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A Cross-Country Comparison of Public Relations
Practices Employing Critical Theories and Mixed
Methods

La personnalité de marque : une approche cross-
culturelle

The role of context in coaches' post-match
discourses

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Studies and articles

Sorin NASTASIA*

A Cross-Country Comparison of Public Relations Practices Employing Critical Theories and Mixed Methods

Abstract: This study analyzes the configurations of public relations practices in France and in Romania, and the connections between such configurations and U.S.-based models of public relations, through critical theoretical lens, and with the aid of mixed research methods. The study has employed a content analysis of website materials and a thematic analysis of interviews. In the quantitative component, the websites of 50 firms in France and 50 firms in Romania – 25 nationally-based firms and 25 headquarters/affiliates of international firms for each country – were content analyzed. In the qualitative component, 20 practitioners from public relations firms in France and 20 practitioners from public relations firms in Romania were interviewed. Overall, data collected through thematic analysis of interviews support data gathered through content analysis of websites. Regarding public relations activities, headquarters/affiliates of international public relations firms in France and in Romania, as well as nationally-based firms in Romania, share two main features: they are heavily influenced by U.S.-based public relations practices; yet they are associated with lower public relations models. By contrast, nationally-based firms in France carry out a different form of public relations, more independent from U.S.-based theories and practices and in the same time more connected to higher models of communication.

Keywords: international public relations; critical theories in public relations; comparative public relations research; mixed research methods; Europe.

1. Critical Theories of Public Relations

As multinational for profit and even nonprofit organizations are gaining economic control, social influence, and cultural dominance on United States markets as well as on other markets around the world, such institutions are shaping the ways in which people live their everyday lives, the ways in which they dress, eat, work or play, raise their children or grow up, enjoy themselves or are entertained, perceive or produce information and news. Critical considerations about the characteristics and the roles of public relations in non-U.S. settings seem all the more necessary, as these issues of control, influence, and dominance have become increasingly important to consider in a world torn between globalization imperatives and recession pressures, and as people's everyday lives, activities, thoughts, and feelings have been changed and sometimes crushed because of such imperatives and pressures.

As this study attempts to problematize public relations rather than take it for granted, it belongs to and it becomes part of the critical paradigm of public relations studies. In a critical approach, discussing institutional and corporate communication discourses and practices regarding a particular society becomes a way to understand the power of institutions and cor-

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porations over various publics and regular people in the respective society, or to assess the ideological and the hegemonic tendencies in the respective society and internationally (Moffitt, 1992, 2005; L'Etang & Pieczka, 1996, 2006; Mickey, 2003). Additionally, in a critical approach, documenting people's ideas on how public relations is and how it should be is turned into an opportunity to document sites of power and issues related to justice or injustice domestically and internationally (Badaraco, 1990; Toth & Heath, 1992; Leichty, 2003; Roper, 2005; Heath, Toth, & Waymer, 2009). This study features a combination of the critical reflection on U.S.-based public relations with the applied research on how U.S.-based models shape French and Romanian public relations practices.

Inspired by the considerations of Stuart Hall (1980, 1982) and of other theorists who have attempted to depict historical and current features of the critical paradigm (see Jansen, 2002), this study looks for and at points where lines are disrupted and elements are displaced in discourses and practices, namely for and at those points where lines are disrupted and elements are displaced in the communication and the activities of public relations firms and professionals in France and Romania. For example, the study examines discrepancies between official statements of international corporations claiming to work in different parts of the world with diversified practices and research results showing that there are few differences among the ways in which such corporations function in various settings. I also reflect on discrepancies between the claims of regional independence in public relations practices made by numerous practitioners in France and Romania and often the uniform ways in which they conduct business.

In addition, following the examples of several critical scholars in public relations, this study examines public relations in France and Romania in terms of ideological implications. For example, this study considers the availability or lack of availability of certain public relations activities in connection with the material resources and power relations identified. Thus, this study provides an opportunity for a type of public relations research that is well grounded in comparison not only in what concerns spaces but also in what concerns issues.

2. Mixed Methods for Considering Public Relations

In their book *Quantitative-Qualitative Research Methodology: Exploring the Interactive Continuum*, Isadore Newman and Carolyn R. Benz (1998) write:

Qualitative and quantitative research strategies and their underlying presuppositions have been increasingly debated since the early 1980s as though one or the other should eventually emerge as superior. We reject the dichotomy assumed by this debate. We take the position that the two philosophies are neither mutually exclusive (i.e. one need not totally commit to either one or the other) nor interchangeable (i.e. one cannot merge methodologies with no concern for underlying assumptions). Rather, we present them as interactive places on a methodological and philosophical continuum... (p. xi)

Placed on a continuum, methods can be understood not in terms of whether or not they employ numbers, but rather in terms of how they consider quantification. Researchers at the quantitative end of the continuum affirm the assignment and the analysis of numbers as entirely independent of the researching subject, whereas researchers at the qualitative end of the continuum reject the attribution and interpretation of numbers as solely dependent on the researching subject. In-between these extreme positions, there are numerous possibilities to collect and utilize numerical data while acknowledging that the collection of such data is not neutral and the usage of such data is not absolute (see Berger, 2000).

In tune with the idea of the continuum is the notion of mixed methods research. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), mixed methods research is “a class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative research techniques... into a single study” (p. 17). Proponents of mixed method research are grounded in the belief that middle of the way positions on the continuum are not ontologically, epistemologically, and ideologically incompatible but may be closer to one another than to the extreme positions, whereas extreme positions on the continuum are indeed incompatible. As such, proponents of such research have stated that when they are used in conjunction quantitative and qualitative methods not only complement one another but also have potential for informing each other (see Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Mixed methods research has several advantages. As Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) wrote, quantitative research methods have often been directed toward theory verification and qualitative research methods toward theory generation, but with mixed methods a researcher can do both. In addition, mixed methods provide opportunities to explore the multifaceted aspects of various issues. Whether results of the quantitative and qualitative parts of a mixed method study converge or diverge, such results lead to insights into the complexity of the problematics researched. And whether the results of the quantitative and the qualitative parts of the mixed methods study provide a coherent image or offer fragmented images of the issue analyzed, such results give the researcher to continuously reassess the issues as well as the means for interpreting issues (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 17).

To depict and interpret a variety of issues about public relations in France and Romania, including their similarities and differences and their dependence on or independence from U.S. public relations theories and practices, as well as to challenge and problematize predominant and long taken for granted notions about public relations, this study has employed a content analysis of website materials and a thematic analysis of interviews. Efforts have been made to corroborate the data from the content analysis with the data from the interviews and to provide as many connections as possible between the two sides of the study.

In the quantitative component of the study, the websites of 50 firms in France and 50 firms in Romania – 25 nationally-based firms and 25 headquarters/affiliates of international firms for each country – were content analyzed. The critical interpretation of the content analysis offered opportunities for considering the dissemination of public relations practices, and the formation of institutional ideologies through public relations, in the European context. In the qualitative component of the study, 20 practitioners from public relations firms in France and 20 practitioners from public relations firms in Romania were interviewed. Interviewees were selected from among public relations practitioners in nationally-based as well as in international firms in France and Romania, such as to include individuals with different demographic profiles who work in different organizational environments. Interviews provided a chance to document and interpret opinions about how the public relations profession is and should be in organizations in the two countries examined.

3. Selected Results from the Content Analysis

One set of elements considered through the content analysis of website materials were the number and the types of activities pursued by nationally-based public relations firms and by headquarters of international firms in France and Romania. These issues are significant be-

cause examining how many things and what kinds of things public relations practitioners are deemed to do on a daily basis gives the researcher an opportunity to examine what types of influences and authorities are at work in a public relations firm.

Regarding the number of activities, the data reveals significant differences between nationally-based public relations firms and headquarters of international public relations firms in France. As identified from information presented on the websites of the nationally-based firms examined for France, two such firms feature under three types of activities, 12 firms showcase 3-5 types of activities, 11 firms feature 6-10 types of activities, and no firm had over 10 types of activities. As reported on websites by French headquarters of international firms, six such firms feature 3-5 activities, 13 firms showcase 6-10 types of activities, and six firms present over 10 types of activities. Quantity of public relations items seems to be related to amount of money and number of resources available: it is clear that French headquarters of international firms have more capacities than nationally-based firms in this country.

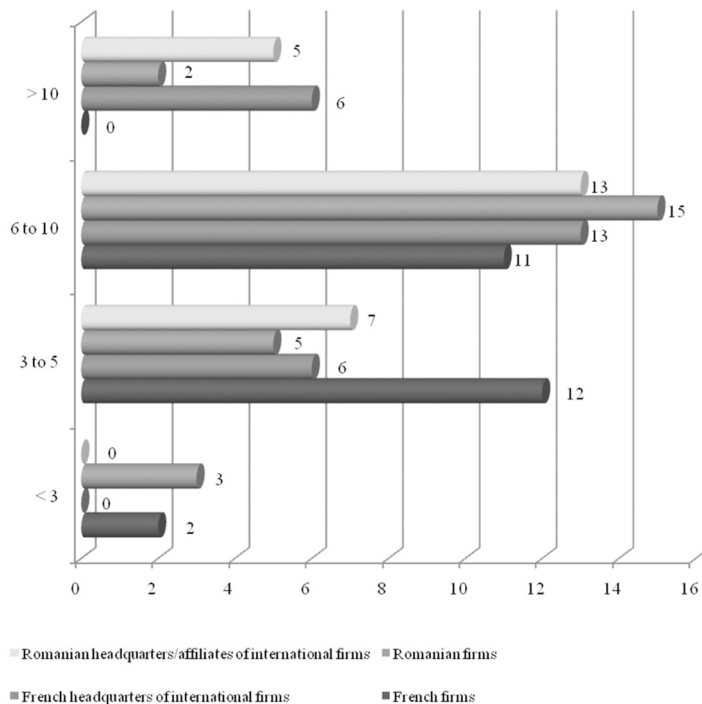
Additionally, it has resulted from the website analysis of public relations firms in Romania that three of the 25 nationally-based public relations firms analyzed have under three types of activities, five such firms have 3-5 types of activities, 15 have 6-10 types of activities, and two have over 10 types of activities. It has also resulted from the website analysis that seven of the 25 headquarters/affiliates of international public relations firms analyzed for Romania have 3-5 types of activities, 13 headquarters/affiliates have 6-10 types of activities, and 5 such firms have over 10 types of activities. It can be asserted from the data collected that the numbers of activities reported on the websites of nationally-based firms and of headquarters/affiliates of international firms in Romania are similar, with most public relations firms featuring on the websites 6-10 activities and a smaller number of firms declaring on their websites 3-5 activities.

Overall, the highest number of activities as reported on the websites was recorded for nationally-based public relations firms in Romania. In close proximity in terms of number of activities specified on websites were the headquarters/affiliates of international public relations firms in Romania. Also in close proximity in terms of number of activities declared on the websites were the headquarters of public relations firms in France. It seems interesting that nationally-based public relations firms as well as headquarters/affiliates of international public relations firms in Romania report such high numbers of activities, even higher activities than headquarters of international public relations firms in France, although another component of this study shows that headquarters of international public relations firms in France have more clients. One possible explanation, that to some extent shows flexibility and to some extent might raise ethical issues, is that public relations firms in Romania declare on their websites all of the activities that they know of and they might consider performing if clients ask or in the future, rather than declaring on their websites the activities that they have offered or they currently offer. Another possible explanation is that public relations firms in Romania contract full packages of public relations activities and then outsources some of the activities to other firms on the market; thus, multiple firms work collaboratively on the same project although only one firm has won the pitch. It has also resulted from this research that nationally-based public relations firms in France select much more carefully the portfolio of activities that they showcase on their websites, and that some such firms are more specialized in terms of activities. This data is presented synthetically in Figure 1.

In addition to the number of activities, types of activities were considered. The types of activities featured in the coding scheme correspond to the four models of public relations

coined by several U.S. scholars of a functionalist orientation (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1978/2000; Grunig, 1992; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006): writing and editing, multimedia production, and media placement are connected with the one way asymmetric model, project administration, research, and media contacts are linked to the one way symmetric model, training and counseling are connected to the two way symmetric model, and conflict resolution and integration are linked to the two way symmetric model. In addition, to leave space for formulating ideas that might not be in tune with those expressed within the U.S. dominant paradigm of public relations scholarship, a rubric of “other (specify)” was added to the coding scheme.

Figure 1. Number of activities.



Among the 25 nationally-based public relations firms examined for France, 21 report on their websites to have activities related to writing and editing, seven to multimedia production, four to project administration, three to research, 23 to media contacts, seven to training, 17 to counseling, six to conflict resolution, and 10 to communication integration. In comparison, among the 25 French headquarters of international public relations firms analyzed, 23 specify on their websites to have activities related to writing and editing, 22 to multimedia production, 23 to media placement, 21 to project administration, 17 to research, nine to media contacts, seven to training, ten to counseling, four to crisis management, and two to communication integration.

Several observations are particularly interesting to be made. While both nationally-based public relations firms and headquarters of international public relations firms in France have a heavy load of public relations writing and editing, the international organizations also do a lot of multimedia production while the nationally-based organizations are less oriented towards

this type of activity. This, again, could be explained through the amount of resources and of capabilities available. However, if we are to look at further types of activities presented on the websites, nationally-based public relations firms in France seem to do better in terms of activities if viewed either through the lenses of the U.S. dominant paradigm of public relations scholarship or through alternative lenses.

First, let's consider issues within the logic of the mainstream U.S. public relations scholarship. From what is reported on their websites, French headquarters of international public relations firms undertake activities primarily related to one way asymmetrical communication (writing and editing, multimedia production, media placement) and secondarily related to one way symmetrical communication (project administration, research, and to some extent establishing and maintaining media contacts). In the areas of two way asymmetric and two way symmetric communication, such headquarters report significantly less activities. Nationally-based public relations firms in France, on the other hand, are, from what they report on their websites, more grounded in two way asymmetrical communication (especially regarding media contacts) than in one way communication, and also advance more towards the area of two way symmetrical communication. Moreover, nationally-based firms in France report more activities of counseling, crisis management, and communication integration than French headquarters of international firms. This means that, although overall nationally-based firms undertake less activities than headquarters of international firms in France, the nationally-based firms have higher numbers of two way asymmetrical activities (training and counseling) and of two way symmetrical activities (crisis management and communication integration).

Let's now consider issues related to the rubric "other (specify)" under types of activities in the coding scheme for the content analysis. Activities that were specified on the websites of French headquarters of international public relations firms and that could not be included in the rubrics already provided in the scheme were related to promotion of goods and services, branding and trading, sales and planning for operation expansions. Such activities are typically integrated in areas adjacent to public relations such as advertising and marketing, and can still be associated with the predominant U.S. public relations principles. By contrast, activities that were mentioned on the websites of nationally-based public relations firms in France and that did not fall in the rubrics provided in the scheme referred to training in and pursuit of environmental communication, to communication through the sciences as well as the arts, to communication within the francophone world, or to tracing the history of an organization. Such activities seem situated outside of business and administrative concerns and also configure and belong to models of communication that are more grounded in a multiplicity of possibilities and more critical.

Regarding types of activities, nationally-based public relations firms in Romania report on their websites the following: 25 firms activities of writing and editing, 23 firms activities of multimedia production, 22 firms activities of media placement, 19 firms activities of project administration, 17 firms activities of research, six firms activities of training, two firms activities of counseling, and 16 firms activities of crisis management. In comparison, Romanian headquarters/affiliates of international firms present on their websites the following: 24 headquarters/affiliates activities of writing and editing, 16 headquarters/affiliates activities of multimedia production, 25 headquarters/affiliates activities of media placement, 20 headquarters/affiliates activities of project administration, 18 headquarters/affiliates activities of research, two headquarters/affiliates activities of media contacts, eight headquarters/affiliates activities of training, three headquarters/affiliates activities of counseling, and 18 head-

quarters/affiliates activities of crisis management. Again, the large number of public relations activities featured on websites across nationally-based and international organizations in Romania is rather large, and it seems that many such firms declare all types of activities that they are aware of or they might want to further undertake rather than the types of activities that they have done for their clients in the past and they do for their clients at present.

As expected, public relations firms in Romania do a lot of writing and editing as well as of media placement. Interestingly, nationally-based firms do more multimedia production than headquarters/affiliates of international firms in Romania; a possible explanation could be the age and education of the employees in such organizations (with domestic firms hiring more recent graduates that are more technologically savvy but have less established reputation). Significant numbers of both nationally-based firms and headquarters/affiliates of international firms in Romania report on their websites activities of project administration, research and/or evaluation, and crisis management. Like in the case of France, this data can be interpreted within the logic of the U.S. dominant paradigm as well as outside of this type of logic.

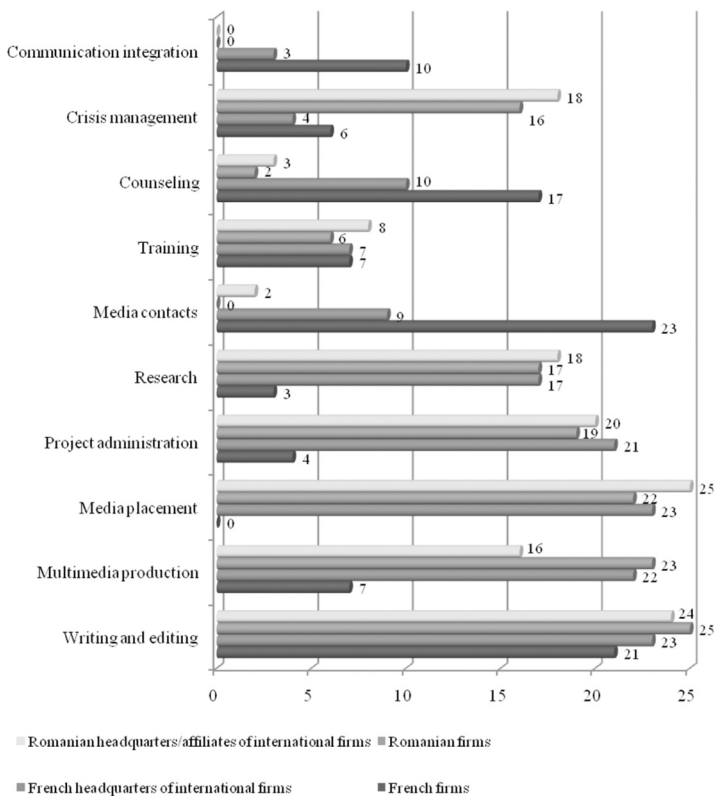
Let's start by applying the U.S. dominant scholarly framework. From what they declare on their websites, both Romanian firms and Romanian headquarters/affiliates of international firms seem to have primarily public relations activities connected to the one way asymmetrical model of communication (writing and editing, multimedia production, and media placement), and secondarily activities related to the one way symmetrical model of communication (media placement and project administration). Activities of media contacts, typically also connected with the one way symmetrical model, are rarely reported by either domestic firms or headquarters/affiliates of international firms: for the organizations studied for Romania, the primary purpose of the communication process is deemed to be the production and transmission of information from the client to various groups including the media, policy makers, and various customers or audiences, rather than building, maintaining, and expanding long-term relationships and coalitions with media professionals or other types of professionals. Few public relations firms in Romania, either domestic or international, report on their websites activities related to two way asymmetrical models of communication (training and counseling), and when such activities are reported few details are provided about the contexts or the settings in which training and counseling were offered to clients. In addition, activities of communication integration, that have been positioned as two way symmetrical communication, seem absent from the Romanian public relations landscape. Numerous nationally-based firms or headquarters/affiliates of international firms in Romania often report on their websites activities related to crisis management, that have also been associated by scholars with two way symmetrical communication; however, one possible explanation for this large number is that, in this case, crisis management is thought more as addressing a crisis after it has occurred (which would be associated with one way models of communication) rather than preventing any potential crisis from happening by means of good planning and effective exchanges.

In addition to the previously mentioned activities, nationally-based public relations firms as well as international headquarters/affiliates of international firms in Romania mention on their websites activities of marketing, advertising, and publicity, as well as an array of financial activities ranging from accounting to investment and trade to financial communication. These are all areas related to the ones included in the models of communication configured within the U.S. dominant paradigm. These firms also report activities, from transportation to translations, that are only loosely associated with communication. Most nationally-based firms and some of

the headquarters/affiliates of international firms analyzed for Romania declare on their websites to be different, innovative, with activities that are cutting edge and out of the box. Yet this research has not identified many activities mentioned on the websites that would not be grounded in the models of communication configured within the U.S. dominant paradigm.

Overall, both types of public relations firms examined in France and both types of public relations firms examined in Romania reported on their websites to do a type of activity typically associated with one way asymmetric communication, namely writing and editing. However, regarding all other types of activities, Romanian nationally-based firms, Romanian headquarters/affiliates of international firms, and French headquarters of international firms differ from French nationally-based firms. Romanian nationally-based firms, Romanian headquarters/affiliates of international firms, and French headquarters of international firms reported on their websites activities primarily related to either one way asymmetric or one way symmetric communication (multimedia production, media placement, project administration, research), whereas French nationally-based firms specified on their websites activities primarily related to two way asymmetric and two way symmetric communication (media contacts, counseling, communication integration). Some activities typically related to two way types of communication, such as training and crisis management, were reported on the websites of both types of firms in both countries (with higher numbers on the websites of Romanian firms, in which case issues regarding declaring activities without actually doing them could again be raised). This data is represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Types of activities.



4. Selected Results from the Interviews

Public relations activities were approached not only as part of the content analysis but also as part of the interviews. Interesting results have been derived from the examination of what interviewees have stated about the activities performed by the firms employing them, as well as from the cross-examination of the content analysis and interview data.

All interviewees working for nationally-based public relations firms in France stated that activities accomplished by these firms, as well as by other firms they know of, include writing and editing news releases and media packages, articles for newspapers and specialized magazines, and other forms of materials that describe an organization and promote the positive features of an organization. In addition, most such interviewees mentioned production and dissemination of packages that comprise not just written materials but also audio and video materials. Other activities that were mentioned several times were: training, doing workshops and other meetings through which clients meet public relations professionals and other clients; counseling, brainstorming sessions and other types of discussions to help clients learn about themselves; and crisis management, providing ways to respond to situations of conflict. But most interviewees working for nationally-based public relations firms focused either on relationship building, or on integrated communication, or on both. Media contacts, as well as various other organizational and community contacts, seem to be at the core of the public relations activities in this type of firms. A non-executive man interviewee said: "When I start working for a client, I first ask who have you worked with, what other firms, what community groups, what media people, and then I start building from there." Another non-executive man interviewee stated: "Above everything else I am a relationship broker. I have become personal friends with many people who help my work and others who keep me grounded." An executive woman interviewee said: "You simply can't just send materials to the media people, they won't read those or they will be upset with you. You have to talk to them, over coffee or something, and tell them why your material is good and who will benefit from it." The articulation of various aspects of different communication processes was also deemed as an important activity. An executive man interviewee said: "We give both simple information and in-depth ensembles of positions. We look both at a concrete situation and at the social environment." Asked how public relations activities should be, practitioners employed in nationally-based firms in France had an overall sense that there are too many activities and too few people, and has a general wish to do activities slower, perhaps one activity at a time.

Interviewees employed by headquarters of international firms in France also discussed as activities they undertake writing of different materials and production of multimedia materials. Several such interviewees described in detail the requirements of different written formats and types of production. Media relations were addressed across interviews, and good relationships with journalists were mentioned but not as a focal point in these interviews. Media monitoring and the monitoring of several other types of information including financial and legislative data were also considered important by multiple interviewees. The most often discussed and arguably the most important issues mentioned by interviewees employed by headquarters of international firms in France were project management and research/evaluation. A non-executive woman interviewee stated: "We decide together with our clients what projects they want from us and what projects we can offer." An executive woman interviewee said: "We work on large but manageable projects that involve everything from organiz-

ing events to making them known.” In addition, when discussing activities many such practitioners affirmed that no activity can be done without the right amount of research before starting the activity and a good amount of evaluation at the end of the activity. A non-executive man interviewee said: “We know how important research and evaluation are when clients ask for them and audience members ask for them.” Training, counseling, and crisis management were also discussed several times. An executive man interviewee presented an overview of types of training offered by the firm he works for. When asked what activities should public relations practitioners do, interviewees working for headquarters of international firms also mentioned well managed projects, and several such interviewees also talked about lobbying.

Comparatively, nationally-based and headquarters of international firms in France seem to share a number of activities including writing, multimedia, counseling, training, and conflict management. However, interviewees from nationally-based firms declared a focus on relationships and integration, done in spite of apparent heavy loads of work, whereas interviewees from headquarters of international firms talked about manageable and well managed projects and about research and evaluation.

All public relations practitioners from nationally-based firms as well as from headquarters/affiliates of international firms in Romania specified as their main activities writing and editing and media placement. Several interviewees from across the two types of firms mentioned that they produce texts for the media, some that are “real public relations” that would be placed in the media for free and some others that are “more like marketing” that would be placed in the media for payment. A few interviewees stated that media people like to receive a combination of such materials, some that they would choose to publish and some that would increase the bottom line of their organization. In addition, several interviewees specified that they take materials previously written by their clients or produced by the management of their clients and improve them, make them more attractive for the media or more in tune with a specific type of media niche. For example, an executive woman from a nationally-based firm affirmed that her public relations operation has mostly computer companies as clients, and that writing for specialized computer magazines has become an important skill among her employees. Most interviewees said that they organize frequent press conferences for their clients, for some clients every month and for some clients even more often than that. In addition to writing for the media and placements in the media, several interviewees from both nationally-based and headquarters/affiliates of international firms addressed their research activities. Several interviewees mentioned that they do media monitoring and analysis. An executive man interviewee from a nationally-based company stated: “In my firm, we created a very professional database, with research engines... We also participated in the creation of comunicatedepresa.ro, a website with a database of press releases.” An executive man interviewee from a headquarter/affiliate of an international firm said: “We always do research first anyway, but clients indirectly also ask for it. So, when you are asked to do research, you get a briefing from the client about whatever their problem is, but we also then want to do our own background as to say where is this issue, where did it come from.” The same interviewee added: “I always remember to relate to policy issues..., whether there is some regulation or law which is impacting the client’s business.” In addition, one interviewee from a an international firm specified training, another interviewee from an international firm mentioned counseling, and two interviewees both from international firms briefly discussed crisis management. Overall, the activities of public relations firms in Romania seem confined to media production and placement. There seems to be not only a scarcity of such activities, but also a scarcity in the discourses of public relations

practitioners about such activities: the answers provided to this question were the shortest across the interviews, with not just few words but also few specific examples. This comes in sharp contradiction with the multitude of activities reported on the websites of public relations firms in Romania; the contradiction, again, can be explained in terms of an inflation of activities presented on websites.

Romanian public relations practitioners from nationally-based firms and from headquarters/affiliates of international firms also did not provide rich responses to the question of what activities should be offered by public relations firms. Several interviewees from nationally-based firms as well as from international firms discussed again the need for the Romanian market and for Romanian public relations to become more modernized and more mature. Needed activities mentioned included enhanced and more creative media production and placement, increased multimedia production, and increased crisis preparedness. A non-executive male from a nationally-based company mentioned that press conferences could also be accompanied or in some cases replaced by on-site visits and road shows. An executive male from a nationally-based company stated that public relations firms should offer a full range of activities or full service, and should be prepared to export some of the activities to other public relations firms if necessary. This was a very interesting observation, because this desire for full service, and this belief that full service is beneficial to the public relations firms as well as the client even if some parts of the service are outsourced, might explain why many public relations firms in Romania place on their website an array of activities that they might or might not offer. Another executive male from a nationally-based company discussed a situation in which his firm refused to continue offering activities for a client. This interviewee said: "You have to be strong enough to say sorry, we don't work in these terms any more... Which we did, with a major client, a gas station chain in Romania... Because they are so much into marketing that they don't realize that PR is different and it includes other activities and works with other tools." In addition, among the interviewees from headquarters/affiliates of international firms, activities mentioned included keeping clients posted of what is happening in the media and in the business world on a daily basis, promoting the image of the people beyond the companies they work for, and doing activities in a more organized manner. An executive woman interviewee made the following commentary on the lack of coordination of public relations activities in Romania: "PR here is very seasonal: people lose their minds in May and June and everybody wants to communicate, to do something, launch something – and then again in September and October – and after that everything is dead!" A non-executive woman interviewee mentioned reputation counseling and corporate social responsibility activities.

Comparatively, nationally-based and headquarters of international firms in France seem to share a number of activities, especially writing and multimedia. However, interviewees from nationally-based firms declared a focus on relationships and integration, done in spite of apparent heavy loads of work, whereas interviewees from headquarters of international firms talked about manageable and well managed projects and about research and evaluation (in tune with U.S.-based principles). Romanian public relations practitioners also seemed related to U.S.-based principles in what concerns their and their firms' activities. All public relations practitioners from nationally-based firms as well as from headquarters/affiliates of international firms in Romania specified as their main activities writing and editing and media placement. Most interviewees in Romania said that they organize frequent press conferences for their clients, for some clients every month and for some clients even more often than

that. In addition to writing for the media and placements in the media, several interviewees in Romania addressed their research activities. Several interviewees in Romania mentioned that they do media monitoring and analysis. This data is represented in *Figure 3*.

Table 1. Comparative thematic analysis of interviews.

Type and location of firms	Nationally-based firms in France	Headquarters of international firms in France	Public relations firms (nationally-based and headquarters/affiliates) in Romania
Activities	Production and dissemination of media packages Media contacts Training Counseling Crisis management	Production of media/multimedia formats Media monitoring Project management Research and evaluation Other	Writing and editing Media placement Research Media monitoring Other

5. Discussion and Conclusions

I observed from the website research that regarding public relations activities, headquarters/affiliates of international public relations firms in France and in Romania, as well as nationally-based firms in Romania, share two main features: they are heavily influenced by U.S.-based public relations practices; yet they are associated with lower public relations models.

Overall, data collected through thematic analysis of interviews support data gathered through content analysis of websites, in that in France nationally-based firms carry out a different form of public relations that headquarters of international firms (a more two way form of public relations, and an independent from U.S.-based dominant models form of communication), whereas in Romania nationally-based firms and headquarters/affiliates of international firms carry out similar forms of public relations (forms that are relatively one way and heavily dependent on U.S.-based models). In addition, few activities in public relations discussed by interviewees working for nationally-based firms in France were related to U.S.-based mainstream theories, whereas most such items were addressed by interviewees employed by headquarters of international public relations firms in France in terms borrowed from U.S.-based mainstream theories. In Romania, discourses primarily led to U.S.-based approaches, yet there seems to be some space for negotiation of activities, as well as a desire to provide comprehensive activities.

