

“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi

**Doctoral School Of The Faculty of Philosophy and Social- Political
Sciences**

Specialty: Social- Political Sciences

Abstract of

DOCTORAL Thesis

Scientific Coordinator:

Ph.d Professor George POEDE

Ph.d candidate:

Oana OLARIU

Iași, 2015

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The Role of Media on the Changing Societies

The Contemporary Life-Style as a Political Statement

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Abstract

This study aims at establishing a reference framework for the social assimilation of self-organization and direct action principles. It strives to prove that both self-organization, as well as direct action are conceptual nodes synthesizing behaviours, attitudes and cultural values reflecting the media paradigm shift. The pivotal argument of this thesis is that the digital paradigm is closely related to the social normalization of the prefigurative politics. Prefigurative politics mean to practice personal principles and values through the daily life-style. It will be shown that the new-new social movements, as they reflect the values of the digital paradigm, are the expression of a conflicted state between the individual and the traditional state design. In other words, the political actions that are manifested by the new social movements are not triggered, it's argued, by the political allegiance of the individuals, but rather by their tendency to self-manage their private life.

Perspectives on Democracy

Touraine (1994) associates democracy with modernity, as a political order regulating a laic world, wherein the Laws, Principles and Universal Rights are manmade and conceived to protect the liberty and the equality of the individual, while the human himself is the rational subject. The liberal democratic system assumes the development of an aware civil society, based on knowledge and reason, which is fully able to comprehend and sanction the behaviour of political actors. The press is given, therefore, a crucial role in the

democratic edifice. The digitalization, at its turn, is conducting to the envision of new democracy models. The model of emergent democracy or decentralized democracy (Johnson, 2002) is based on the observation that interconnectivity enables individuals to act independent of each other and, at the same time, to intuitively synchronize with each other, without the need for hierarchic structures to regulate their behaviours. Johnson (2002) is describing the model of emergent democracy in analogy with the mound-building termites which are communicating through pheromones and are self-regulating in the absence of directives provided by hierarchical structures.

The interconnectivity – as Johnson (2002) explains – converges to natural order, pluri-disciplinary oriented and without hierarchy, not unlike a termites colony where each insect acts on the mutual space complying to a non-hierarchic society (Johnson, 2002).

The extreme democracy – as a political philosophy specific to info-societies – is articulated once Web 2.0 is developed. The model assumes the interconnected individuals are placed in so-called *relative centres* of the political landscape, thus enabling them to be in complete control and unmitigated involvement in the political life, without being assimilated to traditional political structures. The concept of *relative centre* is borrowed from the Theory of Relativity, postulating that in an open system the centre is everywhere, while the periphery is nowhere (Lebkowsky, 2005). The abovementioned philosophy is related with extreme development theories, according to which an extremely small number of individuals may significantly alter an interconnected macro-space. The empirical roots of this perspective may be found in the experiments conducted by small teams of

researchers who created digital applications that radically transformed the social behaviour patterns. The Ushahidi platform is an eloquent example concerning this aspect. The application was used to enable the citizens to monitor alleged election fraud in Kenya, in 2008, and it is presently used by Human Rights international organizations. The application was developed by three men with limited financial resources.

The Extraordinary Politics and the Layman

It is widely believed that by amplifying digitization, the non-political individuals are enabled to influence the political landscape (Joyce, 2010). The result will be the banalization and the wide diffusion of the *extraordinary politics* (Euchner, 1996). *The extraordinary politics* are political action repertoires aside the conventional, recurrent civic participation mechanisms. The protests, petition signing, and, generally speaking, the challenging behaviours disrupting the every-day political environment, are all assets of *extraordinary politics* (Euchner, 1996).

