain the massive exodus of women from rural to urban areas and from poorer to richer countries.

As we have seen, these unions of couples from different nations are referred to as: intercultural marriage, international marriage, mixed marriage and transnational marriage. The term cross-strait marriage refers specifically to those unions in which one member of the couple is from Taiwan and the other one from Mainland China.

In the case of Taiwan, statistics indicate that in 2004 one out of every four new marriages were between a citizen and a foreigner. In 2007 more than half of the

marriages with a foreigner were with a spouse from mainland China (Hsia, 2004; Ministry of Interior, 2008).

1.1 Taiwan and the Chinese spouses case

The immigration flow from China to Taiwan and vice versa began to form at the end of the 1980s when the veterans who had previously served the military to defend the newborn independent country against Chinese attack were allowed to go back to their city of origins and visit their families (Jian, 2004). Gradually liberated from the rules which regulated their lives, veterans were given the opportunity to go back to their home towns and find potential wives amongst the girls inhabiting those villages (Kuo, 2003).

Prior to the 1980s there were only a few sporadic cases of cross-strait marriages which saw a significant increase towards the end of the decade. This was thanks to a lifting of the martial law in Taiwan and the establishment of dialogue with China. This was aided by China relaxing its migration control in the mid 1980s, thus facilitating the movement of people in the country. The flow from the rural to the urban areas increased dramatically. Poor uneducated women from the countryside were marrying wealthier men from the cities or from abroad, thus increasing their social status in society (Fan and Huang, 1998). A subsequent improvement of the economic relations between the two countries favored a further increase of cross strait marriages from 1992 up to the present. The peak of these unions was in 2003 with international and cross-strait marriages accounting for 19.9% of all national marriages (Yan, 2005; Y.H. Chen, 2006; Chung, 2003, October 1; Wang, 2004).

An exhaustive analysis of the reasons for the growth of this phenomenon is offered by Wang (2004). Although his analysis refers more broadly to the foreign spouses' phenomenon, it can also be applied to the case of Chinese spouses. The author distinguishes between external (mainly economic: globalization, capitalist development, and spread of Taiwanese business in South-East Asia) and internal causes (mainly social: inequalities in society, a male population higher than the female ones and the social changes of the last decades). Many studies show that in the last twenty years Taiwan's social structure has changed dramatically. This has resulted in the weakening of some important traditional values within the family. The fertility rate dropped heavily, the nuclear family replaced the extended one, the mean average age of first time marriages of females went up, the divorce rate increased, more and more women continued their studies up to university, and the male population outnumbered the female one. These changes coupled together with the fact that Taiwan became one of the major importers of foreign labor amongst the South East Asian countries, made easier for transnational marriages (Sheu, 2007; Gold, 1996; Napiere, 2007).

In the mean time Asian countries, such as China, helped to facilitate these transnational marriages. Internal conditions within the country assisted these migrations. Conditions such as unemployment, hunger, disease, meant many women wanted to break away and marry men from richer nations (Hsia, 2004).

1.1.1 Chinese spouses: demographic data

Research by Chai (2004), indicates that between 1987 and 2004 there were a total of 324,668 marriages with foreign spouses, out of these 207,894 were with Chinese people, which meant almost two thirds of the total. The majority of these immigrants constituted of females (foreigners: 92.92%; Chinese: 93.04%), the only exception were spouses coming from Hong Kong, which were almost equally divided between the two genders (males: 49%; females: 51%).

Focusing specifically on the Chinese spouses' case, we can see from Table 3, that 2003 registered the highest number of cross-strait marriages. After this, the flow abruptly halved and stabilized at around fourteen thousands per year. One reason which may explain this is the quota limitations imposed by the government. According to the Ministry of Interior report (2008) in 2007 most of the Chinese spouses were residing in Taipei city (12.4%) and county (16.5%). Also Taoyuan county (11.2%), Gaoxiong city (6.1%), Taizhong county (6.8%) registered relevant percentages, while the remaining was proportionally spread all over the rest of Taiwan.

The majority of foreign spouses come from the main cities of each province and autonomous region of mainland China. Fujian (27.10%), Henan (9.61%), Guangdong (8.88%), Sichuan, Guangxi, and Zhejiang (Chai, 2004).

Table 3: Foreign spouses married to Taiwanese (2001-2007)

Year	Mainland China	Hong Kong	South East Asia	Others
2001	26,516	281	17,512	1,893
2002	28,603	303	18,037	2,070
2003	34,685	306	17,351	2,292
2004	10,642	330	18,103	2,235
2005	14,258	361	11,454	2,354
2006	13,964	442	6,950	2,574
2007	14,721	425	6,952	2,952

Source: Ministry of Interior.