It seems interesting to note that the imitation of U.S.-based practices does not seem to have brought the two way communication models and the excellence in public relations that numerous U.S. public relations scholars have heralded for professionals in other cultural spaces. In contrast, nationally-based public relations firms in France seem to feature public relations activities, services, and definitions that are less dependent on U.S. predominant practices, and are also more connected to higher models of communication. It seems that actually local groundedness might have more potential to bring better communication to public relations than imitation of U.S. precepts.

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Nicoleta CORBU*

La personnalité de marque : une approche cross-culturelle

Résumé : Cet article présente les résultats d'une analyse cross culturelle de la personnalité de marque des automobiles, en tant que porteur de sens des marques locales et globales. Les marques sont discutées dans une perspective sémiotique, comme types spéciaux de signes publicitaire. Le sens des marques se construit différemment en espaces culturels différents, situés dans des positions extrêmes ou intermédiaires sur l'échelle de l'individualisme proposé par Geert Hofstede. Pourtant, il y a des similarités remarquables qui suggèrent des mécanismes de construction du sens semblables dans des cultures différentes.

Mots clé : personnalité de la marque; espaces culturels; individualisme; analyse cross-culturelle.

1. Considérations préliminaires

La publicité est, à part la promotion d'objets, de services etc., une forme de transmettre et de perpétuer des images, des logotypes, des symboles ; par conséquent elle a une dimension socio-culturelle bien évidente, car « la matière de la publicité est sociologique ». C'est pourquoi, affirme Bernard Cathelas, « afin d'orienter le consommateur vers l'acte d'achat, la publicité doit lui présenter en vue d'une identification motivante *une image de soi* en accord avec ses attentes » (Cathelas, 2005/2003, p. 223). Il y a, donc, derrière tout signe ou tout message publicitaire une convention. Du point de vue pragmatique, tout message publicitaire est un acte de langage indirect directif. Le discours publicitaire est un acte complexe indirect, dans le sens proposé par Searle (1969), dont la force illocutionnaire est tellement modifiée que l'acte primaire se traduit pratiquement par l'intention du locuteur, dont le récepteur est d'ailleurs conscient par la conscientisation même du but de toute réclame. Autrement dit, le récepteur décode de manière conventionnelle ce qui est transmis au niveau de la méta-communication, par ce qui est déjà établi au niveau social à l'égard de la communication publicitaire en tant que promotion d'objets au sens large.

Dans ce contexte, les signes publicitaires ont une vie liée indissolublement à la convention de la publicité. Ils sont des signes porteurs de signification sociale ; ils sont par leur nature même des signes intentionnels et conventionnels en même temps. Les signes intentionnels – ou nonnaturels dans l'acception de Grice (1965/1957) – sont toujours produits par un locuteur dans l'intention d'accomplir un but, et leur réception correcte dépend de la reconnaissance de cette intention par le récepteur – dans le cas des signes publicitaires, de la reconnaissance de la convention de la publicité comme acte de langage indirecte directif.

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Parmi les signes publicitaires, la marque occupe une place singulière à cause de sa spécificité d'avoir l'apparence d'un nom propre, dont l'identification n'est pas du tout la seule fonction.

2. Le signe. Une approche quasi-américaine

Avant de montrer les spécificités de la marque en tant que signe publicitaire, il faut préciser l'acception du signe en général dans cet article, et du signe publicitaire en particulier. Il y a, à l'égard de la définition du signe, deux traditions sémiotiques distinctes qui se réclament de leurs « pères fondateurs », Ferdinand de Saussure et Charles Peirce, à savoir la tradition européenne et la tradition américaine. L'approche européenne est construite à partir de l'idée du signe comme entité dyadique, c'est-à-dire comme la combinaison entre *concept* et *image acoustique* ou *signifiant* et *signifié* (Saussure, 1998). D'autre part, la conception américaine conçoit le signe en tant que relation triadique entre un signe (ou *representamen*), un *objet* et un *interprétant* (Peirce, 1996). Dans cet article on propose une définition construite à partir de la conception américaine. Il faut préciser quand même qu'il y a quelques points sur lesquels on propose des conceptualisations différentes.

L'un des problèmes les plus disputés à l'égard de la théorie de Peirce est lié à l'idée de sémiose infinie. Peirce propose que l'interprétant est un signe à son tour, c'est pourquoi il est à son tour une entité triadique qui a un interprétant donc, qui est à son tour un signe et ainsi de suite. Du point de vue du sémioticien américain, les opinions humaines tendent, le long du temps, vers une forme définitive qui est la Vérité. Si un individu dispose de suffisamment de temps et de ressources, le résultat en sera qu'il arrivera à une conclusion définitive, qui est justement la conclusion à laquelle arriverait tout autre individu dans des situations favorables semblables (Peirce, 1958, p. 81).

Dans l'une des lettres à Lady Welby, qui date de mars 1909, Peirce parle des trois types distincts d'interprétants : dynamique, final et immédiat. La conception sémiotique de Peirce, déjà fermement esquissée, avait formulé deux types de signes : le signe-action (ou la sémiose) et le signe-objet (ou *representamen*). Dans ce contexte, trois types d'interprétants sont formulés de la manière suivante : L'interprétant dynamique est l'effet directe produit par un signe sur son Interprète (en. *interpreter*). L'interprétant final est l'effet que le Signe *produirait* dans tout esprit auquel les circonstances permettraient aboutir à l'effet total. L'interprétant immédiat est l'effet totalement non analysé que le signe devrait produire et il serait prédictible qu'il le produise. (Peirce, 1958, p. 413) Toujours dans les mots de Peirce, l'interprétant immédiat est impliqué dans le fait que chaque Signe doit avoir sa propre interprétabilité avant d'arriver à l'Interprète. L'interprétant dynamique est ce qui est expérimenté à chaque acte d'Interprétation et diffère d'une interprétation à l'autre. L'interprétant final est le résultat final de l'Interprétation à la quelle chaque Interprète est censé aboutir si le Signe est suffisamment étudié. (Peirce, 1958, p. 414) Gérard Deledalle, l'un des exégètes remarquables de l'œuvre de Peirce, montre que, en fait, les trois avatars de l'interprétant sont des étapes de son devenir, qui assument des rôles différents dans le processus de la sémiose. (Deledalle, 2000, p. 43)

Il y a, donc, une Vérité ultime (dans le sens de réalité objective) à laquelle l'individu peut arriver ; donc cette réalité objective est cognoscible, en dernière instance. Similairement, il y a un interprétant final, comme forme de connaissance de cette réalité.

Nous croyons que Peirce s'est arrêté, dans l'explication des interprétants, avant de rendre compte de la dimension pragmatique du signe. Il y a deux points sur lesquels nous nous délimi-

tons de la conception peirceen du signe. Nous croyons, avec Peirce, qu'il y a de signification latente dans tout signe. En d'autres mots, la nature même du signe ne peut pas être comprise en ignorant l'idée de signification primaire, autonome, préexistante à l'Interprète. L'interprétant dynamique, ou l'avatar dépendent de l'interprète de l'interprétant, a quelques caractéristiques sur lesquelles il faut insister et qui tiennent de la dimension pragmatique du signe.

Imaginons le signe comme une sphère de signification en expansion continue. Il y a un noyau de cette sphère, qui est l'interprétant immédiat. Le reste de la sphère, construite en cercles concentriques autour du noyau, est un univers de significations en expansion continue, qui peuvent être actualisées en contextes différents par des interprètes différents, probablement jamais identiques ni même pour le même interprète à des moments différents. Cette sphère se trouve dans une expansion continue parce que l'interprète se trouve, du point de vue cognitif, en expansion continue. Le même signe dans le même contexte pour le même interprète à des moments différents, construit et actualise des sphères de significations différentes. Nous insistons sur le verbe « construire », parce que l'interprétant dynamique est une forme de création continue, mais additive en même temps. En d'autres mots, les expériences antérieures de l'interprète peuvent actualiser et modifier dans une certaine mesure une sphère ancienne de significations, mais elle ne sera jamais identique à l'antérieure, mais peut se superposer partiellement. L'idée de sphère de signification en expansion continue refuse l'idée d'interprétant final et, en même temps, l'idée de réalité cognoscible et vérité immuable auxquelles on peut aboutir finalement avec suffisamment de temps et de ressources. Il y a, à notre avis, une réalité indépendante des individus, mais elle ne peut être connue que de manière subjective, individuellement. Pourtant, le fait même de son existence, explique la possibilité des réceptions semblables des signes (même si jamais identiques) par des interprètes différents, en d'autres mots la superposition massive, mais non totale, des sphères de signification du même signe.

La distance que ne prenons par rapport à Peirce consiste, donc, dans une situation épistémique différente et qui implique le besoin d'apporter une dimension pragmatique au signe afin de résoudre la question de la sémiologie infinie. L'interprète reste, à notre avis, un élément clé du signe, qui explique la coupure de la chaîne de la sémiologie infinie par desinstanciations ponctuelles de l'interprétant dynamique qui n'arrive jamais à ce que Peirce appelait un interprétant final.

3. La marque en tant que signe

La marque occupe une place privilégiée parmi les signes publicitaires en général, parce qu'elle est porteuse de significations sociales qui s'accumulent et se modifient dans le temps, tandis que le signe en tant que forme reste le même. En même temps, elle « met en scène des mythes culturels et identitaires et sert à incarner un récit » (Heilbrunn, 2007, p. 29)

Du point de vue sémiotique, la marque a été définie comme un mécanisme capable de produire un discours, lui offrir de signification et le communiquer au récepteur. (Scolari, 2008, p. 179). En même temps, la marque se présente comme un vecteur de significations qui contient un faisceau de valeurs et propose un contrat aux consommateurs (ses lecteurs). Une interprétation sémiotique de la marque qui inclut son caractère narratif peut être construite sur l'idée de mythe de Barthes, à partir de la distinction dénotation-connotation. Les recherches des dernières décennies ont montré quand même la réalité encore plus complexe de la production de la signification et de l'interprétation des marques.

De notre point de vue, la marque est un signe qui a tout d'abord une fonction d'identification. Il y a, par conséquent, une signification primaire de la marque qui est incluse dans un système de signification plus complexe. On définit le système de signification de la marque comme le faisceau de significations culturelles et de constructions mentales associées à une marque (Danesi, 2006, p. 29). Tout signe publicitaire associé à une marque évoque dans l'esprit du récepteur un faisceau de significations qu'il attribue à la marque en question. Pourtant, toutes les significations ne s'actualisent pas à toute instance, mais de façon différenciée, en fonction du contexte.

Les significations associées à une marque sont intrinsèquement liées à la culture où la marque est décodée. En outre, les marques peuvent devenir à leur tour des médiateurs des significations culturelles et symboliques. Les significations associées à une marque ont deux sources différentes : d'une part les significations précodifiées et communiquées par le créateur de la marque, surtout dans les phases initiales du développement d'une marque, d'autre part les significations dérivées, créées et attribuées par les consommateurs, suite à leurs propres expériences partagées avec (ou par) d'autres consommateurs (Batey, 2008, p. XV).

A notre avis, ce qui est spécifique à la marque en tant que signe est le fait qu'elle est un signe vide de sens à l'origine, qui se remplit de signification(s) dans le temps, et ses diverses significations s'actualisent en fonction du contexte social ou des instances de communication publicitaire. L'instance d'actualisation est comme la lumière d'un réflecteur, elle favorise une certaine zone de la plage de significations, laissant dans l'ombre ou dans la pénombre les autres significations. Mais, comme pour tout autre signe, il y a un niveau de signification globale qu'un récepteur peut actualiser alors qu'il pense tout simplement à une marque.

Bref, il y a deux distinctions essentielles entre les marques et les signes ordinaires : la marque est un signe vide de sens à l'origine qui a une évolution diachronique spectaculaire, étant un signe dont la signification est plus fluide, plus inconstante, volatile, plus prédisposée au changement et, en même temps, la marque est un signe intentionnel, les récepteurs ont inévitablement à l'esprit la convention de la publicité comme acte de langage indirecte directif (demande d'acheter un produit, un service, une image, une idée etc.).

Par conséquent, aucune signification de la marque n'est jamais donnée une fois pour toutes. Elle est un signe en évolution continue, un signe dont l'interprétant devient le prisonnier d'une sémiose infinie, mais non dans le sens proposé par Peirce (l'interprétant qui est, à son tour, un signe qui a un interprétant qui est, à son tour, un signe etc.), mais dans le sens d'une migration et réadaptation continues du signe aux réalités toujours changeantes de la vie sociale. C'est pourquoi la signification d'une marque n'abolira jamais la sémiose infinie dans une habitude, comme le pensait Eco (1988/1980, p. 254) à l'égard du signe en général, mais elle générera de nouvelles significations et la recréation continue des significations déjà existantes.

4. La personnalité de marque. Vers une approche sémiotique

Dans les recherches sur la marque, celle-ci est présentée comme ayant une existence propre, elle possède une identité, une personnalité et en même temps agit par elle-même, elle lance un nouveau produit, change de nom, regroupe des produits sous son nom etc. (Merunka, 2002, p. 3). L'une des composantes principales qui englobe les significations attachées à une marque est donc la personnalité de la marque.

La personnalité de marque a été définie comme le faisceau de caractéristiques associées à une marque (Aaker D., 1996 ; Aaker J., 1997; Kim, Han & Park, 2001) ou la somme des

traits de personnalité transférés des personnes associées à une marque (Bosnjak, Bochmann & Hufschmidt, 2007), les qualités assignées aux marques suite à un besoin d'anthropomorphisation des objets pour faciliter les interactions des gens avec le monde inanimé ou un faisceau d'inférences de personnalité construites par le consommateur par l'observation répétée des comportements dictés par la marque et qui sont cohérentes avec le rôle perçu de la marque en tant que partenaire dans une relation dyadique (Fournier, 1998). En même temps, la personnalité de la marque reflète la façon dont les gens *sentent* à l'égard d'une marque, plutôt que ce qu'ils pensent que la marque *fait* ou *est*. (Keller, 1998, p. 97). Cette association des traits de personnalité « permettrait au consommateur d'exprimer une certaine vision de lui-même, de telle sorte que la consommation lui procure des bénéfices symboliques valorisants » (Vernette, 2003, p. 3).

Il y a en même temps une composante économique de la personnalité de la marque, qui offre un outil stratégique pour améliorer le positionnement d'une marque sur le marché, par attirer les consommateurs sensibles aux traits de personnalité attachés à la marque en question (Ferrandi, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2003/4, p. 157).

La construction d'une telle personnalité peut aider les stratégies des marques en enrichissant leur compréhension des perceptions et des attitudes des gens à l'égard d'une marque et contribuant ainsi à la différenciation de l'identité de marque (Aaker D., 1996, p. 150). Les chercheurs ont tenté de comprendre les raisons pour lesquelles les consommateurs apprécient les significations symboliques associées aux marques. En passant en revue les recherches des dernières années, deux chercheurs de University of Technology (Lau & Phau, 2007) montrent qu'il y a de différentes perspectives déjà étudiées. La perspective de l'écologie sociale souligne le fait que le sens symbolique associé à la personnalité de marque offre au consommateur la possibilité d'esquisser *le soi* qu'il veut dévoiler, ce qui permet aux consommateurs de compenser pour les inadéquations ou les inconséquences qu'ils trouvent du soi propre, en comparaison du soi désiré (ou le soi idéal). Dans une perspective psychologique, les consommateurs peuvent réaliser des relations dyadiques avec les marques qui sont humanisées, anthropomorphisées, leur permettant une réflexion évaluative d'un produit. Par conséquent, apparaît un besoin puissant d'établir des relations avec les marques dont ils apprécient les personnalités, tout comme ils feraient au cas des interactions avec les humains. Une troisième perspective, le marketing (Grohman, 2009), suggère qu'en fait les gens de marketing sont ceux qui suggèrent que les marques ont certaines caractéristiques humaines et alors les gens construisent des cartes avec une large gamme de traits humains, le genre y inclus, à l'égard d'une certaine marque.

La personnalité de marque est le résultat du processus de *branding*, vu comme une « tentative de 'personnaliser' les produits de manière stratégique, de leur offrir une histoire et une personnalité » (Power & Hauge, 2008, p. 124). Elle peut inclure des caractéristiques démographiques (Aaker J., 1997), telles le genre (par exemple les cigarettes Virginia Slim sont appréciées comme féminines, tandis que Marlboro masculines), l'âge (Apple est considéré jeune, par rapport à IBM, plus âgé) ou la classe sociale (les voitures Ferrari en comparaison des voitures Trabant). La personnalité de marque se construit à partir de trois sources : les associations mentales des consommateurs avec la marque, l'image de la marque qu'un compagnon essaie d'imposer et les attributs du produit. (Lin, 2010, p. 5)

Généralement, la personnalité de marque est caractérisée par des traits communs humains. Le besoin de mesurer cette caractéristique de la marque, de quantifier les qualités anthropomorphes des marques, a conduit, dans le temps, à la construction d'un schéma (ou une échelle), proposée par Jennifer Aaker et développé et testée aux Etats-Unis, qui comprend cinq dimen-

sions essentielles (*the big five*) : Sincérité (*Sincerity*), Excitation (*Excitement*), Compétence (*Competence*), Sophistication (*Sophistication*), Rudesse (*Ruggedness*) (Aaker J., 1997).

L'échelle proposée par Aaker a été testée et adaptée dans de divers espaces culturels – par exemple en France, Espagne, Corée, au Japon (Koebel & Ladwein, 1999; Ladhari, Boulaire & Nyeck, 2004; Sung & Tinkham, 2005), les résultats montrant des différences spécifiques, locales. Pourtant, comme règle, généralement, quatre des cinq dimensions proposées par Aaker se retrouvent dans d'autres cultures, et quelques autres (une, deux, trois au maximum) apparaissent comme spécifiques aux espaces étudiés.

Les chercheurs ont suggéré que la personnalité de marque renforce les préférences des consommateurs, évoque leurs émotions, accroît le niveau de confiance et de loyauté. C'est pourquoi les marques ont été perçues comme porteuses de culture, en d'autres mots les significations contenues dans une marque peuvent servir de représentants et peuvent institutionnaliser les valeurs et les croyances d'une culture. (Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera, 2001).

Les marques sont vues, donc, comme porteuses de signification anthropomorphisée, qui suivent une voie de transfert des biens vers la marque, ensuite de la marque vers les utilisateurs (McCracken, 1989). Les gérants (*endorsers*) des traits d'une marque sont les célébrités qui promeuvent les produits associés à une marque, les managers des compagnies qui produisent les produits en question ou les personnes qui apparaissent dans les réclames. Ce premier pas esquisse un premier faisceau de qualités associées à une marque. Le transfert de ces qualités au consommateur est un processus compliqué, qui tient non seulement de l'achat (et l'expérimentation répétée) des biens, mais surtout de l'image créée à l'esprit des consommateurs. La personnalité de marque peut être liée aux valeurs personnelles ; les recherches montrent que, au cas de la consommation de biens et de services, le comportement peut être compris à partir des valeurs personnelles qui dictent la sélection d'une marque précise d'une catégorie (Pitts & Woodside, 1983, p. 37). Développer une personnalité de la marque saillante peut être interprété comme une façon d'établir une relation durable avec les consommateurs. (Kim, Magnini & Singal, 2011, p. 449). En même temps, les « possessions » peuvent devenir des extensions du soi (Woodruffe-Burton & Wakenshaw, 2011, p. 70), ce qui fait de la personnalité de la marque un élément clé dans les habitudes de consommation.

Située en contexte sémiotique, la personnalité de marque peut être définie comme le faisceau de significations connotées culturellement, qui caractérisent la marque comme signemiroir par un système de « prismes » réflecteurs, qui sont les produits (ou biens), l'acheteur et la marque en soi. Autrement dit, la construction des significations associées à la personnalité de marque se réalise comme transfert de sens dans un système complexe de « réflexions » construites en contexte culturel.

C'est intéressant d'observer que, dans cette chaîne de fixation du sens, les biens semblent toujours être le point de départ constant. Dans le monde des biens, les signes sont toujours, dans un sens, plus motivés et moins arbitraires que dans le monde du langage (McCracken, 1986, p. 74). Le fait que les biens eux-mêmes ont une signification est souvent évident au consommateur, mais parfois caché. Les consommateurs peuvent voir et manipuler de manière consciente des significations culturelles, telles le statut d'un certain bien, mais, la plupart du temps, les consommateurs reconnaissent la signification culturelle « cachée » derrière les biens seulement en situations exceptionnelles. Par contre, dans le cas des marques, les consommateurs sont conscients dans la majorité des cas du fait qu'il y a des attributs, des traits, des caractéristiques associées aux marques, même s'ils ne les actualisent pas toutes en même temps.

La signification derrière la marque fonctionne, à notre avis, de la même manière que les discours idéologiques, dans le sens proposé par les études culturelles. Des formulations par-

ticulaires des discours pourraient être idéologisées non à cause des *bias* conscients ou des distorsions volontaires de leur contenu de surface, mais parce qu'ils ont été générés ou transformés à partir d'une matrice limitée de significations et de contextes concurrentes des idéologies au sein desquelles ils ont été construits (Hall, 1982, p. 72). Tout comme les locuteurs natifs produisent en général des phrases parfaitement correctes du point de vue grammatical, mais ils sont – à de rares exceptions – incapables d'expliquer les règles à base desquelles ils ont formulé les phrases, tandis qu'une langue étrangère est acquise à partir des règles de grammaire, montre Stuart Hall, de la même manière l'idéologie émerge de la grammaire propre et la plupart du temps difficile à percevoir, d'un même cadre référentiel. Nous croyons que c'est de la même manière que les significations des marques « s'insinuent ». Elles se développent avec le récepteur, dans le même cadre culturel, conceptuel et, en dernière instance, personnel, sans être saisies la plupart du temps. Nous sommes tous des « locuteurs natifs » des marques auprès desquelles nous nous développons en tant qu'individus.

5. La personnalité de marque et les différences culturelles

Les recherches dans le domaine de la publicité, surtout à l'égard de la marque en tant qu'image ou personnalité, privilégient la distinction cultures individualistes vs. cultures collectivistes dans la définition culturelle de la personnalité de marque (Triandis, 1989; Trafimow & Triandis, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Briley, Morris & Simonson, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 2003).

Les cultures collectivistes sont les cultures où l'intérêt du groupe est plus important que l'intérêt individuel, tandis que les cultures individualistes sont les cultures où l'intérêt individuel compte le plus (Hofstede, 1991, p. 50). Dans les sociétés collectivistes, l'individu est intégré dans des groupes sociaux formés par les membres de la famille élargie (*in-groupes*) dès son enfance, groupes qui continuent à protéger l'individu le long de sa vie, en demandant en revanche loyauté inconditionnée. Dans ces cultures, la confrontation directe avec une autre personne est considérée impolie et non désirable. Dans le même temps, dans les familles collectivistes, les enfants apprennent à emprunter les opinions des autres, étant en harmonie continue avec l'opinion du groupe. L'opinion individuelle n'existe pas, elle est prédéterminée par le groupe. Dans les familles individualistes, d'autre part, les enfants sont encouragés à penser d'eux-mêmes, dans le sens de construire et opérer avec des opinions individuelles, qui reflètent leur personnalité, une personnalité faible reflétant seulement les opinions des autres. (Hofstede, 1991, p. 59)

Dans les cultures collectivistes, il y a une pression constante d'obéir aux normes du groupe ou aux normes sociales (Lam, 2007), tandis que les cultures individualistes privilégient les buts personnels, même si on n'encourage pas la transgression des normes sociales. La distribution des cultures collectivistes / individualistes montre, conformément aux analyses de Hofstede, une prédominance du collectivisme dans les cultures asiatiques et sud-américaines et de l'individualisme dans les cultures nord-américaines et européennes. Pourtant, beaucoup de cultures sont proches de la zone moyenne, autres variables étant pertinentes. (Triandis, 1989)

Nous présenterons dans cet article une recherche cross-culturelle, réalisée à base de questionnaire, dans quatre cultures situées dans des positions différentes sur l'échelle de l'individualisme (les États-Unis, la France, la Roumanie et la Chine), afin de comprendre la façon dont la signification des marques globales se construit dans de divers espaces culturels.

Les quatre espaces culturels qui seront investigués dans cette étude représentent des positionnements distincts sur l'échelle de l'individualisme proposée par Hofstede. Les dates les plus récentes (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) montrent qu'ils s'y situent de la manière suivante : la Chine, extrêmement collectiviste, score 20, située sur les positions 56-61 dans la hiérarchie des 87 cultures investiguées (*Individualism Index* ou IDV), la Roumanie, modérément collectiviste, score 30, située sur les positions 46-48, la France, modérément individualiste, score 71, située sur les positions 13-14, les Etats-Unis, extrêmement individualistes, score 91, situés sur la première position. L'analyse couvre, donc, une gradation des espaces culturels, de l'extrême collectiviste jusqu'à l'extrême individualiste, ce qui nous permettra une investigation nuancée des différences entre les quatre cultures.

Avant de ne pas considérer les données présentées comme infaillibles, il faut faire quelques précisions. Nous pensons que, surtout pour les cultures collectivistes, la Chine et la Roumanie, il faut considérer une certaine relativisation des données, d'une part parce qu'elles n'ont pas été obtenues, comme dans le cas des deux autres cultures, par les études IBM standardisées, mais par des estimations et répliques et, d'autre part, parce qu'on remarque, dans les deux cultures, des tendances vers des formes d'individualisme.

Nous apprécions que, même si la société roumaine est plutôt une société collectiviste qu'individualiste, l'influence Ouest-européenne se ressent au niveau de l'opinion individuelle, qui est encouragée et appréciée, en gardant en même temps le besoin d'accord avec les normes du groupe.

D'autre part, la culture chinoise, même si elle a subi des changements significatifs après la Révolution communiste de 1949 vers un nuancement de sa tradition collectiviste, semble rester dans la zone extrême collectiviste. Même si moins traditionaliste (suite à la Révolution Culturelle), la Chine moderne continue de privilégier les valeurs du groupe, le besoin d'harmonie des opinions. Le post-matérialisme, qui est apparu comme réaction au matérialisme extrême (soumis à des attaques dures pendant la Révolution Socialiste (les années 1950), la Révolution Culturelle (les années 1966-1976) et le Mouvement Socialiste Spirituel (les années 1980)), accentue le besoin d'harmonie avec les gens et avec la nature, comme opposée à l'accentuation des récompenses matérielles de la dite période « matérialiste » de l'histoire de Chine (Zhu & He, 2004, p. 66) qui a ouvert la voie à une influence individuelle dans l'identité culturelle chinoise. Diverses études montrent le fait que, y inclus parmi les segments qui comportent un rythme de modernisation très rapide, il y a pourtant encore une tendance d'agir en accord avec les attentes des autres et des normes sociales plutôt qu'en accord avec les désirs individuels ou les attributs personnels (Chu, 1985 ; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). En outre, les cultures asiatiques en général (non seulement la Chine, mais la Corée et le Japon aussi) sont considérées des cultures éminemment collectivistes et, dans un certain sens (lié plutôt au concept de soi qu'à la situation économique) traditionalistes (Triandis, 1989; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Briley, Morris & Simonson, 2000; Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 2003).

6. Méthodologie

L'instrument de recherche utilisé est le questionnaire d'opinion autoadministré (collectivement dans le cas de la France, la Roumanie et la Chine, individuellement en ligne au cas des Etats-Unis). Les sujets questionnés sont tous étudiants en première année à de diverses

facultés des universités des quatre pays : University of Georgia (Athens, Etats-Unis, 154 étudiants), Institut Universitaire de Technologie (Toulouse et Tarbes, France, 166 étudiants), Ecole Nationale d'Etudes Politiques et Administrative et Université de Bucarest, Roumanie, 150 étudiants) et l'Université de Nord-Est (Shenyang, Chine, 138 étudiants). Un nombre total de 608 étudiants ont complété les questionnaires.

Le questionnaire a été pré-testé sur un nombre de 25 étudiants de chaque pays, dans la même période de temps (août-novembre 2008), avant la rédaction des formes finales des questionnaires. Par conséquent, les variantes finales ont été élaborées en tenant compte des informations fournies par le pré-test dans les quatre cultures.

Les données obtenues suite au pré-test ont été employées à la rédaction des formes finales, avec un impact spécial sur le choix des marques. Celles-ci sont Mercedes, Toyota, Porsche, Chrysler. La cinquième marque a été choisie individuellement pour chaque culture, les marques autochtones choisies sont Zhonghua pour la Chine, Dacia-Logan pour la Roumanie, Renault pour la France, Ford pour les Etats-Unis. Toutes les quatre marques locales sont considérées des marques populaires, pas trop chères, mais très répandues.

Les hypothèses de la recherche ont été les suivantes :

H1 : Plus une culture est individualiste, plus la personnalité de marque des marques globales est moins proéminente.

H2 : Plus une culture est individualiste, plus la personnalité de marque des marques locales (autochtones) est moins proéminente.

Nous avons formulé les hypothèses à partir de l'idée que, dans les cultures collectivistes, les individus ressentent de manière plus puissante la pression du groupe, c'est pourquoi ils auraient la tendance à apprécier/juger toute chose d'une façon similaire, tandis que, dans les cultures individualistes, l'opinion individuelle se construit plutôt indifférente à l'opinion du groupe, c'est pourquoi on s'attendrait à une cohésion plus accentuée des opinions dans les cultures collectivistes.

