POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

THE MEDIA AND THE EDUCATION FOR THE DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT
In the contemporary world media perform many functions, and one of the most important of them is their education function. While writing about the connection between education for the democracy and the media, the author presents the deep characteristic of concepts: media, democracy, communication, and by the last concepts she refers to the idea of John Dewey. Characterising the present day, the author states that the world is heading in the direction of development of the communication systems, in the direction of the society of mass media, in which fiction, imagination, or the definition of the reality plays more important role than the reality itself, in which people desire continuous entertainment, in which the way of judging the events plays more important role than the events itself. Without judging this state of affairs, the author asks a question: Is the world in which we live better or crueler in comparison to the past? The author doesn't answer this question directly, but she finishes the article with the ascertaining that the media, similarly to school, universities, and family have a duty to educate the citizens for the democracy. No one gave anyone the freedom for ever, and one has to continuously strive, and fight for it, especially in the years of crisis, when there is a strong temptation to introduce another solution than the liberal democracy. Democracy requires knowledge, because only educated citizens can fully use the democratic rules in wise and responsible way. This knowledge should be also provided by the media.

Keywords: Internet media, education, citizenship, democracy

Media and Society

The media in the contemporary world have many functions, but in the first place they constitute an important element of social-political system. For the political system the media are not only the elements, but also tools, instruments in the struggle for authority. Thanks to the globalisation and the new technologies both politics and the mass media undergo changes which have crucial meaning in the struggle for authority. The picture of politics in the media doesn't usually represent its real state, but is created by the media. Therefore, the impact of media on the politics is significant, sometimes even determines

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the politics (Street, 2006). The media have also a great influence on the social relations, by fulfilling their basic functions such as information, interpretation, correlation, continuation, entertainment, and mobilisation (McQuail, 2010). For the politics the media are mainly an instrument in the struggle for authority, for the economic system they are mainly a branch of an economic activity, whereas the receivers treat them as a source of entertainment (Mrozowski, 2001). Among some other aims of media their most important objective is an educational function. We live in the world in which formal education such as school loses its educational function – although school still retains very important socialisation function. The knowledge is often gained outside the school, mainly thanks to the media. It's the media which are the main sources of the information about the world, which create the picture of the contemporary culture, which create tastes, and the attitudes towards the others (Gajda, 2010).

While writing about the connection between the education and the media, the first problem that one may meet are the definitions of the concepts of communication: communication in the general meaning, and the communication with others. The most simply one may say that the first concept refers to the activity of mass media (with the passive receiver) and the second defines the process of the mutual flow of signals – from sender to receiver, and from receiver to sender. If education for the democracy is to be effective, then some actions should be undertaken that allow both above mentioned terms to exist.

The concept of communication was introduced in the 19th Century. Since then one dates the numerous attempts to define, and describe this concept. The most generally accepted description of this concept was made by Schramm, who specified it as a tool, which makes possible the existence of the societies, and from its nature distinguishes the human beings from the other creatures *(Schramm, 1969).* Information in the general sense is something which removes or reduces the insecurity, and by improving the peoples' moods has a great influence on their behaviours and choices.

Ubiquity, and wide influence on the reality which the media have, causes that it is important in whose hands they are, which values they represent, and in whose interest they are doing it.

The ideological propaganda of totalitarian regimes takes over functions and tasks of education. The recipient receives an obvious, clear message which has its own logic. An excellent example of this propaganda was the one that the Bolsheviks used to conduct.

Soviet journalism in post-revolutionary period was immediately acquiring experience in the society control, implementation of governmental guidelines, in assistance to its endeavours and in increasing the number of its supporters. One of the most famous of these types of spectacular actions which was implemented in newspaper in the early years of the new government was popularizing the party slogan "struggle for bread - the struggle for socialism". Post-revolutionary Soviet propaganda style was characterized by vociferousness and persistence in presenting the subject, both in terms of international and internal affairs. All subjects were presented in a form that was excluding a rational discussion. Press always had a right to know how to solve every problem, what the reason for temporary difficulties was and how to overcome them.

