

Chiara Valentini

PhD student in Organizational Communication and Public Relations,
Department of Communication,
University of Jyväskylä,
Finland

Institution address:

Department of Communication; P.O.Box 35 (TOB)
FIN-40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland
phone: +358415733806; fax: +35814 2601511;
e-mail: c.valentini@cc.jyu.fi ; URL: <http://www.chiara-valentini.org>

Home address:

Zugerstrasse 35, 8810 Horgen, Switzerland
Phone: +41 43 8104102

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The European Odyssey: communication of cultures vs. culture of communication

by

Chiara Valentini

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Abstract:

Communications in Europe in the last fifty years has taken a more and more important role in the whole society. Starting as a branch of social sciences, communication studies have found their position within the university programmes not long time ago. However the differences between European programmes in communication studies are still wide. At the same time there is a need for integration and cooperation within this research field. In this paper I will present and discuss some questions about the European communication research. Firstly I will examine the main concerns about mass media in relation to their content and their role in the construction of values. Then I will introduce the new trend in communication fields in Europe, its origins and the present situation in communication studies (the culture of communication) and its relationship with the concept of culture and globalization (the communication of cultures). Finally I will give specific attention to the main problems of European approaches and possible common frameworks for European research in communication studies. The arguments presented in this paper are based on an intercultural standpoint.

Introduction:

Communications in Europe in the last fifty years has taken a more prominent role in the society. In Italy it began to assume relevance in academic field from the sixties as a part of sociological research. In fact communications has been considered more as framework for sociological studies with the aim of explaining certain behaviours or certain aspects of life. Only at the beginning of nineties communication studies in Italy received their independence from other fields of social sciences with the creation of a specific university course. In whole Europe, in the last ten years, communications has seen a steeper growth and is currently one of the most chosen fields for young students. One explanation is related to the role of mass media in the contemporary society. Mass media have an important function in constructing values, ideologies and behaviours more now than in the past. They affect the life of a single person as well as that of a specific institution. At the same time mass media are the instrument of power for several influential individuals. In an environment where mass media have such important role for many people, the research for the best communication strategy is extremely important and it requires full-time involvement by communication specialists. Within this process, public institutions have re-considered the task of communication in their practice of establishing good relationships with their citizens, for example in Italy in 1993 they have introduced a special office for public relations (URP). The same trend is recognizable inside the European Union, where the necessity of having specific communication policies has become a “must” in order to establish democracy and trusted relationships between European citizens and their institutions. In addition communications is one of the aspects of the society, which is not static, but rather dynamic, and it changes faster and faster with technology and innovative approaches. Technology as well has shortened the distances between different audiences, but it has increased the necessity of a common language and code for different groups. This global language has required new skills in intercultural communication. Many European universities have recently developed specific courses in this field within management or communication departments. Nevertheless there is a gap between theoretical and practical approaches. In fact cultural prospective is superficially considered in practical life for the planning of communication campaigns. In Europe, partly because of the previous American studies in communication fields and partly because of the present EU communication policies, communication studies are going towards a more and more cultural amalgamation. Communication developments in each country have followed also societal and historical rules which have changed the traditional practices of communication and which has raised important questions regarding future developments.

This paper is a “journey” (the European Odyssey) towards a common European communication research. This journey presents and discusses questions that mass media and new technologies have brought up in our century within a specific prospective. The approach applied for this discussion is intercultural. Firstly I will discuss about the main issues of mass media in relation to their content and their role in the construction of values. These societal dynamics have direct connection with the second topic of this paper, “the culture of communication”. In this section I will introduce the main trends of communication in Europe, its origins and the present situation in communications and then the “communication of cultures”, which is intrinsically related to the concept of globalisation and cross-national communication. Finally I will give specific attention to the main problems of European approaches and possible common frameworks for European research in communication studies.

