

The Role of Media Pedagogy in Post-Crisis Societies within a Globalized World

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ABSTRACT

Although globalization as a phenomenon is perceived in everyday life as an economic process, it is strongly connected with culture, knowledge, communication and mediated information, forcing today's societies to face novel communicative challenges while trying to maintain stability. For post-crisis societies, these challenges represent a new level of complexity to overcome. Many regions in the world still face conflicts and crises and will eventually face similar situations regarding their communication, media and culture.

This paper uses data from two empiric studies made in post-crisis societies (Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; studies in Santos 2010 and Shahini-Hoxhaj 2014) and analyses them through the perspective of cultural science, social systems theory, and systems thinking to answer the question: What kind of system dynamics can be helpful to generate knowledge, assuming the interactive use of media and global connection, and how can media education be an active support for the self-organization of a community in a transitional process?

The societies in question are not only moving away from dictatorship, but they are also moving towards democracy, and the media as means of communication are contributing to this process. From the point of view of cultural science, the media are no longer just the producer of content for recipients. Media is the venue, the place where information, values and structures can be exchanged and discussed. Recipients and producers of information are now one and the same.

Keywords: media literacy, system dynamics, transitional society, knowledge generation, post-crisis society, cultural science, emancipatory relations.

INTRODUCTION

Our society is experimenting disruptions in all areas. Private and professional life is constantly changing in a hectic pace. In addition, over the last years, “*progress in science and technology has led to rising globalization efforts and growth of the world economy leading to new inventions and choices in all areas of life.*”[1] The process of communication also suffered a big revolution with the use of social media networks. Over the last decades cultures have been changing, facing different behaviors in and due to the use of new media, other costumes, peculiar food, novel knowledge – and communication often finds its way in a transcultural level.[2] This revolution contributes to increasing complexity and challenges us, as member of this globalized society, to find innovative solutions for common communication problems such as spreading information in a group of people with different cultural backgrounds and being understood.

New communication technology, social media networks, access to international media, access to knowledge (e.g. many Internet offers on learning new languages), this is also the world which created post-conflict societies, coming out of dictatorship period after having had to deal with devastating conflicts. Two empiric studies were inspirational to this paper as a theoretical analysis of the role media and media pedagogy (a/k/a media literacy) play in organizing post-crisis/transitional societies): The 2010 study by Fernanda Costa dos Santos on media pedagogy, self-organization, and community building in Bosnia-Herzegovina,[3] and Remzie Shahini-Hoxhaj's study on the role of media in building an identity in a post-conflict society in Kosovo (2014).[4] Both were done against a background of post-crisis societies and the role of media in their re-organizing process, and how the media could support the education process to use the media as place for discussion and society transformation. This study will analyze the following questions from a cultural science and systemic point of view:

- 1) What kind of system dynamics can be helpful to generate knowledge assuming the interactive use of media and global connection?
- 2) How can media education be an active support for the self-organization of communities in a transitional process?

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES

New-media technologies coupled with various kinds of global communication have changed and revolutionized the way of life in post-war Kosovo¹. There is much more information and knowledge about the world. The changes in the fields of politics, education, and communication were crucial topics of transition in social life in Kosovo. There were difficulties in establishing free and responsible media as an integral component of a democratic society, though it has made remarkable progress in its transition from state-controlled to market-oriented free press. The public was encouraged to engage in political, economic and social life by promoting the right to information through professional and independent media.[5]

In the globalization discourse, media are treated as an independent cause or separate from other cultural change within societies. For many researchers, the effects of the long process of globalization in the media are detectable and influential. Anthony Giddens states that globalization is an inevitable process, affecting all sectors of society, and how strongly globalization influences our daily lives, and how unstoppable its process is through the remarkably frequent use of the term.[6] Globalization also protects national and/or cultural identities. Rüdiger Safranski notices that “globalization” is a cute expression that describes a long process and traces its history to the middle of the 19th century. He believes that the contemporary globalization had begun at that time, and was experienced by the people as the beginning of a future.[7] He speaks of “*globalization*” as a process that is not uniform, but multifaceted,[8] and makes further distinction between *globalization* and *globalism*. According to him, there is a potential ideological manifestation of globalization