Avant de présenter les résultats proprement dits, il faut faire quelques précisions. La plus importante est liée à la manière dont les questions ont été formulées dans les questionnaires, à l'égard de la personnalité de marque. La personnalité de marque, dans sa forme traditionnelle, c'est-à-dire comme caractéristiques humaines associées à la marque, ne reflète que dans une certaine mesure la signification des marques, étant plutôt une expression du besoin des individus d'établir des relations avec les marques, besoin généré tout d'abord par le besoin d'expression du soi ou de projection d'un soi idéal qui « corrige » le soi actuel (Aaker J., 1997; Kim, Han & Park, 2001; Lau & Phau, 2007; Grohmann, 2009). C'est pourquoi, partant de l'idée qu'il existe un transfert de sens des biens aux marques et des marques aux consommateurs (McCracken, 1989), les questions qui mesurent en général la personnalité de marque sont présentées comme exercices d'imagination : « Si la marque était une personne, quels sont les traits que vous lui attribueriez ? » De notre point de vue, le sens (la signification) se construit non comme exercice d'imagination, mais plutôt comme jugements de valeur attribués aux personnes qui emploient (possèdent) les marques. Parce que, dans la société, les marques sont porteuses actives de signification, une personne choisit beaucoup de fois une marque et non pas une autre, parce que les autres lui attribuent, par conséquent, de manière spontanée, certains attributs ou qualités. En outre, une « confrontation » directe avec l'idée de juger une personne à partir de la voiture qu'elle conduit pourrait amplifier les différences culturelles dans la construction de la personnalité de marque.

Par conséquent, la question a été construite de la manière suivante : « Est-ce que la voiture qu'une personne conduit vous dit quelque chose à l'égard de ses qualités ? Est-elle une personne... ». Pour chaque attribut qui suit, les sujets ont eu la possibilité de choisir entre les variantes de réponse suivantes : Fortement en accord / En accord / En désaccord / Fortement en désaccord / Ne me dit rien de cette qualité de la personne / Ne sait pas, sans réponse. L'option « Ne me dit rien de cette qualité de la personne » a été préférée au lieu d'une option neutre (« Ni en accord, ni en désaccord ») pour laisser aux sujets la possibilité d'exprimer l'opinion selon laquelle les marques qu'une personne emploie ne la caractérisent pas de manière directe ou indirecte. Conformément aux hypothèses, on s'attendrait qu'une bonne partie des réponses soient de ce type, surtout dans les cultures collectivistes. Sinon, on apprécierait que les gens aient une sorte de sixième sens qui leur permet de juger (parfois sans équivoque) les autres selon les marques qu'ils utilisent. Pour une analyse plus légère des données, les réponses « fortement en accord » et « en accord » ont été codifiées comme « accord », et les réponses « fortement en désaccord » et « en désaccord » ont été codifiées comme « désaccord ».

Les attributs sélectionnés pour l'analyse sont distribués dans les cinq catégories proposées par Jennifer Aaker (1997) : Sincérité (« modeste », « snobe »), « Excitation » (« aventurière »), Compétence (« éduquée »), Sophistication (« stylée », « enflée d'orgueil »), Rudesse (« puissante », « médiocre »). Etant disposés sur une échelle de type Likert, sous forme d'un différenciateur sémantique, ces traits (alors que les répondants choisissent d'être en désaccord) englobent ainsi une partie des traits opposés, là où l'on peut imaginer de tels traits contraires.

7. Résultats et analyse

Comme nous l'avons montré dans la partie théorique, la signification de la marque en tant que type spécial de signe publicitaire, se construit dans une bonne mesure par la personnalité de marque. Nous discuterons les résultats de la recherche en analysant séparément chaque marque et en comparant ensuite les résultats pour tester les hypothèses.

Pour la marque Mercedes, les qualités attribuées par les répondants à une personne qui conduit une voiture la marque Mercedes, sont distribuées comme dans le tableau ci-dessous :

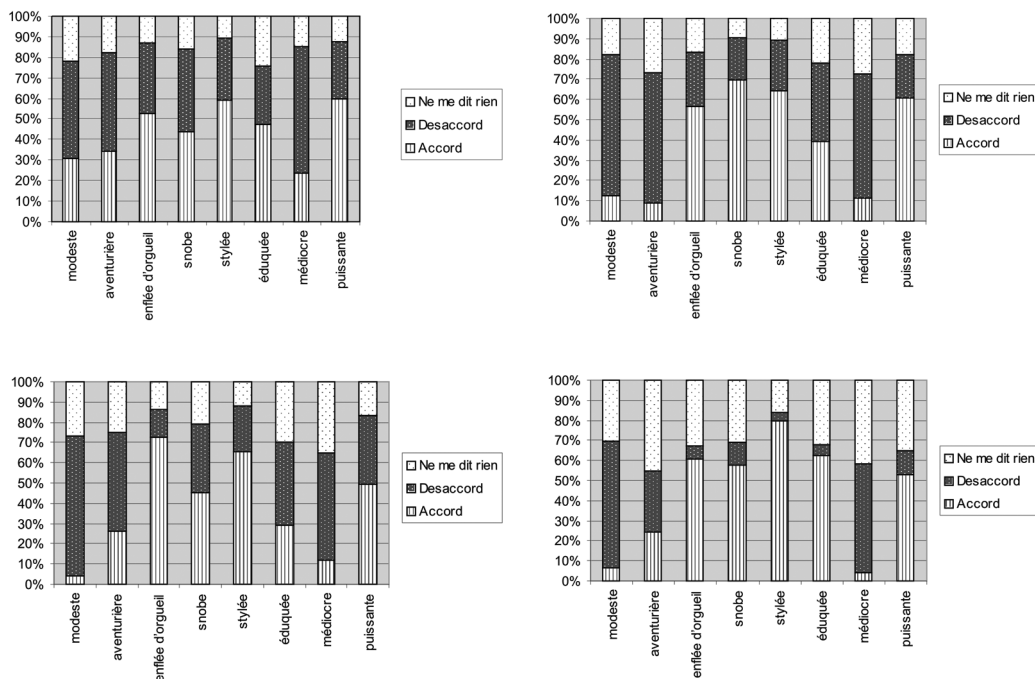
Tableau 1. La personnalité de marque pour la marque Mercedes.

Mercedes	Chine		Roumanie		France		Etats-Unis	
	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord
modeste	30.5%	47.6%	3.9%	69.5%	12.7%	69.3%	6.5%	63.0%
aventurière	34.3%	48.1%	26.4%	48.8%	8.8%	64.6%	24.6%	30.3%
enflée d'orgueil	52.8%	34.3%	71.4%	13.3%	56.8%	26.7%	60.8%	6.3%
snobe	43.9%	40.2%	45.4%	33.8%	69.4%	21.1%	57.7%	11.3%
stylée	59.4%	30.2%	65.2%	22.7%	64.4%	24.7%	79.9%	4.2%
éduquée	47.1%	28.8%	28.9%	41.4%	39.0%	39.0%	62.5%	5.6%
médiocre	23.4%	61.7%	12.0%	52.8%	11.6%	61.0%	4.3%	54.3%
puissante	60.0%	27.3%	49.2%	34.1%	60.5%	21.8%	52.8%	11.8%

En ensemble, on remarque une homogénéité des réponses dans les quatre cultures. Quatre qualités sont considérées dominantes pour une personne qui choisit d'utiliser la marque Mercedes : « stylée », « enflé d'orgueil », « puissante », « snobe », tandis que deux qualités sont considérées comme opposées à une telle personne : « modeste », « médiocre ». Pour les deux autres qualités, « aventurière » et « éduquée », elles sont majoritaires dans une culture pour chacune d'elles, les répondants français considérant qu'une personne qui conduit une Mercedes n'est pas une personne aventurière (64,6%), tandis que les sujets américains considèrent qu'il s'agit d'une personne éduquée (62,5%). Les répondants chinois tendent à être d'accord avec ces opinions, 48,1% ne croient pas qu'il s'agisse d'une personne aventurière et 47,1% pensent qu'il s'agit d'une personne éduquée.

Il faut remarquer que, dans le cas de tous les pourcentages de plus de 50%, soit en accord, soit en désaccord, la majorité est d'autant plus claire que les pourcentages sont calculés compte tenant de la troisième possibilité, « ne me dit rien de cette qualité de la personne ». Autrement dit, alors que les sujets américains considère en proportion de 79,9% qu'une personne qui conduit une Mercedes est une personne stylée, seulement 4,2% n'en sont pas d'accord, le reste de 15,9% étant des personnes qui s'abstiennent en avoir une opinion. La remarque est valable dans tous les cas de majorité d'opinions, dans des proportions différentes, mais avec une polarisation nette entre accord et désaccord. L'exception, comme ligne générale, est la culture chinoise, où les opinions sont bien moins uniformément distribuées, l'accord ou le désaccord étant rarement évident. Pourtant, comparativement, cinq attributs des huit enregistrent une différence de plus de 50% des opinions en accord ou en désaccord pour les Etats-Unis, seulement un pour la France, deux pour la Roumanie et aucun dans le cas de la Chine. Comparativement, la personnalité de marque Mercedes peut être représentée comme dans la Figure 1.

Figure 1. La personnalité de marque Mercedes. Représentation graphique.



Pour les qualités proéminentes dans toutes les quatre cultures, on ne remarque pas une cohésion plus évidente des opinions dans les cultures collectivistes. Au contraire, les pourcentages élevés se situent dans les cultures individualistes, ce qui suggère une idée générale qui semble résulter de l'analyse, que la signification des marques globales est bien plus clairement dessinée dans les cultures individualistes.

Dans le cas de la marque Toyota, même si l'accord ou le désaccord n'est pas aussi évident que dans le cas de la marque Mercedes, les répondants des quatre cultures polarisent leurs opinions de manière similaire pour deux qualités, à l'égard desquelles ils expriment leur désaccord, « enflée d'orgueil » et « snobe ».

A l'exception des répondants américains, les sujets sont d'accord qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une personne médiocre et, à l'exception des Roumains, qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une personne puissante. Ce sont toujours les Roumains qui considèrent que la personne qui conduit une Toyota n'est pas modeste.

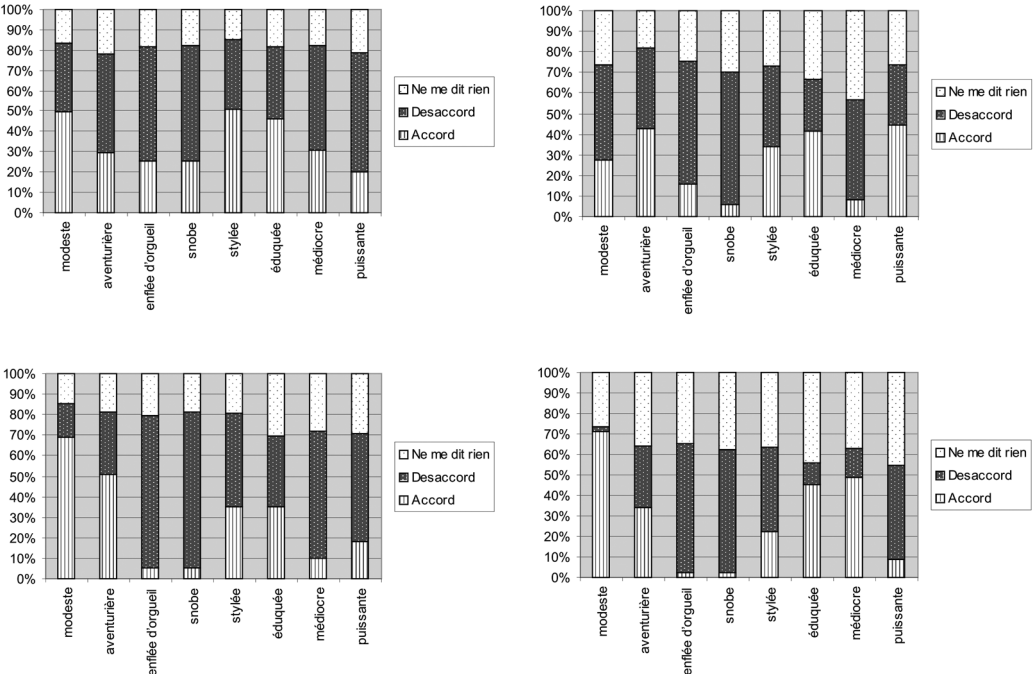
Tableau 2. La personnalité de marque pour la marque Toyota.

Toyota	Chine		Roumanie		France		Etats-Unis	
	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord
modeste	50.0%	33.3%	27.2%	46.4%	69.0%	16.2%	70.9%	2.8%
aventurière	29.7%	48.5%	42.4%	39.4%	50.7%	30.7%	34.3%	29.9%
enflée d'orgueil	25.5%	55.9%	16.0%	59.2%	5.1%	74.6%	2.2%	63.0%
snobe	25.7%	56.4%	5.8%	64.2%	5.1%	76.1%	2.2%	59.9%
stylée	51.0%	34.0%	34.1%	38.9%	35.3%	45.3%	22.1%	41.4%
éduquée	46.1%	35.3%	41.4%	25.0%	35.3%	34.5%	45.3%	10.8%
médiocre	30.7%	51.5%	8.0%	48.8%	10.2%	62.0%	48.6%	14.3%
puissante	20.4%	58.2%	44.4%	29.4%	18.1%	52.9%	8.9%	45.9%

Autres attributs sur lesquels on est d'accord en majorité sont caractéristiques seulement à une culture : « stylée » pour la Chine, « aventurière » pour la France.

En général, tout comme pour la marque Mercedes, les opinions sont plus clairement polarisées dans le cas des cultures individualistes, l'explication probable étant liée au fait que la personnalité de marque est plus puissante dans les cultures individualistes, avec des économies plus développées. Des différences de plus de 50% entre les opinions en accord et les opinions en désaccord se retrouvent pour trois des huit attributs dans le cas des Etats-Unis, quatre attributs pour la France, un pour la Roumanie, aucun dans le cas de la Chine. Les personnalités de marque pour Toyota peuvent être représentées graphiquement comme dans la Figure 2.

Figure 2. La personnalité de marque Toyota. Représentation graphique.



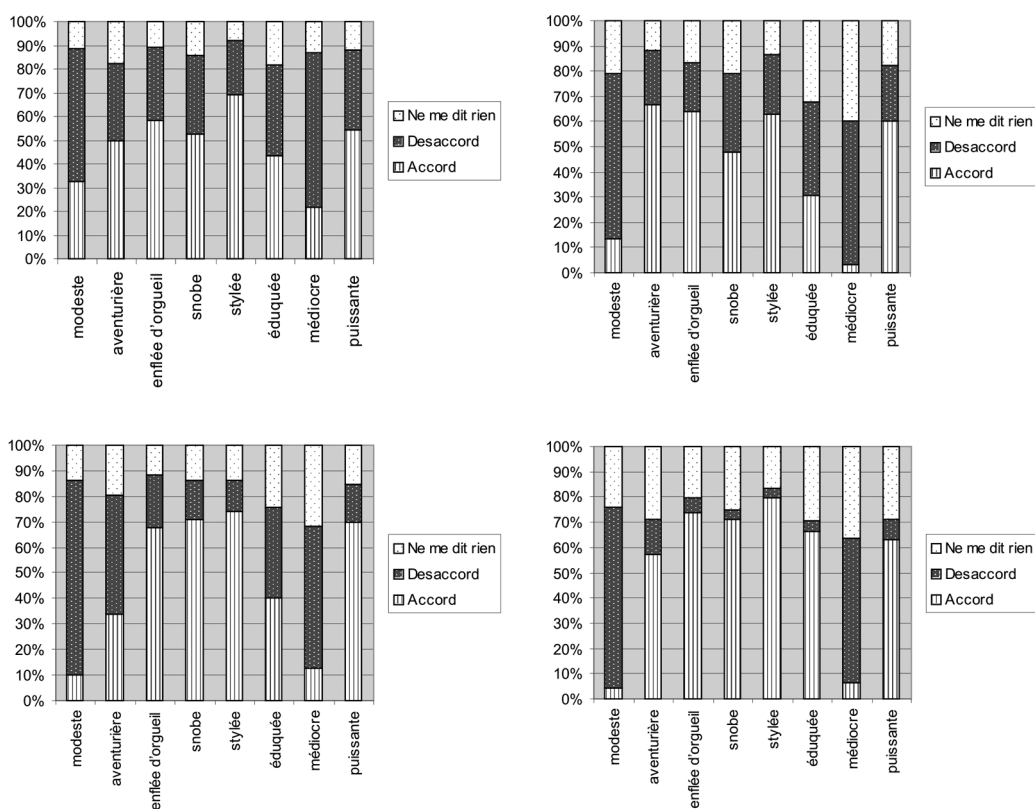
La personnalité de marque dans le cas de la marque Porsche est très proéminente dans toutes les quatre cultures et se construit de manière similaire. Six des huit qualités reçoivent des scores de plus de 50% dans toutes les quatre cultures : accord pour « enflée d’orgueil », « snobe », « stylée » et « puissante », désaccord pour « modeste » et « médiocre ». Pour l’attribut « aventureuse » la majorité des répondants de trois pays est d’accord, la France étant l’exception. Pour l’attribut « éduquée », seulement les répondants américains en sont d’accord.

Tableau 3. La personnalité de marque pour la marque Porsche.

Porsche	Chine		Roumanie		France		Etats-Unis	
	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord
modeste	32.7%	55.8%	13.4%	65.4%	10.0%	76.0%	4.3%	71.4%
aventureuse	50.0%	32.1%	66.4%	21.9%	34.0%	46.3%	57.4%	13.5%
enflée d'orgueil	58.2%	30.9%	64.1%	19.1%	67.6%	20.7%	73.9%	5.6%
snobe	52.4%	33.3%	47.6%	31.7%	70.7%	15.6%	71.1%	3.5%
stylée	69.4%	22.5%	62.9%	23.5%	74.1%	12.2%	79.7%	3.5%
éduquée	43.4%	38.4%	30.8%	36.9%	40.0%	35.9%	66.2%	4.2%
médiocre	21.8%	65.3%	3.3%	57.0%	12.8%	55.3%	6.5%	57.2%
puissante	54.5%	33.7%	60.0%	22.3%	70.1%	14.3%	63.0%	8.0%

Comme remarque générale, on maintient la tendance évidente de la polarisation plus évidente des opinions dans les cultures individualistes, la Chine étant de nouveau la moins unitaire, même si pour cette marque particulière les opinions sont plus homogènes que pour les autres. Les Etats-Unis sont les plus homogènes, les différences entre les pourcentages en accord et en désaccord étant, en sept des huit cas, de plus de 50%, toutes les huit qualités étant évidemment polarisées pour construire une personnalité de marque puissante et clairement dessinée. Dans le cas de la France et de la Roumanie, on peut remarquer des différences de plus de 50% entre accord et désaccord pour quatre, respectivement deux attributs. Dans le cas de la Chine, aucun attribut n'enregistre une polarisation de plus de 50%. Comparativement, les graphiques des personnalités des marques dans les quatre cultures sont représentées dans la Figure 3.

Figure 3. La personnalité de marque Porsche. Représentation graphique.



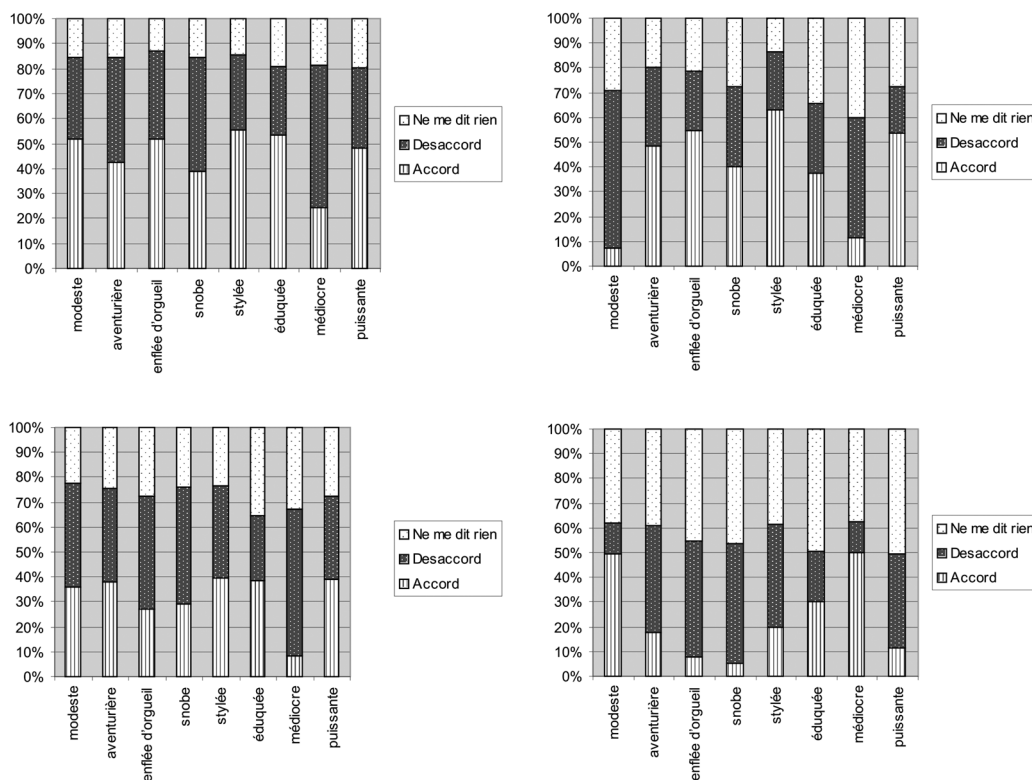
La marque Chrysler est la moins homogène comme attribution de significations dans la personnalité de marque dans les quatre cultures. Aucune de huit qualités ne se retrouve en accord ou en désaccord avec plus de 50% pour toutes les quatre cultures, certaines qualités recevant même des appréciations contradictoires. Par exemple, plus de 50% des sujets chinois et américains sont d'accord qu'une personne qui conduit une Chrysler est une personne modeste, tandis que plus de 50% des Roumains considèrent que, au contraire, il ne s'agit pas d'une personne modeste. Similairement, plus de 50% des Chinois et Français ne sont pas d'accord avec l'idée de personne médiocre (un pourcentage assez proche est construit pour les Roumains aussi, 48,4%), tandis que 50% des Américains sont d'accord avec cette qualité.

Tableau 4. La personnalité de marque pour la marque Chrysler.

Chrysler	Chine		Roumanie		France		Etats-Unis	
	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord
modeste	51.9%	32.7%	7.3%	63.7%	35.7%	42.1%	49.6%	12.6%
aventurière	42.7%	41.8%	48.4%	31.7%	38.2%	37.4%	17.8%	43.2%
enflée d'orgueil	51.9%	34.9%	54.8%	23.8%	27.0%	45.2%	7.8%	47.0%
snobe	39.0%	45.7%	40.2%	32.0%	29.1%	47.2%	5.1%	48.7%
stylée	55.3%	30.1%	63.0%	23.6%	39.5%	37.1%	20.0%	41.7%
éduquée	53.4%	27.2%	37.6%	28.0%	38.7%	25.8%	30.4%	20.0%
médiocre	24.3%	57.3%	11.3%	48.4%	8.1%	58.9%	50.0%	12.5%
puissante	48.0%	32.4%	53.5%	18.9%	39.0%	33.3%	11.3%	38.3%

La culture chinoise est la seule où plus de la moitié des huit attributs (cinq) reçoivent des pourcentages de plus de 50%, quatre en accord, un en désaccord. Pourtant, tout comme dans le cas des autres marques, la différence entre les pourcentages en accord et en désaccord ne dépasse pas 50% pour aucun des attributs. Dans le cas Chrysler, cela est toujours valable pour les Etats-Unis, tandis que la France et la Roumanie ont un attribut clairement polarisé en désaccord, « modeste » pour la Roumanie, « médiocre » pour la France.

Figure 4. La personnalité de marque Chrysler. Représentation graphique.



Comme on peut remarquer dans les graphiques aussi, en ensemble, on peut apprécier que la marque Chrysler est la plus faible des quatre marques globales, non seulement dans chaque culture, mais globalement aussi, la personnalité de marque étant différente (et parfois contradictoire) dans les quatre cultures.

Il est possible que les significations associées à cette marque soient en voie de changement, à cause des problèmes financiers auxquels la firme productrice a du faire face dans la période de collection des données, sur le fond de la crise financière globale.

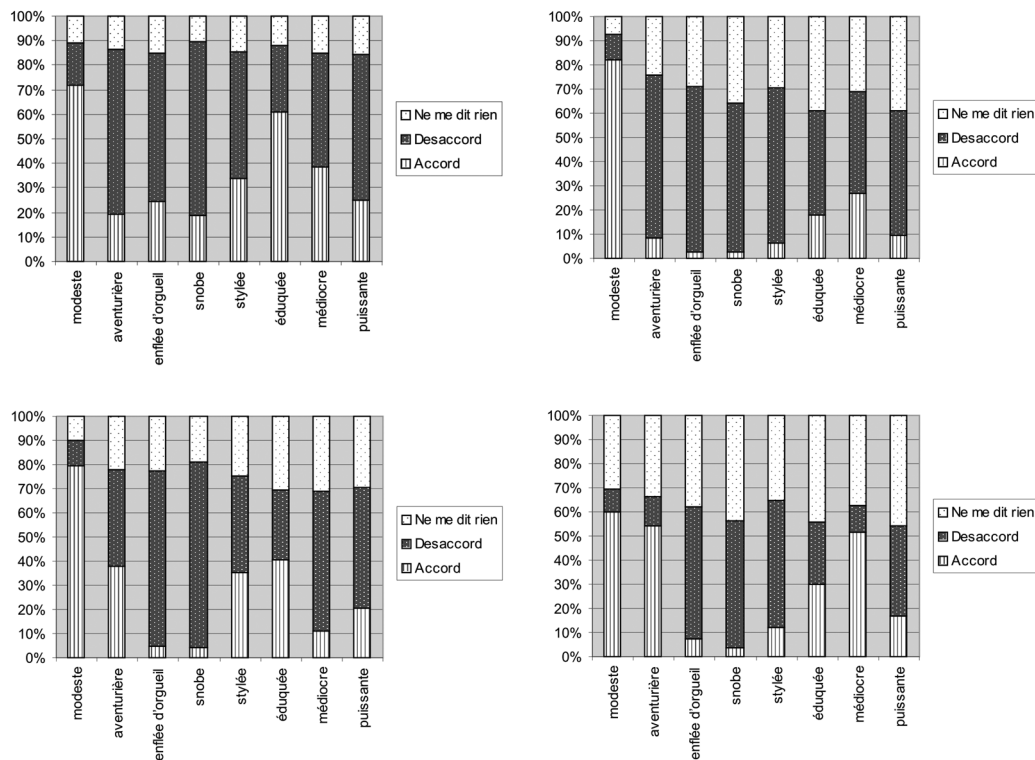
La situation est différente pour les marques populaires autochtones et il faut la juger individuellement, pour chaque culture. A la différence des marques globales, la personnalité de marque des marques autochtones semble être plus clairement esquissée dans les cultures collectivistes. Sept attributs des huit bénéficient de l'accord (deux) ou du désaccord (cinq) des sujets chinois dans plus de 50% des cas et six de l'accord (un) ou du désaccord (cinq) des sujets roumains. Même s'il s'agit des marques différentes, les qualités sont distribuées de manière similaire dans les deux cultures, tant les Roumains que les Chinois étant d'accord qu'une personne qui conduit une voiture de la marque populaire autochtone (Zhonghua pour la Chine et Logan pour la Roumanie) est une personne modeste, elle n'est pas aventurière, ni enflée d'orgueil, ni snobe, ni stylée, ni puissante. En outre, les Chinois la considèrent une personne éduquée. Pour deux attributs (la Chine) et quatre (la Roumanie), les différences en accord ou désaccord sont de plus de 50%.

Tableau 5. La personnalité de marque pour les marques populaires autochtones.

Marque autochtone	Chine		Roumanie		France		Etats-Unis	
	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord	Accord	Désaccord
modeste	72.1%	17.1%	82.0%	10.8%	79.5%	10.3%	60.0%	9.6%
aventurière	19.2%	67.3%	8.6%	67.2%	37.8%	39.9%	54.4%	11.8%
enflée d'orgueil	24.3%	60.7%	2.4%	68.5%	4.9%	72.5%	7.6%	54.5%
snobe	19.0%	70.5%	2.4%	61.9%	4.2%	76.8%	3.8%	52.6%
stylée	34.0%	51.5%	6.3%	64.3%	35.2%	40.1%	12.0%	52.6%
éduquée	61.1%	26.9%	17.9%	43.1%	40.4%	29.1%	30.1%	25.6%
médiocre	38.3%	46.7%	26.7%	42.0%	10.8%	58.3%	51.5%	11.0%
puissante	25.0%	59.6%	9.5%	51.6%	20.7%	50.0%	16.8%	37.4%

En ce qui concerne les cultures individualistes, la situation est un peu différente. Six (les Etats-Unis) et cinq (la France) qualités bénéficient de l'accord ou le désaccord des répondants dans la majorité des cas, et seulement un (les Etats-Unis), respectivement trois (la France) enregistrent des différences de plus de 50% entre accord et désaccord. Trois qualités sont distribuées similairement aux cultures collectivistes, tant les Français que les Américains considérant qu'une personne qui conduit une voiture la marque populaire autochtone est une personne modeste, mais non enflée d'orgueil, ni snobe. En outre, les Français croient qu'elle n'est pas médiocre, ni puissante, tandis que les Américains pensent qu'elle est aventurière et médiocre, mais pas stylée.

Figure 5. La personnalité de marque pour les marques populaires autochtones. Représentation graphique.



En ensemble, comme on peut le remarquer en regardant les figures, la personnalité de marque des marques autochtones semble être plus clairement délimitée dans les cultures collectivistes, si on la compare aux personnalités des marques des marques globales dans la même culture et moins individualisée, mais non pas faible, dans les cultures individualistes. Une explication possible est, encore une fois, d'ordre économique. Toutes les quatre marques autochtones sont associées aussi à une classe sociale basse, en générale, ce qui nous indique le fait qu'elles sont accessibles à un nombre plus élevé de personnes qu'autres marques (comme, par exemple, les marques globales analysées). Or les cultures individualistes sont des cultures avec des économies plus puissantes, où la puissance d'achat individuelle est plus élevée, ce qui permet une plus haute diversification des choix de la marque pour une voiture personnelle. Par conséquent, les marques autochtones sont beaucoup plus utilisées dans les cultures collectivistes, c'est pourquoi les interactions répétées des individus avec les marques ont permis la délimitation des personnalités de marque plus puissantes.

Comme remarque générale, il y a une correspondance relative dans la construction des personnalités les plus fortes et les plus faibles. Nous considérons qu'une personnalité de marque est d'autant plus puissante que la polarisation des opinions en accord ou en désaccord est plus nette. Un tableau comparatif avec la moyenne des différences en valeur absolue entre les opinions en accord et en désaccord montre une distribution relativement uniforme de la hiérarchie des degrés de puissance des personnalités des marques dans les cultures analysées.