Mass media in our society

The importance of the media today is immense. Never before the media have had such a significant impact on our lives and behaviour and this is due to modern technology. Television, radio, newspapers, satellite and internet have shortened the distance between people. They are our eyes and ears of what happen in the world. However mass media represent only one side of the reality or better they represent what Lippmann (1922) called “social reality”. There is a difference between “reality” and “social reality”. Reality is the world outside of actual events while social reality is our mediated knowledge of those events, because we think and behave based not what truly is but on what we perceive to be. Generally news on media are based on one or more social realities, mainly because news are influenced at least from the observer’s point of view. There is no such thing as an objective observer of reality. All of us use our experiences, personalities and knowledge to interpret what we see (Fishman, 1980). Many social scientists, who study the media, are concerned with elusive concept of objectivity of news. In more recent years, journalists have found objectivity increasingly hard to maintain and have fallen back on more defensible standards such as “accuracy”, “balance” and “fairness” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, pp. 244) or at least that is what they should perform.

Harold Lasswell (1948) identifies three important functions that communication serves in our society: surveillance of the environment; correlation of parts of society in responding to the environment, and the transmission of social heritage from one generation to another. To these Wright (1986) adds entertainment, which I believe can be as much dangerous as a nuclear reactor in the hands of wrong people. If we consider for example the relation between children and television

this dichotomy can become essentially true. From early childhood, children sit in front of the television. For hours, the succession of pictures is watched by eyes that are only just opening onto the world and it becomes imprinted on minds that are still impressionable. A few years later, when going to school, newspaper headlines and magazine covers arrest the eye. Out of this plethora of images, what will remain in the mind of the child? Pictures of war, violence, women's bodies, clothed or not, sporting exploits; the faces of film stars or political leaders.

Media critics claim that commercial mass media controlled by a few multinational conglomerates have become an antidemocratic force supporting the status quo (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Keane 1991; Herman and McChesney 1997; Alger 1998; McChesney 1999; Kellner 2004). The news are more entertaining than informing, supplying mostly gossip, scandals, sex, and violence. In the same line are other scholars (Entman, 1989; Jamieson, 1992; Patterson, 1993; Sartori, 1997) who think that mass media have distorted the political process also by turning politics into a market like game and have ridiculed political leaders' words and deeds. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) have talked about this phenomenon as mediatized politics. Mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media.

Mass media can be also influenced by media owners or interest groups. An interest group is composed of individuals who want to communicate their stance on one or more issues to the public and they often try to influence legislation, as well as public opinion and behaviours. News is about the powerful; therefore, news organizations station their bureau and reports to be near the powerful. News media reflect these power relations in the selection of sources, by relying on official and other wealthy, corporate and bureaucratic elites (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, pp. 59).

Nevertheless mass media constitute the "backbone of democracy" (Fog, 2004). Mass media help people to orientate to political events and create possibilities for citizens' political participation. The media also as instruments of the political elite, socialize, persuade and work on public opinion (Nousiainen, 1989). They can also question and criticize political decisions and events and, such being the case, serve as gatekeepers and filters between politicians and the media audiences. Media are forums of political and social discussions and conflicts. They can either support or disrupt social integration. They shape social identities. They influence Europeans' social interaction and everyday lives by providing topics of discussion, an agenda. In this sense mass media are very important for the process of Europeanization.

Cultural studies scholars have instead a different idea of what is the role of the mass media. They believe that the recipient of the message is playing an increasingly active role. Viewing is, first and foremost, an active and social process. Television audiences actively and creatively

construct their own meanings rather than passively absorbing pre-packaged meanings imposed upon them (Ang, 1991). Viewers' active interaction with television texts turns reception into a site of struggle and not simply a site of domination. As Thompson (1995) says, the interaction between the media and the public always includes a creative process of interpretation by which the recipients make sense of the message, using the resources available to them. This process can have effects in the short or in the long term, and may be intentional or unconscious. In addition, every mean of communication acts in a different way. That is why it is also important to consider the combined effects of different types of communication working together.