The interactive information technology development is usually linked to the enhancement of both the social reflexivity and the uncertainty (Tornero & Varis, 2010; Bauman, 2007; Giddens, 1994). The exposure to social issues and direct interaction should enable one to assume a personal responsibility conscience regarding problems transcending the domain of the domestic life. This context generates the premises of a debate aimed at re-evaluating the very nature of conventional politics, and as such the birth of *generative politics*. „Generative politics exists in the space that links the state to

reflexive mobilization in the society at large. (...) Generative politics is a politics which seeks to allow individuals and groups to make things happen, rather than have things happen to them, in the context of overall social concerns and goals.

Generative politics is a defence of the politics of the public domain, but does not situate itself in the old opposition between state and market. It works through providing material conditions, and organizational frameworks, for the life political decisions taken by individuals and groups in the wider social order” (Giddens, 1994, p. 15).

The generative politics belong to the broader field of the contemporary radical politics. These aim at empowering the individual, enabling one to become self-determined in the wide context of the global society. The *radical politics* terms are describing the politics addressing the roots of the problems and thus are redefining the social functions’ patterns (Pugh, 2009). The alter-globalisation movements, anti-capitalism or ecologist movement, alongside multiculturalism, anti-militarism or the Islamic State phenomenon are usually mentioned in discussions concerning contemporary radical politics (Steven, 2014; Pugh, 2009).

Strongly influenced by the post-anarchic principles blending the post-modernism and anarchism (Žižec, 2012), the contemporary radical politics are built around the suspicion toward the power structures. As such, they are contemptuous when faced with traditional power edifices. This kind of politics are oriented mainly towards communization (Clark, 2013) and are rejuvenating the principles of *prefigurative politics* (Yates, 2014). *The*

prefigurative politics are revived through digitalization that enables collaborative economies, such as those based on *sharing* (Davis, 2011; Einstein, 2011). In collaborative digital environments, the class segregations are fading, while the social and economic status is becoming meaningless. The collaborative networks are enabling the unhindered enactment of autonomy and egalitarianism. Giddens (1994) observes that currently more people are members of mutual aid groups, than members of political parties. The importance of these groups resides in their ability to bring forward in the public environment, issues or situations which are often ignored by the traditional actors of power.

Patterns of Decentralized Behaviours

The development of various networks further led to the dissemination of cultural values which are different from those endorsed within the dominant social order. There are certain fundamental distinctions between the decentralized network or organisations, and the centralized ones. First of all, there is no control and command unit in a decentralized community. As such, each one becomes fully responsible for one's actions, without delegation.

While a centralized organisation will usually attract its members through promises derived from the economic and social status bestowed to them, the affiliation with a decentralized organization is conducted solely on ideological compatibility premises. Furthermore, while the members of a centralized organisation are pecuniary dependent of it, and the organization itself owns a capital to be distributed according to various meritocracy patterns, the decentralized organization holds no capital apart from the direct

contribution of its members. There is no control or impediment in accessing a collaborative capital (Amant & Still, 2007; Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006).

The horizontal and collaborative nature of these decentralized networks generates a different dynamic when compared to a centralized organization. The positions in a decentralized organization are self-assigned by each individual, without any formal investiture rituals. The knowledge and the power are also evenly distributed across the network. In other words, the members are free to express themselves using the entire repertoire of roles made possible within a network. They are encouraged at the same time to diversify the types of actions (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006). These kind of networks are favouring the inspiring leader, rather than the magnetic leader. While the magnetic leader attracts *toward himself* (Ayalew, 2010; Lipman-Blueman, 2004), the inspiring leader attracts *from himself*, encouraging authenticity and autonomy in others.

The rejuvenation of mutual help

The development of digital networks rejuvenated the cybernetic anarchism, in general, and enhanced the post-anarchism, in particular. This current pleads for pacifism, autonomy, liberty and egalitarianism, based on free collaboration and mutual help. The mutual help behaviours are constructed around three action principles: the egotist drive, the communitarian drive, and the quixotic drive (Salgado & Ocejja, 2011). The individuals involved in humanitarian activities, following a quixotic drive are investing more time and effort when compared with egotistic or communitarian types. The

quixotic drive is describing a social action based on the belief that by doing so, the world itself will become better (Salgado & Oceja, 2011).