Tableau 6. La hiérarchie des personnalités de marque, selon le degré de cohésion des opinions.

Personnalité de marque	Chine		Roumanie		France		Etats-Unis	
La plus puissante	Mercedes	43.9%	Mercedes	37.8%	Porsche	43.1%	Porsche	61.4%
	Porsche	25.5%	Porsche	36.8%	Mercedes	40.4%	Mercedes	43.6%
	Toyota	22.9%	Chrysler	29.1%	Toyota	38.8%	Toyota	33.5%
La moins puissante	Chrysler	18.0%	Toyota	25.1%	Chrysler	14.4%	Chrysler	30.2%
La marque autochtone	Zhonghua	35.7%	Logan	48.3%	Renault	38.1%	Ford	36.9%

Comme on peut le remarquer, les marques Mercedes et Porsche sont les plus proéminentes, tandis que les marques Toyota et Chrysler sont les plus faibles du point de vue de la personnalité de marque. La marque autochtone se situe sur des positions intermédiaires en général, à l'exception de la Roumanie, où c'est la marque la plus clairement délimitée. Pour la Chine, la marque autochtone occupe la seconde position, tandis que pour les cultures individualistes, elle occupe la troisième (les Etats-Unis), respectivement la quatrième position (la France).

L'hypothèse H1 a été infirmée ; en fait son sens (direction) a été renversé : plus une culture est individualiste, plus les personnalités de marque sont plus puissantes pour les marques globales. Pour les marques autochtones, l'hypothèse H2 a été confirmée en grandes lignes : même s'il n'y a pas de hiérarchie qui respecte strictement le sens des cohésions des opinions en rapport du degré d'individualisme des cultures, dans les cultures collectivistes la personnalité de marque des marques populaires autochtones est plus puissamment construite en comparaison des cultures individualistes, surtout si l'on juge les attributs individuels et leur prééminence dans la personnalité de marque et non les chiffres des moyennes des cohésions des opinions.

Il devient clair qu'il y a une liaison entre le degré d'individualisme des cultures étudiées et la construction de la personnalité de marque, mais la relation est inversement proportionnelle, autrement dit les personnalités de marques les plus puissantes apparaissent dans les cultures les plus individualistes, la logique économique étant l'explication la plus plausible.

Les résultats obtenus pour les marques autochtones montrent une direction différente. Généralement, la personnalité de marque des marques populaires autochtones est plus puissante dans les cultures collectivistes, si l'on considère en même temps les moyennes des cohésions des opinions et les attributs individuels et leurs positions dans la personnalité de marque.

8. Limites de la recherche

En ce qui concerne la recherche proprement dite, quelques limites sont évidentes, la majorité étant des conséquences des ressources limitées dont nous avons disposé. Elles peuvent être groupées en deux catégories : des limites associées aux échantillons et des limites concernant la construction de l'instrument de recherche.

La première catégorie est liée à deux aspects : d'une part le choix des espaces culturels, d'autre part le choix des échantillons à l'intérieur des espaces culturels. Même si les quatre cultures analysées présentent une grande variété de positionnements sur l'échelle de l'individualisme, étant représentatives de ce point de vue, des résultats comportant un degré élevé de généralisation peuvent être obtenus en étudiant un plus grand nombre de cultures, des catégories les plus diverses. Ce qui manque, par exemple, et aurait pu apporter des clarifications supplémentaires, est une culture sud-américaine, ce qui aurait représenté non seulement un espace géographique nouveau, mais aussi un positionnement extrême sur l'échelle du collectivisme. De même, on connaît très peu des cultures africaines, du point de vue des signes publicitaires.

Quant aux échantillons, même si l'on a argumenté que les recherches montrent des différences assez insignifiantes entre les échantillons d'étudiants et les échantillons représentatifs (surtout pour la population jeune) dans les recherches sur les marques (O'Cass & Lim, 2001), le degré de généralisation est réduit à cause du caractère opportun des échantillons.

À l'égard de la construction de l'instrument de recherche, il faut mentionner deux aspects liés à la conception des significations des marques globales. L'ambition de cette recherche n'a pas été d'offrir une recherche exhaustive des marques choisies, mais de proposer une image première de la modalité dont se construit le sens des marques globales ; c'est pourquoi le choix des qualités de la personnalité de marque a été conventionnel, suivant une logique de la distribution des données des recherches actuelles sur la marque, respectivement le modèle *the big five* de la personnalité de marque développé dans la recherche américaine, qui a été repris par les chercheurs d'autres pays aussi. Une recherche ayant la prétention de généralité des résultats (qui aurait un impact important dans l'industrie de la publicité et non seulement dans la recherche sémiotique) devrait comporter une recherche préliminaire qui établisse les qualités représentatives pour la personnalité de marque. Une telle recherche préliminaire devrait viser des associations spontanées d'un nombre significatif de répondants qui seraient regroupées, par la suite, par une analyse factorielle, dans des facteurs et des items représentatifs pour chaque culture et, à la suite d'une analyse comparée, on pourrait établir un faisceau de traits (qualités) représentatifs à toutes les cultures étudiées.

Un autre problème lié à la construction du questionnaire tient du choix des marques. Il est évident qu'une recherche exhaustive des marques d'une certaine industrie est impossible. Pourtant, une recherche préliminaire peut investiguer les marques ayant les personnalités les plus proéminentes de manière systématique, notre recherche montrant que les significations des marques sont d'autant plus visibles que les marques sont plus puissantes. En outre, la logique de la formulation des questions de recherche et des hypothèses devrait englober aussi des facteurs économiques, qui semblent être des points importants dans la construction de la personnalité de marque.

Un cas spécial dans notre recherche a été la marque Chrysler, qui s'est avérée proéminente à l'esprit des répondants (dans la phase du pré-test) à des raisons liées aux premières nouvelles apparues dans la presse sur la situation financière précaire de la compagnie productrice, ce qui a conduit à des résultats peu concluants pour cette marque. Par conséquent, les recherches futures devraient tenir compte d'un critère stricte de la proéminence de la personnalité de marque.

9. Conclusions

Ce que l'analyse a montré comme vraiment remarquable est le fait que les gens associent aux marques des significations qui ne sont pas nécessairement liés (parfois pas du tout) aux marques elles-mêmes, mais plutôt à des appréciations subjectives des signes publicitaires comme porteurs de signification anthropomorphisée, relativement homogène en contextes culturels différents. Le mécanisme de construction du sens des signes publicitaires semble tenir compte de la dimension sociale, les adjectifs associés à une personne qui utilise une certaine marque étant jugés pertinents par la majorité des répondants. Même si les marques ont une vie propre, le fait qu'elles sont porteuses de signification humaine, caractérisant pratiquement les personnes qui les préfèrent ou les emploient, est un phénomène généralisé, nonspécifique à une certaine culture ou à un certain espace géographique.

La personnalité de marque est un mécanisme de construction du sens des marques dans toutes les cultures étudiées, les sens étant le plus puissamment construits dans les cultures individualistes, suivant plutôt une logique économique qu'une logique d'harmonisation de l'opinion individuelle dans l'opinion du groupe.

Les traits individualistes ou collectivistes des cultures corrélés aux espaces culturels analysés devraient être regardés en tant qu'influences indirectes, les critères économiques étant plus importants que les critères des opinions individuelles plus ou moins obéissantes à l'opinion du groupe. En outre, l'échelle de l'individualisme peut être corrélée avec d'autres traits spécifiques des cultures pour expliquer les différences cross-culturelles.

En ensemble, les résultats indiquent des similitudes remarquables entre les quatre cultures dans la construction du sens des marques globales, ce qui indique des mécanismes similaires de création des sens des marques le long du temps. Si l'on suppose que toute marque globale a été, à l'origine, une marque locale, il devient évident que, au moment de la migration vers des espaces culturels nouveaux, il y a eu une phase où la construction de la signification globale a été un phénomène de frontière culturelle qui s'est élargie, avec des adaptations locales, de manière relativement homogène, vers d'autres espaces.

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Diana DUMITRIU*

The role of context in coaches' post-match discourses

Abstract: Nowadays, when there are liquid boundaries between sports and other social areas of life in terms of values, communication or behaviour models, analysing the impact of social context upon sport actors' discourses could provide interesting insights regarding the socially situated nature of discourses. The focus of this study case is on the impact that the context has upon coaches' public discourses and, moreover, on how they define and position themselves towards other sports' actors. Based on a corpus of coaches' discourses during the post-match press conferences from an international handball competition, there are two main dimensions of analysis: the contractual/situational one and the relational one. While, the compelling force of the communication contract of press conferences determines a high level of similarity between coaches' discourses, the sport courtesy speech acts work both as a way of establishing a consensual frame of interaction between the participants, as well as a way of building and maintaining a positive face for the speaker and his team.

Keywords: communication contract; sport courtesy; social comparison; positive face; coaches' discourses.

1. Introduction

For many decades, sport was considered to be a marginal area of interest for academic research, as it was perceived as a less important aspect in the social dynamics of everyday life. However, in the context of a new balance between work time and free time (Dunning, 1999; Dunning, Malcolm & Waddington, 2004; Malcolm, 2008) and the orientation towards a hybridisation process between *homo ludens* and *homo consumans*, the interest and importance of sports' activities have faced a significant increase. Probably the most concrete indicators of this re-evaluation of sports' place inside the social dynamics are the time and money investments that have been made in this area, which, in turn, led to the emergence of what is now known as sports' industry. Thus, today sports means more than recreation, competition or healthier lifestyle as specific practices and social roles have been developed and institutionalized inside this field. Moreover, we can speak about the crystallization of a phenomenon of *liquid boundaries* between sports and other social areas of life looking at the significant influence between them in terms of values, communication structures and contents or behaviour models. Based on this new position that sports has in our social life and also on the au-

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tonomy and complexity of its structural and dynamic aspects, sports can be thus approached as a social field per se, in bourdieusian terms (Bourdieu, 1998).

One of the factors that facilitate and even amplify the phenomenon of *liquid boundaries* between sports and other social areas of life is the competitive profile of today's society and the consequences of this dominant contest framework that we now find from politics, business or education, to TV shows' formats and friends' free time activities. It is, more or less, all about hierarchies, top10/top 5/ top 3, winners versus losers, training and confrontation - a whole social imaginary borrowed and re-contextualized from sports. Although this melting process is a multilayered one, the communication component is the most sensitive channel of transfer from and towards sports' area. That is why a communication approach of sports can offer valuable insights that go beyond the sports' area to the general dynamics of the relations between sports and other social areas of life.

This study is focused on the impact that the context has upon coaches' public discourses and, moreover, on how they define and position themselves towards other actors from the sports' social field. Therefore, the conceptual field that this approach is based on combines the role of context and communication contract in coaches' discursive performances with the relational dynamics that the competitive situation generates, taking coaches' perspective as the reference point of analysis.

2. Anchoring discourses into context

Beyond the communicative nature of the concept, which is the core axis of any discourse analysis, from a more integrative perspective, discourse should be approached as both individual and social practice. As any other component of the *interaction order* (Goffman, 1983) that defines the social dynamics of everyday life, discourses are socially situated and embedded. Moreover, being a form of social practice, discourses imply a "dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, social institutions and structures which frame them, as they are both *socially constitutive*, as well as *socially conditioned*" (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, pp. 7-8). Thus, the social and situational aspects of communicative events play a significant role in understanding the production of discourse whether we speak in terms of discursive structure, content or effects.

In speaking about context, as the general frame in which discourses are produced and received, van Dijk (2009) circumscribes the concept to those properties of the communicative situation that are relevant for discourse either from the speaker's view point, and thus for the production of discourse itself, or for recipients, and hence for the understanding of discourse. However, van Dijk (2009) argues that contexts are not *objective*, but *subjective* components, referring to what is seen as relevant in a particular social situation by the participants themselves, which is consonant with a constructivist approach of the social facts –social representations dyad. In other words, "context is not some (part of a) social situation, but a *subjective mental model* of such a situation" (van Dijk, 2009, p. 5) that is activated and mediated by the participants' interpretations of the social reality they are placed in.

The balance between the constraining social forces that act upon the discourses and the power that discourses themselves have in terms of transforming and redefining the social context can vary significantly depending on the normative matrix of the situation, as well as the statutory position of the speaker or the public visibility and significance of the commu-

nicative context. This compelling pressure generated by the normative framework and the social expectations that have been socially negotiated and perpetuated in terms of discourses' structures and content can be correlated with the concept of *communication contract*. By communication contract we understand a set of social norms and expectations which govern a particular frame of interaction in terms of social desirability and routine. Although the communication contract is subject to a permanent process of re-contextualization and re-defining, it has a stable hard core determined by this normative component of the social roles and practices it refers to. This can be correlated with the *idealization process* (Goffman, 2003, p. 62) that reflects the way social performances have been socialized, transformed and remodeled in order to fit the common knowledge and expectations that they put on the social stage. Therefore, the main role of the communication contract is to exert a constraining force upon the "operating procedures of the production and interpretation of the communicative act, allowing the participants to co-construct the sense of their discourses" (Charaudeau, 2002, p. 309). All these aspects that are circumscribed to the communication contract are based on the shared knowledge of the members of a community/society and, moreover, on a predefined and socially accepted form of performance that is context-dependent. Many of the elements that define a particular communication contract can be seen as *standard formulaic routines* (Bing & Ruhl, 2008), which contribute to establishing and maintaining the relationship between the participants in a conventional register that has been socially negotiated and reaffirmed. From this perspective, what is important to be outlined is the degree in which social actors in a communicative situation conform themselves to the communication contract or when, how and why they chose to deflect from it.

All in all, even if we refer to the general social context of a communicative act or to the narrow definition of the context in terms of subjective interpretation of the communication situation, the basic assumption is that meaning depends on context or, in other word, discourses are socially situated. Thus, contextual appropriateness of discourses as both individual and social practices responds to the socially constitutive and conditioned nature of discourses as performative acts.

3. The dynamics of the competitive situation

In approaching sports as research area, there have been two major frameworks of this field's representation: *sports as performance* and *sports as competition* (Birrell & Donnelly, 2004). These two complementary perspectives can be associated with the dichotomy between the dramaturgical model of sports as spectacle and the belligerent model of sport as confrontation of opponent parties. However, both metaphors are base on the premise that individuals' representations upon the social field of sports is determinant in understanding their attitudes and behaviours inside this micro-universe and, in turn, that there is a strong relationship between the representational sphere and the action one (Moscovici, 1997). Therefore, as it was previously discussed, the distinction between the objective and the subjective nature of contexts in general, can be re-contextualized in terms of the "*objective competitive situation* and the *subjective competitive situation*" (Weinberg & Gould, 2007, p. 106). If objective competitive situation is defined by the existence of evaluation criteria known by at least one person who can evaluate the performance from the position of an exterior observer (i.e. standards of performance, the level of performance in the past, etc.), the subjective compet-

itive situation refers to the way people perceive, accept and redefine the objective competitive situation itself. So, as in any other field of interaction, sport actors are involved in a continuous process of negotiation and construction of meanings as they balance their performance between the social and the individual dimension of their acts.

Except for the goal achievement component, whether we speak of a task or an ego involvement of the sport actors (Nicholls, 1989; Harwood & Beauchamp, 2007; Kuan & Roy, 2007), another *sine qua non* condition of any competitive situation is its evaluative nature, as it is based on putting face to face at least two opponent parties. Regardless of the explicit or implicit type of comparison between the parties, a competitive situation means referring to the level of expectations, to the results achieved (Bardel, Fontayne, Colombel & Schiphof, 2010) and to the other actors involved: opponents, teammates, coaches, referee or supporters. The social comparison mechanism (Festinger, 1954) is based on the fact that the social actors are continuously involved in a self-evaluation process in order to place themselves on a position according to a particular set of characteristics they value. Therefore, when analyzing the roles' dynamics inside a competitive situation, we should first of all identify and focus on the bidirectional process between *self* and *significant others* in order to understand the way sport actors define themselves in reference to the others and definite the others in reference to themselves.

On a discursive level, what is important is how these psychosocial mechanisms influence and are transposed in the structure and contents of sport actors' discourses. The aim of this study is to focus on how the dynamics of a competitive situation is reconstructed through coaches' post-match public discourses. Using a contractualist approach, which endorse the idea that every communicative act implies a contractual dimension based on the reciprocal expectations of the participants that, in turn, are activated by the particular characteristics of the communicative situation (Charaudeau, 1998), we are interested in outlining the relation between the conventions and constraints involved in coaches' discourses and their constitutive power. "How compelling is the communicative context?" and "How it affects the discursive representation of the competitive relational dynamics?" are the two main research questions that this study is guided by in analysing coaches' public discourse form press conferences context.

4. Methodological aspects

The analysis of coaches' discourses is based on a pragmatic framework as one of the most contextually –oriented approach to language (Hoye, 2006). Being focused on who speakers adapt their discourses to the specificity of the context and to the other participants in the communicative situation, the pragmatic perspective outlines the performative dimension of discourses. The main indicators that the discourse analysis will be outlining in this study are: the *communication contract*'s constraining effects on coaches' discourses, the *positioning* of the speakers and the way in which they redefine the *relation* towards the other sport actors and the *competitive situation* itself throughout their public discourses. When speaking about the speaker's positioning we refer to the social actors' orientation at several levels: "between the speaker and what is being said, between self and other in face-to-face occasions of talk and interaction" (De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006, p. 7) and towards the content of talk itself as a referential component. The positioning of a speaker acts as a guiding line for his

discourse and, moreover, reveals the “key set of expectations participants have on where to place the other in a given interaction” (Ribeiro, 2006, p. 72). Using a metaphoric representation, positioning can be understood as a discursive anchor that determines the way the relational dynamics to other actors is being defined.

The corpus of the study gathers 94 coaches' discourses that were held during the official post-match press conferences from the European Feminine Handball Championship, from 7th until 19th December 2010. There is a perfect balance between the winning and defeat position that the coaches speak from and also a significant cultural diversity, as the corpus covers the representatives of all 16th national teams performing in the competition. Although the aim of this study is not to outline an in-depth comparative analysis on the criterion of winning versus losing positions' of the speakers, the outcome of the match and its impact on coaches' position during the press-conference discourses plays an important role in understanding the bond between contextual elements and relational ones.

5. Findings and discussion: The scenography of post-match press conferences

When referring to the contextual dimension of coaches' discourses, there were three inter-correlated levels of analysis: the *contextual concentric circles* (van Dijk, 2009), the *communicative dispositive/ apparatus* and the *communication contract*. Each of them contributes to the overall scenography of the communicative situation in which the coaches' discourses were performed.

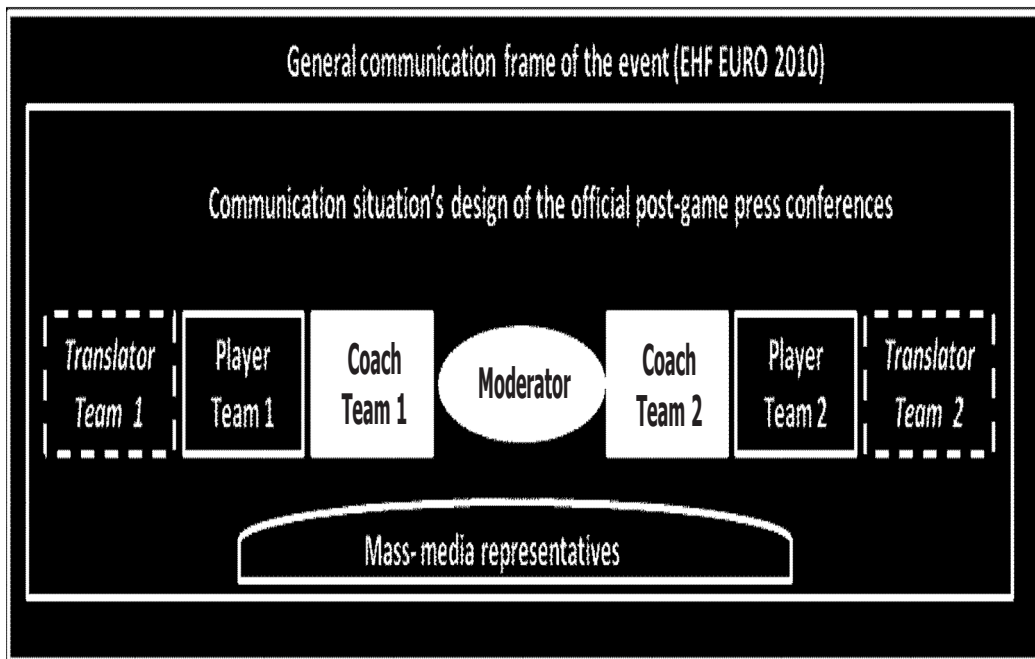
In discussing the contextual framework of a communicative act instead of focusing on “a context” it is probably more appropriate to speak in terms of a plurality of contexts or a multilayered concept that van Dijk referred to as the “*contextual concentric circles*” (van Dijk, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, on a specific-general axis of the context's structure of coaches' discourses that this study is focus on we can speak of several levels of contextualization: the particular press-conference of each match, the more general frame of the handball press-conferences, the context of the event itself - the European Feminine Handball Championship 2010, the context of European Feminine Handball Championships as a profile of competition or the overall sports press conference format as generating a discursive gender per se. As you can see, the matrix of combinations from which these *contextual concentric circles* emerge put together at least four general criteria: particular (now and here) versus general competitions, episodic versus integrative framework of the competition (press conference versus the whole event that the press conference is part of), specific sports' areas (handball) versus the sports' social field, general competition formats versus culturally situated ones (the cultural context of the host-country of the competition).

Before the analysis of the communicative dispositive/ apparatus of the press conferences organized during the European Feminine Handball Championship 2010 and the general communication contract of the post-match press conferences it is important to point out some aspects regarding the European Feminine Handball Championship as a competitive event. There are two main dimensions of defining this competition: one refers to its cyclic dimension and its instrumental value for the direct qualifications to the World Feminine Handball Championship held the next year and the other refers to the symbolic capital that is at stake in this competition. For the handball community the European Feminine Handball Championship is perceived

as the most balanced international competition in terms of performance levels of the participant teams, as the Old Continent is the hard core of handball emergence and development. That is why the level of competition is very high, the discrepancies between teams' values quite small compared to other international handball competition and, hence, the pressure and the importance of the outcomes significantly relevant for both the teams' representatives, as well as for mass media and fans. Drawing on a didactical discursive repertoire, often used by sports journalists, the European Feminine Handball Championship is the hardest international *test* for a team. The consequences of this fact on the discursive positioning of coaches is that it facilitates the assumption of *equality/evenness* in terms of teams potential or, at least, it *minimizes the statutory distance* between the two parties in the game confrontation.

On the communicative dispositive/ apparatus level of the press conferences organized during the European Feminine Handball Championship 2010, we can speak of a *metonymic mechanism* of transposing the confrontation design of the game from the handball field to the press conference context. The teams' representatives are placed symmetrically on both sides of a neutral moderator (Fig. 1), which can be seen as a substitute for the referees, mediating and maintaining the spatial and symbolic distance between the two parties. Moreover, along with this symbolic opposition associated with the sport actors' placement, it can be noticed an implicit hierarchy of power implied by this spatial arrangement: starting with the central role of the official representative of the competition, to coaches, players and translators. This relation of symbolic power and confrontation is also confirmed by the sequence of participants' interventions during the press conference: starting with moderator's short presentation of the two teams' representatives, the coaches' discourses, one after another, followed by the players' interventions, which are based on the same mirroring principle.

Figure 1. The post-match communicative apparatus' design.



Although press conferences are primarily known as a question-driven form of interaction between spokespersons and journalists, allowing a “non-reciprocal flow of information, with one side seeking information and the other releasing it” (Jiang, 2006, p. 237), the European Feminine Handball Championship's press conferences' format differs from the usual dynamics of interaction. Instead of a dialogic frame of interaction, there is a series of monologues of the participants, which follow a strict order and time limit that, in turn, leads to a high level of uniformity and predictability in terms of all press conferences' course of action. Every actor waits his turn and conforms himself to the normative frame of the press conference as a part of the ritualized competition programme: the message before the game, the game itself, spontaneous reactions right after the end of the game, the official press conference and the interviews after the press conference. In this circuit of communicative situations related to a game, the press conference is the most formal and yet the less dynamic sequence. However, it is the only mandatory public position that team's representatives have to express regarding the match evolution and outcome.

Probably the most important component for every act inside the social field of sports, including the communicative ones, is the *fair-play* principle that acts as the basis of the sports' culture. At the communicative level, the fair-play component and its related indicators can be analyzed from the perspective of the politeness theoretical approach. Therefore, the choice in coaches' discursive strategies are influenced by certain variables, mainly situational (intra-cultural) or culture-specific (cross-cultural) ones (Nureddeen, 2008). In terms of what Goffman (2003) called the *positive* or *negative face* (public image) of the participants, the instrumental role of the politeness component of coaches' discourses is to build and maintain a favorable image of themselves, one that is consistent with their contextual expected identity. We will use the term *sport courtesy* to refer to all the communicative acts of coaches' discursive politeness. There were three main categories of sport courtesy elements that were common for most of the coaches' press conferences discourses: *Congratulations and Thanks*, *Appreciation and Respect*, *Good Luck Wishes*, which will be discussed further in this paper.

In the structure of coaches' discourses, congratulations to the opponent team, generally, the winning one, are the starting point that establish the sport courtesy grounds of the relationship between the two teams. For a sport press conference context this is probably the most stable part of the communication contract, which became a standard formulaic routine. Besides the relational dimension that this starting formula implies, there is also a secondary dimension that refers to the speaker position towards the game itself, in terms of accepting the final result of the confrontation. As congratulation speech acts are generally found in the defeated discourses, they are seen as a fair-play indicator of accepting the winner-loser position. However, even winning coaches draw on this kind of elements, whether they are classic formulas of congratulations or, more often, acts of giving thanks to the opponent team for its performance. What is also worth mentioning is that, for most of the coaches' discourses, this congratulations/thanks part is the one in which the degree of personal involvement is higher and explicit, as it is followed by a less assumed discourse in referring to the game evolution. This can be noticed from the variation of pronouns and the switch between the clear individual position (“I”) in giving thanks or congratulating the opponent team to the collective position (“we”-ness) towards the overall match evaluation.

Illustrative samples:

“First of all *I want to **congratulate*** France for the victory. *We* must remember that my team took part at a EURO for the first time and today *we* showed signs of fatigue after two tough matches.[...]” (Slovenia team’s coach)

“*I want to **congratulate*** the Danish team for their determination. [...] *We* made many individual mistakes, which helped the Danish team. Now *we* have to focus on the last game.” (Romania team’s coach)

“*I want to **thank*** Ukraine for the match. *We* did a good second half and I’m very pleased with our defence.” (Holland team’s coach)

“First, *I want to say **thanks*** for the match. *We* were nervous yesterday, but *we* prepared well for today. *We* played with full speed from the start and *we* kept this speed during the match.” (Norway team’s coach)

However, even when there are no explicit congratulations/thanks formulas in coaches’ discourses, the sports courtesy is reflected in other forms of showing the speakers appreciation and respect to the opponent team. The intensity of this attitude ranges from contextual appreciation of the performance during that particular game, to general appreciation of the track record and reputation of the opponent team. Although first seen as an indicator of fair-play and respect to the opponent, these public appreciation speech acts can be also interpreted as discursive strategies of establishing and strengthening the *positive face* of coaches’ own team. The main advantage of these strategies is that they work both sides, whether you are on the winning or on the losing position. Thus, while for the winning team the victory is more important as the opponent is stronger, for the losing team the defeat is easier to be accepted, as the opponent is perceived as being stronger. So, projecting an image of a strong opponent is an indirect way of outlining a positive image of your own team, whether it managed to win or not.

Illustrative samples:

“I’m very satisfied with winning the opening match *against **one of the best teams in the world. I **respect***** French handball and my colleague the French coach. I’m sure France will be much stronger at the next match.” (Norway team’s coach)

“I am very happy with this win. This was the *big test* for us, as we had not beaten *one of the **top teams*** yet. *Romania belongs to this category.* [...]” (Denmark team’s coach)

“Congratulations to Spain for a *deserved win*. They had the lead the whole match. My team missed too many clear chances and then *you can never win against the **silver medalists of Europe.*** [...]” (Serbia team’s coach).

“We lost because we played against Norway. *They are the **best team in the world.*** [...]” (Slovenia team’s coach)

In affirming their appreciation towards the opponent team, many coaches tend to relay on a contextual form of admitting the superiority of the opponent, which, in this manner is limited only to that particular game or even to those critical moments of the game that swung over the balance between the two teams. In other words, the situational frame of “*today*” acts as a way of saying that the result is far from being conclusive when judging the overall dif-

ferences between the values of the teams. This is strongly related to one of the unwritten laws in sports: that no result is definitive, but just a contextual, here and now, outcome which reflect a particular sequence of the confrontation between two opponents.

Illustrative samples:

“**Today** Hungary was stronger than my team but we kept pace with them throughout the game and it was as close as it could get. I want to congratulate Hungary for the victory and we will come back even stronger.” (Ukraine team’s coach)

“Sweden were simply better **today**. I think their good defence, a disciplined performance, good tactics and going high pace gave them the victory. Good job for my colleague from Sweden!” (Norway team’s coach)

“[...] Sweden improved in the second half. We have won over Sweden earlier this year, but **this time** we met a new and stronger opponent. [...]” (Hungary team’s coach)

Regarding the *Good Luck Wishes* category of sport courtesy speech acts, although it is less used than the previous ones, its main functions are similar to the ones discussed earlier: as fair play indicator and, sometimes, as a way of expressing the power of the opponent by using a projective strategy. For this last role of good luck wishes, coaches rest on anticipating the opponent qualification in the final phase of the competition, which means that their fight was against one of the top teams and, therefore, contributes to the overall strategy of maintaining a positive face for themselves and their teams.