The culture of communication: communication developments in Europe

Mass media as we have seen has a very controversial role in our society but they have as well important functions in constructing values, ideologies and behaviours more now than in the past. We are now entered in era of “culture of communication”, where communication is complex as much as modern societies. With the term “culture of communication” I refer to the trend that communication fields are living in the last decade. For communication fields I mean a broad set of patterns, which are related directly or indirectly with communication studies and processes, media organizations and social influences (communication as distributor of values, norms, ideologies; everything that messages can carry within their meanings). These patterns represent a broader view of what communication fields are and they include as well clear examples of trends in our society. Hence we can talk about culture of communication, if we consider the enormous weight that communication, as it has been defined, has in our society. This weight is expressed by the increment of the number of courses in communication studies available in many European universities, the growing number of communication graduated students and then specialists, and the growing importance that mass media have in our society due mostly by the intrinsic meanings that communication process carries. Communication is easily associated with power, when considered a fundamental tool for career escalation. Murdoch and Berlusconi, to mention some, have made their success with media organizations. Others have made their fortune by appearing in television programs. In this regards in the last five years the number of entertainment programs such as *Big Brother*, *Survival*, *Idols* and so on have increased in quantity and they have given a possibility for unknown people to potentially become stars. For those who are already famous, communication, intended as publicity, is a tool for increasing social status – specifically in the case of actors, models

and other celebrities mass media have a specific role for increasing/decreasing popularity of these people.

Communication through personal appearance is as well a tool for group acceptance and inclusion. Successful people are wearing precious clothes, jewelleries, shoes etc. and they take part in elitist parties. Communicating a status symbol is one of the primary and specific goals of brand advertisement and it has gained a lot of space as well in the communicational world. Those who are successful managers in communication fields are at the same time the promoters of this appearance phenomenon, what can be called commercialization. Hallin and Mancini (2003) believe as well that commercialization, including all its sides and I add this appearance phenomenon too, is the most powerful force for homogenization and globalization within the media system.

Communication as strategic planning can be as well an essential tool within private organizations and multinational companies for creating/improving/developing new business. Communication is used too by political elite in order to gain citizens' support. For example, Bush administration has invested a lot of money in PR agencies and has paid different journalists in order to have a supportative coverage of his policies [i].

Within the European Union communication has become a very important aspect of the EU agenda, that is why different communicational activities have been planned. As the influence of European Union institutions has multiplied, so a nascent Brussels-based community of professional lobbyists - lawyers, public relations professionals and public affairs consultants - has grown. More or less there are 13,000 lobbyists in Brussels, which makes this city the second largest centre for lobbyists after Washington [ii]. Although lobbying techniques in Brussels and Washington are often considered similar, public affairs professionals on both sides of the Atlantic are convinced that differences in style and substance will remain between the two capitals. The differences in communication practices around Europe are reconnected with the country-based approach, which is typically originated by a re-evaluation of American theories and methodologies in a more local and cultural context. Of similar opinion are some scholars (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Farrell and Webb, 2000) who think that European countries have borrowed American innovations mostly for reasons rooted in their own economic and political processes, often modifying them in significant ways.

Nevertheless, it is certainly possible to affirm that many of the structures and routines which dominate an increasingly homogeneous global communication system were tried in the United States for different reasons. First, because the diffusion of the American communication techniques in Europe, in Latin America and Africa mainly depend on the diffusion of American expertise through different actions. In Plasser's opinion (2000) this expertise has proliferated through five

main channels of diffusion and these include the organization of campaign training seminars and trade journals, of donor-driven democracy-assistance programs and foreign visitors' programs, professional organizations and academic programs and finally the American political consultants working overseas. Second, because of the old generation of top managers in Europe were all more or less similarly trained to put the commercialised interests of their enterprises above other considerations, and were increasingly divorced from their particular national framework and reflect, if anything, the business philosophy of the ruling US scholars (Schiller, 1976). And third, because the influence of American communication techniques is a consequence of the available knowledge in communication studies. In general in Europe students of communication start learning methodologies and approaches from the well known American scholars, which were somehow the first to consider communication as phenomenon of investigation.