The specificity of the Soviet press was its unique style. It consisted of the formulation of the categorical opinions, and then obstinate repetition of their contents. There were no worries about a logical consistency of the information, or their veracity. Force the assumption that conveys even patently false information, but when frequently repeated it begins to live its own life, and over time becomes a stereotype which is adopted uncritically. Many examples of spreading in this way of various myths, falsehoods, distortions and misinformation could be indicated, which in the opinion polls were present for many years. Continuous indoctrination, which then began, caused such havoc in the minds of men that it became impossible for society to behold the hypocrisy of the ruling elite. Moreover, the unavailability of other sources of information and total isolation contributed to the fact that in the minds of the enslaved could not even rise a need to critique the actions of authority, and that was what was going on for Soviet policy makers. The Bolsheviks seized control of its state institutions, and - on the basis of their power - to reign, seeking to rule over the word as the primary instrument for shaping public opinion.

Soviet policy makers were aware of the fact that the strengthening and expansion of domination necessary for the exercise of power is possible primarily thanks to the word. It can be used to impose on citizens to evaluate what was considered useful for their own interests (Życki, 2006).

Information as an intangible good, and as a commodity

Information is an instrument of making all kinds of decisions, and at every level of peoples' activity. Therefore it's not strange that – especially today – the

information constitutes a specific good, which can be characterised by some specific features. As a good, the information can be analysed from its market attributes. In this aspect one may individuate following economic features of information: first, it is not amortised during its exertion and spreading, which makes possible its multiple, and simultaneous exertion; second, it is impossible to estimate the average cost of an information transaction ("the price of information"), because the individual transmission systems differ with the exploitation parameters; third, it is impossible to fully pursue the profit on the information, sometimes one may even do not cover the costs, although the next user of information may gain more than the "manufacturer"; fourth, information tends to be a product of extremely short life cycle, which is not favourable to its effective transfer between the disconnected contractors; fifth, the value (usefulness) of information is impossible to measure without possessing it (this way one may explain the scepticism in the attitude toward the creditability of information); sixth, "manufacturing", processing, and "storage" of information is capital intensive and required special skills, therefore the viability of these ventures increases together with the scale; seventh, the responsibility for purchasing of the information rests on the purchaser, who doesn't have the guarantee of accuracy of the information (Piontek, 1997).

The characteristics of information as a good is based on the fact that the information as an intangible good, which contributes to multiplying the material goods. Therefore, the information is a key to gain some competitive advantages in the field of manufacturing the material goods. For this reason the value of information is very difficult to be estimated and, more importantly, this value varies in time and depends on the sort and quality of users. However, information brings some measurable profits to their owners.

Above mentioned Schramm defined three roles of information, which are important from the social development point of view. Two of them are information as the indicator of the line of behaviour, and the indicator which defines the area of responsibility. Third role of information is information as a teacher who socialises the new members by providing them with the beliefs, which are valuable from the social point of view. These beliefs are particularly important for the media's education for the democracy.

While describing the concepts, which concern the ways of defining the idea of communication, one usually refers to the classic depiction. Therefore an alternative proposal seems to be interesting. One of the most important and also not commonly known of them is the idea of John Dewey. This idea

indicates that there are two sources of definitions, but its genesis may be formulated on the basis of common religious traditions. These orientations are "transmission" and "ritual" orientations.

The "transmission" orientation is widespread in the tradition of communication. It dominates in the way of explaining the concept, and is defined by such means as: sharing, sanding, and transmitting, or giving the information to the others. The "transmission" understanding of the process of communication has been formed while some religious communities were persecuted in Europe, and moved (as well as their ideas) into the New World, where they created the New Life, and new communities – the New Jerusalem. The later period, which was dominated by the science and the secularisation processes, coincided with the changes of the communication techniques. From now on the information flow has been separated from the transportation, which created a new quality of information. The telegraph and all contemporary information carriers make the flow of thoughts independent from the transport of people. The communication, according to the "transmission" conception, exists all the time, because the ideas are created, and sent by people, who either stay all the time in move, or stay at their places and use the technical means of communication.

The "ritual" orientation, although far less spread in the theoretic considerations, is older than "transmission" one. In the definitions of this orientation, the communication is connected with such concepts as "sharing", participation, associating, community, or having the same faith. The thing that should be common to all people, are their objectives, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge, common understanding. The archetype of communication in the ritual meaning is a sacral ceremony, which unites the people in the brotherhood, and community (Piontek 1997, Eliade 2001).