¹ Kosovo is situated in southeastern Europe. With Yugoslavia’s constitution of 1974, Kosovo became a constituent entity of the Federation, equal to the other republics, with full political and territorial autonomy. Its autonomous status was abolished by the Serb regime in 1989, followed by occupation, repression, ethnic conflict, and eventually war, 1998–1999. Upon NATO intervention in 1999, Kosovo was liberated from Serbia and was placed under the administration of UNMIK. After three years of negotiations between Kosovo, Serbia and the international community that took place in Vienna, Austria, Kosovo declared its independence on 17 February 2008. Thus far, it has been recognized by 110 states and has gained membership in the several international organizations.

whereby various nations lose their power of establishing identity.[9]

Globalization as a phenomenon is a process that depends on many factors and seems a rather difficult one to be comprehensively circumscribed. It is strongly connected with communication, culture, knowledge and the emancipatory use of media. Colin Sparks[10] defines globalization as “*incorporation of the societies into a capitalist modernity*”. Sparks endorses the correlation between “globalization” and “transition” terms that could be applied to a wide range of aspects of diverse societies, but in this case it applies specifically to those societies which moved away from dictatorial regimes. He argues that these are examples of post-crisis societies in transition towards democracy and that even the media landscape is similar in those countries and contributes to knowledge generation.

SYSTEMS THINKING

The role of Systems Thinking in this article and its principal contribution is to present, with a unifying conceptual framework, the common denominator of the studies of Santos 2010 and Shahini-Hoxhaj 2014, both of which are dealing with observed systems (communities, post-crisis societies – first order) and their observers (media and all opportunities for self-reflection of the community – second order). The studies explore the peculiar situation of societies and media after wars to analyze self-organizing systems observing themselves in a complex environment.

Social systems are permanently organizing themselves in order to exist. They keep changing social structures and ways of thinking and acting in a dialectical process. Society’s participants create and change social systems successively by referencing their actions and their thoughts to each other. On the other hand, from the social point of view, thought and action exist only on the basis of social structures.[11]

For the purposes of this article, the two primary considerations to be kept in mind when assessing complex situations from the point of view of Systems thinking are [12]

- First, there is no way to fully understand the structure or the dynamics of a complex system. Causally determined relationships and the functioning of the system remain, generally speaking, an enigma. Behavior or reactions of the system can also never be completely anticipated. However, it is possible to develop a mental model of the system. Such models may not fully represent the system, but they help us ask the right questions and to have a good non-linear feel for the feedback-loop structures, interdependencies and interactions of the system.

- Second, we must always bear in mind that the system is to be considered a black box. We can observe the effects of its emergence, its characteristics, its outputs. But this information does not enable us to make inferences regarding the structure of a system, and neither does it give us an idea of how the system works. Although the system behavior cannot be deduced by understanding its parts, with mental models we have means to recognize the limits or the course of the systems. Doing this we can at least deduct what the system is most likely not to do or will probably achieve.

THE CONTEXT

Along the way to becoming democratic societies, post-crisis societies find themselves having to deal with a number of barriers. In the case of Kosovo, among many other obstacles, there was also the reconciliation process between Serbs and Albanians as parties of the conflicts. This was a process which was shaped through the media in post-conflict society. That is why media were considered a crucial priority regarding the development of a democratic society in Kosovo. In line with European standards, the International Community assisted the development of the media through a “Standards before Status” policy[13] in order to establish a multiethnic state and stable society.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, one of the biggest challenges of Santos’ study was to reflect on the role of media education in a society that has problems reaching beyond the media perspective. The religious breakdown of this country and the lack of confidence due to high levels of corruption frustrate most of the initiatives where people should be encouraged to participate, especially young people. According to the United Nations Development Program (2001), 63% of the population in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina believe that the media system is corrupt.[14]