Although this shared background in American communication theories and techniques, European communication specialists tend to modify and adapt these approaches to the context and culture of their target groups. Hence it is unreliable to talk about a common communication approach in Europe in the sense that European communication is not the same in all Member States even though it has similar characteristics. Somehow talking about European communication techniques is like talking about European identity, a construct of the society to explain and legitimate certain decisions and policies. Communication studies began to unfold as an independent area of research studies in many European country in the 1960's and even later and they still did not have similar developments. In some universities communication studies fall into the faculty of humanity, in others in the faculty of foreign languages and in the majority of the cases they are considered part of the faculty of social sciences. However, the confusion is bigger when single programs are taken into account. To which faculty does public relations belong? Is it an economic/business or a communication program? What about information science? Sometimes this program is equipollent of computer science other times it is assimilated to the department of communication. Similarly the department of film and television, department of graphic design, department of photography and media lab - what is called more the "artistic approach of communication" - can be either in the department of communication or of arts. These differences are important as much as the curriculum of the programs itself. Within each of these studies the courses taught can differ in substance from one university to another. Surely until these distinctions persist it is very difficult to talk about a European communication approach.

There are some communalities among European communication approaches as well as deeper differences. The commonalities between different European communication approaches are related with the basic studies in communication sciences, which are based on Anglo- Saxon approaches and

which are common taught subjects in all the European universities. Similarly the process of developing a more country-based approach characterizes European approaches, which starts from American communication studies to arrive at a differentiation in the practices. Finally another common aspect is related to European Union. All European Member States should follow and respect the EU policies regarding communication, broadcasting, consumers and trade issues, etc.

In the last decade there have been some common developments within the universities [iii], which are dealing with practical aspects of recognition of university degrees. In general there is the motivation and necessity to amalgamate communication studies in a more and more cultural path partly because of the globalization phenomenon which interest communication fields too and partly because of the present EU communication policies, which aim at having a more distinctive approach from the American but at the same a more coherent and similar within the Member States.

The communication of cultures: the European Union

The 21st century is considered to be the age of globalization, which is a modern term used generally to describe changes in societies and the world economy that result from dramatically increased international trade and cultural exchange. In communication fields globalization implies the acquisition and use of specific globalized language or better cross cultural communication in order to communicate with all the possible groups. The real problem of cross cultural communication is not one of language per se but the meaning of the words for each individual (connotative meaning). According to Samover and other scholars (1981) connotative meanings derive from personal and collective cultural experience and are never the same for two people or two cultures.

In spite of these multinational companies such as Nokia, McDonalds, Nike etc. have managed to find their own cross cultural communication strategy in order to reach their target groups all around the world. Their strategy is based on intercultural communication theories and practices, and their successes depend mainly on the tight relation between communication and culture as well on the use of different types of media. Especially new media as Internet and satellite television have the possibility to reach several audiences, that is why the information presented in those media need to be considered in a global view. In this context some scholars (Friedman, 1999; Poster, 1999; Chen and Starosta, 2000) have spoken about globalisation of new media, but little has been said about the incongruent effects that different cultures intrinsically disclose within the communication process.

It is impossible to communicate with other people without expressing our cultural understanding. Culture is the base of each communication process. Culture is the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, timing, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a large group of people in the course of the generations through individual and group striving. Culture manifests itself in patterns of language and in forms of activities and behaviours that act as models for both the common adaptive acts and the styles of communication that enable us to live in a society within a given geographic environment at a given state of technical development at a particular moment in time. Culture is persistent, enduring, and omnipresent (Samover et al., 1981, pp. 24-25). Society, in searching of understanding itself, increasingly gets involved in paradigms, which mirror less the conditions of continuing formations, but more the challenges of alteration. Culture and communication are such paradigms. According to Kuhn (1962) paradigms are based on currently shared beliefs and expectations and as a result, we tend to take them for granted. We lose sight of the fact that beliefs and expectations (paradigms) change not only over time but from one cultural environment to another. Paradigm is “an accepted model or pattern” (Kuhn, p. 23) that helps to make sense out of the world. The paradigm remains valuable as long as it provides a useful practical guide and practitioners who share its underlying assumptions. Although Kuhn spoke of scientific paradigm, it can be applied to cultural perspective as well. By providing a model, a paradigm exerts a powerful influence on our views of the world, by restricting the range of questions deemed appropriate for study.