The importance of news and the meaning which the spreading of news generates is known from the beginning of human history. The control over the information flow and the manipulations are and used to be a tool in keeping the crowd and the whole nation in line. Generally, there are two trends in the global information stream. The first is message, and the second propaganda. These streams can be defined by naming its aims, and not by naming its contents. The purpose of the message is simply to inform. The aim of propaganda is to influence.

The importance of the media, which have always been fundamental, is now the biggest-ever. Although the information have always been a tool for the

rulers, not until today (since the Watergate affair) one uses to define the information providers – journalists – as the fourth authority. The importance of the media increased also thanks to the technological development, which took place in the recent ten years.

More and more frequently one defines the liberal democracy of the 21st Century as the media democracy, and the fourth authority is recognised as the first one. The media accompany us throughout the entire life, they can be found everywhere, they report on everything, and cause that one becomes the participant of tragedies that take place in the farthest corners of the world. Since the beginning of nineties the social psychologists observe a new phenomenon, which is described as "the second-hand trauma", i.e. the psychological results of the phenomena that we know only from the media transmissions. Being "bombarded" with the images and information we suffer from the trauma similar to the one from which one suffers as the participant of these phenomena (for example witness, rescuer, or relevant of casualty). Even such tragic crimes as these committed in Auschwitz, Brzezinka (Birkenau), or Katyn that we know of but never experienced, due to the fact that they were "hidden" make far lower impression on us than the crimes that take place in the farthest corner of the world, but are "visible" in the media transmissions. No-one asks about the difference in the scale of phenomena, no-one rationalises them, because this is not the aim of the media transfer. The real objective of this transfer is influencing our emotions. This state of affairs gives many possibilities of manipulations, but also of educating the society (Guła, 2008).

The civilisation development on one hand facilitates the human life, but on the other makes it more and more complicated, and makes the existence more and more tragic. The contemporary crisis of the civilisation is demonstrated in the different regions and states. The value of the human life is being decreased, human becomes more and more frequently a supplement to the civilisation development, although it is the human who is its creator. Another problem is the dehumanisation of life. The system of values is being changed. The moral values give way to the cult of money. The human of the television era is interested in the presence. The young generation acknowledges only the todays' experiences, is hedonistic, and not only finds pleasure in this, but also doesn't know and doesn't try to get to know the alternative way of life. The world of ideas is being devaluated, or undergoes the metamorphosis. We live in the period in which the traditional authorities lose its voice; the values and ethical standards lose its importance; in the period in which anonymity and isolation are

common. These things are favourable to the advertisement, and simple entertainment, and makes people susceptible on propaganda.

The world is heading for the direction of development of the communication systems, for the direction of the society of mass media, in which fiction, imagination, or the definition of the reality plays more important role than the reality itself, in which people desire continual entertainment, in which the way of judging the events plays more important role than the events itself. The newest technology of communication slowly, but systematically penetrates our social life. Information is transferred everywhere, breaks the age and background barriers, stimulates the human consciousness and sub-consciousness. The contents of the mass-media became integrally connected with our thoughts and, therefore, became more and more obvious. This process is invisible.

Fortunately, the offer of the mass-media is diversified. The media take new objectives in the social life, particularly the television, which took over the tasks of family and church in the field of socialisation and control. This state of matter is, however, not unequivocally positive, because the television attracts nearly full attention of the members of particular social group (for example family) on itself, and simultaneously distracts the attention of the group. Therefore, the television makes the communication difficult, and contributes to breaking of particular community, because there are little integrative activities inside the community, such as conversations, or games (Schneider, 1992).

Democracy and the media for citizens

Every debate conducted in the media can be favourable to the education for the democracy, or act against it. A good example of the first case are the discussions on the social portals on the Internet regarding the issues about which the citizens can decide in the act of voting, and which transgress strictly political issues. Contemporarily, the citizens in the democratic states have a right to vote only on the political issues. This representative system undergoes criticism, and in the opinion of net surfers should be changed. The vast majority of citizens do not have a right to vote on the most important issues, concerning for example the economy, investments, production, development, and the impact of these decisions on the environment. One formulates the opinion that the struggle for the range of issues that should fall within the act of voting is as much important as the issues of who should vote was in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The democracy needs informed citizens. Their ability of finding intelligent solutions by the democratic means can be developed only when they have an equal and open access to the information. The equal access doesn't only mean the ban on censorship, but also assumes that there are no manipulations of the information, as well as its excessive exploration, or dissembling is not allowed. The system of the public media should reduce the amount of unreliable and sensation-orientated information. The democratic procedures, although imperfect, take the precedence over all kinds of other types of decision-making processes, because they allow the citizens whom they concern to reconsider the unintentional results of these decisions. These procedures allow the majority to make decisions on the issues which they do not understand, but also allow the minority to ask questions which aim at forcing the majority to make a reasonable decision. The democracy allows the citizens also to oppose and the public media should make the citizens aware that there is a certain hierarchy of decisions, and that some of them may be irreversible after the implementation (Keane , 1992).