In 2003 half of the women were aged between 25 and 34 years old, while just one fifth were between 35 and 44 years old (Chai, 2004). If we look at Table 4 we can see that in 2003 the average age of Chinese spouses was higher in comparison to the average age of other South East Asian spouses, most of whom were aged between 15 and 24 years.

For many of these women their levels of education were often similar to or higher than that of their husbands. Many of them would have attended middle or high school. In some cases (7.31%) they even went to university (Chai, 2004). In contrast to South East Asian spouses (who were marrying for the first time) many Chinese women were marrying for a second time in Taiwan (Chai, 2004).

Table 4: Age distribution of Chinese and South East Asian spouses (2003)

Age (years)	Chinese Spouses		South East Asian Spouses	
	Grooms	Brides	Grooms	Brides
Below 15	2	35	1	15
15-19	3	98	2	4,858
20-24	199	8,327	100	6,119
25-29	620	7,726	453	3,556
30-34	725	6,018	315	1,394
35-39	705	4,517	119	420
40-44	429	2,515	71	159
45-49	283	1,369	13	53
50-54	78	521	5	17
55-59	20	164	1	8
60-64	7	43	-	1
Over 65	2	20	1	-

Source: Ministry of Interior

Although Chinese women have a lower birth rate than other South-East Asian females, many of them were pregnant soon after they were married, some were even pregnant before they arrived in Taiwan (Y.H. Chen, 2006). This meant that many women had to cope with the demands of pregnancy as well as adapting to a new environment, thus making the process much more difficult (Chung, 2003, October 1; Sheu, 2007). The reasons for a high number of births can be related to three main factors. Firstly, the

husband wishes the family line to be continued. Secondly, access to contraception was not widely available. Finally, it was necessary to confirm the woman's status within the family as that of mother (Sheu, 2007). Therefore the changes to Taiwanese society is not only directly determined by these new women, but also indirectly by their children who are often referred to as 'Taiwan new children' (Y.H. Chen, 2006).

The age gap between these couples tends to be high, with the husband often being fifteen years older than the wife. This age difference tends to be even higher if compared to local couples (see Table 5).

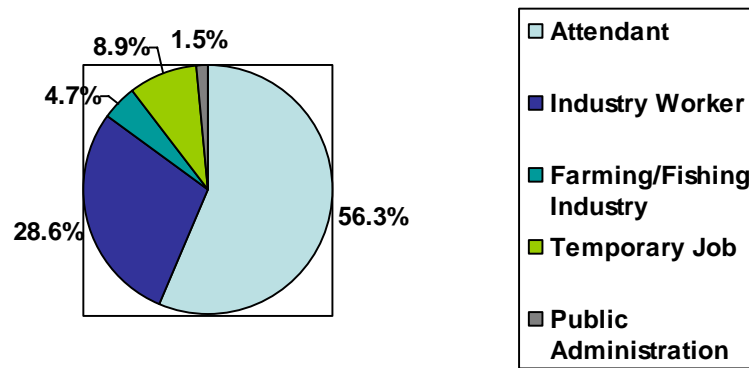
Table 5: Average age gap within couples in Taipei (2003)

	Wife average age	Groom average age	Age gap
Taiwanese couples	30.1	33	2.9
Chinese spouse	31.1	46.2	14.9
Foreign spouse	24.5	37	12.5

Source: Health Office of Taipei

Once in Taiwan, less than one quarter of these women are able to find a job. For some families these women are the main bread winners and many had to engage in illegal jobs (Chai, 2004). We can see from Figure No. 2 that amongst those who have a job, the majority work as attendants (56.3%) or as workers in factories (28.6%). As well as holding jobs outside the home, many of these women are expected to also take care of the housework, the children and elderly members of the family.

Figure 2: Job distribution amongst Chinese spouses working in Taiwan (2004)



Source: Minister of Interiors.

1.1.2 Taiwanese grooms: demographic data

As a consequence of the social changes in the last couple of decades in Taiwan, in terms of marriage prospects there are two groups which have been affected the most: old veterans and socioeconomically less favorable men, such as low-skilled agricultural and industrial laborers as well as fishermen (Y.H. Chen, 2006). Many of these men have difficult relations with females because the natures of their jobs force them to stay away from home for long periods of time. Very often they also live in peripheral areas where the percentage of women is lower. Napiere (2007) finds that the kind of men who search for a spouse abroad, are generally “very traditional in their thinking”, they are often poor and uneducated low skilled workers who want a large family, or “unmarried senior citizens in need of a caregiver”. Described as socially marginalized, they find it difficult to find a spouse amongst today well-educated, assertive and career oriented women, therefore they try other ways to create a family. A similar situation is reflected also in

Mainland China, where, according to several studies, the men who marry *wailainu* (this term is used in Mainland China to name those female migrants who come from other provinces) are typically older, poorer, physically or mentally handicapped and often opt for these girls because they are more compliant and less demanding (Fan and Huang, 1998).

