



The attitudes, perceptions and practices in terms of editorial reporting on **cultural** diversity in Macedonian media

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Abstract

Republic of Macedonia is democratic multicultural society and has unique characteristics which are real positive manifestations on ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic complexity. Basic research challenge in this study will be the question if this characteristic, in the past as for today, from members of the Macedonian people as a majority and other communities and groups that live in Macedonia, perceived as a threat to social integration or new regional and common European values for cultural diversity. The way different communities and groups are presented through media, their possibilities to express their opinions and attitudes through media content and be part of the redactions in the media which are crucial to the overall development of the Macedonian society and developing mutual understanding, coexistence, cooperation and tolerance.

Key words:

Cultural differences; media; pluralism; journalists; impact; audience.

Introduction

-Media pluralism has different dimensions, one of which is ensuring cultural pluralism in the media¹. This dimension is connected with fair presentation and expression (passive and active approach) to different cultural and social groups in the media, including ethnic, linguistic and national minorities. If the media does not have enough employees from different cultural groups and not enough non-profit media for minority groups it is a problem which will reflect on cultural pluralism and diversity.

Diversity among people is woven into the foundation of every society: young and old people, people with different economic and social power, employed and unemployed, socially marginalized and people with different religious affiliation or belief, individuals with different sexual orientation or gender identity, people of different national, ethnic or racial origin. They all expect and deserve to be represented and presented in a fair and sensitive way in social, political and cultural life, and in the media and its reflection.

Mass media, especially those which publish news and information, have a central part when speaking about building cultural diversity in media society. They affect the formation of attitudes and beliefs of people, as on their perceptions for other societies, cultural groups and communities. Although, this affect does not always have expected or desired direction. The way media is presenting information and allow volume / visibility of the various social actors, or the manner in which they are focusing to the negative phenomena and processes can not intentionally encourage stereotypes, intolerance, bad or hate speech. In the past decade in Macedonia were noticed

¹ Miklós Haraszti, Media pluralism and human rights, Strasbourg, 6 December 2011

numbers of examples which were carelessly or intentional reporting, without sensitivity of interethnic, intercultural and interfaith relations in our society.

The most important research questions that needed answers to the survey were: research or other data are available for the representation of ethnic and cultural diversity in the media, i.e. the way the Macedonian media reported on different social groups; the awareness, perceptions and attitudes regarding the redaction reporting about cultural diversity; the practices and experiences of redactions (for editors and journalists) in connection with the reporting of diversity; the initiatives in media sector launched with purpose to influence on positive way to the cultural diversity in media.

Individual characteristic of journalists

*-Individual characteristic of the journalist (sex, ethnic affiliation, sexual orientation, education, religious affiliation) have decisive influence on reporting in reporting about diversity.*² For example, in redactions which are multiethnic, journalists show more sensitivity when reporting on events related to ethnic issues. On the other hand, stereotypes and prejudice towards members of other ethnic communities are more easily stimulated and nurtured when the editorial board is composed of journalists from only one ethnic community.

However, in a redaction mono-ethnic personal views and prejudices come to the fore only when the individual has power in the medium, i.e., when he has a key role in the production of news. If redactions or the editor impose their professional values and norm and rules, stereotypes and prejudices of individual journalists will be incidental occurrences.

Stereotypes regarding multiethnic issues in Macedonia are not only manifested in reporting for the two dominant communities, Macedonian and Albanian. Example for encouraging stereotypes is monitoring the world day of Roma people in Macedonia. On this occasion that day the media published footage only that their life is miserable and desperate, without conveying positive examples or persons from their life.

Professional experience and professional competence of journalists shape their professional roles and ethnic beliefs. Although there is awareness for importance of diversity and sensitivity for this subject, most of them consider themselves only 'transmitters' of events and facts. For several reasons, office redactions while reporting on these topics do not advocate proactively and continuously, there is widespread passivity, a few stories arising from the initiative of the journalist or editor. Today, Macedonian journalism is in severe professional and ethic crisis.

In terms of professional competence, opinions are divided. One group of journalists believes that are sufficiently trained for reporting these issues and that they need additional training, while another group categorically claims that "... journalists in Macedonia are not sufficiently trained to report any of the daily events, not to mention the differences ... prepare interviews without knowing with whom they are discussing, without enough information to treat the problem and do not know the subject." One well known journalist from one of national television had very illustrative statement for all these estimates: "I think in general there is not awareness for professional standards, and less for commitment to the profession. Office redactions are full of uneducated journalists and not objective reporters, editors who defend certain views, especially political. As far as journalism becomes more mercenary profession, the standards sink lower."

Professional rules and codes of journalists and office redactions

In redactions which comply with some (even unwritten) professional rules and values, the impact of various factors on the notification of cultural differences is less pronounced.

The survey showed that only a small number of media have formally adopted internal documents which are obliged to respect the legal and ethical norms related to these issues. Great number of interviewed journalists and editors have witness that except existing codex of the journalists, are not opened by other written notification rules for all topics, including cultural diversity.

² Marina Tuneva, Diversity reporting HandBook, Skopje, Macedonia, available at:
http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Venice/pdf/news/Diversity%20Reporting%20Handbook_EN.pdf

Unlike many media in European countries, Macedonian redaction offices do not have internal ombudsman whose role is to maintain accountability and responsibility toward the public. Ombudsman, is one kind of representative of the public and usually mediates when citizens have complains for the media, it encourages the use of professional and ethical standards, and self critical thinking of journalists.

On the whole journalistic community in Macedonia, the media is polarizing the different ethnic communities, as if they are functioning in parallel universes. Journalists write stories about their own audience, and ignore the subjects which are interesting for the audience of the other community. They avoid subjects which could be helpful for bigger understanding and cultural dialog. Subjects about ethnic communities are being ignored, and when writing about the same events, then the journalistic angle is quite different and corresponds to the expectations of his/her own audience. There are very few exceptions with contents intended for different audiences.