The quixotic drive does not necessarily implies grand actions. It may be the spark behind every gesture or action, if one is doing it in the hope of creating a better world. The decentralized communities oriented towards challenging the traditional power paradigm may, thus, be especially effective if they foster the quixotic behaviour.

A longitudinal analysis on the three action drives as emerging from the members' discourse of three decentralized networks

In order to investigate the quixotic, communitarian and egotistic drive, a discourse analysis was conducted at first. In employing this particular approach, the monthly level of each drive could be assessed, as it is apparent in the discourse of three decentralized networks: Impossible, Couchsurfing and Occupy. As the three action drives are based on Schwartz's (1992) cultural values taxonomy, 10 categories were established, one for each cultural value. A list with the assigned lexical thesaurus was created for each category. Based on these lists, a frequency occurrence assessment was conducted, on the basis of the collected discourse from those tree networks. Ratios were subsequently calculated, because the discourses varied in size on monthly basis. The results were then exported in Spss, for statistical analysis.

The investigated hypotheses were such as listed below:

1. The quixotic drive was more present than the communitarian and the egotist drives;

2. The quixotic and the egotist drives were more present than the communitarian drive;
3. There is connection between the quixotic drive and benevolence and passion;
4. There is connection between the egotist drive and self-fulfilment;
5. There is connection between the communitarian drive and self-determination;
6. The hate speech is seldom present in the case of all three communities;
7. The quixotic drive is more present in the Impossible and Couchsurfing communities than it is in the Occupy community.

Results

The analysis showed that empowering self-determination may lead to all three action drives. Although the egotism is the most frequent motivation, there is a quixotic drive more powerful than the communitarianism drive. The first hypothesis was, thus, invalidated.

Quixotism prediction model

	b	SE b	β	p
Constant	3.03	0.32		.00
Benevolence	0.13	0.05	.30	.01

Passion	0.30	0.14	.25	.03
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$R^2 = .46, p = .00$)

The regression equation: $Quixotism_i = 3.03 + (0.13benevolence_i + 0.30passion_i)$

Communitarianism prediction model

	b	SE b	β	p
Model 1				
Constant	1.77	0.50		.00
Self-determination	0.09	0.07	.26	.22
Hedonism	-0.88	0.06	-.24	.15
Passion	-0.20	0.1	-.21	.12
Self-fulfilment	0.55	0.07	.15	.46
Model 2				
Constant	1.60	.45		.00
Self-determination	0.13	0.03	.39	.00
Hedonism	-0.05	0.04	-.16	.20
Passion	-0.23	0.12	-.23	.07
Model 3				

Constant	1.33	0.40		.00
Self-determination	0.14	0.03	.43	.00
Passion	-.32	0.10	-.33	.00

$R^2 = .26$ for the first model and $\Delta R^2 = -.00$ for the second model and $\Delta R^2 = -.01$ for the third model ($p < .00$)

The regression equation: $\text{Communitarianism}_i = 1.33 + (0.14\text{self-determination}_i - 0.32\text{passion}_i)$.

Egotism prediction model

	b	SE b	β	p
Model 1				
Constant	6.70	1.10		.00
Self-determination	0.41	0.15	.45	.01
Hedonism	-0.38	0.16	-.39	.02
Passion	-0.13	0.28	-.05	.62
Self-fulfilment	-0.52	0.16	-.55	.00
Benevolence	-0.02	0.14	-.02	.89
Model 2				
Constant	6.68	1.08		.00
Self-	0.41	0.15	.44	.01

determination

Hedonism	-0.39	0.12	-.41	.00
Passion	-0.13	0.28	-.05	.63
Self-fulfilment	-0.52	0.16	-.56	.00
Model 3				
Constant	6.82	1.03		.00
Self-determination	0.38	0.14	.41	.00
Hedonism	-0.43	0.10	-.45	.00
Self-fulfilment	-0.50	0.15	-.54	.00

$R^2 = .53$ for the first model and $\Delta R^2 = .00$ for the second model and $\Delta R^2 = -.00$ for the third model ($p < .00$)

The regression equation: $Egotism_i = 6.82 + (0.38self-determination_i - 0.43hedonism_i - 0.50self-fulfilment_i)$.