Another aspect of the Bosnian society are the religious rifts. One cannot but wonder how it is possible, through media, to develop cross-boundary competencies in a religiously divided society without provoking more conflict.[15]

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN KOSOVO AND BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

The Kosovo media sector² improved in its transition from

² Prior to World War II, the state authorities (Kingdom of Yugoslavia) had prohibited reading and writing in the Albanian language for speakers of Albanian within its state borders. As constituent unit of Yugoslavia until 1989, Kosovo had inherited

state-controlled to market-oriented free press. Freedom of speech was proscribed by the Yugoslav communist regime and later, in the 1990s, by the authoritarian Milosevic regime. In the post-conflict period, it became very important to provide the public with unbiased information in order to encourage the citizenry to participate in decision-making processes on the crucial issues facing Kosovo on its path to becoming an independent country. This of knowledge was encouraged to engage in political, economic and social life by promoting the right to information. Due to the lack of reading culture in the country, television is seen as a key factor and main information source.[16]

Beside the role of television as main information source, many researchers (Clarke, Hamelink, Schiller etc.) see it as a very influential medium in the globalization process, where national culture is dominated by transnational TV formats as Dallas, Dynasty, Xena, Beverly Hills 90210 etc.[17] McLuhan rightly said that through television, the world became a global village, where there is extreme awareness and curiosity about other cultures.[18] That is why Beck[19] sees this as a force of “*cultural uniformity*” with global influence, especially present in broadcasting. Western TV genres and programs were adopted and reconfigured to Kosovar market needs and transmitted everywhere as cultural breakthrough for a generation (e.g. music television MTV was reconfigured to MyMusic).[20] Most TV programming includes internationally dominated formats such as the reality show (e.g. Big Brother, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire).[21] The emancipatory use of the media in sense of media pedagogy allows referring to globalization not only based on individual media but also to its content and its cultural exchange. Through this cross-cultural communication, social networking media like Facebook and Twitter became very important for political communication in Kosovo.[22]

As for Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war, important meeting points and locations where communication happened were usually destroyed. Most of the places where e.g. teenagers used to meet, organize themselves, think about their own community and find their own solutions, no longer exist. In such conditions and with the added the feeling that there is no more support, future prospects easily vanish from sight. It is therefore of crucial importance that communication structures are rebuilt after a

a state-controlled media system from its communist predecessor state. The Milosevic regime (1989–1999) persecuted and repressed the Kosovar media and journalists. This period is known as “the information blackout,” considering that Kosovars relied on foreign media for information. The post-war emergency phase was very important in drafting the media laws and regulation but also in establishing the media institutions which were unknown until after the war in 1999.

war.[23] From a cultural science point of view, the notion of “media” can be considered as denominating a site where self-organization, discussion and reflection take place. Media can also be regarded as a facilitator and support for the maintenance of a community or society.[24] It was under this aspect that the Santos study analyzed the reopening of a youth center in Sarajevo (Revival Festival – Dom Mladih), for which an documentary movie was made (Project This is[25]) showing the story of this place where young people from Sarajevo used to meet, talk, play – in short, to interact.

MEDIA PEDAGOGY

In post-conflict societies, the media play an educational and important role in the self-organization and reconstruction process of communities.

According to Baacke the duty of media education is to train members of a community or society in the use and interpretation of the media. However non-media-related actions may also be promoted in the educational process, since every action has the potential to be part of media content. Media Literacy takes a critical look at media programs and makes suggestions for their development.[26]

In post-conflict societies, the media play a different role than usual in terms of self-organization and reconstruction, especially when viewed as an educational foundation. In this cases media basically have the function of self-reflection – they offer a way to reflect the society and discourses of all kinds (political, cultural, etc.) and make them accessible to all. In the aftermath of a conflict, the media can also help work up issues of the community, provide explanations and make responsibilities clear, thus producing a sense of justice.[27] For this to happen, three principal elements have to be present in the community regarding the media: Trust, Credibility and Knowledge.