It is worrying how the public service has visible division, although it has legal obligation to develop and support social cohesion and cultural diversity. Even the journalists and editors from the national public service, MRT admit that services on Macedonian languages and of ethnic communities languages are not collaborating and functioning, they are not exchanging news and information, they even don't have mutual contents which can be broadcasted on all channels.

Public services, by definition should be example for highest standards, professionalism and quality. Unfortunately, in recent years of public service were recorded gross violations of journalistic ethics.

Structural and organizational characteristics of the media

In daily reporting the pressure of fulfilling deadlines contributes journalists to have less time available for focusing and processing one subject. Continuously, redaction offices lack materials, technical and human recourses.³

Lack of investigative journalism in the media in Macedonia is a problem that is particularly present in the public service, which should be example for other media and should encourage deeply reporting for diverse cultural subjects and analytical approach to processing of daily events.

Furthermore, most journalists play roles of transmitters of the position of the owner or the management of the media, which media depends on their current bias toward any political or business group or another center of power.

Hence we can conclude that news about events and information that represent the cultural diversity in society, competing for space and time, not only with events, but with many different factors and influences, and their publication in the most dependent on decision of the editorial team.

Impact on the market and audience

Fact that most of the news of private media are commercial product, has influence also affects the distortion of the image of reality they create.

Journalists are "forced" to serve reality to public on a way that it causing attention, i.e., to serve what it actually 'sold' to the market. This "commercial" pressure makes journalists one kind of entertainers or "showmen", because news "have to be" integrated and cause emotions so they can hold the attention of the audience.

Even in most serious media we can detect tendencies for dramatizing, but this should not be identified with vulgar sensationalism.

Editorial staff should impose attitude of respect for basic professional rules increases public confidence and credibility of the medium, which, ultimately will contribute to its market success and profitable operation. When this attitude will prevail as attitude of team redactions it would be imposed to owner, than professional journalism can become a successful story in commercial media. *In that kind of redactions reporting about cultural diversity is more responsible, designed and targeted towards tolerance and cohesion of communities and groups in society.*⁴

³ Vesna Šopar, "Macedonia," in *Divided they Fall: Public Service Broadcasting in Multiethnic States*, Sarajevo, 2008).

⁴ Nancy J. Adler, *Communicating across Cultural Barriers*, Boston, 1991

Influences of the owners, political parties and government

*Fact that media is constructing reality and that reach to broad audience does not remain unnoticed by the various centers of power, they find different ways to pressure media and influence creation of news, in order to win over public on their side.*⁵In Macedonia it is concluded that the situation in this matter is very poor.

The guilt for low professional standards in reporting we could locate among owners which do not invest in their information redaction.

*Media that are connected with leading parties, report about same event different in comparison with other with media which are not close to the government. This political influence on media is reflected on cultural diversity reporting.*⁶Very often, when reporting on this topics, they are placed in political context because the dominant political influences on media, which are politically divided and polarized as never before. One example for how sensitive multicultural subject are part form dominant political discourse between government and opposition were the events in connection with fortress hill "Kale". "What happened there... is reflection for the political situation in our country... it was more spoken who stands behind that event, VMRO or SDSM?"

Positive experiences and practices

As for the positive practices that reflect this analysis, crucial importance is the fact that reporting about cultural diversities in the Macedonian media, generally is guided by the interests of the audience. Also research showed that national and local media are aware of their role in society, forming redaction principles according to that role. It should be mentioned that large part of media do not publish unconfirmed information, but are guided by principles of professional publication.

Positive examples are multilingual redactions and couple of commercial media who are aware of the meaning of cohesion and the need to nurture mutual cultural tolerance. There are examples of media which are trying to promote inter- culturalism, although they have commercial purpose. One editor sad: "... before couple of years we decided to make Bayram recipes, we made them and the newspaper was sold... mutual tolerance is based on learning about the customs, to know each other like humans..."

Some redactions of daily newspapers try to cooperate for exchanging contents which are published on other languages but this are mainly sort term initiatives. Collaboration in media of the media that publish content in different languages is mainly conducted at local level. Important to mention are initiatives of some local TV stations from multiethnic environments. For example, in Tetovo is specified that on local level are more reports about cultural diversities toward bringing citizens together than the national televisions, because life in multiethnic environment simply impose that. There are every day events in which Roma, Turks, Macedonians and Albanians are the participants, and the media is trying to show that cultural diversity real and without prejudices.

In the last decade, especially for the time and after finishing the conflict in 2001, were completed several projects for program connection of media redaction and teams of local media, and most of them were successful because were supported financially by foreign donations. When financial support was stopped the initiatives were closed, it is only confirmation that without financial support is very difficult to implement serious production endeavors.

Conclusion

In different international documents and in the codes of journalistic associations internationally and on national level, it is often reminiscent of professional journalistic standards when reporting on the various social groups. Media should report correct and unbiased, and be sensitive when it comes word about tensions between communities in one society. They should avoid encouraging stereotypes, and should treat individuals as equal, without associating their behavior to a particular community when in the present case it is irrelevant.

Research provides relevant information for understanding the context, processes and most important factors in reporting diversity: Individual characteristics, attitudes and beliefs of professional journalists and editors; professional rules and codes of journalists and editorial offices; structural and organizational features of the medium; the impact of market and audience; and the impact of owners, political parties and government.

⁵ Broadcasting Council, Analysis of the Market for Broadcasting: Broadcasting Council of the Republic of Macedonia 2011, Skopje

⁶ Risto Karajkov, Macedonia: Media Freedom Under Threat, July 5, 2011

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