

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

This thesis is a case study of a Taiwanese association which has offered service to Chinese spouses since 1999. The particularity of this organization is that it aims to empower its members favoring their participation and involvement in several activities and community projects.

Due to its emphasis on members' participation and empowerment, the communication techniques employed by the organization could be analyzed as an example of community communication.

A first part of this research aims to introduce the reader to the theoretical background of this area of study.

Chapter one offered a brief introduction and presentation of the main themes of this thesis. Starting from the general issue of 'international marriages', it then focused on the case of Taiwan. In this country, the phenomenon of Southeast Asian spouses is considered separate from that of Chinese spouses, as these two groups have different needs which are regulated by different laws. An overview of CARES activities and goals was presented in order to let the reader become familiar with this case study. The chapter ended with a general description of the area of investigation of this study and its significance.

Chapter two contained the literature review. It was divided in two main parts: communication perspectives and social perspectives. After an excursus over the debate about alternative and community media, a series of examples of how community media can be applied were offered. This first section was concluded with a presentation of the theoretical background on participation and empowerment. The presentation of Berrigan's (1979) and Zimmerman's (1995) models followed. The second part of this chapter aimed to present an outline of the Chinese spouses' case in Taiwan. Historical, social, economical, legal and demographic factors were discussed in order to let the reader understand the importance of this issue on the island.

The second part of this research focused on the case study of CARES and its members.

The third chapter contained the methodology with detailed information on how the participants and organization's were selected. The guidelines on how the interviews were carried out and how the data was processed, aimed to demonstrate that great attention was paid to the quality of this analysis. As we could see from this part, the 14 interviewees were all members of CARES, but each of them had a different level of involvement in the organization (7 volunteers, 3 ex-volunteers, 4 non volunteers). Eleven lived in Taipei while 3 were from Hualien. They joined CARES for a period of time which ranged from a minimum of six months to a maximum of six years. The average age of interviewees was 36 years. They came both the capital and provincial cities in China. They mainly met their husbands through friends and relatives. Some of them lived

in China with their husbands before coming to Taiwan. None of their husbands belonged to the category 'people in need of care' and 'veterans', most probably because in Taipei these categories of people are rare and because women married to these men often can not join the organization. In the following part three main areas of interests were investigated: a) the community communication techniques employed by the organization and by the spouses, b) how spouses participate in these mediated and non-mediated communications and c) the empowerment process at individual, organizational and community level through the mediated and non-mediated communication techniques.

What findings and the related discussion shows that most of the spouses were powerless when they arrived in Taiwan. This is mainly due to their personal, family and social sphere. Once spouses joined the organization they went through a process of empowerment and redefinition of their identity. CARES facilitated this process, by trying to promote spouses involvement in their community and using specific communication techniques. As we could see from this debate, the media employed by CARES could be included in the category of community communications bringing them in accordance to the definitions offered by Jankowski (2002) and Berrigan (1979). The thesis offered an excursus of the communication techniques employed within the organization and of the possible reasons why some channels (mainly non-mediated and traditional communications) were preferred over others. This could be related to women's lack of proficiency in modern technologies, their lack of interest in new technologies, and to a scarce of encouragement by the organization.

As argued in this thesis, the communications employed in CARES facilitated the exchange of information amongst spouses, and also the interaction between spouses and the public. Therefore CARES constituted for them a place where they could create their collective identity and where they could enhance the control of their personal (release their frustrations, share emotions, learn new skills, collect and spread information) and collective (discuss collective projects and ideas, discuss collective topics, become involved in activities, participate in public projects, become involved in voluntary activities) spheres.

This thesis provided several considerations about the issues of participation and empowerment. Findings showed that spouses' participation and empowerment were only partially developed. A mutual relation between these two factors was noticed, since a lack of involvement in the organization and in the public affairs also determined an incomplete empowerment at organizational and community level. The debate offered a list of possible aspects which could be related to the partial development of empowerment and participation. They could be traced back to cultural, social, political, personal and gender factors. These elements could be deducted from participants' narratives and found confirmation in the literature of experts and scholars.

Assumptions on the partial participation were related to women's educational and cultural background, to their personality, to what Buzzanelli defined as "integrative thinking" (cited in Papa et al., 2000), and to a limit of the organization. While the incomplete empowerment was associated to the fact that spouses were not able to

empower their community without the mediation of an agent (CARES). This could be traced back to the following reasons:

- A top-down orientation of the organization, especially when dealing with the public.
- The definition of empowerment offered by the organization omitted the macro-level empowerment.
- The community of spouses might not have reached the highest and most complex level of empowerment yet.
- Women might lack basic rights in Taiwan to be able to empower their community without the help of an agent.

#### **1.4 Limitations**

Several limitations of this study need to be highlighted. This might help readers understand the difficulties and problems related to the methodology applied to this research. In addition it might be of help for future research on similar issues.

Firstly, participants were selected only from amongst the two main centers, one based in Taipei and the other in Hualien. The fact that I could not conduct interviews with spouses from Gaoxiong can constitute a limitation for this study. However, as I previously mentioned, the Gaoxiong branch is still in an early and confused phase and its coordinator was in China when interviews were conducted. Under these conditions, it was very difficult to organize interviews and to arrange the meetings with spouses in

Gaoxiong. In addition, more interviews would need to be carried out with spouses in Hualien, in order to have a better understanding of the level of involvement of spouses in that area. The previously mentioned differences between Hualien and the capital city, needs to be considered when selecting the participants.