Illustrative samples:

“[...] When Russia changed their tactics after a timeout we were really in trouble. But we have learnt a lot and *I wish Russia **good luck** for the rest of the EURO.*” (Island team’s coach)

“My players performed in a fantastic manner in front of 12,000 spectators. They had great heart and we achieved a fantastic result against a strong team. We showed tonight that we are not just a team from the Balkans but a European team that wants to compete at the big competitions. *I wish Denmark **good luck** for the semi-finals and the Final.*” (Montenegro team’s coach)

“Congratulations to Sweden for reaching the finals, *I wish them **success** tomorrow*. I think they fully deserved the victory today.” (Romania team’s coach)

All in all, these sport courtesy discursive elements reflect the compelling power of the communicative situation of press conference as well as the strategic communicative intentions of coaches to establish and maintain a positive face of themselves and their teams. Besides the consensual register that the sport courtesy generates, the references to the opponent team and the way coaches’ built their opponent image reflect Goffman’s concept of *replaying*, giving the fact that “what the individual spends most of his spoken moments doing is providing evidence for the fairness or unfairness of his current situation” (Goffman, 1986, p. 503) throughout his own version of the situation he took part in. Therefore, although not in a very explicit way, sport courtesy means more than a sequence of standard formulaic routines, because it also engages elements of defining the context, the opponent and the speakers own positioning.

As for the secondary objective of this study, which refers to the relational dynamics reflected in coaches' discourses, the main aspects that should be discussed are: who do the coaches' discourses refer to and what mechanisms they use in referring to them. First of all, coaches' discourses are mainly oriented towards collective entities ("we", "our team" vs. "They", the opponent team), references towards individual actors being exceptionally made. However, if we were to look at these rare occasions in which sport actors were individualized we can see that there are two types of situations: a formal courtesy cross-talk between coaches, showing agreement or returning/paying a compliment to the opponent team's coach or outlining the crucial contribution that a player had for the game's outcome.

Illustrative samples:

"We came here with a hope that we could win against Norway. [...] I'm happy and *I want to thank my colleague coach.*" (Sweden team's coach)

"*I agree with my Spanish colleague* that both teams were very tired today, but we wanted to win more [...]." (Montenegro team's coach)

"Montenegro was the best team today. All their players performed at a high level and *Borjana Popovic in particular was incredible* [...]." (Denmark team's coach)

Although most people would expect that coaches' post-match discourses will be more focused on their own team, in reality the analysis showed that the main reference point in their discourses is the opponent team. Yet, as discussed earlier, coaches use their remarks upon the opponent team's image and evolution as a tool to refer to their own team by implication. Correlating the overall evaluative nature of sports competition with the evaluative dimension of post-match discourses, this comparative frame of referring to the opponent and their own team is a natural consequence in coaches' discourses. As for the comparative mechanism itself, it has three levels of manifestation: a historical perspective upon the handball tradition and reputation of the national teams, a more recent accounting of previous results of the games between the two teams and a strongly contextualized comparison between the two teams' evolution in that particular game. However, the dominant register of all coaches' discourses is a comparative one, build on a mirroring principal that puts one team's reputation/general or particular performance against the other team's one. Even the core component of most of the coaches' discourses, meaning the narrative *replaying* of the game evolution, is based on presenting the action and counteraction of the two teams or on identifying the strong and weak points of the teams' tactics.

Illustrative samples:

"[...]It was a bad game. *We were* bad in attack. *Hungary had* good tactics. [...]The Hungarians *were better.*" (France team's coach)

"The Swedish team were stronger and better today. [...] They dominated the match." (Ukraine team's coach)

"It was a very tight game today and the two teams looked tired. *We missed* too many shots from the wings and *Croatia was more precise* with their shots." (Spain team's coach)

"*They had the lead* the whole match. *My team missed* too many clear chances and then you can never win *against the silver medallists* of Europe. *My colleague had the opportuni-*

ty to use more players. *I was not able to replace key players who played the entire match.*" (Serbia team's coach)

Apart from this dominant dyad: own team – opponent team, the reference to the general representation of the game as a show was made in just 4 of all 94 coaches' discourses, all of them games against one of the two hosting teams. So, it can be said that the spectators and the atmosphere in the hall during an official competition play an important role only for the hosting teams' matches, where their impact on the game evolution is felt by both teams.

Illustrative samples:

"[...] *The atmosphere in the hall was simply fantastic.* [...]" (Sweden team's coach)

"[...] We managed to *put pressure* on the Russians and I think we showed our best attacking performance so far. There were a lot of brilliant combinations and it was fantastic to play in *such a wonderful arena with so many people.*" (Denmark team's coach)

Giving this relational dimension of the discourses, it can be concluded that coaches' representation upon the game is almost entirely focused on the competitive nature of the confrontation between the two parties involved, not on the dramaturgical dimension of the game as a show for the public. What coaches' do throughout their press conference discourses is to transpose and redefine the real confrontation from the handball field into a less intense evaluative form of comparing the two teams. The sport courtesy and the comparative mechanism that coaches' discourses are based on are the ones that manage to build the bridge between what can be called the belligerent form of fair-play on the field and the more consensual relationship between the opponent teams during the press conference context.

6. Conclusions

The public and intercultural exposure of coaches' press conferences discourses act as an intensifier of the compelling power that the communication contract associated to this communicative situation has on the discourses' structure and content. The overall effect of the constraints imposed by the communication contract and the communicative dispositive/ apparatus of press conference is a high level of similarity between coaches discourses. Therefore, we can speak of a routinized discourse, which is focused on what we call *sports courtesy* as a discursive form of the constitutive principal of fair-play. All three main categories of sports courtesy speech acts identified in coaches' discourses - *congratulations and thanks, appreciation and respect, good luck wishes*- have a double function: first of all they establish and guarantee a consensual frame of interaction between the sport actors and, secondary, they work as a tool to build and maintain a positive face for the speaker and his team. In other words, showing respect to the opponent and admitting the value of his performance is an implicit way of providing the first brick for the public image you want to deliver about yourself. The pressure of the communication contract and the social desirability that it relies on make the sport courtesy the safest choice for coaches' public positioning towards the opponent team and the game itself. However, despite the contextual constraints in the discourses' length and structure, there are three common aspects that define the relational dimension of coaches' discourses: the comparative mechanism of evaluating the two teams, the dominant orientation

towards collective actors and the general focus on the opponent team as reference point. All in all, it can be said that coaches' discourses during press conferences tend to reflect the dyadic game design from the field, keeping the comparative evaluation logic of the teams, but changing its coordinates from direct confrontation between the teams to a softer and consensual sequence of their representatives' discourses. Starting from the insights emerged during this case study, further research need to be carried out for a better understanding of the sport courtesy phenomenon, whether using the politeness theoretical approach, an intercultural framework or another complementary perspective.

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Institutional Discrimination against the (non) Constituent Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Blocking the Europeanization Process

Abstract: In spite of the fact that more than a decade Bosnia and Herzegovina has been going through deep European Union-related reform processes the country is still facing troubles in terms of its democratic progress. For instance, the post-Dayton public discourse has been characterised by ideological domination of the nationalist political elites which are doing very little to include the so-called non-nationalists and a members of several minority groups from public policy-making. As a result Bosnia is facing serious democratic deficit since one of the most fundamental objectives of Bosnia's EU reforms processes has been eradication of a dangerous politics of nationalists or 'ethnic fascists'. Thus, in this paper the main focus was on the theme of the post-Dayton ethnic projects which have brought about massive discrimination against the non-constituents and a so-called Others as they are referred to at the constitutional framework. Better to say, in the post-war Bosnia democratic inclusion has turned into a competition between the country's three biggest national communities, Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats. Overall, Bosnian citizens still live in the political system which is largely based on ethnic-nationalist paradigm or ethnocracy rather than democratic political system. Therefore, Bosnia which is largely discriminating against significant number of its citizens can not enter the European Union as such.

Keywords: Democracy; Dayton Agreement; European Union; Minority Groups; Ethno-nationalism.

1. Democracy, Bosnian Style

Parallel to massive democratization reforms in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) which started after dissolution of the Soviet Union, in November 1990 the first democratic elections were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter, Bosnia or BiH). These democratic elections were among the first indicators that described the democratic transition of the country from the communist regime to democratic society. Furthermore, the first political parties in the country were allowed to be organized along ethnic or national lines resulting in the nationalist parties together collecting 84% of the vote (Arnautovi?, 2007, p. 7). Thus, an organization of the first democratic elections in the country hammered out the start of the political supremacy of nationalist political parties as majority of citizens have voted for nationalist parties: that is, Bosniaks voted for Party of Democratic Action (SDA), Bosnian Serbs for Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), and Bosnian Croats for the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) (Freedom House, 2010, p. 122). To illustrate, even the post-election distribution of power was based upon the ethno-nationalist principles so that the President of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was a Bosniak, president of the Parliament was a Serb, while the prime minister was a Croat representative. Furthermore, the war that broke out in 1992 further in-

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creased ethnic tensions and intolerance resulting in ethnicity and ethnic homogeneity as a dominant social and political magnum opus.

In other words, the conflict between the three ethnic communities significantly intensified inter-ethnic polarization and massively strengthened the political dominance of ethno-nationalist political parties in the decision-making processes. Moreover, the Dayton Peace Agreement signed in 1995 and brought the war to the end, not only created an extremely cumbersome policy process that would frequently cause institutional and political deadlock, it also left unresolved the conflicts that had come to the fore in the 1992-1995 war and enshrined the ethno-nationalist standards as the foundation of public politics (Vogel, 2006, p. 2). While the DPA brought the war to an end and laid the foundation for consolidating peace, many analysts and scholars also argue that the agreement as a document reflects wartime circumstances cannot by itself ensure BiH's future as a functioning, free, and democratic state (Ashdown, 2005). Thus, the post-war political and social ambient has been largely dominated by three ethnic groups leading to institutional marginalization of minority groups and their members. That is, the members of all the three ethnic communities have been defined by law as 'ethnic citizens'. Even though democratic transition has been thought bring about participation and inclusion of diverse groups into public policy-making the post-war Bosnian public sphere has been dominated by ethno-political matrix causing discrimination against those who are not defining themselves as nationalists.

2. 'Balkanisation' vs. Europeanisation

Furthermore, a discriminatory political system in Bosnia is not compatible with the country's aspirations to enter the European Union in the future. Actually, at the late 1990s through the newly launched Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) the European Union has aimed to encourage the path of the region's countries, including BiH, integration into political and economic structures of the EU (Becker, 2008, p. 20). Additionally, in June 2000 in the Feira European Council it was agreed that all the SAP countries, including Bosnia, have the status of potential candidates for the EU membership. Following difficult and irritating reform process Bosnia and Herzegovina has signed the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA) with the EU in June 2008 which was the first pre-accession tool for this Balkan country towards eventual EU membership. Thus, for BiH and for the whole Western Balkans, the EU-related reform processes mean adjustment and adaptation to advanced Western models as well as security and prosperity for the future (Anastasakis, 2005, p. 80). Thus, the so-called Europeanization process has influenced the political, economic, administrative and social policy-making in the country. That is, the Europeanisation process is a model which bears tremendous potential and power to influence policies, values and norms in the EU aspirant countries.

For instance, Kubicek (2005, p. 374) stresses that the process of Europeanization not only guarantees new opportunities and alternative for societal and political subjects which had been previously excluded from the policy-making processes but also it contributes to transformation of other structural elements such as a political ideology (identity politics), the legal framework, and the party system, and triggers changes in them all, finally resulting in internal reforms. Furthermore, Ladrech (1994) asserts transformative power of Europeanization process exerting influence on the citizenship and national identity. However, it is high-

ly debatable to what extent the Europeanization process in Bosnia has influenced the idea of citizenship since minority groups and non-national members are extensively marginalized both at state and a community level. Even though there have been a number of difficult challenges and problems slowing down Bosnia's EU reform process, widespread ethnic polarization and omnipresent ethnic domination over public sphere have become the most staggering challenge on the country's route to Brussels. That is, the current Bosnian ethno-political arrangement has limited realization of citizens' individual identity and civic values that should be an essential part of the Europeanization process. The post-war Bosnia has mostly been closer to the process of 'Balkanization' that is viewed as contrary to what may be 'Western' values and norms (Todorova, 1994). That is, public sphere in Bosnia is today influenced by two opposite flows, namely Europeanisation process which aims at bringing democracy and peace to Balkans, and Balkanization which can be described as a process which refers to possibility of new conflicts, political tensions and ethnic segregation.

3. Protection of Minority Groups in the EU

Among other things, the aim of integration of European countries has been to reduce harmful influences of nationalist and fascist projects across Europe to happen again. That is, the aim has been to create the European Community, later the European Union, and thus reduce disintegrative influences of nationalists further integrating the European countries into a peaceful, prosperous, and secure community. Thus, a peaceful and harmonious coexistence between different national, linguistic, religious, sexual, and racial groups have been encouraged in the EU institutional framework (Wilk-Woë, 2010, p.79). Especially, at the beginning of the 1990s the EU intensified its activities in the field of a minority protection prior to the enlargement of the Central and Eastern European countries. Thus, in June 1993 the European Council held in Copenhagen agreed on the so-called Copenhagen Criteria that, among other things, emphasizes the protection of minority groups as important political norm that has to be respected in the member states and those which aspire it to become. That is, the EU's Copenhagen political criteria require both potential and candidate countries to achieve "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities" (Harryvan & van der Harst, 1997, p. 285). This being said, the applicant countries are supposed to implement necessary reforms and pass the laws that will effectively protect a minority groups before they become the EU member state.

Furthermore, the Copenhagen criteria have to a significant extent contributed to making the members of minority groups, regarding their religion, nation, gender, etc., equal to other citizens. In other words, the Article 12 of the TEC had prohibited discrimination based on national identity. Following the Amsterdam Treaty the Article 13 of the TEC forbids the discriminatory acts on the basis of eight following grounds, namely, sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Recently, the Treaty of Lisbon has decided to include minority groups across the European Union as a legal entity into the EU's primary law. Thus, in the Article 1a it was stated that the rights of persons belonging to minority groups have become the central values and principles that the EU protects. Furthermore, the EU Fundamental Rights Charter paves the way to the principle of the non-discrimination and encourages the member states to protect religious, cultural and linguistic diversity (Vouters, 2001). This brought the EU much closer to its visionary ideal of

“Unity in diversity”. And despite few cases of violation of rights of minority groups in the EU states it can be concluded that Brussels has build an image and credibility of the organization which to a significant extent ensure rights and opportunities for its minorities.

4. The Theory of Citizen Recognition

Apparently, the post-war public life in Bosnia has been extensively marked by massive exclusive political modus vivendi based on extreme violation of fundamental human rights marginalizing both the citizens that do not sympathize with nationalist politics and the members of minority groups. Thus, the post-Dayton political model has been concerned with the extent and nature of political participation of the citizens belonging to the three largest national communities in the country. In order to thoroughly comprehend and analyze the process of political participation of the citizens in the country Jürgen Habermas’s notion of citizen recognition provides adequate theoretical framework as a basis for constructive debate and argumentation. For instance, Habermas examines cases where cultural or national identity of citizens prevents their political participation in the public sphere with the rest of society denying them the basic human rights. According to Habermas, the public spaces characterized by serious violation of basic human rights by other citizens there exists “an incomplete or unequal inclusion of citizens, to whom full status as members of the political community is denied” (2005, p. 16). That is, those citizens are there only physically while in political terms they are non-existent.

Furthermore, Habermas has strongly defended democratic principles such as popular sovereignty, rule of law, constitutionally guaranteed rights, and civil liberties as an indispensable component of the open, free, just, and democratic administration. Therefore, Habermas claims that constitutions are the basis for creating peaceful and democratic society in a heterogeneous context. In this regard, he also points out that it is the constitutional principles based on a rule of law that unite and integrate the citizens of a society in which there is a wealth of social, cultural, national, philosophical values and ideas (Habermas, 2003). Inclusive constitution is the basis of democratic order in every free and open society. As O’Neill points out: “no citizen, or group of citizens, should be excluded from a democratic process of legitimation. Relevant interests and needs, values and aspirations, convictions and conceptions of identity, must somehow all be factored into our law-making procedures” (2000, p. 1). Therefore, societies perceiving themselves as democratic can not set up its political order on exclusionary or discriminatory constitutional principles or marginalizing social mindset. Even the mind set of ordinary citizens can to a significant extent be shaped by inclusive and democratic Constitution.

5. Supremacy of the Ethnic-nationalism

Although 15 years passed since the Dayton Agreement was signed, political tensions and national disagreements are still omnipresent across Bosnian society and national leaders are challenging the Peace Accord more openly and more harshly than ever before. In the post-Dayton Bosnia the exclusive ethno-nationalist approach to politics has managed to gain up-

per hand over the reconciliation and consensus (Bianchini, 2000, p. 79). Thus, BiH is still far from functioning and democratic state that the accord had envisioned and had promised. Today the country still consists of de facto three mono-ethnic territories, three education systems and a central state government where ethnic key is the rule of the game. Better to say, the whole state structure is built according to omnipresent ethno-nationalist governance model. Therefore, the three majority ethnic groups dominate the public discourse in every aspect of life excluding minorities and non-nationalists just because they do not nourish the same political preferences as they have. The best example is the Bosnian rotating presidency consisting of a three members: one Bosniac, one Croat and one Serb, each of whom must be directly elected in their respective entity level. Thus, the Bosnian constitution is clearly treating non-ethnic members of its community as aliens or apostates. Furthermore, under such political regime it is shameful and sometimes even dangerous to declare yourself as non-nationalist or minority member. Thus, those who do not declare themselves as nationalists are treated like outsiders.

For instance, as it is clearly stated in the Dayton Agreement the Constitution of BiH prevents candidacy of “others”, which are the members of a minority groups, to the Presidency and the House of Peoples on the ground of their ethnic backgrounds because these positions are guaranteed and safeguarded for the so-called ‘constituent’ peoples, i.e. Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. Thus, ethnic groups are represented as communities in different power-sharing levels institutionalizing the ethnic nationalism as a dominant political objective and superior governance model. The hegemony of ethno-politicians has been perpetuated by vague and manipulative idea of “constituent peoples”. Even though the concept of a constituent peoples is crucial and necessary in heterogeneous societies such as Bosnia it should not be implemented in such a way that it harms and blocks political participation by all citizens in the country, and especially minority groups. As a result, minority groups and non-ethnic members of Bosnian society are completely excluded from the current power-sharing governance model. It is a kind of national betrayal to declare yourself non-ethnic or sympathizing minority identity. For instance, Touquet and Vermeersch claim that “These people have now been excluded from mainstream accounts of the outcomes of the recent conflict: it is not possible to be a Yugoslav, a Bosnian or an Eskimo in a situation in which ethnic nationalism has transcended all else and in which there are intensely localized variations in identity and ‘national’ sentiments” (2008, p. 280). While ordinary people are not so concerned with the problems of minority groups it is worrying that even policy makers are ignoring the fact that situation of minorities in Bosnia should be much improved.

6. Institutional and Constitutional Crisis

The current constitutional framework is shaped in such a way that it best fit the interests and preferences of ethnic-nationalist elites which do not support an idea of equal citizens as in other democratic communities. A number of scholars regularly point out that DPA was negotiated by the nationalist leaders who actually were one of the main causes of the war, and thus it just extended the power of the ethnic-nationalist parties and their leaders (Kaldor, 1997, pp. 28-30). Bosnian citizens that do not belong to the so-called “constituent peoples” were forgotten and excluded during the negotiations table in Dayton and latter completely excluded from the institutional framework as well. Thus, the so-called “Others” in the Bosnian con-

stitution, namely Jews, Roma and all other national minorities together with those who do not declare affiliation with the three biggest ethnic groups have become citizens without institutional space to exercise their political and social rights. Given such an unlawful provisions of the Bosnian constitution the country has faced deep institutional and constitutional crisis which openly threatened an idea of democratic or deliberative participation. As the post-war Bosnia was designated to become “ethnic state” in the eyes of ethno-nationalist leaders the national minorities as an argument of genuine multi-national Bosnia have been marginalized from public space.

Furthermore, through extensive institutionalization of ethno-nationalization Bosnia has become a place where only citizens declaring themselves to be nationalist have a right to take part in the country’s policy-making processes. For instance, the category of “others” and non-nationalists are openly perceived as a threat to the power-sharing model of rotation where three ethnic groups chose their representatives respectively. The “rotation model” is clear mechanism of political engineering in order to achieve the objective of ethnically-divided Bosnia ethnically-segregated community. Thus, democratic participation in the country is actually competition between ethnicities or ethnic-nationalist communities rather than a race of equal personalities or citizens (as it is understood in consolidated democracies) having equal right of vote and be elected. As a result, the post-war hegemony of ethno-nationalists has paradoxically resulted in increasing democratic deficit of the country. Consequently, all these that belong to category of “others” who number 17 in BiH, namely, Albanians, Montenegrins, Czechs, Italians, Jews, Hungarians, Macedonians, Germans, Poles, the Roma, Romanians, Russians, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Turks and Ukrainians (Hammarberg, 2010, p. 6) are just playing a role of mere spectators at a ballot box. Currently, minority groups are powerless in political and constitutional terms.

7. Exclusion of Non-Constituents

The Dayton Peace Agreement resulted in a power-sharing structure dividing Bosnia into two “ethnic” entities, the Bosnian Serb-populated Republika Srpska, and Bosniaks and Croats-populated Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, at the state level there is rotating presidency consisting of three ethnic representatives respectively, and a state parliament which are superior to the entity institutional structures. Nevertheless, as stated in the Dayton Agreement the Constitution of BiH prevents candidacy of “others”, which are minority groups, to the Presidency and the House of Peoples on the ground of their ethnic origins because these positions are guaranteed for the so-called ‘constituent’ peoples, i.e. Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. This includes national minorities who have lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries (Claridge, 2010, p. 1). This power-sharing arrangement has considerably contributed to the massive process of ethno-nationalization since non-ethnic elements are completely excluded from the political participation in the country where they were born and raised up. That is, the citizens from minority groups such as the Roma, Turks, or Jews, are granted only a limited degree of self administration and sovereignty (Soberg, 2008, p. 715). Although BiH joined the Council of Europe on 24 April 2002 there has been increasing discrimination against minorities in the country. Recently, there appeared serious messages and statements that there is a serious possibility that Bosnia will be expelled from the Council of Europe if it does not implement laws which would make all Bosnian citizens equal.

Indeed, by forbidding minority members the right to run for office Bosnian constitution violates fundamental human rights though in 2002 its government ratified the ECHR and its Protocols. Thus, Jakob Finci and Dervo Sejdić who are respectively Jewish and Roma by their ethnicity, contested these provisions before the ECHR since they were banned from running for office. In December 2009, the Court ruled that the exclusion of minority groups from Bosnia's highest elected offices constituted unjustified discrimination. Thus, "the European Court has made it clear that race-based exclusion from political office has no place in Europe," said Clive Baldwin, senior legal advisor at HRW (Hirsch, 2009). If correctly implemented, the decision of the ECHR will assist in breaking down ethnic and religious divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina by encouraging political participation and representation, and promoting social cohesion (Claridge, 2010, p. 2). That is, reforms to include minority groups into policy-making processes can be a new beginning of establishing genuine multi-national and tolerant society all across Bosnia. However, two-three years passed from the Court decision and the country's politicians have not yet removed discriminatory provisions from the constitution due to their different ethnic interests. As a result, Bosnia is still profoundly undemocratic country. While most of Europe is going towards multi-national structures Bosnia is still pushing ethno-nationalization projects. And the Roma population are probably the most discriminated group in the country although it is actually not so small comparing to other minority groups.

For instance, the Roma problem in the country is the most illustrative and representative case. Although in 2008 Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Action Plan to Address the Problems of Roma in Employment, Housing and Healthcare, this minority group is still highly marginalized and harmed. Similarly, both in the pre-war and the post-war Bosnia the Roma members have been one of the most marginalized and repressed minority group. According to the Roma NGOs, between 75,000-100,000 Roma are living in BiH and they are considered to be one of the largest national minorities in the country. Although the country is on the way to the European Union there has been profound discrimination against Roma in terms of their prospects in education, employment, health to political representation. For instance, Roma are the most numerous ethnic group amongst the homeless in BiH. More than 70 % of Roma do not have a house, while the rate of Roma returnees is very low (2009). According to a 2007 report by UNICEF, up to 80% of Roma children in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not attend school, only 20% of Roma participate in secondary education, and less than 1% in higher education (2007). The proportion of Roma employed within the public sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is estimated at 2–3%. Thus, they are discriminated against even in the terms of basic human rights. Also, most Roma do not have identity card so thus they can not use public and social services.

Further, even in the media the Roma members are degraded and describing them as "problematic", "violent", "dangerous" etc. For instance, when an incident involving the Roma happens, their full names are given in sensational headlines, even if they are minors, with almost an obligatory remark that they belong to the Roma minority (Turcilo, 2009). In addition, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Thomas Hammarberg, and his delegation visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, from 27 to 30 November 2010 in order to evaluate the living conditions of minority groups in BiH. As far as Roma minority is concerned, the Delegation summarized that their lifestyle prevented the State from including them in official statistics. The government knows they live in difficult situations and is serious about this issue. But the delegation said the question was more one of prejudice than discrimination

(2011). Whatever it be, Roma is one of the most discriminated minority groups in the country. Further, it is even more troubling due to the fact that most of ordinary Bosnians do not consider Roma population an equal citizens worth of respect and any attention. So, what is of utmost importance is that this minority group, and other as well, is enabled to be on an equal foot as the “three big” so this can be a start in change of mentality among all ordinary citizens as well.

8. Education as an Ideological Tool

In Bosnia, the education system has been widely utilized by the ruling ethno-nationalists to strengthen their ethnic hegemony. That is, the ethnic leaders have not demonstrated necessary political will and commitment to establish genuine multi-ethnic education programmes and curricula. Furthermore, education policies have played significant role in the promotion of ethnic segregation and ethnic apartheid. For instance, the European Commission argued in the 2009 Progress Report for Bosnia that divisions in the education system through continuous development of mono-ethnic schools in both entities are still a matter of concern and result in de facto segregation of pupils from the very beginning of their schooling (2009). As an illustration, educational system in Federation of BiH is built on the model of “two schools under one roof” where children from two ethnic groups, Croats and Bosniaks, attend classes in the same building, but physically separated from each other and taught separate curriculum. Today, there are 57 such schools in this part of Bosnia. Some ethnic politicians oppose integrated multi-ethnic schools free from political, religious and any other discrimination arguing they would loose their ethnic identity mixing with others. Ethno-nationalists have used education for the systematic indoctrination of their respective ethnic community. It is probably logical since these three ethnic groups have completely different opinions about past events, and especially during the Bosnian war. However, if they want to live together in peace they should create education curriculum which can bring them stability, prosperity and cooperation.

Yet, while education system could help spread values such as democracy, dialogue, and tolerance, the education in Bosnia is largely manipulated by political elites and thus used as an ideological tool to spread values such as ethni-nationalism, superiority of its own nation and religion, fear of others, etc. In this way, a children of minority groups in Bosnia have been the collateral damage of the ethno-nationalist policy-making in the sphere of education. In developed democracies, education system is playing a substantial role in spreading a universal values such as peace, democracy, mutual, respect, tolerance, equality, and justice. However, in the post-Dayton Bosnia minorities have become “invisible” in the education system which is hammering out ethno-nationalist paradigm. For instance, Valery Perry claims, “Let us take a look at language. The official language in the Republika Srpska is Serbian, and in the Federation the official languages are Bosnian or Croatian, depending on the canton. The ‘others’ learn the language that is dominant in their particular surrounding. It is worth stressing that we have three official languages in one country. ‘Others’ have been assimilated into an official language, but only the language of their specific territory, which in my opinion is not in accordance with their human rights” (2002, p. 27).

9. Consociationalist Model of Power-sharing

Probably marginalization of minority groups from the Dayton negotiations and from the agreed accord conception was a result of speedy reaction to end the war and find difficult compromise solution. The most important thing was to end the horrible war and find a power-sharing model in which each ethnic groups will take part without being discriminated and dominated by other two groups respectively. That is, the main objective of the Dayton negotiations was peace rather than equality, thus discriminating against non-nationalist groups. As the European Court of Human Rights concluded in their ruling concerning Sejdic-Finci case:

“a very fragile cease-fire was in effect on the ground. The provisions were designed to end a brutal conflict marked by genocide and ‘ethnic cleansing’. The nature of the conflict was such that the approval of the ‘constituent peoples’ ... was necessary to ensure peace. This could explain, without necessarily justifying, the absence of representatives of other communities ... at the peace negotiations and the participants’ preoccupation with effective equality between the ‘constituent peoples’ in the post-conflict society” (2009, p. 34).

Thus, BiH has been a bi-cameral legislature where the three so-called “constituent peoples”, Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats, are represented in parity (5:5:5) in the second chamber, the House of Peoples (Marko, 2005, p. 6). In addition, both state presidency and national government with a ministers and their deputies are composed according to the ethnic power-sharing. Thus, the post-Dayton institutional framework is to a large extent based on the consociationalist model of power-sharing (Lipjhart, 1994). Consociationalism is a form of power-sharing whose main purpose is reconciliation of diverse social preferences along ethnic and religious lines (Schneckenner, 2002, pp. 203-206). In other words, Dayton Agreement has resulted in an institutional framework in which the largest three ethnic groups are officially recognized in the constitution and which take equal part at all administrative decision-making levels, and also enjoying the same right of veto when their respective “vital national rights” are endangered (Bieber, 2004). However, consociationalist model of power-sharing in Bosnia has not brought about necessary democratic transformation and reconciliation even after the 15 years of transition period. While envisaged to keep the equilibrium between three ethnic groups, the Dayton-based consociationalist model completely excluded minority members and non-nationalists from the policy-making structures.

The post-war power-sharing order in Bosnia has heavily relied on the constituent ethnic groups. However, weak performance of democracy and ethnic tolerance under the current rules reveals limits of institutional engineering (Manning & Anti?, 2003, pp. 55-56). It is of crucial importance to apply institutional engineering in the post-conflict societies in order to bring peace and stability among warring fractions. In fact, institutional engineering is the art of providing for rules and institutions in order to pursue political goals – such as creating a functioning multi-ethnic democracy (Reilly, 2001; Grofman & Stockwell, 2003). Nevertheless, the war in Bosnia was thought to end through ethnic balance of power-sharing which resulted in a political concept that was counterproductive further increasing ethnic tensions among warring groups. As Prof. Zarije Seizovic points out: “The “ethnic criteria” introduced in the Preamble of the Constitution of BiH (being reinforced in number of places in its normative part) prevents BiH authorities from sharing power equally within the civil society, favouring ethnic groups to the detriment of the individual citizen” (2007, p. 2). Thus, such a power-sharing model has been viewed in essentialist and absolutist terms by ethnic groups or a clear example of zero-sum game.