Schiller (1976) spoke about cultural imperialism referring to the influence of U.S in on other cultures. In his opinion cultural imperialism is the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system. Although this is one of the aspects that is the most criticized to American policy, the ideology behind is the key factor that makes news media devices of such social construction.

Williams (1977, pp. 109) defines ideology as a “relatively formal and articulated system of meanings, values and beliefs, of a kind that can be abstracted as a world-view or as a class outlook”. According to Becker (1984, pp. 69) ideology “governs the way we perceive our world and ourselves, it controls what we see as natural or obvious. An ideology is an integrated set of frames of reference through which each of us sees the world and to which all of us adjust our actions”. Media transmission of ideology works as it does by drawing on familiar cultural themes that

resonate with audience. Also in an era of European integration, top-down rhetoric has a potential to continually shape politics and affect the way we – as citizens – perceive reality (Hellström, 2002).

Within the European Union the major ideology is intrinsic to the concept of “Unity in diversity”. The European commission strives to create a more coherent EU at the same time as it claims to recognise its internally different national and regional features. But how does it communicate this diversity maintaining the idea of unity?

The communication of cultures is also one of the most important paradigms for the European Union. A proper communication campaign leads to a proper cross cultural communication. Since the EU motto is “Unity in diversity”, it is essential to be able to communicate with different groups in a way to enhance support, trust and to legitimate the European institutions too. The dichotomy “unity in diversity” is however a clearly difficult aspect to reach. Diversity demands unity. Simultaneously, the unity is based on a notion of cultural diversity where different collective identity constructions harmonise into one united whole. According to Hellström (2002) the rhetorical device “Unity in diversity” can in this respect come in handy, since it avoids the potential clash between the endeavours to establish a coherent political/cultural/social entity (unity) and at the same time permit for differing internal identity constellations (diversity).

However I believe that this rhetorical device clashes if it is considered in a communication prospective. In fact the concept “Unity in diversity”, which the European Union embodies, is not realistic neither possible in practical planning. Talking about “unity” within an information campaign means considering a unique message delivered to all target groups. If European institutions want to communicate their new policies to all citizens using the same message (unity), then they will not be able to catch all the different perceptions and positions that EU represents. They basically will not take into consideration the “diversity” of the communication process, which is based on cultural understanding. However, if they decide to differentiate their information campaign and tailor their messages to the different groups, then the “unity” of the communication process, which is the base of the political thought of the European Union project, fails. So far European commission has preferred the unity paradigm in communication strategies, but this strategy did not achieve the goals planned. One example is the European campaign for the EU membership, which had different effects in the different EU countries. The strategy applied reflects the general idea that European communication policies should be communicated to all European citizens exactly with the same words (unity), where the documents are based on translations as closer as possible to the official texts. Therefore, this common practice creates misunderstanding and prejudices. For example in the new Member States, which were influenced for many years by the Soviet Union communication style, the slogan of EU information campaigns was easily

associated with the Soviet propaganda, and the objective of promoting and convincing people of the benefits of European Union has been seen as more persuasive than informative.

Information campaigns and all the communication aspects should be made considering the culture of those citizens and what is the perception that certain words have for them. In fact we communicate with people of different countries in a common language but we are never totally sure that the words we use in our communication process are perceived exactly how we meant. If we are not aware of the cultural perceptions that some words have for some people, we will easily end up in some unpleasant communication situations. This is more truth between people of different countries and cultures, for example between Western and Asian countries, but it is valid to some extent also in many European countries.

The importance of cultural understanding

In the era of culture of communication, the communication of cultures is representing a big part of the communication activities in different organizations, institutions and entities, consequently cultural understanding is essential and necessary to all communication specialists.

Culture and communication are to each other the one to the other side of the coin, which is society (Bauer, 2004); the one is not negotiable without the other. In spite of the fact, that they are different competences of social practice, the fragility of culture always is the fragility of communication, the vulnerability of culture is communicative, and the vulnerability of communication is cultural. Hence you could not understand international communication, foreign media, news flow, and all of the political issues swirling around them without understanding something about culture.