TRUST, CREDIBILITY AND KNOWLEDGE

During an event as cruel and incisive as the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, people will have experienced that the media misused them for propaganda purposes; as a consequence, after the war’s end, they viewed new media services with a lot of skepticism. This is understandable and could be the starting point for the media pedagogy approaches. It is important to make a clean break in this issue of mistrust: It must be questioned so that media consumers can, for example, distinguish fair journalism from demagoguery. Another example is learning how to recognize when a person or a group of people manipulate the media or influence it. It is equally important to understand the characteristics of objective and balanced reporting. The skepticism towards the media should be used as an opportunity to learn how to distinguish quality variations among the contents of

different media.[28]

This procedure of recovering trust and credibility works much faster nowadays. As soon as individuals of communities have Internet access, they are able to access a lot of information. On the one hand this opportunity gives individuals more options to find the information they are looking for, and on the other hand there is less room for mistakes or lies by the media. In addition, information consumers can also turn into information producers. Trust as well as credibility are therefore both easier to gain (e.g. when you or your friends are the information producer) and quicker to lose (e.g. in case of defamation or mistakes). During this process, new knowledge always may arise at any time. From the perspective of cultural science, which is the perspective both studies applied for their analysis, knowledge is seen as a dynamic model of reality.[29] To generate new knowledge, one therefore has to be able to change the structures of his own “old” knowledge. From this perspective, to acquire new knowledge in turn means more than just add new information to the same old structures, beliefs or values. All participants of this process experience a circular causality in a complex self-organizing system. Trust depends on credibility that depends on knowledge that depends on trust; only knowledge emerging from this interlocking web of relationships will be accepted as “true” knowledge. Media pedagogy is one possible beginning of a positive influence for this feedback-loop – and can be the trigger for a self-organizing process.

CONCLUSION

The power of self-organization of societies emerges from the values and attitudes of the communities. The media create room for knowledge and information exchange and have in addition an educational function, allowing the participants of this process to develop media competence. They then can experience the results of the communication process and present them to the community. This promotes self-organization since the community is able to learn from its own experience. In this manner the continuous development of the community is nurtured. The media therefore become a support for continuing the community.

The central argument of Shahini-Hoxhaj (2014) is that though television was a main information source in post-conflict society in Kosovo, it has not contributed sufficiently to the development of the so-called knowledge society. It has provided an opportunity to jump from illiterate and oral society to media society, bypassing critical stages of societal development through reading, critical reasoning, and educational development. The absence of this society-wide intellectual enlightenment has contributed to this deviation, as well as the externally imposed media regulations, undermining and delaying thus modernization and development of society. Never-

theless, television has provided the informational but not the educational opportunity.

In contrast to the lack of contribution to knowledge from television consumption, the use of new media and the encouragement given to community members to be the producer of their own stories and information seems to have a positive influence in building new knowledge and create space for changing cultures.

Regarding the first question this article wants to answer, we can affirm due to the results of both studies that if knowledge is seen as a dynamic model of reality, as it can be defined from the perspective of cultural science, knowledge generation only occurs if there is openness for the new. This situation implies a specific context, where self-organization and knowledge generation can develop. This context includes trust, credibility and a common knowledge as the basis for communication. For transitional societies this required context often represents an additional challenge to be overcome in order to begin a peaceful and democratic process that contributes to the construction of a stable but flexible (in terms of acceptance of differences) society.

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For the second question on how media education can be a support for the self-organization of a community, Santos (2010) shows that including the community as producer of its own story promotes inclusiveness, accountability and the consensus of the community in the communication process. In this process it seems to be essential to embrace all aspects of the community such as religion, gender, education, income levels and people with disabilities. No group should be excluded in order to give the movement trust and credibility preparing the ground for the development of new knowledge. This is the role that media pedagogy can play in transitional societies. In this article the function of the media is understood as a place, as intermediaries and as supporters of a community. The media literacy and media competence connects these concepts with the topic of destroyed areas. The post war area served as an example to show how media can serve as educational means, because the things shown by the media are important for a successful process of reconstruction.

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