Manifestly, while minority groups were completely marginalized during the negotiations among warring ethnic groups their presence and political inclusion could be utilized for the development of democratic and open system of governance. While today after the ruling of the ECHR they have become a huge problem on the country's integration into Euro-Atlantic associations they could actually be a part of a long-term solution. Indeed, the Constitution of BiH recognizes basic human rights and protection of minority groups and requires the State institutions and both Entity government to ensure the highest level of internationally recognized human rights and freedom from discrimination (Art. II 4). Yet, in practice all the country's citizens do not enjoy the human rights and fundamental freedoms on equal basis. That is, the current constitutional order was unsuccessful from the very outset in BiH, as it has not provided for protection of individual citizens but their collective identity (Seizovic, 2007, p. 2). Were the minority protected from the discriminatory acts the whole concept would turn from ethnic to civic eradicating the ethnic homogenization as a main source of political and social tensions in Bosnia. This would lead to strengthening of universal human rights as prescribed by the liberal-democratic governance models.

10. Who are the 'Bosnian citizens'?

Following the ethnic conflict in 1992-1995 and the post-war domination of the ethno-nationalist paradigm the citizenship in Bosnia has acquired unique features based extensively on the primacy of group rights over individual rights. Actually, the Dayton constitutional framework guarantee both state and entity citizenship for population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is, acquisition of the entity citizenship has further intensified the process of ethnic homogenization and also exclusion of non-ethnic elements in the country. As Sarajlic argues:

"In addition to the malaise of postsocialist transition, shared by all the Yugoslavian successor states, the existing Bosnian citizenship regime has been strongly influenced by a heritage of ethnic conflict and the provisional constitutional set-up of the country, ... the conceptualization of citizenship in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been dependent on the definition of the community of citizens who constitute the state. Since Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a nation-state (and has never been one) but a federal union based on the sovereignty of ethnic groups which have political supremacy over individuals, making clear-cut assumptions and definitions of Bosnian citizenship is close to impossible (2010, p. 2).

Thus, it has become almost illogical and funny to talk about the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina since more than half of the country's population do feel as Serbs, Croats, or Bosniaks rather than Bosnians. In other words, BiH political discourse has become limited and even restrictive for the members perceiving themselves as Yugoslavs, Bosnians, Romas, Jews, and so forth. In that regard, Prof. Atajić points out that, "Everything – from the greeting you use to the dialect you speak and the newspaper in your coat pocket – is judged, commented upon and categorized in terms of an omnipresent, mysticised 'ethnicity'. Under such circumstances, defining oneself as a citizen of the BiH state is tantamount to a betrayal of one's national identity" (2002, p. 118). In other words, by vast majority of people in Bosnia ethnicity is perceived as a religious dogma that has to be respected and emphasized all the time. Such situation has produced negative consequences on the development of common Bosnian citizenship. In this context, there is also a kind of absurdity; namely, even those citizens who are Bosnians (instead of being Serbs, Bosniaks or Croats) constitute a minority in BiH

(Turcilo, 2009, p. 1). In other words, every person not aligning himself/herself with one of the three ethnic groups is automatically considered as minority or a kind of foreign element.

Furthermore, the interests of collectivity have dominated individual preferences of the citizens preventing development of free discussion and inclusion of non-ethnic elements of society. As Mujkic and Husley point out “since the first democratic elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1991, politics has been characterized by ethnopolitics rather than interest-based politics. The result is that political competition for voters has been warped, with the role of voters reduced to a kind of ethnic census” (2010, p. 144). Moreover, before the day of elections the vast majority of the members of three ethnic groups decide “collectively” to give vote to their ethno-nationalist political parties respectively. Not only that non-nationalists and members of minority groups are excluded from the public discourse but they are very often under strong pressure to give their vote to one of the nationalist political party. In other words, the post-war ethno-nationalization discourse has created an omnipresent “ethno-nationalist pressure” over the members of Bosnian society to identify with one of the three national groups. In other words, the post-war ethno-nationalist paradigm “naturally” exerts a pressure on Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Catholics, and Bosnian Orthodox, to align with their respective nationalist political parties. Thus, in the election campaigns it can often be heard among people who suggest to each other that ‘we should vote for ours’, referring to the politicians of their respective ethnic group.

Further, in terms of the institutional ethno-nationalization, the Bosnian system suffers from institutional blockades that emerge because politicians elected separately by each ethnic community do not manage to agree on compromises that can withstand the manifold veto powers (Chivvis & ?ogo, 2010). The exclusionary Bosnian institutional structure under Dayton has allowed the representative of each of the three ethnic groups to enjoy the veto power over any proposed legislation and it created the tripartite state presidency consisting of each group and empowered each member with a veto over any legislation. While “veto power” of the ethnic representatives is their guarantee mechanism that they will be equally included in the decision-making process it is clearly discriminating against civic interests. As Lyon claims, “the concept of “constitutionality of nationalities” permits legalized discrimination on the basis of ethnic background, and prima facie contradicts principles of the Council of Europe. Indeed, the entire constitution enshrines ethnic discrimination as a principle of law (2006, p. 52). As a result, each and every civic initiative is discredited by the highly institutionalized ethno-nationalist practices.

In addition, extensive institutionalization of ethno-nationalist politics in the post-Dayton Bosnia has been realized through structural framework where ethnic rights are safeguarded on the basis of the so-called “vital national interest” (VNI). That is, in the House of Peoples of BiH the representatives of each constituent nation have a right to block law if it is against the VNI of their nation respectively. In a similar fashion, tripartite state presidency has the power of veto on legislative decisions if they believe they represent a threat for the vital interests of their nations. However the notion of the VNI in the Bosnian case it employs a rather vague sense of „national.? „National? is usually interpreted simply as „ethnic? (Mujkic, 2007). Therefore, at the heart of notion of VNI clearly lies the ethnic dimension of political representation rather than a kind of state or national interest. Thus, the principle of VNI is highly discriminatory against minority groups and non-nationalists since they do not have a right to use veto in state and entity level. Simply put, widespread politicization of ethnicity and the success of ethnically-oriented political parties are serious obstacles in front of the long-term

democratization process (Chandler, 2000, p. 111). Genuine democratization in multi-ethnic communities can not be achieved by strictly dominance of ethnic paradigm, but there should be a balance between ethnic and multi-ethnic type of politics.

The fundamental idea behind the vital national interest was to provide a sophisticated system of checks and balances to guarantee the rights of Bosnia and Herzegovina's "constituent peoples", i.e. Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. Thus, both state and Entity constitutional frameworks have some kind of 'blocking tools' whose main objective is to safeguard the so-called vital interests of the country's constituent peoples. Yet, while the VNI completely marginalizes each member of the society not declaring as nationalist it further slows down legislative process on the country's road to the Euro-Atlantic integration. This power-sharing provision based on the concept of VNI has impaired the quality of Bosnian democracy where citizens are represented only as members of one of the three constituent peoples, placing ethnic representation before general interest and making "nations rather than citizens the bearers of all rights" (Katana & Igric, 2005). As stated in the report of the USAID, "Bosnia's constitution enshrines the "vital national interests" of the constituent peoples and in doing so guarantees both political inclusion and exclusion by ethnicity... Bosnians filter public discourse by ethnicity, including as valid their group's views, excluding as invalid the views of other groups. The public square is available to all – one opinion, one voice and one group at a time" (2007, p. 6).

The post-war Bosnian political system does not contain democratic values such as equality and freedom and it does not ensure all its citizens to feel equal before the law and having equal access to legislative process. As Bojkov stresses democracy in the post-war Bosnia can not be said to be constitutionally framed (2003, p. 60). Democracy is a form of government in which all citizens can participate on equal basis in the decision-making process that affects their lives. The term democracy was invented in ancient Greece in the middle of the 4th century BC to define the political order in some Greek city-states, and meaning "rule of people" coined from *demos* meaning people and *kratos* which means power. In terms of ontology of power, in the post-Dayton Bosnia the political power has been in the hands of ethnic oligarchies and ethnic communities as a group rather than in the hands of individual citizens. That is, Bosnian social context has been dominated by the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* or the people's community rather than community of free individuals. In this manner, Prof. -ivanovi? highlights the post-war political constellations in Bosnia and Herzegovina as following: "here, we do not live as human beings but as Serbs, Croats and Bosniacs" (2005). Put differently, the post-Dayton governance regime has dehumanized public life in Bosnia.

Today's Bosnia resembles rather a kind of "illiberal democracy" as Fareed Zakaria explains the phenomena of promotion of free elections around the world without provision of basic human rights and freedoms (1997). Consequently, the post-war Bosnian political regime is a kind of ethnocracy rather than representing democratic political system. An ethnocracy is a regime that facilitates "the expansion, ethnicization and control of contested territory and state by a dominant ethnic nation" (Yiftachel & Ghanem, 2004, p. 649). Thus, extreme prioritization of ethnic principles and values over individual principles and civic values have made it threatening and harmful for democratic progress. Hence, Mujkic stresses: "I call a community characterized by the political priority of the ethnic group(s) over the individual that is implemented through democratic self-legislation, and a community characterized by the political priority of the ethnic group's right to self-determination over the citizen's right to self-determination where the citizen's membership in a political community is determined by her or his membership in ethnic community, Ethnopolis. And I call the political narrative and

practice intended to justify this ethnically-based social construct, ethnopolitics” (2007, p. 116). Overall, the ethnopolitics have openly put under threat whole European integration process that Bosnia has achieved so far.

11. The Europeanisation without Democratisation

Furthermore, the Dayton constitutional framework is in contradiction with European Union values of the most fundamental political and human rights. The Dayton Agreement ensures the protection of collective rights of ethnic groups while rights of minority groups have not been included into legal framework. Thus, in March 2005, the Venice Commission proposed the range of the constitutional reforms that are necessary to prepare Bosnia and Herzegovina for the future EU membership. The main recommendations that the Venice Commission made are:

- Transfer of competencies from the entities to the state,
- Reform of inefficient state legislative and executive structures,
- Elimination of “prerogatives for ethnic or group rights”,
- Strengthening citizens’ rights,
- Clarification of the entities’ future relationship to the state (Joseph & Hitchner, 2008, p. 5).

Identically, the Venice Commission points out that integration process of Bosnia into the EU is under serious threat since its institutional framework is in direct breach of the ECHR rules acknowledging “the existence of tensions between a constitutional system based on collective equality of ethnic groups on one hand, and the principle of individual rights and equality of citizens on the other.” (2005, p. 17).

Besides, Bosnian citizens not belonging to the three biggest national communities may align with one of the three nationalist political affiliations respectively in order to feel on equal basis with the members of the three ethnic groups. For instance, there have been high-positioned officials at state government that have preferred one of the ethnic political parties in order to “exercise their citizenship rights”. However, this is not a long-term solution that can guarantee an equality of citizens in whole country. In this regard, the Venice Commission highlights that “First of all, the interests of persons not belonging to the three constituent peoples risk being neglected or people are forced to artificially identify with one of the three peoples although they may, for example, be of mixed origin or belong to a different category. Each individual is free to change his political party affiliation. By contrast, ethnic identity is far more permanent, and individuals will not be willing to vote for parties perceived as representing the interest of a different ethnic group, even if these parties provide better and more efficient government. A system favoring and enshrining a party system based on ethnicity therefore seems flawed.” (2005, p. 12).

12. Conclusions

With other ex-Yugoslav countries Bosnia and Herzegovina has started extensive democratisation processes in the aftermath of disintegration of Yugoslavia in early 1990s. While democratic transition in the country was expected to bring about wide participation of diverse societal groups into policy-making the post-war Bosnian public sphere has been dom-

inated by ethno-nationalists causing omnipresent discrimination against minority groups and those that declare as non-nationalists. In other words, democracy brought about collectivist doctrine rather than promotion of individual rights. In addition, in spite of the fact that BiH is going through deep Europeanization process in which country's political, economic and administrative system are supposed to transform into stable, functional and democratic structures the members of minority groups and non-nationalists are widely marginalized and excluded from the decision-making processes. Although the Copenhagen political criteria require applicant countries to achieve "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities" BiH is even today facing serious democratic deficit, and especially with regards to widespread discrimination against a non-constituents.

Strictly speaking, in the post-Dayton BiH the public sphere has become limited only for the members of the three largest ethnic communities constitutionally recognized as the so-called constituent nations. As Jurgen Habermas argues, the public space has been build on extreme marginalization of citizens as the holders of power whose status as the members of political community has been restricted. Indeed, democratic participation and deliberation in the country's public space has turned into a competition between ethnicities or ethnic communities rather than race of equal individuals having right of vote. The question of ethnicity has become a *raison d'être* of the three ethnic groups since they believe that their physical survival depends on the permanent struggle for ethnic identity. Such political model is a kind of ethno-democracy or ethnocracy which vehemently violates the human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus slows down country's progress towards the EU membership. Thus, Bosnia can not enter the EU while its public sphere is extremely dominated by ethno-nationalist elites that prevent development of open and democratic society. Therefore, BiH politicians, media, civil society and other pro-EU societal actors must make additional efforts in order to include diverse societal groups, including minority members and non-nationalists, into the decision-making process. The inclusion of minority groups and all the citizens in decision-making process would also make the country closer to becoming part of democratic and free community.

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A Prodromal Checklist to Diagnose Crisis Preparedness of Business Organizations***

Abstract: Crisis communication, as an essential part of crisis management, is a major challenge for organizations, especially the business within the current communication framework. As the stakeholders' perceptions represent very often the greatest potential danger in crises, communication plays quite frequently an important role in the organizational efforts to control, contain, and resolve a crisis situation. The absence or insufficiency of crisis communication management is a major threat to the organizational achievements because of significant financial losses generated by inadequate stakeholder perceptions. We have initiated a research in this field, with special attention to the Romanian business situation. The first empirical step of our research sought to determine to what extent Romanian business organizations are perceived as being aware of this challenge. A survey has confirmed that they are perceived by their stakeholders as quite unaware, as not acting on a planned basis as far as organizational crises are concerned. Based on this initial empirical research, in order to help business organizations to be seen as reliable actors in crisis situations, we have made a preliminary checklist with "prodromes" (symptoms) to be considered both by business managers and communication strategists while planning for crisis management.

Keywords: proactive communication; crisis communication; pre-crisis; crisis prodromes; signal detection.

1. Introduction

The unprecedented dynamic of the world today, portrayed by numerous and complex interactions among all social actors, favours the rise and development of more and more complex situations – issues, risks, emergencies, crises – which may challenge any kind of organizations, no matter if they act in the governmental, business, or non-profit fields. More than that, the above-mentioned organizations could face such situations regardless who has actually generated them.

As a consequence of the new communication paradigm, the organizational visibility has also grown very much, thus endangering the organizational functions due to the risks generated by stakeholders' perception of those organizations. This state of facts has consequently

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facilitated scholar opinions defining organizational crises mainly from a perceptual point of view: “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes” (Coombs, 2007a, p. 2).

In order to prevent inadequate perceptions, organizations must communicate with their publics in a manner as effective as possible, because „communication is the most important tool in gaining cooperation from the public and linking responders” (Andersen & Spitzberg, 2009, p. 211).

Business organizations seem to be the most exposed to this crisis-prone framework and therefore should be interested in finding out new ways either to avoid crises or at least to professionally confront them. Fortunately, proactive crisis management policies provide tools and procedures able to forecast and appropriately control potential crises. Acknowledging the importance of detecting crisis signals, some authors pay special attention to the “prodromal” phase of numerous crises (Fink, 2002), in which symptoms often announce such developments and concomitantly allow preventative measures.

Unfortunately, in quite many cases business organizations are seen as unaware of proactive managerial policies in this field, such perception worsening the efforts to manage crises. This observation has proved to be valid in the case of Romanian business organizations, as we will describe below. Failures are hard to avoid keeping in mind that crisis management and consequently crisis communication as its essential tool in the Romanian organizational environment are still in their beginnings; the PR history in Romania is shorter than 20 years. This is why our concerns have primarily gone to practical routines and aspects on how to support the development of substantial strategies and tactics, how to help organizations – companies in this case – in their effort of controlling unpleasant situations endangering their businesses.

It is not just a theoretical anxiety, because both empirical observation and statistical research show that most of organizations are not still aware of this potential threat. Many of them simply let things go their natural way, without realizing that they have easy-to-use tools at their hand, among them being communicational techniques. Others try to implement ad-hoc reactive measures, hoping that these responsive strategies based almost exclusively on reactions will produce results. The proactive way of doing things, which should be a must in crisis management, is still far away in many cases.

Our research has been motivated by the preliminary assumption that business organizations in Romania have hardly been using proactive approaches as far as crisis management, particularly crisis communication as an essential component of crisis management, are concerned. This assumption is based primarily on empirical observation of various crisis management outcomes in Romania over the past few years. Among other reasons – e.g. the insufficient knowledge of crisis communication principles and procedures, a supposition that we intend to elucidate in a future research – this state of facts also originates in the poor perception individuals have on organizational abilities and capabilities engaged in the management and resolution of crisis situations.

Our supposition has also been based on previous empirical observations made by industry experts – see for instance the research made by the Rogalski-Grigoriu PR agency in 2008 – announcing the poor management of crises from the perceptual point of view, although there must have been common sense that, in many such events, public perceptions are the most dangerous, requiring careful attention; indeed, according to the estimations made for the year

2008 in this report (Rogalski-Grigoriu, 2008, p. 30), 60% of the potential crisis sources would be attributable to organizations: 33% to managerial factors, such as lack of professionalism, lack of transparency, overwork, and 27% to communication factors, such as lack of professionalism, insufficient number of communication experts, little co-operation between communication departments and management, weak concern for crisis communication management. Moreover, in another previous investigation trying to determine the levels of crisis awareness in 10 Romanian organizations (Chiciudean, David & Mircea, 2009), we received only four valid responses showing that the management had an acceptable understanding of basic crisis management concepts.

2. Literature review

From the very beginning, founders of crisis management noticed the importance of scanning for early signals of crises and suggested that proactive action should be taken to resolve them or at least to acceptably minimize and control their boost. Steven B. Fink, one of the most cited pioneers of the field, has been emphasizing since 1986 that “recognizing and taking appropriate and necessary action in a prodromal situation may prevent a crisis just by making managers more vigilant” (Fink, 2000, p. 11). Otherwise, he has been the one making a parallel between organizational crises and human illnesses; he referred, in his approach of crisis stages, to an initial “prodromal¹ crisis stage”, when various crisis symptoms can be determined and prevented instead of allowing their maturity thus requiring for being “cured”. In fact, as one can see, the next part of our paper will be dedicated to drafting a list of such “prodromes” to be considered by business organization in their proactive approach to crisis management.

W. Timothy Coombs, another prominent researcher actively involved in crisis communication issues, has made a major contribution in the development of the “situational crisis communication theory” (SCCT). The SCCT is a proactive theoretical framework which “provides a mechanism for anticipating how stakeholders will react to a crisis in terms of the reputational threat posed by the crisis. Moreover, SCCT projects how people will react to the crisis response strategies used to manage the crisis” (Coombs, 2007c, p. 163).

The proactive features give also to this theory an practical dimension, as managers and communicators in organizations “can anticipate how stakeholders are likely to perceive and react in their crisis. Thus, research on crisis communication can help crisis managers to be more effective in their selection and utilization of crisis communication strategies for reputation management” (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay & Johansen, 2010, p. 338).

On its turn, SCCT has its roots in Bernard Weiner’s attribution theory, which states that people tend to assign responsibilities for events, particularly for the negative, sudden, unexpected ones; they attribute responsibility for an event either to the situation or the person (organization) in the situation; this process of attribution goes along with emotional attitudes manifested on a scale going from sympathy to anger. These emotions affect the way people (stakeholders) interact with those involved in the situation; business organizations are almost every time subject of this attribution of responsibility. Although SCCT has largely been used as a founding principle for crisis response strategies, one must take it into account when it comes to preventative action. Indeed, in order to turn into a functional tool, crisis managers

must make use of scientific evidence resulted from experimental research rather than look for support in subjective preferences and experiences.

Signals (prodromes) detected in the early phases of a crisis cycle (basically in the pre-crisis stage) are actually a significant part of such scientific evidence to be interpreted in order to come up with systematic conclusions on how stakeholders' attitudes, attributions, and behaviors may be anticipated and directed.

Another theoretical approach backing up the option for proactive policies – the theory of mutual inattention – belongs to James E. Lukaszewski, researcher and practitioner of crisis communication. In individual terms, this theory states that people tend to ignore each other until something happens, thus requiring attention from those potentially affected. In organizational words, the theory “captures the true nature of our relationship - the public doesn't really care nor should they care about us until we do something to them which affects those six [community] core values² [...] When any of those values is jeopardized, you'll have the public's undivided attention and reaction” (Lukaszewski, 2000, p. 54). We would mention two consequences deriving from this theory, consequences organizations should be aware of: on one hand, it is the public (i.e. stakeholders) who decides when an issue becomes an issue and when this issue needs to be resolved; on the other hand, the same public, not the organization, is to decide whether or not an issue is important. The “inattention” level can be controlled if the organizational management understands and uses tools as: patterns of behavior and response (questions, oppositions, mistakes, media coverage, and action by public officials – all of them predictable, which allows proactive approach); strategic preparation techniques; lessons learned from failures (especially from own ones).

3. Methodology

Following the pragmatic introductory remarks, we conducted a survey among people working in the Romanian business field, trying to find out to what extent business organizations were perceived by own members, as well as by their external publics, as communicating in crisis on a planned basis.

Hypothesis. The hypothesis for this study, based on previous systematic observation of samples as mentioned above, has been shaped by putting together two variables (organizational crisis management approach and stakeholder perception), as follows: if organizations have a proactive approach to crisis management, then the stakeholder perception of organizations confronted with crises is favorable. Derived from it, several research questions have been designed:

- Have Romanian business organizations been perceived by their internal publics as practicing proactive crisis management?
- Have these organizations been perceived by their external publics as practicing proactive crisis management?
- Is there a proportional correlation between those two variables?
- How publics assess the organizational efforts made to manage crises?

In order to verify this hypothesis and answer the corresponding research questions, we conducted a survey on April 15-30, 2011, meant to test the above-mentioned experiential examination results, among people working in the Romanian business field. The purpose of this research was to find out to what extent business organizations were perceived by own mem-

bers, as well as by their external publics, as communicating in crisis on a planned basis; it is important to find out in what measure stakeholder perceptions – both internal and external – are complying with organizational expectancies, because perceptions, especially those belonging to internal stakeholders, have a major potential to worsen any type of crisis.

Sample. To fulfill this purpose, we addressed a questionnaire to people working in the business environment, both in industries with a high crisis probability (air transportation, food, FMCG, chemical products, natural resources) and with a low-risk (apparel, various services). Although we have tried to follow thoroughly the general structure of organizations studied, there were no optimal conditions to conduct a probability sampling able to reveal mathematical correlations between the sample addressed and the entire population working in business environment; this is why we had to choose the alternative non-probability sampling, trying to test eventually our hypothesis rather than to obtain detailed measurements.

From a total number of 140 people addressed, 122 respondents had answered the questions; their general profile is described in the charts below (figures 1-3):

Figure 1. What is your position within your organization?

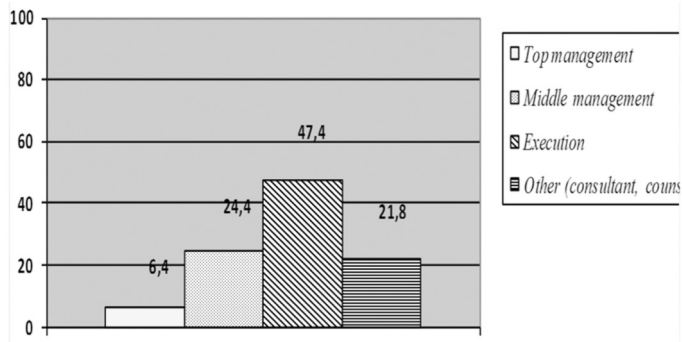


Figure no. 1 actually reflects the average structure of a business organization as far as managerial and execution levels are concerned.

Figure 2. Are you working in a communication/public relations/marketing department?

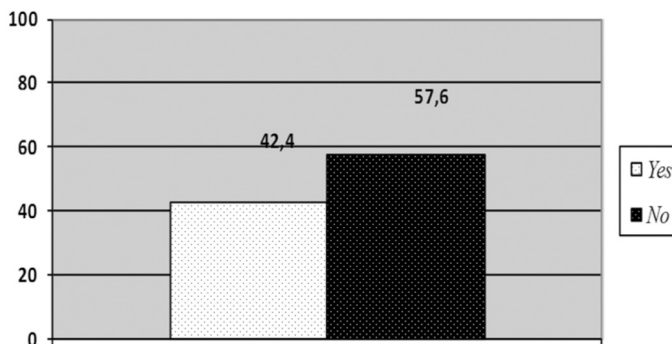
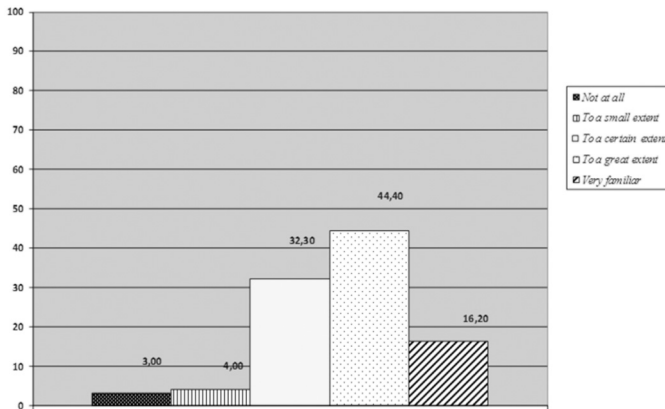


Figure no. 2, based on a screening question, shows that a relatively significant percentage of the respondents were expected, as a result of their job descriptions, to have detailed knowledge of the crisis management aspects. This insight goes further in figure no. 3; unfor-

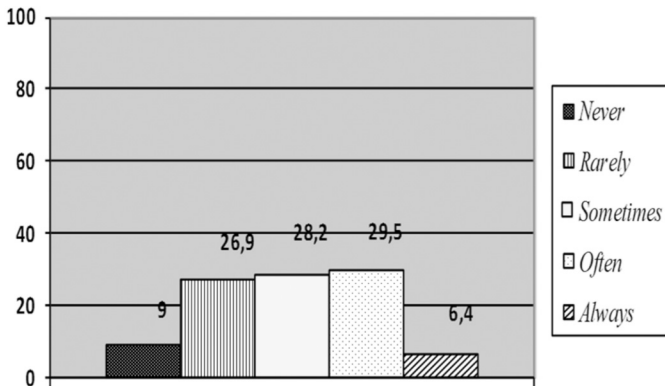
tunately, because of a certain reticence of the respondents, instead of splitting them in two categories (specialized and non-specialized), we had to accept a general answer on their familiarization with the concept of crisis management. Nevertheless, an important percentage of the answers (93%), even if in our interpretation it is rather enthusiastic, shows that people questioned have at least certain knowledge on this matter, thus giving appropriate substance to their further responses.

Figure 3: Are you familiar with the concept of “crisis management”?



Research questions. The perception of the above-mentioned respondents on the plans and policies of their own organizations is initially described in the charts below:

Figure 4: Does your company operate proactive policies?



The question in the figure no. 4 aimed to elucidate whether or not business organizations were perceived as applying proactive policies in their managerial processes and consequently as taking preventative, “prophylactic” measures in order to detect earlier, prevent and control organizational risks and crises. Approximately 64% respondents answered that their organizations carry out at least occasionally (“sometimes”) proactive policies. This percentage could be taken as fairly accurate; however, we should mention that 22% of the respondents skipped that question, and we met this reserve in all the answers to the other questions that followed. Another mention to be made refers to the bias produced by the “Hawthorne ef-

fect”, and we believe that the respondents tried to add a certain amount of “positive” substance to their responses; therefore, a correction by diminishing a little bit the percentages in figure no. 4 would give a more appropriate insight on this perception.

Figure 5: Does your company do crisis management?

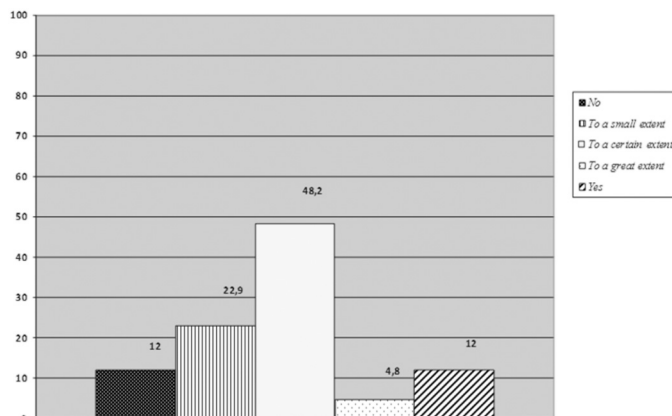
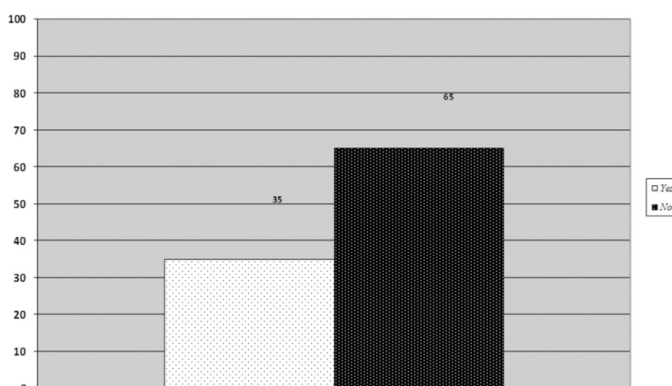


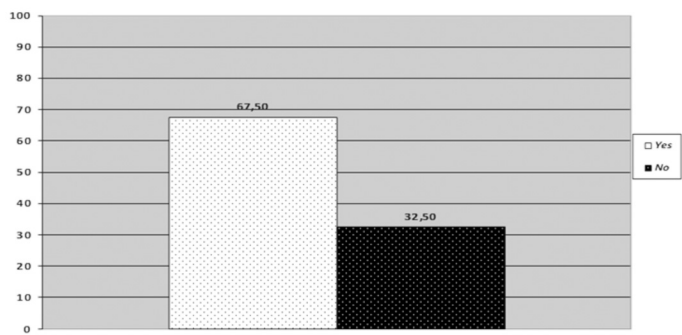
Figure 6: Do you know about the existence of a crisis management plan within your organization?