In this study of Chinese spouses in Taiwan, we can see from Table 7 that there is a concentration of marriages within the groups of veterans and those in need of care (Chai, 2004). However, there is still a great percentage (74.1%) that is married to men who belong to other categories (which are not specified by the author).

Table 6: Status of men married by foreign and Chinese spouses (2003)

Men status	Foreign spouses married to them	Chinese spouses married to them
Minorities	0.8%	1.1%
Veterans	2.1%	16.1%
People in need of cares	9.1%	9.0%
Low income people	1.5%	3.6%
Others	87.4%	74.1%

Source: Ministry of Interior.

1.1.3 Meeting channels

Many of the sources seem to agree that the way in which Taiwanese men find their wives in South East Asian countries often do not follow the traditional channels, Traditional methods would be an introduction from relatives or friends or spontaneous selection. However, these new marriage brokers (agencies) have played a big part in assisting Taiwanese men to find a wife (Napiere, 2007; Shou, 2007).

Despite the fact that Article 71 of the Civil Code states that any marriage based on a financial transaction is not only immoral but also illegal, advertisements for marriage with foreigners are everywhere in Taiwan. “Reasonable price for a nice and safe wife”, “the advantages of marrying a wife”, “for richer or poorer, a normal man should get married, unless there is something wrong with you” (Sheu, 2007: 183). Fake marriages, although not a majority, are still common and permit girls to enter the island to work as singers, entertainers or even prostitutes (Napiere, 2007; Wang, 2005, January 4). Statistics from the Vocational Assistance Commission for Retired Servicemen demonstrate that only one third of the women married to a retired serviceman are in a genuine union whilst the rest entered the marriage as caregivers or for other reasons (cited in Fanchiang, 2003, October 17).

Chinese spouses, though, are different. The couples are introduced mainly through friends and relatives (61.4%) and only in a few cases through marriage brokers (11.1%). This is even more apparent when a Chinese woman has a higher level of education as they tend to search for their grooms independently from brokers (Chai,

2004). Another way in which Taiwanese men find a Chinese wife is from the business trip they make to China. It gives them more opportunities to find a Chinese wife (Wang, 2004).

1.1.4 Problems they encounter getting to and staying in Taiwan

Although Taiwan has a similar cultural background and language to mainland China, it does not make the adaptation process easier for these women, once they settle in the island. The legal and economic difficulties they meet every day are associated with the discrimination from Taiwanese society. It makes it much more difficult to integrate into everyday life.

Not many scholars provide reasons for why life adaptation for these women is so difficult. One such scholar though is Wu (2004). He lists seven categories of problems encountered by Chinese spouses. They are life adaptation, education, job search, health insurance, family, social welfare, and documents. Many of these women do not speak Minnanese (Taiwanese) and Hakka, they can not read traditional characters therefore they have problems educating their children. They do not have a network of friends and confidants in Taiwan and they often come from poor households so they lack the money to join the national health insurance. Sometimes they suffer from abuse and violence at home, and lack communication with their husbands. In some cases they have to share their house with the husband's parents. They often find it difficult to get a job and encounter legal limitations in their visa extension (Chai, 2004; Jian, 2004; Li, 2004; Wu, 2004).

1.1.4.1 Psychological problems

Chinese spouses are pressured by their husbands and families to stay at home, as they fear the wives may try to escape (Chung, 2003, October 1; Cheng, 2007, January 31). Some wives are treated as commodities, or as machines to produce children and to take care of the house. Brought up in the traditional way of thinking they are supposed to follow the belief and will of their husbands without opposing it: as an old Chinese proverb says “when the husband sings the wife has to follow him”¹ (Wang, 2004: 324). Due to these problems these women often suffer from depression and loneliness.

1.1.4.2 Legal problems

Nowadays the standard process for a foreign spouse applying to stay in Taiwan is Alien Resident Certificate (one-year validity), permanent residence, and finally naturalization. In this last step, the wife has to provide documents which prove she is self-reliant, she is the spouse of a Taiwanese citizen and she has an income or property (Kuo, 2003). Generally this procedure requires four years, but in the case of a Chinese woman everything is different and she has to wait up to eight years before obtaining citizenship. During this period she is not allowed to work and is not eligible for social service and welfare benefits (Hsia, 2004; Yan, 2005). The reason for such discrimination is that mainland spouses are not treated as foreigners because they are ruled by the Act Governing Relations between Peoples of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area promulgated in 1992. As a result, they have to go through a process of short-visit, joining

¹ Personal translation from the Chinese saying: “*Fuchang fusui*” (Wang, 2004: 324).

family, resident visa, and finally long term residency (Cheng, 2007, January 31; Yan, 2005).