A culture develops as the result of interpersonal communication. At the same time, the form, the nature, the makeup of the culture results from the interaction of the people (communication) and the place and time in which they live. Living together, working together, relating to one another is communication. We are always communicating or attempting to communicate. An awareness of the relationship between culture and communication as well as an understanding of the differences between cultures is helpful and at times essential in communicating successfully.

Perhaps the simplest way to explain culture and its relationship to communication is to say that people are different, we live, work, and play in different societies, environments, and climates, and we adapt to these in different ways. As a result of this, people develop special needs, acquire habits and customs peculiar to themselves, and have experiences and since words are the names we

give to our experiences, we have language differences, too, which, in general, result in particular patterns and methods and forms of expression and relating with one another. We need to know about people and their background if we are to understand their communications. This has important implications for when you may find yourself doing business in a foreign country. It is important that you become acquainted with the local culture and be prepared to follow its rules while you are doing business there.

The importance of cultural understanding in communication sciences lies on the strict relationship between culture, communication and diversity. In fact the analysis of diversity within a communication theory gives at its end basically the same results of the analysis of communication and culture within a theory of diversity (Bauer). In addition communication and interaction between people support a framework of reference and order of the reality, intended as sharing meaning, of those involved by permanent changing performance, character and media. At the same time culture, which is a meaningful social practice, maintains the same framework negotiating collective identity by permanent trying out its potentials of development, change and variety. According to Bauer any “development, change and variety can be taken as the intrinsic characteristics of cultural unity and universality, which get expressed and symbolically mediated in diversity. Diversity is a matter of media performance through which culture expresses the intrinsic competence of variety and plurality” (pp. 4).

Future European communication research

During the past 20 years the European Commission has established several large-scale programmes, and observatories and networks have been set up to monitor and report on social and economic developments in Member States. At the same time, government departments and research funding bodies have shown a growing interest in international comparisons, particularly in the social policy area, often as a means of evaluating the solutions adopted for dealing with common problems or to assess the transferability of policies between Member States.

Within communication studies, this process of research comparison between different countries has been quite modest and it has depended on the linguistic skills of the researchers and on research approaches applied. Different studies (Johnson and Tuttle, 1989; Hantrais, 1995; Redmond, 2003) shows that relatively few social scientists feel they are well equipped to conduct studies that seek to cross national boundaries, or to work in international teams. This reluctance may be explained not only by a lack of knowledge or understanding of different cultures and

languages but also by insufficient awareness of the research traditions and processes operating in different national contexts. In this sense it is absolutely necessary to give a possibility to all researchers dealing with cross-national projects to learn the languages and research approaches necessary to do international work. This seems quite obvious, but many centres, who have short resources, cannot afford this necessary training. Hence, it should be created a system of exchange of know-how and financial supports from those who have the possibilities to those who do not have. It is also necessary to create a data base of information available to all European institutions, research centres, and universities including findings, methodologies and approaches of different communication research projects which have a European context. It will be mutually beneficial to know who do what and how in order to select possible partners for cross-national research and to learn from different experience new way to carry out research in communication fields.

One of the problems mostly discussed by different scholars has been the selection of the countries to be included in a study. Many times this selection is determined by factors (sometimes political) which do not make for easy relationships between team members. European programmes often include all Member States, although the countries concerned may represent very different stages of economic and social development and be influenced by different cultural value systems, assumptions and thought patterns. Especially when the financial situation of the country is not most favourable the results of the research can be influenced by economical purposes. Funding bodies have their own agenda: a topic that may attract interest in one country may not obtain funding elsewhere (Hantrais, 1995). That is why it is important to create a pan European foundation where private, public organizations and individuals can donate some money but with not influence on the project founding decisions. These donations should be collected and distributed considering the needs of the institutions as well as the single research projects.

Another problem frequently discussed is the standards of the data. Many times in cross-national research there is not certitude on how the information provided is handled by every analyst involved in the comparative study. This is by no means straightforward, as national research standards may vary in their stringency and many nations have either differing, or no, data protection laws in force. These differences in research procedures and in the perceptions of both the research community and the society as a whole can make comparative social analysis a highly complex undertaking, and can sometimes sabotage the entire enterprise (Freed-Taylor, 1994). This problem I believe can be solved if general guidelines and norms are decided in advance and applied by all European research centres.