Secondly, interviews were carried out in cafés or in the organization, often in an empty room or in a quiet area. Only one woman accepted to be interviewed in her house in Hualien. This is understandable, because for a Chinese person it is an uncommon thing to let a stranger access the intimacy of their home. In addition, knowing the unhappy home situation of some of these women, to carry interviews at their home would have been risky. The probable presence of family members, may make women feel uncomfortable or constrained to answer in untrue ways.

Thirdly, it is important to note that not all the spouses have the possibility of joining the organization. This means that women who live far away from the center, spouses who live in the countryside, women married to people in need of cares can not easily take part in CARES activities. In addition there is also a great number of spouses who are prohibited from joining the organization. One of the respondents constituted a case: her husband prohibited her to continue joining the group. Under these conditions we can assume that CARES can only reach a certain type of spouse, whom are not a representative of all the spouses who live in Taiwan.

Another limit was language. I used some devices to bypass this problem though. During interviews I could rely on a list of potential questions translated from English into Chinese thanks to the help of two Chinese friends. They are both students of communication, so they are confident with the terminology related with this field of study. In addition they are both familiar with the topic of my thesis. During the interview sessions, if I did not understand a concept, I would ask participants to repeat it in another way, or to write the sentence on paper so I could check the characters later. I could count on the help of another Chinese friend whenever I did not understand words or sentences at the transcription stage. In addition I made use of two very helpful computer programs: Wenlin (Chinese-English dictionary) and Oxford Paravia (Italian-English dictionary).

Aside from these devices, I am aware of the fact that I worked with two languages which are not my mother tongues. Although I am fluent in English and I have an average understanding of Chinese, these are second languages for me. Therefore through the process of translation some language nuances and shades of meaning could be lost, because of the simple fact that I could not perceive them. Translation being a process of transformation from one language to another, individuals' expressions were interpreted rather than transcribed. This was a way to maintain the richness and complexity of participants' narratives.

We have also to consider the fact that some participants may have answered in a biased way, trying to exaggerate or to emphasize only certain aspects of their experiences and life. Not only could participants have exaggerated the difficulties they met in Taiwan,

but also they could have diminished them in order to distance themselves from the stigmatized portrayal of Chinese spouses on the island.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The findings and the relative discussion of this case study revealed interesting considerations on community communications. The following recommendations might be helpful in order to improve existing projects and avoid past errors. This could be a reference point for CARES and also for other organizations with similar goals.

- To try to develop into a more modern organization. This is a very challenging step for any organization, which will increase its possibilities of action and success. This is because new technologies, and especially the Internet (it is inexpensive), are fast and can be reached by a wider population.
- To introduce new technologies to the community. It is necessary to follow the interests, needs and potentialities of the community, but it is also important to motivate the group to use other and more innovative forms of communications (e.g. community blogs which might be a channel for women to speak out and to be heard also by other Chinese spouses). These new technologies could be helpful also in the dialogue with the publics. This is because they could directly reach a wider number of people, in a faster and cheaper way.



- To integrate traditional classes with more modern and progressive classes. This means that, besides the lectures on how to adapt to Taiwanese life, also classes on how to be an active citizen could be helpful. This could inspire women to use more modern tools and to be more active for the organization and their community.
- To extend the empowerment process at the macro level. This would empower, not only individual members, but also the entire community. At the beginning, it might be necessary to motivate individuals to become involved in a dialogue with the government and the public, but later they would have to do it for themselves.
- To effectively promote individuals' involvement at the self-management level. This will facilitate the cooperation and exchange of information between the organization and its members.
- To push the members of the community to think independently, not only with reference to their own sphere of action but also to the area of influence of the entire community. In order to do this, it is necessary to create not only a sense of belonging to but also a sense of commitment to the community and its causes.
- To limit the control of the organization in the activities organized by the members of the community. This is related to the principle that in community communication, process is more important than form, therefore women need to be given the space to act independently.

- To implement communication with all the public. CARES has promoted exchanges mainly between spouses and old people (most of them are veterans, so they are from mainland China too). However it is only through extending the dialogue with other Taiwanese people (e.g. youth and other women) that integration at all levels of society can be achieved.

A few remarks might also be directed to the group of spouses who joined CARES. These suggestions can be extended to the members of any other community.

- To be proactive. This means that community members need to limit their passive attitude in favor of a more active one. It is important to search for new stimulations continuously. This would bring fresh ideas to the community, and favor each level of empowerment.
- To think as a group rather than as a single individual. It is not sufficient to be committed to the group and to offer help to the organization, it is also important to create group awareness and commitment.
- To be open to new ideas and technologies. To not limit the use only to traditional tools, each individual should develop a disposition to embrace more modern techniques. This will be fruitful for the individual, the organization, and, on reflection, for the whole community.

### **1.5 Future research**

This case study was used as an example to investigate how community communication techniques were employed by a Taiwanese organization and its members. It was based on the qualitative analysis of the interviews carried out with fourteen participants. This investigation inspired ideas for potential future research and exploration.

It would be interesting to research the future of the organization. Whether they will promote new communication techniques and how they will be accepted by the group of spouses. In addition, the issue of empowerment at community level needs to be revised to see if there is any development in women contribution and commitment.

I have previously mentioned the fact that this area of study has been seldom investigated in communication studies. This study could also be integrated with quantitative studies with the aim of providing statistical data on Chinese spouses in Taiwan, their participation in community activities and empowerment.

Comparative studies could also be helpful to understand the issue of partial participation and empowerment of Chinese spouses. Comparison with other groups of foreign spouses in Taiwan would help discover if the assumptions offered in the discussion could be valid. Comparison with Chinese spouses in other countries (e.g. Singapore) could enlighten new aspects which have not been considered in this thesis.

Investigations on the indirect effects of CARES on spouses which are not its members could also be an inspiring area of research.