Chinese spouses are not only submitted to stricter regulations when applying for citizenship, but have to pass through tighter controls when entering Taiwan. Since 2003, upon their arrival at Taiwan airports, spouses are interviewed by local police in order to verify if their marriage is fake or not. Whenever it seems to be fake or suspicious, they are denied entry (Yiu, 2004, February 5). According to press accounts, this interview system is divided into three steps. First, a test directly upon arrival for all spouses, except those with children or those who are pregnant. Secondly, another test for those who are suspected of false marriage during the first test. Finally, a third one for Taiwanese citizens who wish to apply for an entrance visa for their Chinese spouse. These measures aim at discouraging the arrival of girls involved in false marriages but at the same time makes it more difficult for those women who genuinely wish to join their family (Yiu, 2004, February 5).

Moreover, they are subjected to work and career limitations since they are not allowed to be employed in a public post until they have had citizenship for at least ten years.

1.1.4.3 Discrimination problems

During the 1980s foreign spouse were just a curious anomaly, as they were only a small minority amongst the population. Starting from the early 1990s they attracted the

attention of the media and began to appear regularly in magazines and newspapers columns, and were generally reported as a problematic situation. In the first ten years, the media portrayed them negatively, exaggerating their problematic marriages and stereotyping them. The three main narratives associated with them, were the numbers of mixed marriages in Taiwan (often based on absent official data), the living conditions of the foreign spouses, and the problems related to their children's education (Yen, 2005, January 14).

Chinese spouses were perceived as a social problem and related to prostitution. They were considered to be easy to run away, poorly educated, passive victims of a chauvinistic society, and vulnerable to commit crimes. Their husbands were portrayed as a group of socially undesirable men. Often they were physically disabled, mentally ill, old, poorly-educated, losers, deceivers or sexist. Marriage between these two marginalized groups were often described as abnormal, easy to break, based on money interests, and were opposed to the good traditional marriage of people from the same country (Hsia, 2007). Mainland spouses were sometimes described as a black widow, that is a woman who marries a Taiwanese men close to his death, in order to inherit their wealth (Liu, 2003, July 11)

These stereotypes were not only emphasized by the media but also confirmed by scholars' studies and researches. A conference paper from professor Cai Hongjin (also published in *The China Times*), argued that the South-East Asian migrants' flow (Mainlanders included) needs to be limited because it negatively affected living

conditions on the island (Lin, 2004). During these years no one seemed to pay attention to the female migrants' problems. Even the Taiwanese feminist movement, one of the most active in Asia during the 1980s, failed to show any concern about their rights. These women were regarded as second class citizens (Lin, 2004).

Alternative explanations of the issue were not available, anger and fear grew as a consequence of the interplay between public discussion stereotypes and official policy. In a homogeneous society, multiculturalism was perceived as a menace to the quality of the population. People from developing countries were seen as a threat to the national prosperity. Fear of mainlanders was even stronger because, if cross-strait marriages continued, Chinese spouses might one day have the power to influence the reunification of Taiwan with China (Gluck, 2004, July 29).

It is important to note that the ruling party ideology strongly affected Chinese spouses' legal situation. For example, the previous government was under the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The DPP supported the 'two China' policy which was separation oriented. Therefore, in this period most of the immigration laws on Chinese spouses were tightened. In addition, according to Hsia (2007), the fact that also media covered the issue uniquely as a social problem legitimized the immigration policies amended by the government. Since last May the nation was under the Kuomintang party. Under its rule, the moderate policy towards China was reflected also in the improvement of Chinese spouses' legal situation.

1.1.5 Taiwanese civil society and the Chinese spouses movement

The aforementioned problems offer an insight into why Chinese spouses are often treated as outsiders and ‘others’. Not only do they have difficulties to get adapted to the new life, but also, between the media’s portrayal of them and a lack of local knowledge about them, they find it difficult to integrate into society.

