

Communication, Mediation and Culture in the Making of Europe

What is the role of media and communication in European Union integration? Is it the “making of Europe” in danger because of the EU institutions incapacity to communicate with its citizens? Does – and should – exist a European public sphere? And what about the role of culture? Should Europe deal with it?

These are only some of the relevant questions discuss from different perspectives and authors in the book “*Communication, Mediation and Culture in the Making of Europe*”, edited by Juliet Lodge and Katharine Sarikakis to explore the causes and underline the negatives consequences of the lack of a *European public sphere*.

The communication gap between EU and its citizens still remains a hard task due to the common perception of distant and technocratic institutions. Political, economic and cultural resistances can explain these sense of distance.

One of the first obstacles to the creation of a European public sphere is the European institutional democratic deficit. On one side, European Parliament seems to have not enough power to represent its citizens, while, on the other side, European Commission, originally designed as a ‘*faceless technocratic motor of integration*’, has still limited communication capacity with European people.

As underlined by K. Sarikakis, in fact, according to many member states opinion, EC should communicate only “*positive message about European governance in an anodyne, non-prescriptive, non-partisan a-political way*” and these circumstance obstacles the creation of a European public sphere. European citizenship is perceived from national governments as dangerous evidence of “*an erosion of national sovereignty and authority*” and this fear explains why the public media does not speak frequently about European politics or, if they do it, they usually refer to negative arguments, ascribing to Europe the responsibility of the unpopular decisions at national level.

So, if “*national media fail to report Europolitics affectively or to communicate it constructively*”, as affirmed by Sophia Kaitatzi-Whitlock, and consequently does not stimulate the debate on European Union, what about private media?

Taking into account the European media landscape, K. Sarikakis points out a radical transformation happened during the last decade, in consequence of the information market liberalisation, and the dominant role assumed by a few media barons, who are not interested in mediating Europe, because this is not an attractive argument for their audience or, worst but probably more true, have no economic interest in talking good about European politics.

As demonstrated by Sophia Kaitatzi-Whitlock, the evidence is the global financial crisis press coverage. If we focus on the past and on-going information about the weakness of EU, put the attention on the actions which successfully would mine the European cohesion, stressing the vulnerability of peripheral economies in Euro zone, it clearly appears how much dangerous is the “*financial-media-industrial-complex*” and how it could easily influence and manipulate a political ignorant audience.

Facing this aggressive information strategy, no answer comes from Europe. Starting from the “Europa TV” project up to the “Euronews” satellite channel, different actions have been undertaken by European

Institution to promote the creation of pan-European media and stimulate a European public debate, but the results are still poor.

Taking into account the role of culture and the importance of audiovisual sector in mediating Europe and promoting cultural diversity of its citizens, many efforts have been undertaken also for the creation of a European film market, through film support funds: MEDIA (EU) and Eurimages (Council of Europe). Nevertheless, the scarcity of resources and the fragmentation of the initiatives don't deliver to any tangible results in this sense.

Consequences of the absence of a European public sphere are everyday more evident: growth of disaffection towards EU and its policies, increase of intra-EU member states incomprehension and development of phenomenon of cultural, ethnical and political intolerance. Thus, in a society where information plays a key role, while political mistrust is growing, the European Union and its citizens are invited to reflect on the importance of the communication and media in the "*Making of Europe*" and the urgency of creating a European public sphere.

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