The role of media in educating the public

The decline of traditional social ties, values, and authorities is a permanent feature of the atomised, post-industrial society. The society whose significant share – especially the young people – lives in the virtual world, from which the knowledge and the models of behaviour are gained by this group. School, university, family, and church do not educate the young people, but only socialise them. These functions were taken over by the media. Its power, which may be destructive, is significantly big. The discussion about the democracy does not take place in Hyde Park, but on the Internet; the debates of scientist do not take place at the universities, but in the television. This new media community is silent, and not visible in the reality, unless no-one wants to take away its world, as it took place with ACTA – then this society, after acting together on the Internet, gets to the streets. The new media constitute a trouble for the authority. They made "the Arab Spring" possible, and, therefore, not only the dictators, but also politicians in the democratic countries are scared of them. The media are something unknown, and unforeseeable; therefore anyone, together with the media society, does not know who will be supported by the media in the future.

This state of matter imposes a particular responsibility on the media owners, legal bodies, and the whole democratic society to guard against the media manipulations, or the play of interests of limited groups; manipulations and games of interests which may undermine the idea of the democracy.

The media have to educate, and improve the skill, which are the most important from the social point of view. This task is based on moulding the habit of participating not only in the economic, but also in social life. Democracy demands the social commitment both in the state and local issues. The social commitment guarantees that the democratic solutions in solving the contentious issues become established. The social commitment, however, exceeds the frames of the state commitment. The United Europe demands the international cooperation by taking the responsibility for the EU members and the states of the closest neighbourhood.

We live in the period in which the authoritarian regimes are better adapted to taking profits from capital than the democratic countries. The dominating microeconomic powers treat the effectiveness of economy as the primary objective, not as the mean to implement the social objectives. This attitude treats human as another capital good (whose costs should be minimalised), and not the subject of the activities. This situation may lead in the long run to the domination of the authoritarian regimes over the liberal-democratic countries. The question arises: How to prevent this situation?

The role of the media is not to educate people for the professional carrier, but to stimulate them to the personality development, to assist in the self-realisation, and to mould the social commitment in the democratic society. The media should play an important role in forming the integrated society, which is free from the xenophobia, racism, or discrimination. Moreover, they should promote the fundamental values of the European culture such as tolerance and observance of the human rights.

The importance of the media for the democracy is not to be overvalued. The social order depends on the media transmission. Moreover, strengthening of the citizens' disapproval of the way of solving problems by the means attributed to the liberal-democratic system is also strongly dependent from the media. The unemployment which is more and more common, especially among young people who are usually well-educated, can lead to the social upheavals on a scale difficult to imagine. These upheavals may become a medium for populist movements, and in the further perspective one may make an effort to negate the democracy as the ineffective system. While considering the hopes and fears

connected with the new media one has to remember that nothing, including the forms of the organisations, have been reached once, and belongs to us forever, and that the freedom was not given forever. One has to continuously fight and strive for it, and the media should spread this message. In the liberal-democratic states a categorical imperative for the media should be the education for the democracy, because only educated citizens can follow the democratic rules in wise and responsible way (Życki, 2007).

Characterising the present day one has to state that the world is heading in the direction of development of the communication systems, in the direction of the society of mass media, in which fiction, imagination, or the definition of the reality plays more important role than the reality itself, in which people desire continuous entertainment, in which the way of judging the events plays more important role than the events itself.

Without judging this state of affairs, it is worth to ask a question: Is the world, in which we live better, or crueler in comparison to the past? It is impossible to answer this question unambiguously, but in the common belief the media, similarly to school, universities, and family have a duty to educate citizens for the democracy. No one gave anyone the freedom forever, and one has to continuously strive and fight for it, especially in the years of crisis, when there is a strong temptation to introduce another solution than the liberal democracy. Democracy requires knowledge, because only educated citizens can fully use the democratic rules in wise and responsible way.

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