As a consequence of the boom in cross-strait and international marriages in Taiwan, the government has increased its concern on the issue. In 2003 classes and centers were opened to help these women integrate into Taiwanese society. The Foreign Spouse Care and Guidance Fund was established in 2005 with the purpose of sponsoring activities and projects for these women (CARES, 2007). Civil society organizations could draw from these funds and they started to offer services to foreign spouses. For example, The Loving Sisters Association, the Taiwan Nanyang Sisters Association, the Eden Social Welfare Foundation, The Pearl S. Buck Foundation. The first two associations are the two NGOs primarily run by foreign spouses themselves (Tsai and Hsiao, 2006). The Taiwan Nanyang Sisters Association launched the movement Don’t Call Me Foreign Bride. Not only this group worked for the publication of a collection of stories written by spouses, but also it lobbied the government to change its behavior towards foreign spouses. One of the consequences was the replacement of the expression ‘foreign bride’ with the less discriminatory ‘foreign spouse’ in the government’s law terminology.

Although these organizations aim to help all foreign spouses, their activities focus mainly on the needs of Southeast Asian spouses. Only two organizations address

specifically Chinese spouses: CARES and the Association for the Promotion of Cross Strait Marriages. It was thanks to these two organizations that the Chinese spouses could have a voice and support in Taiwan. For example, in 2003 the Chinese spouses, helped by the Association for the Promotion of Cross Strait Marriages, organized a protest against the restrictions they were subjected to (Fanchiang, 2003, October 17).

The particularity of CARES is that it does not only offer a service, but it also tries to involve women in community activities and projects with the aim of improving their life. Located in Taipei, it was established in 1950 with the name of Mainland China Association for the Relief of Calamity Victims (Zhonghuo Dalu Zaibao Jiujizonghui, 中國大陸災胞救濟總). In 1991 it changed its name in China Association for the Relief of Calamity Victims (Zhonghuo Zaibao Jiujizonghui, 中國災胞救濟總), and from 2000 it acquired the present name. CARES originally had the purpose of giving assistance and help to both women and men who came to Taiwan from Mainland China after 1950. But, starting from 1999 it changed the focus of its services from general Chinese welfare to that of Chinese spouses (Tsai and Hsiao, 2006: 22). Initially it was government funded, but from the 1990s it became a self-financed organization.

There are no statistics available on how many spouses have been helped in these years by CARES. But according to CARES (2007), between 2006 and 2007, 2,449 spouses took part to its national forums on Chinese spouses. Almost all of them were females, while only 16 were grooms. Besides these forums, hundreds of spouses reach

the organization sites in Taipei, Hualien and Gaoxiong in order to take part in the activities and to attend the lectures.

CONCLUSION

As we could see from this overview, Chinese spouses have to face a harsh reality once they enter Taiwan. They do not have a network of friends and confidants, they do not know local regulations, and they are marginalized from society. This can cause demoralization and loss of hope. For these reasons their emotional condition can often become very fragile. The first two years are often the most difficult for these women. They need help and support from the outside world to adapt to their new life.

Several organizations help foreign spouses in Taiwan, but just a few focuses on issues related to Chinese spouses. Amongst these, there is CARES. As we see, this organization does not only offer a service, but it also tries to involve women in its activities and projects. As a consequence, Chinese spouses are able to find a familiar environment in CARES, which helps them to escape from isolation and loneliness. Through the use of community communications, CARES promotes and raise spouses empowerment and aid their process of awareness raising.

Community communications are about mediated and non-mediated techniques for the use of the community. They place stress on the active participation of the individual in order to achieve his/her empowerment. Basing my study on the literature review, firstly I will try to investigate which channels and technologies have been employed and

promoted by CARES and its community. For the purpose of this investigation I will follow the definitions offered by the two main scholars discussed in the literature review: Jankowski (2002) and Berrigan (1979). As previously mentioned, the first scholar offered seven criteria to define community communication (objectives, ownership and control, content, media production, distribution, audience, financing) and placed the emphasis on the concept of empowerment of the “politically disenfranchised” (Jankowski, 2002: 7-8). Whilst the second scholar focused on two main points. Firstly, the use of mediated and non-mediated forms of communication “for whatever purposes the community decides” (p. 7). Secondly, each member participation in the community activities and project. The findings will aim to answer to the first question of my research:

- How can the models of Jankowski (2002) and Berrigan (1979) be applied to the mediated and non-mediated communications employed by CARES?

The second part of my study will focus on Chinese spouses and on the issues of participation and empowerment. This part of the study aims to understand whether and how Chinese spouses have achieved any benefit from the use of these communication techniques. The findings will try to answer the following questions:

- How do Chinese spouses participate in the community communication practices of the organization?
- How is the process of individual, organizational and community empowerment achieved through the community communications employed by CARES?

Participants' answers will be analyzed qualitatively using the methodology that is identified in the following pages.