The third hypothesis postulating the connection between the quixotic drive, on one hand, and benevolence and passion, on the other, was validated. The more present the benevolence and the passion, the more apparent the quixotic drive. However, as it is shown, the relationship is established when the hedonism level is over the average. The mean values for the quixotic drive are lower for the Occupy community than the other two. The seventh hypothesis was, as such, validated.

There is a negative connection between egotism and self-fulfilment. The higher the self-fulfilment level, the less present the egotist drive. There is a positive connection between communitarianism and self-determination. The higher the self-determination is present, the more apparent the communitarianism. The fourth and the fifth premises were, thus, validated. Furthermore, the hate-speech was seldom apparent in the discourse of the three communities, as expected.

The impossible community project, based on mutual help (Clark, 2013; Kropotkin, 1907), becomes the more efficient the more is implemented. In other words, as individuals are practicing benevolence, they become more susceptible to act on quixotic drives and to experiment social relationships different than those provided by the dominant social order. Their dependence on the traditional power structures will, thus, lessen.

However, the analysis shows that cultural and generational particularities may generate numerous blocks. Detail analysis shows that the quixotic and the egotist are vastly influenced by hedonism. If the hedonism level is diminishing, the egotist drive is most likely to emerge. A high hedonism level equals amplifying benevolence and passion. As a consequence, the quixotic drive becomes more probable. The hedonism level is influencing also the relationship between self-fulfilment and quixotism. When the hedonism level is low, the connection between self-fulfilment and quixotism is negative. In other words, for individuals experiencing low levels of hedonism, the higher the self-fulfilment, the lower the quixotism. On contraire, when the hedonism level is elevated, the higher the self-fulfilment, the higher the quixotism. The results are supporting the observations

regarding the novel creative class (Florida, 2012), emphasising the ludic spirit and mixing free time, personal development and professional activities. At the same time, it becomes apparent that the scepticism of the researchers in the pessimist trend concerning the technology social role is well founded, as hedonism strongly influences their dynamic and drive.

Final conclusions

The collaborative economy principles (Eisenstein, 2011) are fostering benevolence and personal conscience, while enabling self-management. The collaborative structures are not directly threatening the state. But they are creating a parallel social order. The dominant values of the traditional social order and the values cherished in these networks are antagonist. While the conventional social order implies hierarchical structures, power and control, the network experience leads to egalitarianism, autonomy and self-determination, based on collaboration and mutual help.

Paradigm Shift, Davis, 2011, p.11

The Old Paradigm	The New Paradigm
The individual is self-centred.	The individual is part of the ecosystem.
Industrialisation and consumerism	Sustainability
The organizations are focused solely on financial profit	The organizations are TBL oriented („triple bottom line”), meaning they are aware of social, ecological and financial consequences of their activities

The employees are “workers”	The employees are people
The progress is quantified depending on the investment return	The progress is quantified depending on the social return of the investment
Isolation	Collaboration
Technology is employed in increasing productivity	Technology is employed in creating community.
Closed world	Open world
Insular vision on the world	Holistic vision of the world

The values conflict is generating a unique context for the citizens who don't cherish a political identity to develop a political conscience, since they find themselves in dissonance with the very concept of the state. As the digitalization empowered self-expression, the decentralized communities' members are spontaneously reacting when the political decision-making is ignoring the social values cherished by them. The more the members of a society are living by their own principles, the more they become sensible to the political decisions which are ignorant of their values. In a culture regarding self-expression as a public communication action, it is only to be expected that breaking these values to be sanctioned by public manifestations.

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