Finally I suppose that it will be possible in 50 years to talk about a European approach of communication studies, intended as a shared knowledge and methodologies among European

scholars, which is a development and then detachment of current national communication studies. The new approach will differ from the American for the cultural differences, which are much stronger in Europe than in America. In fact it is possible nowadays to talk about American culture as a unified pattern, but it is not possible to talk about a European culture. This distinctiveness will bring interesting findings and discovering if there will be some guidelines available to all researchers.

Conclusions

European communication studies in the last 50 years have represented what I like metaphorically to call a “European Odyssey”. The word “odyssey” that derives from the famous Greek epic poem has come to mean any significant and difficult journey. Although the poem is technically about one particular man's journey, as Horace (1993) observed in his first “Satire”, *mutato nomine, fabula de te narrator*, translated would mean “changed the name and the story could be told about you”. In this context the journey represent the path that communication studies in Europe have embarked. So the story is about European communication, which is still an open story, full of surprises and innovations.

In this paper I have tried to demonstrate the importance of culture within the communication processes and in view of globalisation. Culture is intrinsically related with communication and within the European integration framework it is taking a special role. Culture is one of the parameters used in media organizations to decide which information to deliver and how. Culture is expressed everywhere and once more in all communication fields. Living together, working together, relating to one another is communication. In the first part of this paper I presented the main problems of mass media in our society, those problems open ethical questions on societal dynamics. Media form opinions in different issues, they create our perception of the reality and they can as well influence our culture, intended as shared values and norms. Media have also a role in the creation of what I called “culture of communication”. Culture of communication represents the trend that communication is living in the last decade. In fact communication in all its different fields has rapidly grown both in quantity of university courses available and in importance as vehicle of fame and success. In Europe this culture is pretty young and mostly country-based. Although there is no common European approach in communications, some similarities are presented in all Member States and they are related with the same Anglo-Saxon influences and the same interest expressed through the European institutions to regulate media broadcasting. This last aspect deeply

rotates as well on the idea of communicating to different cultures- the globalisation phenomenon or the communication of cultures- and it has opened as well some questions about the importance of cross-cultural communication. For the European Union is very important to be able to communicate to different people in an uncultured biased environment. However it is not always easy to do. Finally I have presented the main obstacles of a common communication research in Europe for examples the problems related with the availability of resources, the language skills of researchers working within an international framework and the research code and some possible ideas in order to ameliorate the cross-national communication research. A common communication research in Europe is not a dream; it can be realized but still much more work need to be done. This is possible if a cultural prospective is an integrated part of the communication research.

The European Odyssey has started 50 years ago, the journey for a common approach is still long and full of important decisions to been taken. As T. S. Eliot said: “Twentieth-century art may start with nothing, but it flourishes by virtue of its belief in itself, in the possibility of control over what seems essentially uncontrollable, in the coherence of the inchoate, and in its ability to create its own values” [iv], so it will be for the European communication research during this 21st century. This European Odyssey will take us towards a new and better, unbiased and democratic way to perform research.

Notes:

- i. Just to mention some of the recent cases: Bush administration has paid commentator Armstrong Williams to promote a controversial act “No Child Left Behind Act” on his television and radio programs, and Maggie Gallagher for promoting President Bush’s marriage promotion initiatives. It has as well made fake reports in White House press briefings and it is clearly involved in media manipulation around the invasion and occupation of Iraq. More information at URL:
<http://www.prwatch.org/node/3547>;
http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=No_Child_Left_Behind_Act;
http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Armstrong_Williams

- ii. The number of lobbyists working in Brussels is taken from EU Lobby webpage at URL:
<http://www.eulobby.net/eng/Modul/Abstract/ReadAbstract.aspx?Mid=1489&ItemID=541>

- iii. I refer to the Bologna process, which has recently changed the structure of the university programs in all Europe for the first and second cycles of study. More information at URL:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

- iv. This quotation of T. S. Elliot is available at URL:
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/tseliot120657.html>

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