The scholar prudence just mentioned above was also generated by the responses in figure no. 6: although respondents claim that their organizations carry out crisis management, 65% of them have no knowledge about the existence of a crisis management plan; in our perspective, the existence of a plan is one of the key prerequisites of a proactive, preventative policy. A correction ought to be made on these figures as well, keeping into account that 20% of the respondents chose to skip this question.

When it comes to the perception on how other business organizations apply proactive policies, particularly crisis management plans and procedures, the respondents were asked first to give an input on whether they perceive other organizations as being concerned of crisis management. According to the answers illustrated in figure no. 7, 67.5% of the respondents have knowledge of such organizations:

Figure 7: Do you know other organizations than yours practicing crisis management?



Going further with the next two questions, the respondents were asked to describe up to five organizations, other than theirs, from the perspective of proactive policies and crisis management. The percentages are quite poor and, at the same time, the ratio of people skipping the answers went up to 40%, respectively 37%, thus seriously affecting the value of the answers:

Figure 8: Do organizations you know (other than yours) operate proactive policies?

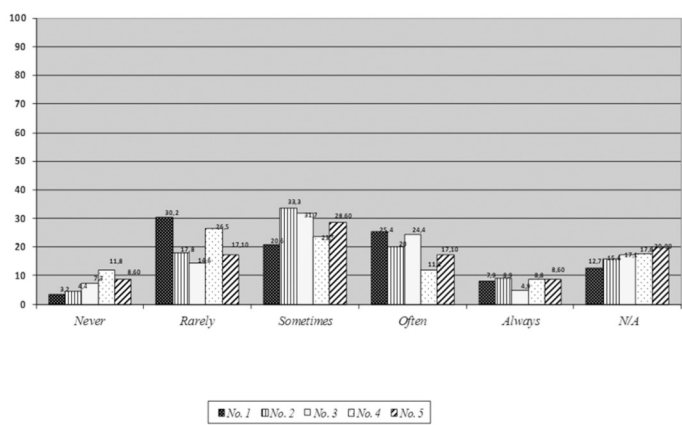
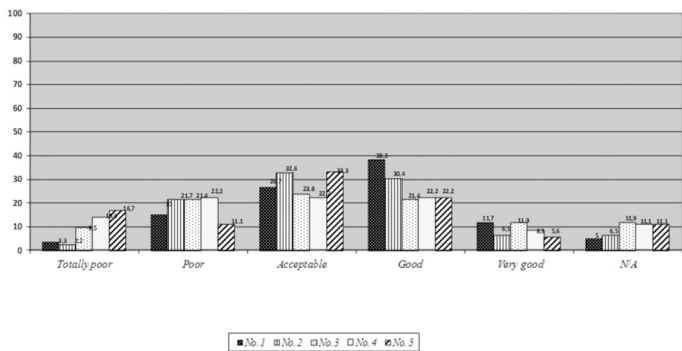


Figure 9: How do you assess the crisis management in organizations you know?



Our primary conclusion is that the survey describes the confusion existing within organizations as to crisis management and the role of proactive policies and strategies while managing crisis situations. This state of confusion has been generated, among others, by the lack of concern regarding internal communication as a powerful tool of crisis management: people have a poor idea and inconsistent perceptions on crisis management actions and tools existing in their organizations. This kind of perception can be considered itself as a prodrome able to affect in a negative way the proper management of an organizational crisis.

On the other hand, considering crisis situations as processes – systematic successions of actions and events directed to a certain end – has given us a pertinent understanding on the role of proactive policies in influencing such processes: acknowledging that crises are not sudden, unpredictable events, scholars such as Fink, Coombs, Pauchant, Mitroff and Fearn-Banks have already debated intensely on the time sequence of the crisis stages; thus knowing, controlling and managing the early stages of such a series of events would give substantial influence over how the process goes forward. For instance, some of the above-mentioned authors speak about “signal detection” (Coombs, 2007a, p. 18) as a proactive tool to be used in the pre-crisis stage; we would add that it should be extended to “signal detection and resolution/management”, thus influencing the direction of the process to the advantage of the organization.

Based on this second conclusion, our intention has been to give business organizations a checklist of items to be considered when their managers intend to initiate proactive policies meant to control crises. Our purpose for the future is to go beyond this first step and to create a diagnose procedure for specialists trying to audit crisis preparedness within this kind of organizations.

Approaching crises as processes also allows an improved control over the direction emerging after a crisis. Indeed, if one accepts the premise that every crisis may be considered a “dangerous opportunity” (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007, p. 177), the natural conclusion is that crises bring a potential to renewal, which should be put to good use managing the direction and the purpose of such a process from its very beginning.

Finally, one must not forget that, in the existing organizational environment, especially under the growing influence of social media, “reputation is more fragile than ever” (Crenshaw, 2010). Social media allow – encourage, we would say – consumer interactivity beyond the areas business organizations can manage. They also may represent a more affordable platform for activist action (activist blogs, “causes” on Facebook, tweets, etc.), thus putting much pressure on businesses to keep their promises concerning the standards and features of their products. Early warning signals forecasting negative evolutions allows thus proactive measures meant to help solve them long before they become major reputational threats.

4. Findings: a checklist of prodromes

“Proactive crisis management naturally affects the recovery measures a company must use and is a vital strategy in mitigating the negative effects of crises. Proactive planning is also critical in capitalizing on opportunities provided by a crisis before one occurs” (Penrose, *apud* Jaques, 2010, p. 471). Based on this assumption and on the results of the above-described survey, we have tried, as already mentioned, to give managers and communication practitioners a list of “symptoms” to be considered in the strategic planning process. The list resulted both from theoretical statements and empiric observation.

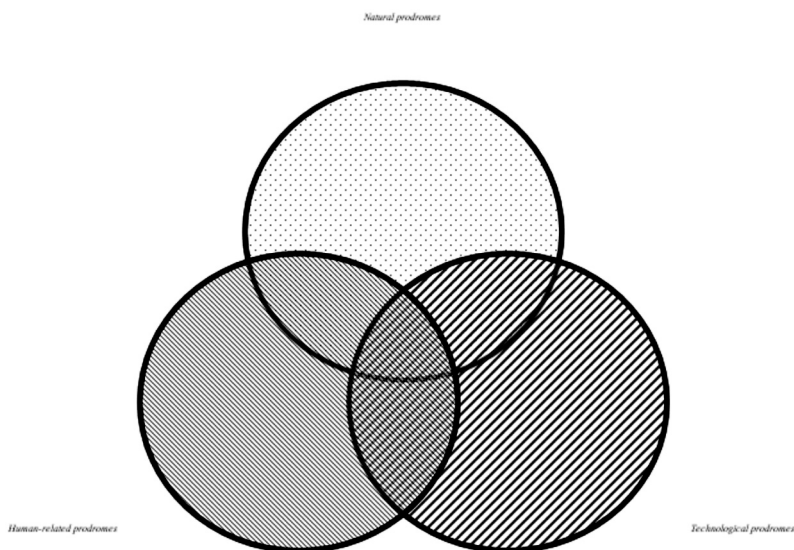
One may use various classification criteria in order to systematize the potential crisis signals to which business organizations should pay attention:

- their nature (natural, human-related, technological);
- organizational stakeholders (internal, external);
- consequences (critical, non-critical);
- managerial approach (proactive, reactive, interactive, resolution vs. containment);
- predictability (predictable, unpredictable), and so on.

In this paper, we will focus on the first above-mentioned criterion because, in our opinion, the nature of prodromes is one of the criteria easiest to be used; it allows a quite effortless causal approach: managers and stakeholders link easily these signals to their origin. On the other hand, it allows managers to better distinguish signals forecasting risks and crises; this may be a challenge indeed for managers, because, as experts mention, “some warning signs are difficult to see [...]: they are easy to see after a crisis” (Coombs, 2007a, p. 21). Thus following this criterion we can talk about natural, human-related, and technological prodromes.

If we accept this classification for methodical reasons, we must point out that all these factors actually interact, generating consequences which may be found in any other category: for instance, natural disasters often reveal technological and/or relational malfunctions in organizations; human-related factors frequently affect how technologies work and how natural disasters should be approached, etc., as it shown in the figure below.

Figure 10: Interactions among prodromal categories



Error! Reference source not found. Attempting to prevent negative developments and outcomes due to crisis processes, one must first prioritize the probability and the impact of each prodromal category over a specific organization, because some of the organizations might be severely affected essentially by natural phenomena (drought affecting farms, for instance), while others must primarily monitor technological breakdowns. In this attempt, Steven Fink’s crisis plotting grid aggregating the above-mentioned factors (impact and probability) is a useful tool (Fink, 2000).

Figure 11: Steven Fink’s crisis plotting grid

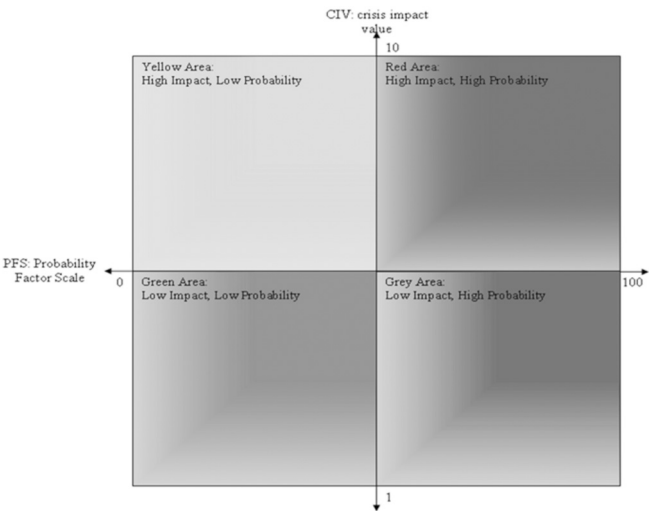
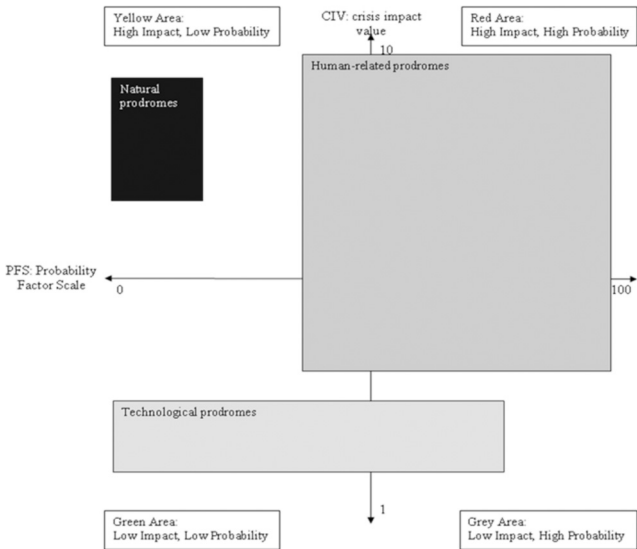


Figure 12: Simulation on crisis prodromes using Fink’s crisis plotting grid



Once listed and prioritized, these prodromes should be also analyzed from the perspective of costs: what are the resolution costs (including human, material, technological, and financial resources) compared to the estimated losses? Can they be reasonably managed? Which of them could turn in major threats to the organizational goals and processes?

In order to make this attempt easier to business organizations interested in anticipate risks and crises threatening their functions, we have listed a number of prodromes which should be considered for planning and prediction purposes:

Natural prodromes: forecasts, warnings or signals of earthquake, flood, landslide, drought, cyclone, hurricane, tornado, storm, fire produced by natural causes, epidemic and pandemic diseases, avalanches, heat waves, volcanic activity, meteorites; scholar works on the seismic potential of the area, flood likeliness, etc.; statistics on natural phenomena in the area, papers in local libraries, directories, bookshops; information and news on global warming; forecasts on snowfalls and ice (for air and ground transportation companies); governmental or local authority warnings and regulations; increased community concern in natural disaster issues.

Human-related prodromes: when it comes to this category, the bad news is that studies (Cohn, 2000) show that about 80% of the potentially destructive events organizations have to face originate in human actions; therefore, this prodromal category must be carefully observed by organizations; the good news is that human actions produce, among others, quite numerous early warning signals which, properly handled, may stop their progress to risks or crises.

Here there are several such signals to be considered within this category:

a. Organizational interactions: mergers and acquisitions; hostile takeover attempts; organizational malevolence (extreme tactics to attack an organization); administrative notifications; evaluation reports on financial, technical, legal, professional, security and work safety, environmental issues; increased pace of share sales; oscillations in supply flows (raw materials, spare parts); industrial espionage; unusual/unfair competition; increase of competition within the industry; brand attacks; product recalls, particularly done by other companies producing similar/comparable products (when this happens to us, it is more than a signal, it may be even a crisis); warnings on ineffective communication with stakeholders. Regarding the organizational effective communication with its stakeholders, we believe that the case of the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation accurately illustrates the importance of this organizational interaction: trying to open a gold mining project in Romania, the company has been asking for governmental agreements even since December, 2004, because of the hostile public opinion resulted from environmental activism which had not properly been addressed; since 2009, the company has been developing a huge communication campaign including public relations, public affairs, advertising, lobbying, CSR, etc., in order to change public attitudes by appropriate information; the costs of this campaign have become extremely high because of the difficulties coming up from such a changing-attitude effort.

b. Prodromes attributable to the organization, according to the above-mentioned attribution theory: breakdowns in total quality management; failures in the safety and security procedures and regulations; operations done in an inappropriate manner; loss or leak of confidential information; increased time between production and distribution; resource shortages; reorganizations and relocations; failures in workers compensation (either mandatory or promised); noticeable discrepancies among organizational statuses (such as important differences in salaries); organizational misdeeds (organizational actions likely to produce risks to stakeholders or even law violations).

c. Individual interactions: signals on attempts of individual malevolence (such as product tampering); rumors (for instance, the Romanian branch of Danone suffered in September-November 2007 a diminution of its dairy product sales of 25% because of media allegations concerning the presence of dioxine in some of its products. A mention must be made here that rumors referring to a certain industry are also likely to affect organizations: in that same case of Danone, the other dairy producers faced up a comparable sale reduction. The recent assertions – May, 2011 – about the *Escherichia coli* bacterium affecting the whole Spanish vegetable industry is another example); human-error accidents; individual violations of corporate

regulations and procedures (for instance, those referring to hygiene, food safety, paper circulation, hazardous materials); whistle-blowing (disclosure of organizational wrongdoings and/or malpractices); alcohol and drug consumption at the workplace; violence at the workplace; vandalism; law suits; conflicts between employees (individuals). As to these employee conflicts, although it is not actually a conflict, we believe that special attention should be paid to the organizational phenomenon called “mobbing” (also known as “psychological terror”, “moral harassment”, “victimization”, “workplace bullying” and already regulated by legal norms in countries such as Sweden and France), consisting in “hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of persons, mainly toward one individual [...] These actions take place often (almost every day) and over a long period (at least for six months) and, because of this frequency and duration, result in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery” (Leymann, 1990, p. 120). Indeed, especially in cases when mobbing is directed against a supervisor or manager, it can worsen up to a conflict with crisis-generating potential.

d. Stakeholder behaviors: concerns, worries and criticism (both by internal and external publics); customer complaints (about product quality for instance); product returns; revival of activism against organization or its products; objections on legal and/or financial issues; negative media coverage; negative mentions in opinion polls, surveys, interviews, research; negative opinion leader and influential comments; reports of experts, non-governmental organizations, activist groups; discussions on forums, blogs, social networks, discussion groups; unusual traffic on the corporate website(s), particularly on certain pages; preparations for strikes and work conflicts. Special attention must be paid in this field to perceptual prodromes, e.g. concerns, worries and complaints or media speculations, which may evolve to crises even if perceptions have no objective/rational support; more than that, media reports and assertions may be consistently influenced by economic factors in an business environment such as the Romanian one: the media competition for resources (particularly for those coming from advertising), which is very sharp because of the scarcity of funds allotted by companies to promotion through media, results in poor quality and tabloidization of media reports (the dilemma of “get it first or get it right” is often resolved in the favor of “get it first”).

Technological prodromes: pollution and environmental damages/threats; incidents in the observance of environmental regulations; malfunctions of the computer networks and technologies; incidents on the safety of corporate databases; computer hacking attempts; incidents and accidents caused by technologies.

5. Discussion

Due to the size and structure of the sample questioned, a mathematical correlation between the two variables of the initial hypothesis could not be revealed; however, there is a correspondence between them, so that positive stakeholder perception is more plausible in the case of organizations proactively doing crisis management. This is an important element for crisis managers, as positive perceptions will boost and support organizational efforts to crisis containment/resolution. Unfortunately, the answers to the first two research questions reveal much confusion among organizational publics: if internal publics perceive quite positively their own organizations as practicing proactive crisis management, the external publics have no clear idea on organizations they recognize. In our opinion, one of the major causes gen-

erating this confusion is the inadequate communication between organizations and their stakeholders, either internal or external.

As already mentioned, the answer to the third question is negative, i.e. no direct correspondence can be made between organizational crisis management approach and stakeholder perception; we concluded however that they exert mutual influences in their connection. As to the last question, aiming a qualitative assessment on the organizational crisis management endeavors, the confusion mentioned above negatively affects stakeholders' perception, so that approximately 50% of the respondents choose to be prudent, staying within the limits "totally poor" and "acceptable", while the rate of N/A varies from 5 to 12%.

6. Conclusions

Prevention is the best tool to use in crisis management. Being aware of this principle, business managers and executives can scan the organizational environment or they can monitor certain phenomena using a "crisis sensing mechanism" (Coombs, 2007a, p. 44). Early warning and knowledge about symptoms (prodromes) likely to worsen if not prevented allows thus preventative action which would benefit to organizations. In order to fulfill this goal, managers could use prioritized lists based on scientific expertise and able to bring the necessary input required for calibrating, adjusting and regulating crisis management standards and procedures.

Moreover, knowing prodromes and approaching them in a proactive manner is not enough. As our survey revealed, communication flows between organizations and their respective publics are affected to a level which should be seen as worrying. This is why we recommend that business organizations make a first step to improvement by having reliable communication audits made by experts. Such audits could be used as valuable assets in the strategic planning process, especially from the communicational point of view.

A final mention should be made concerning other types of organizations: public institutions, as well as non-profit organizations, have to face risks and crisis situations quite similar to the organizational actors involved in business. With a certain kind of particularization, many of the general assertions made above can be useful for such organizations as well. In our future studies, we intend to see also how these organizations are prepared for crises and how effective their response appears to be to their stakeholders.

Notes

¹ *Prodrome*: forewarning symptom (a symptom indicating the onset of a disease).

² Protection of family health and safety; protection of family economic security; protection of property and personal property values; preservation of peace of mind; pride in community; absence of conflict.

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Self-understanding of the Project Manager in Communicating with Project Teams

Abstract: This paper seeks to investigate the communication role of the Project Manager when it comes to coordinating the project team. Our research aims at identifying to what extent the self-understanding of the project manager influences the communication styles he/she promotes in driving the project team from the “Forming” to the “Performing” stage of team development, as conceptualized by Bruce Tuckman. We expect to find a connection between the stages of team development and the Project Life Cycle. The findings show that PMs in Romania are generally aware of their role of key communicators in the project and consciously adapt their communication style to the needs of the team members and to specific situations. Although most of the PMs are self and social aware, they place different importance on emotions in the decision-making process. The research shows that PMs adopt different patterns of team development according to the type of organization they belong to, their experience, age, the organizational or project constraints. Results show that there are certain specific context-related features which act either as obstacles or as incentives for reaching team performance when implementing projects and which diminish PMs’ perceived contribution in driving the project team to the “Performing” stage.

Keywords: project management; team development model; project communication; social competences; Emotional Intelligence (EQ).

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to investigate whether communication is taken for granted by Project Managers (PMs) or if they consciously make use of specific communication skills, tools and instruments in order to help the project team achieve performance. Although communication processes are also taken into account, this article primarily focuses on soft aspects regarding the role of the PMs in communicating with project teams. As social competences become an increasingly important aspect of the project management skills, our goal is to test whether PMs in Romania are self-aware and consciously assume their role of key communicators, or if

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communication with the project team is carried out solely at an instinctive level. This endeavor is pursued in the context of the self-understanding of the PM in relation to the project team he/she manages, and to the specific communication needs that emerge from each stage of team development, as conceptualized by Bruce Tuckman: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning.

Throughout their life cycle, project teams progress through relatively clear stages of development, intimately related to the project life cycle. Each stage is defined by tasks that require a certain degree of mastery and that provide a foundation for further challenges. However, Tuckman's model is not always a linear process. Teams may return to previous stages due to critical events, to new members or to the insufficient support of the project owner, project sponsor, functional managers and even external stakeholders. The paper argues that the factor that directly impacts the process of team development is communication, as it is proven to determine team effectiveness and, when wisely used, it can lead to increased job satisfaction and performance of the project team. The role of the PM is not only to provide information, but also to adopt different communication styles that can facilitate the project team's transition from one developmental stage to another, successfully reaching performance. Therefore, our paper argues that self-understanding, as part of the Emotional Intelligence (EQ) of the PM, is one of the most relevant factors when it comes to communicating the project to the project team and reaching a "performing" stage.

2. Research questions and methodology

The research questions underlying this paper are as follows: a) Are Project Managers in Romania self-aware and do they consciously assume their role of key communicators in the project team, or is communication taken for granted? b) How applicable is Tuckman's model of team development in the day-to-day practice of PMs in Romania?

In order to shape the research content, the paper focuses solely on the communication flow within the project team, more precisely from the PM to the members of the project team, while the communication between the PM and the senior management or other stakeholders is beyond the scope of this paper. To reach the purpose of the study, semi-structured in-depth interviews with 23 PMs from Romania were conducted, on the basis of an interview guide based on the specific communication style of the PM in the five stages of team development identified by Bruce Tuckman. The interviews were conducted between 13th of January and 24th of February 2011. The 23 PMs come from different fields and organizations, such as private companies, NGOs, the higher education system, consultancy companies or departments. As the terminology used in Romania for the PM is vague, and other positions in the project, such as "project director", "project coordinator" are actually used for the responsibilities of a PM and a PM might not have the responsibilities found in the literature, we consider a PM the person that has the formal and final responsibility for the project progress and results. Thus chosen, we consider the PMs who were interviewed representative for the PM population in Romania.

3. Literature review

Project Management literature and practice shows that project success is highly dependent on the performance of project teams. Methodology and techniques do not always guarantee performance, especially when they are separated from the understanding of the team as a social structure of individuals with different cultures, values and motivation. What project team members have in common is the need to work interdependently with each other, in order to achieve a common and temporary goal (Verma, 1997, p. 63). Managing project teams is not just about processes and getting things done, but also about managing people and emotions. Throughout the project life cycle, team members experience a range of emotions, from enthusiasm and optimism to doubt and frustration. The role of the PM is to be self-aware of his position in relation to the team and to understand the different phases the team members are in, to communicate the project to the team members (the main communication flow), while also paying attention to the team members' feelings, values, attitudes and behaviors.

Projects are social systems (Gareis, 2006, p. 40), they assume working with social groups in different social contexts. This makes social skills essential for PMs, who represent the central communication hub in the project, as "communication needs are very different in a project compared to any other business environment" (Jha, 2010, p. 2). Regarding this role of the PM, interpersonal communication skills are truly relevant when managing a team. Such skills are listening, self-presentation, problem solving, decision-making, negotiating, and conflict management. It is important to bear in mind that the goals of interpersonal communication are "understanding the exact meaning and intent of others, being understood by others, gaining acceptance for yourself and your ideas" (Jha, 2010, p. 4) and, of course, producing action and change. Recent literature has acknowledged the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) as part of the social competences of the PM. The concept of EQ has now gained ground, after Dulewicz and Higgs have extended Goleman's perspective of effective leadership to a new "formula", combining IQ, EQ and Management Intelligence (MQ) (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003). EQ is important to PMs because it facilitates the understanding of one's and others' emotions and sets the ground for team development. As Dennis O'Gorman, Senior Project Manager at Fitzpatrick Contractors states, "people chemistry is key – particularly on large and multi-team projects. As a PM you have to be able to empathize with others" (Elbelk & Thomas, 1998, p. 97).

Daniel Goleman developed a model of EQ competences (Goleman, 2001) relating them to two primary sets: personal and social competences. The personal competence consists of self-awareness and self-management, whereas the social competence consists of social awareness and relationship management, in other words the way one relates to others. These four competences are essential for PMs in the process of managing their own and their team's emotions during the project lifecycle. Self-awareness helps PMs understand their emotions and use them for decision-making, know how they react in certain situations and what "pushes their buttons", recognize their instinctual behaviors and make a conscious choice to follow or avoid them (Adkins, 2010, p. 35). Another concept comprised in self-awareness is accurate self-assessment, which includes "understanding our own strengths and weaknesses and being willing to explore them both on our own and with others" (Mersino, 2007, p. 26). Self-understanding of the PM involves using the self-awareness and accurate self-assessment competences to consciously find the best decisions and actions, based on the identification of their own emotions. In relation to the project team, social awareness helps PMs under-

stand the emotions of the project team members and the effect on his/her own feelings (self-awareness), facilitating not only the team relationship management, but also the actions and decisions needed in order to “push” the team towards efficient interactions and work performance. This perspective of a self- and social-aware PM places him/her in the position of a coach who observes and then plans strategies and actions based on emotional feedback and rational choice. Identifying others’ feelings and understanding the relationship between co-workers bring the PM a real advantage when communicating to and with the project team. A self-aware PM should know what to communicate, when to communicate and to whom, so that the project respects the constraints and the team can perform. This attitude is complementary to transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994) and brings the PM closer to the concept of “servant leader” (Adkins, 2010, p. 38).

Among the main factors identified by Vijay K. Verma (1997, p. 68) to influence a project team’s effectiveness are “the developmental sequence of team members” and “major team issues, which include norms, cohesiveness, and leadership”. This brings us to the importance of understanding the specific behavioral and emotional implications of each developmental stage during the project lifecycle. One of the most cited team development models is Bruce Tuckman’s Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing model (Tuckman, 1965), with the later added Adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Tuckman’s model focused on two levels of analysis: the interpersonal relations in a group and the relation to the tasks. The critics brought to this model include the need to conceive it as cyclic, rather than linear, as different situations can bring a team back to an earlier stage of development (such as, in the case of project management, a new member joining the team, which can determine a return to the storming or even forming stage). However, Tuckman’s model gained ground in several fields, including project management.

How can Tuckman’s model be used in project management, one might ask, and what are the benefits? If the PM is self- and social-aware, he/she can take into consideration the specific characteristics of each stage of development and, based on his/her own observations regarding the team’s behavior, can develop communication strategies to consolidate the project team. Reaching group cohesion and creating a positive climate of confidence are essential premises for efficient project management processes and task achievement. Moreover, high EQ PMs who understand the emotion dynamics in the team, especially the ones in the “Storming” stage, can adjust their interventions in order to attenuate possible conflicts (inside the project team, between the team and functional departments in the organization; regarding resources, decisions, divergent opinions, task responsibility and allocation etc) which are the main risks in affecting the path through performance and the communication flow within the project team.

Interesting to notice is that Tuckman’s stages apparently correspond to the Project Life Cycle phases: initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and controlling and closing (PMBOK Guide, 2004, p. 38), or “project start, project coordination, project control, possibly resolving a project discontinuity and project close-down” (Gareis & Cleland, 2006, pp. 17-18). We can apply the model to the management of project teams by taking into consideration behavior patterns and emotions specific for each stage (that directly influence the communication processes), in correlation with the “Emotional Project Life Cycle” (Dussap & Merry, 2000) and find which the appropriate interventions of the PM are. This is of great importance, as once the PM is not able to manage these factors accordingly, they may very well become risks and then even serious problems in the project’s implementation.

In the initiation phase of the project, the project team is in the “Forming” stage. The objectives of the project and the roles of each member are rather unclear and “people are concerned with how they will fit in, who calls the shots and makes decisions, and so on. During this stage they look to the leader (or someone else) to give them some structure - that is, to give them a sense of direction and to help them get started. Failure of the leader to do this may result in losing the team to some member who exercises what we call informal leadership” (Lewis, 1995, p. 80). Therefore, it is crucial that the PM shows his authority through a directive style of leadership and a direct communication process, accordingly. His/her role is to establish and clearly communicate the objectives of the project to the team and explain their contribution to the organization’s strategic objectives, motivate the project team by assigning adequate roles and responsibilities and involving the team members in the project initiation and planning. One communication tool which is recommended to be used by PMs to this end is the Responsibilities Matrix. Therefore, the PM should carefully communicate the project to the project team and be a good listener and observer. For this stage giving and asking feedback to the project team by the PM is the essential communication technique to be used. He/she must be sure every member of the team has the same perspective on the project as he/she had communicated. In the “Forming” stage the “acquaintance process is initiated as members share their backgrounds, interests and competencies” (Swenson, 1997, p. 21). Therefore, if the project team members do not know each other, the PM can use several techniques like, for example, “team dating” (Curşeu, Kenis, Raab & Brandes, 2010), which can help him/her anticipate compatibilities between team members or potential conflicts and even assign tasks or create working groups according to these observations, all of these being factors that severely influence the communication processes within the team not only in this stage, but throughout the project implementation.

During the “Storming” stage and once the planning of the project has started, team members confront their different ideas about the project and communication problems or even smaller groups formation may appear, due to divergent opinions (Cobb, 2006). These are definitely risks the PM shouldn’t take. The PM should manage potential conflicts by facilitating communication and focusing on team relations. After sharing their frustrations, disagreements or expectations, the team members should, with the help of the PM, reach a consensus. In the “Norming” stage, the members of the project team set up agreements to resolve problems and start to function as a cohesive team. They finally understand and assume the project and their roles and the focus shifts from relations to processes. At this point of team development, the PM should adopt a participative leadership style. “Norming” can occur either in planning the project (which would be most advisable) or as soon as possible in the implementation phase.

When and if a team reaches performance (not all project teams reach this stage), it is mature enough to decrease the need for the control of PM and sustain itself. The PM can adopt a delegating style of management and communication, which leaves him/her more time to focus on the project management processes. We know a project team has reached its performance stage when it succeeds in achieving whatever its members have set out to do, when individuals work together as a single cohesive unit (Steyn & Nicholas, 2008). Moreover, as Margaret McCabe shows, “in order for any team to work effectively together every one of its members must be receiving three key things from the whole team – the three ‘R’s: respect, recognition, and reward” (McCabe, 2006, p. 117).

Finally, the “Adjourning” phase, at the closure of the project, is accompanied by feelings of loss and frustration, the emotional level being highly solicited. Moreover, this stage of

group development may install due to “the addition of new members, critical events, or insufficient support” (Swenson, 1997, p. 20) for the project from the project owner, functional managers or even external stakeholders. The PM should adopt a detached style and set a positive climate by introducing new projects to the team. He/she should be aware of the team members’ feelings, as, if not managed well, the team could go back to “Norming” or even to “Forming”. If this was the case, time could be lost for the project implementation. It is important that the project team goes through every stage of team development in order to perform. It could be relevant to bear in mind that this process takes time, as team members have to accept and integrate other ways of doing things, other norms or values, and even to accept another project culture. David X. Swenson (Swenson, 1997, p. 19) emphasizes that “poor performance teams either worked together for less than a year or for more than four years”.

The critics of Tuckman’s model have identified a number of limitations and have tried to update the model. A solid perspective was brought by two authors (Rickards & Moger, 2000) who have conducted a research on different project teams. Starting from two main research questions: “what if the storming stage never ends” and “what is needed to exceed performance norms”, they have identified two barriers that the team confronts with in its development. One is a weak, behavioral barrier that occurs between the “storming” and “norming” phase, while the other is a stronger, performance-related barrier, which refers to the particular social context of the project. As the authors show, this last barrier makes it difficult for most project teams to move from the norming and performing stage to what they call an “out-performing” (Rickards & Moger, 2000, pp. 277-278).

There have been developed other models regarding team development similar to that of Tuckman. For example, Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) is based on the assumption that leaders should adapt their style to the development style (or ‘maturity’) of the follower, based on how ready and willing the follower is to perform the required tasks (taking into consideration their competence and motivation). The model proposes four leadership styles that match the development levels of the followers, suggesting that leaders should focus more or less on the task in question and/or the relationship between the leader and the follower, depending on the development level of the follower. The model can, to a certain extent, overlap onto the Project Life Cycle phases, which makes it easier to apply to project teams. According to the model, in the first phase, “Telling”, members of the project team are characterized by low competence and low commitment (being insecure, at an emotional level, or even reluctant to change) and the PM should adopt a high task focus, focusing less on relationships and more on “telling” people what to do. A directive leadership style is necessary in order to orient team members towards task achievement and proper roles. The “telling” phase most probably occurs in the initiation phase of the project and coincides with the “Forming” stage in Tuckman’s model.

In the “Selling” phase, project team members gain a certain amount of competence and commitment to the project and the PM should focus both on tasks and relationship with and between team members. The EQ comes at hand, the PM using his/her social-awareness to understand people’s emotions and needs and helping them gain the necessary skills to perform the project tasks. The phase is leader-driven, the PM having to “sell” (explain decisions and gain adherence to project objectives) meanings and coach the team. This would usually happen during the planning of the project, when the team’s contribution is needed. Moving on to the “Participating” phase, during the implementation of the project, the project team has earned a high degree of competence and the PM promotes a supporting leadership, focused

on relationships and motivating team members (as the high competence should already assure task achievement). This phase can be associated both with the “Storming” stage (due to the focus on relationships, rather than on tasks and processes) and with “Norming” (due to the supporting role needed from the PM, but matching less with the need, in Tuckman’s model, on process focus rather than relations), during the implementation of the project.

The last phase, “Delegating”, is defined by high competence and commitment to the project, leading to a delegating leadership style. It is similar to Tuckman’s “Performance” stage and might be associated with the implementation of the project. However, we consider that this phase is not entirely applicable to project management, if we take into consideration the need for permanent monitoring and controlling of the team and project progress and, also, the fact that most of the project tasks and activities have already been attributed in the planning stage of the project.

An “emotionally competent” PM should be aware of the stages of team development and maybe even present them to the project members. Knowing and understanding these models, together with being aware of their own and others emotions during the project life cycle and using them in the communication and decision-making processes are essential premises for pushing the project team to performance. Project Management literature goes even further, introducing the concept of „emotionalising” to describe the capacity of a PM to induce and direct emotions in projects (Gareis, 2004, p. 6). This can be achieved, according to the author, through specific means of communication such as creating project events, discussing “taboos” or developing competitive situations in the team.

4. Findings

The persons who were interviewed have different project management experience, ranging from 2 to 15 years in the field. They have managed projects in private companies, consultancy agencies, NGOs or universities and have worked with small (5-10 members) or medium-sized teams (10-20 members). The majority of the teams described by them were new, only some team members knew each other or had worked together before the initiation of the projects they managed. The financing sources for the projects managed by the PMs interviewed vary from internal funding (from the organizational budget) to external sources either from European funds (Structural Funds, PHARE or other EU grants associated with thematic programmes), or from multi-national companies, grants from international foundations (eg. Charles Stewart Mott Foundation) or other international sources (eg. USAID, World Bank). The size of the projects varies from local or internal ones to national, European and international ones, and their values also range from 10.000 EUR to over 10 million EUR.

Regarding the initiation phase of the projects, the interviews show two types of team behavior, either positively valenced (enthusiasm) or negatively valenced (fear, reluctance). This shows that the start of a project has a significant emotional impact on the team members involved, impact which can be either a motivation or a barrier in the way of team performance. The role of the PM as key communicator must be played in order to avoid the appearance of reluctance within the project team. Over half of the PMs declared they had noticed enthusiasm within the project team, and even emphasized this is a common attitude of project teams: “they were enthusiastic because they did something they enjoyed, that felt it will have measurable results, and that changes things”, “it is a great feeling of enthusiasm in the beginning,

a positive atmosphere, there is curiosity”. On the other hand, some PMs mentioned rather negative valenced attitudes at the project’s initiation, such as the fear to take on new tasks, caution (especially in the case of young team members, without a solid experience), or lack of enthusiasm from team members who perceived the project to bring them “more responsibilities and effort for the same money”. This type of feelings is also common for European financed projects, which carry a higher level of complexity. PMs show very similar attitudes to the team members’, such as enthusiasm - they see a project as an opportunity to gain experience and to learn. The young PMs, the ones without solid experience in managing projects and project teams, the majority of them belonging to the NGO sector or to private companies, declared they experience feelings of frustration, fear, they consider they have to be cautious.

The PMs interviewed were asked to point out three aspects they communicate to team members at the start of a project. According to their answers, in the Forming stage the PMs tend to focus on communicating the project objectives and its vision, the responsibilities, tasks or expectations of/from the project team. Some PMs also carefully describe the project scope. Only a few PMs declared that they first of all establish communication rules or principles. Other participants mentioned they want to develop the focus on project deadlines that are to be met by the team members, that they explain the rules and obligations, while only four PMs emphasized on benefits in being involved in the project – “what’s in it for them”, which they consider to be a form of positive motivation. Other aspects communicated to the project team regard the expected results or establishing working standards. Thus, PMs are rather task oriented and focused on the hard aspects of team development, and not on the soft ones – helping the members know each other, communicate their opinions, bringing them closer to each other or to the project.

When asked what are the main challenges encountered at the forming of the team, the PMs consider the differences of background, experience, way of doing things, knowledge and attitude to be relevant: “not knowing their style of work, as every person has his/her style, the challenge to find a common language for the project”. Other PMs consider role understanding to be a main challenge in this stage: “the main challenge I encountered is the lack of understanding, the fact that at the beginning it is not very clear what everyone has to do, so there is fear to take on tasks”. Others mentioned the need for harmonization of interests, of different expectations or the lack of connections between team members. The interviews revealed that there aren’t universal challenges that all PMs face in the Forming stage, they depend on the context, the type of project or the project owner. The most frequently mentioned solutions to overcoming the challenges faced at the forming stage are mediation, organizing formal or informal meetings, role definition or clarification and motivation. All of them imply that the PM assumes the role of communicator and binder of the team.

The majority of the PMs who were interviewed are focused rather on tasks, milestones and deliverables, than on team cohesion and development. Some PMs are aware of the lack of an adequate forming of the team and even consider this as a cause for the low performance of the team. In the case of PMs coming from NGOs and small companies which promote internal projects, the forming is not considered that relevant, because it is not promoted by the organizational culture. However, most of the PMs identify the Forming stage as a specific phase of team development with its specific characteristics, similar to the ones described by Tuckman.

10 PMs out of 23 consider that conflicts often appear in the execution phase, whereas 9 experienced conflicts between team members at the project initiation or planning phase, when the team is formed. They mentioned conflicts triggered by task assignment, by the misunderstanding of responsibilities, by difference of vision or opinions. Two PMs said that they encountered conflicts within the project team in the execution phase, when team members are facing time pressure. Other PMs consider reporting and controlling the main source of conflicts or when crisis appears. One PM believes that conflicts may appear all the time in the Project Life Cycle. Thus, there is not a direct correlation between Tuckman's model of team development and the Project Life Cycle. The "Storming" phase is not very well delimited in practice, it can appear in different moments or phases of the project.

The PMs interviewed identified several types of conflicts that appear between team members during the project. Most commonly mentioned are conflicts regarding role or task attribution, authority-related conflicts (especially in the case of PMs in NGOs, without a solid experience, or young PMs, who have problems in legitimizing their position). Other PMs mentioned conflicts of interest (when team members have divergent interests) or conflicts raised by differences in ideas or opinions. Some PMs acknowledge the different levels of involvement and dedication to the project as a source of frustration and conflict between team members, while in international projects cultural barriers create problems. Personal incompatibilities between team members are also a source of interpersonal conflicts. A specific conflict source emerges in the case of PMs working in private companies, who complain about inter-departmental struggles on resources (especially human resources, but also financial ones). In this type of organizations, the human resources allocated in the project often have to be negotiated with the departments they belong to, their work being split between the project and their own departmental routine. Moreover, as most of the companies do not yet have a project-oriented organizational structure, problems appear in regard to project and task priority (while PMs consider the project an organizational priority, the heads of different departments consider their own work a priority and not the project) or in regard to PMs' authority over the project resources. The PMs thus complain that "the departments do not understand the importance of the project", because there is no clear defining of the project contribution to the organizational mission or of the PMs position.

When asked about possible solutions and own contribution to overcoming these conflicts, over half of the respondents consider that they have intervened in the conflict resolution by holding face to face meetings with the people involved or by "mediating" the conflicts. In regard to task-related conflicts, the PMs point out several concrete solutions, such as task redistribution, a clear drawing of the project scope, holding trainings for team members or, as a last resort, calling for hierarchical superiors to solve the conflict (the top management). Another possible solution that half of the PMs interviewed insisted on is the importance of them being able to select their project team. In most of the cases, as the respondents have shown (especially the ones working in private companies and NGOs), the PMs cannot choose the members of their team, who are assigned either by project partners, heads of departments or by the management of the organization. Most of the PMs who did not select the project members themselves complain about team inefficiency, while the ones who are in charge of the recruitment decisions consider this to be a crucial factor for team performance. In other words, the interview responses show that teams where the PM does not select the project members, who are assigned by other internal stakeholders, have serious problems in reaching performance.

In respect to interpersonal conflicts, the PMs consider they appear rather in the Forming stage, at the beginning of the project, than in the execution phase, although they experienced other types of conflicts and tensions in the latter phase: “interpersonal conflicts may appear from the first moment, when the team meets, in the forming stage [...] until the presentation of the specific tasks”. As one of the PMs observes, “often, conflicts are not interpersonal from the beginning, but they rather start from professional conflicts which have not been solved”. Most of the PMs interviewed admit they have faced interpersonal conflicts with team members and provide examples, in most cases these conflicts having emerged from task-related ones. In addition, the respondents show that projects where team members do not work for the same organization can often raise conflicts between the PM and the members from organizations different from the one the PM works for. A common radical solution for the interpersonal conflicts faced by the PMs has been, as they acknowledged, the team member leaving the project (either as a result of PM’s decision or of a top management decision).

The majority of the PMs consider the team involvement in the project planning to be essential, as team members, once involved, are offered the opportunity to contribute to the setting of the project scope. This brings them closer to the project: “these people have ownership of the idea. If they are involved in a project with an idea they believe in, a project that deserves their full attention, than they feel motivated”. Also, in most cases the involvement of the team in the project planning depends on when the team is formed. If the team only enters the project in the execution stage, they miss out on the initial planning and have to carry out a project that has been conceptualized and planned by someone else, which may affect their sense of ownership, motivation and even understanding of the project. However, reality does not always coincide with what PMs find the ideal scenario. Some PMs admit that so far, in the projects they have coordinated, team members have not really been involved in the project planning, one of the reasons being that the team was formed only in the implementation phase. This is usually the case for PMs coming from private companies or NGOs, who sometimes are not even themselves involved in the planning phase and for whom the project comes as a “given task”. In their case, the involvement in the project planning depends on who the project initiator is. On the other hand, other PMs say that in the projects they coordinate the team is usually involved in the project planning or is at least consulted. A specific aspect is regarded to EU funded projects, where the planning phase is usually associated by PMs with the preparation of the project proposal. In this case, the “planning” is usually done by the PM alone or with the help of other internal stakeholders, while the project team is formed when the project is approved. The main reason for this practice, as stated by the PMs interviewed, is that EU funded projects take a longer time for approval and until the financing decision there are no funds to pay additional human resources (especially in the NGO sector).

PMs have different visions about what the “ideal project team” should look like. Most commonly referred to are interpersonal skills (the need for a team symbiosis and an openness of members toward each other), competency and experience, project devotion and task orientation. Some PMs also insist on having a team selected by themselves and working with people they trust (from a professional point of view) and who have already worked together in other projects: “an ideal team is one chosen by myself; they should have already known each other, have already worked together in at least one project or activity, they should trust each other and should have already been themselves at least once a Project Manager”. Some PMs prefer heterogeneous teams, where team members have complementary roles or personalities – “as a general rule, each team should have at least one type of personality from the

established ones; in other words, it should have someone who is a leader, someone who works, someone who is more critical, more reflexive, there should be complementarities between the team members. I wouldn't choose a similarity typology in a team because, automatically, if you have more leaders then they will argue instead of working". On the other hand, other PMs prefer homogeneous teams in terms of background, attitude or professional experience. Some of the PMs also consider the autonomy of project members, their capacity to take decisions on their own as a fundamental trait of an ideal project team. While most of the PMs focus on competence and know-how, PMs working in the NGO sector, where financial motivations are less possible, are more interested in having team members who are devoted to the project due to an "intrinsic motivation".

The PMs interviewed have different views regarding the role of emotions in project decisions. Half of them admit that, in their professional experience, they remember having taken emotional decisions in regard to the project and are able to give examples. Some of them consider this natural and inevitable and do not regard it as a negative aspect. On the other hand, other PMs state that in the decision-making process rationality has priority and they declare that they have never made emotional decisions or at least they have avoided it, because this type of decisions could affect the project. The interviews showed that most of the PMs are aware of the emotional motivations that might be the reason for their decisions, and some of them choose to accept and follow them, while others consciously try to block them. For this latter category of PMs, rationality prevails over emotionality, they are conscious of their feelings but choose to suppress them, considering that "emotions have no place in projects".

In order to determine the length of the Forming stage, we have asked PMs how long it takes for team members to understand and assume their project roles. Their answers showed that this depends on their experience or attitude. In most cases, the time needed for them to assume the project roles varies from one week to one to three months, depending on the duration and complexity of the project. Another variable that influences role understanding is the phase when the team is formed. If the team is only formed in the implementation of the project, role understanding and assumption might be more difficult because the team did not participate in the project planning.

The Norming phase is not very clearly delimited in the PM practice, as the interviews indicate. Most of the answers show that there are rules and principles that the PM establishes with the team at the beginning of the project (communication rules and procedures, project-specific rules). In most of the cases, these are rather unwritten or informal rules. However, there are also norms and procedures that are exterior to the project, coming from the organizational culture, though most of the rules are drawn by the PMs. Some respondents also show that, during the project, different rules and procedures are established, as a consequence of specific situations that occur.

The moment the Performing stage is reached depends on the experience of the teams. If project members are experts and if they have formerly worked together, it is more probable that Performing is reached easier, usually in the implementation phase. Also, the PMs who have selected their team members state that their teams perform faster, in the planning stage or even in the initiation of the project. These PMs declare that their teams, formed of experienced, specialist members, "work efficiently from the beginning", while other PMs admit that some of the teams they have coordinated have not managed to reach Performing. Their explanation for the lack of team efficiency points toward the need of more clarity in communication, the lack of team members' experience and know-how or towards the fact that "the

team wasn't sufficiently worn out". PMs consider that team performance is reached when team members know their attributions, when problems and conflicts are solved, when results and deliverables are carried out or when team members are familiar with each other and communicate efficiently.

The factors that are identified by the PMs to be crucial for team performance vary. Most of the PMs consider essential that the team members know their roles and the project objectives, that they are competent and motivated (including financial motivation) and that there is systematic communication with and within the project team. Most of the answers show that the team plays a crucial role in project success. Some consider it important to have a cohesive team, others point towards role complementarities or even to reputation, as a motivation factor (team members are appreciated for their work). Other views find a good planning of the project and a sound budgeting as key factors of project performance.

When asked about the values they wish to share with the team, many of the PMs mentioned honesty, transparency, respect for the others, trust, integrity, being responsible. These values are all correlated with EQ competencies and do not depend on the organizational membership of the PMs. Some of them are also characteristic for transformational leadership.

Only some of the PMs think that the members of the project teams they coordinated find them an example as professionals. Others are more reluctant in this respect, thinking that they might be a model for the team in some aspects, but not in others. The PMs who are more experienced tend to consider themselves as models for their project teams, while the majority of the younger PMs don't see themselves as models. This shows that they are self and social aware, as they don't answer in order to create a positive/desirable image about themselves to the interviewers and are capable of evaluating and accepting their own strengths and weaknesses. In regard to their social awareness, PMs perceive themselves differently in relation to project members. Most of the PMs consider themselves on an equal position with team members, as a "friend", a member of the team or a "colleague". Others see their own role as "the one who solves problems and finds solutions", "the one who is responsible" or "the person that holds the expertise". Some PMs have a self perception that points to a transformational leadership, seeing themselves as a "coach", "a wise person that makes things work" or an "advisor". On the other hand, the responsibility over the project makes some PMs see themselves as leaders, on a different position from other team members, considering that "there can be no equality" because "if you were on equal grounds you would not have authority". The perceived lack of authority in relation to team members is characteristic for young, inexperienced PMs (if a PM is younger than the team members, this may raise legitimacy and authority issues), who are reluctant in considering themselves an example for the team: "I am the youngest in the team and I don't know if I can see myself as an example". PMs with higher focus on empathy have a stronger social awareness, perceiving themselves in relation to the other team members: "I see myself as a part of each member and each role, I try to transpose myself and see what is happening at the other end too", "I have developed a higher capacity to place myself in the other's position". As for PMs' self awareness, most of them perceive themselves as a professional model, especially due to their experience and know-how, while younger PMs consider their lack of experience and authority as obstacles for perceiving themselves as models not only for the team, but also in relation to their own standards.

All the PMs mentioned that they assign autonomy to project team members in decision making when they trust them, trust their experience and think they are involved enough in the project, whereas young team members and the ones focused on financial gains need to be con-

trolled or at least supervised: “you can give them autonomy, in case you see they get involved 90%, but the people who are mainly interested in money must be closely supervised”. Most of the PMs consider delegating and empowerment essential for assigning autonomy to project team members, with the condition that they are specialists in carrying out their tasks and even in this case, they should be supervised. However, some PMs admit that delegating depends on the stake of the decision, preferring to be the one in charge when important decisions have to be made. Other PMs even confess that they are not very comfortable delegating.

PMs use different motivation techniques with their teams, depending on the available resources and on what they perceive as fundamental for team performance. Only 3 PMs state they use financial motivations, while most of the others complain they do not have the financial resources necessary and try to compensate through other means. While some PMs try to motivate team members “through the project itself”, “through obtaining the final results” or by “adapting the motivation to each individual”, most of the answers point to motivation techniques that relate to interpersonal relations and requires communication skills and tools. Interpersonal or informal discussions, a friendly work environment, providing feedback, merit recognition and appreciation, provoking the ambition of team members or “giving them the opportunity to highlight their abilities and the roles they have to perform” are used as compensating motivations when financial ones are not available.

All the PMs are self-aware when it comes to communicating the project to the project team, they consciously use different techniques to communicate with the project team and they use these techniques taking context into account: “there has to be some communication procedures” or “communication has to be related to the situation”. They choose direct communication when immediate action is needed, they prefer formal meetings with all the team members when the issue to be discussed is of general interest, and one to one discussions when only one member of the team is interested in the topic or in case of conflicts: “when a team member has not performed, I prefer to have an individual discussion”. There is a clear preference of PMs for face to face communication, in situations where it is possible. Also, PMs tend to prefer email communication because, as they say, “scripta manent”. On the other hand, the majority of the PMs are inclined to choose an informal type of communication over an excessively formal one.

Some PMs go beyond communication techniques when managing the project team and try to motivate and coach team members, to act as leaders: “usually I act as a coach [...] and try to determine the team members to work together and find out their own answers to problems”. Moreover, some PMs showed empathy to team members in different situations when implementing projects, stating that “it is very important to listen, to understand and respect their opinions”. When asked about the most important aspects in communication with the project team, the PMs point out the need for clarity (a clear definition of project goal, expectations, roles and tasks etc.), sincerity, trust, “common sense” and openness. They also insist on the need to adapt their communication to the individual needs of the members and giving and receiving feedback, together with assuring the possibility of members to freely express their thoughts.

The end of the project or the Adjourning phase is recognized by all PMs as a distinct one, with specific features. Several common messages are communicated by PMs to team members when the project ends. In most of the cases, the members are congratulated and thanked for their efforts, and the results of the projects are communicated to the team. Some of the PMs try to ensure a certain continuity, in order to avoid feelings of uncertainty or frustration,

by talking about future projects or assuring the team of their openness to further collaborations. Other PMs end their projects with follow-up or lessons learned sessions, while some of them state that there is no formal ending of the project or it is neglected, because “there is too much work to do”. Except for this latter category, in the other cases the Adjourning or closure of the project is marked by a formal or informal event. The majority of the PMs state that they hold informal events, such as dinners or parties, in order to celebrate the project closure. In some cases, a formal event (such as a press conference) is held, especially when the project financier imposes.

In respect to the feelings that team members experience at the end of the project, in most of the cases these are positively valenced. Their emotions range from happiness, fulfillment or even “euphoria” to more moderate feelings of relaxation and relief – “Thank God it’s over!”, the members being satisfied at the thought that their tasks and responsibilities are being reduced. Negative valenced emotions appear in some cases, the lack of continuity, the possibility of losing one’s job or of losing the financing or the income causing fear, concern, uncertainty and frustration. The perspective of team dissolution also creates, in some project teams, feelings of nostalgia or regret. On the other hand, some PMs consider that, at the end of the project, the team members feel “exhausted”, while others try to concentrate on the next projects.

The majority of the PMs that were interviewed declared they know or had heard about Tuckman’s model of team development, but they do not consciously apply it when managing a project team. Some of them said they apply it unconsciously or that the model may be applied in some aspects, but not entirely. Even those who are not familiar with Tuckman’s model have mentioned characteristics of teams in different stages, of teams that reached performance: “in the initiation phase, there is the forming of the team, in the planning phase it starts to work in an organized manner and then in a... memorable way – each meeting has to have a result”; teams that went through “Adjourning” at the end of the project, or even when a crisis appeared, or teams that never succeeded in overcoming the “Storming” stage, case in which they turned back to “Norming” or to “Forming”. Moreover, when it comes to the “Adjourning” stage, some PMs mention feelings of frustration, as the theory promotes: team members are worried because they ask themselves “what they will do tomorrow”, when the project ends. But, surprisingly, the majority of them have noticed happiness, emotion, pride that the project was a success, relief that it had ended (“great it has finally ended”). These feelings and emotions are not mentioned in Tuckman’s model.

When asked what they would like to add, some of them emphasized the role of an effective communication between the PM and his/her team and between team members: “I am really interested in having an open communication within the team”. Actually, one PM stated that “projects are nothing else but applied communication techniques” and that “a team develops when its members truly communicate with each other”.

In what regards the limits of the research method and procedures or scope, the authors would like to mention that the majority of the PMs interviewed, although coming from different fields and types of organizations, are from Bucharest or main cities of Romania, having a high degree of education. This means that the results of this research cannot be applied to other PMs, with a different degree of education or who are active in a different community. Moreover, this research is primarily focused on the soft aspects of communication in project management, and secondly on the tools, techniques or instruments used in the communication processes. We consider these soft aspects as relevant to effective communication and project team performance as the hard ones, fact that was actually revealed by our research.

5. Conclusions

The majority of the PMs that were interviewed are self-aware of their role as key communicators and they consciously assume it. They use specific communication tools and instruments in order to help the team achieve performance. Some of them go beyond these communication techniques and place themselves in the role of leader or even coach, who has to have the major contribution to the team members' development. These PMs are the ones who are more social-aware and seem to have a higher EQ than the others, who are rather task oriented, focused more on results, deadlines and objectives. Moreover, the PMs who are focused on leading the team and coaching its members to bring them to performance are more careful with team members' emotions and take them into consideration when making decisions. Regarding the organizational membership of PMs, there seems to be a tendency for PMs in the NGO sector to be more careful with team members' emotions when making decisions, which is often in accordance with the nature of the projects they coordinate. The others, who are task oriented, identify the way team members feel in specific circumstances, but they think they have to be rational and not make emotional decisions, as the most relevant to the project success is achieving its objectives. Though they are self and social aware, they consciously decide not to take into consideration their own or their team members' emotions, considering that this might affect the project.

All the PMs emphasized, at least once, that communication is a factor that directly impacts the project's success, some of them even mentioned it is essential for team performance. Regarding the connection we expected to find between the stages of team development and the Project Life Cycle ("Forming" happens in the initiation of the project, "Storming" in the planning phase, "Norming" at the beginning of the execution and controlling, "Performance" in the execution phase and "Adjourning" at the end of the project), this is not always the case. There are situations when the project team is already performing at the planning phase, because it is a long-term team and has reached the performing phase during the implementation of another project, or because team members are experienced specialists. Also, another finding of the research was that a main factor for the performance of the team is whether the PM was the one who selected the team members (usually from people he had already worked with on other projects or based on recommendations).

Furthermore, there are cases when "Storming" happens in the execution phase, as the "Forming" and "Norming" of the team work smoothly and conflicts appear when there is a crisis, when deadlines are to be met or in periods of peak workload. Sometimes, the "Norming" stage happens at the beginning of the project, at the same time with the Forming or Storming stages. Moreover, some project teams remain at the "Storming" stage until the end of the project, they never perform.

Though some characteristics of the team development model proposed by Bruce Tuckman are identified by Project Managers in their day-to-day work coordinating project teams, the model is not completely applicable in practice, as the research shows. This is explained by the different variables that appear in the way projects are implemented in Romania. Significant differences appear between the various types of projects (commercial, academic, organizational projects etc). Also, the project owner and the financing source have different impacts on the way projects are carried out. Consultancy agencies or universities with experience in developing projects and highly qualified team members have lesser problems in bringing teams to performance, while private companies and NGOs haven't quite yet internalized proj-

ect management methodologies. Most private companies are not project-oriented, they have a functional or matrix organizational structure, which is the cause for inter-department conflicts and different priorities. In the same time, the people assigned in projects, both in private companies and NGOs, are usually specialists on a specific field, but have less experience in projects or project management. Together with the lack of financial motivation (in companies, being a member of a project does not necessarily bring additional income, while in NGOs the financial allocations both for projects and for the team members' wages are low) and the barriers imposed by the organizational culture, these represent three main factors that make it difficult for project teams to perform. However, as the research shows, Project Managers try to compensate these problems by using their EQ competencies and soft skills, motivating the project team members through communication.

This investigation has two major practical implications: it is one of the few efforts in the Romanian scientific field to address the subject of communication in project management, and one of the fewest papers that take into consideration the soft aspects regarding the role of the project manager in developing the project team. Moreover, it reveals aspects regarding the communication skills, processes and flows that the PM may need or manage that one may think of, but not truly be aware of. We consider this research useful for the PM community in Romania to become (more) aware of their role of key communicators within the project team and to take into account the experience, advice, ways of facing problems and of solving them, as the PMs interviewed for this investigation have shown us.

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Appendix

Interview guide:

1. What is your experience in implementing projects? What types of projects have you been involved in? (duration, size, type of financing/initiator, local/national/regional/international, field etc.)
2. Could you please describe the last project team you worked with? (how many members, same nationality, same company, did the member know each other before the project?)
3. What do the team members feel at the start of a project? What about you?
4. Which are the three main things that you communicate to the project team in the initiation of the project?
5. From your experience, what are the main challenges the team members face at a formation stage of the team? How do you help the team overcome them?
6. What are the stages/phases of a project when most conflicts arise between the team members? What type of conflicts are they? Do you take action in solving these conflicts? If yes, how?
7. What are the stages/phases of a project when interpersonal conflicts arise? Can you describe a conflict between you and a team member? How was it solved?
8. What is the role of the team members in the planning of the project, from your experience?
9. In your opinion, which are the most tensed moments for the project team members? What about in your case? How do you overcome them?
10. From your experience, have you noticed any similar behaviors in different teams you have worked with? Examples? How would you describe the ideal project team?
11. Sometimes, people take decisions on emotional grounds. Do you recall having made a project or project team-related emotionally biased decision in your recent experience? Please give an example.
12. What do you consider to be most important in communicating with the project team members?
13. How do you communicate with them during the project phases? Why?
14. How long does it usually take for the team members to assume their roles and responsibilities and fully understand the project scope?
15. Are there common established norms in the team you work with? Does the team establish its own norms or do you? If there are conflicts inside the team or between the team and you or project stakeholders, are there any written or unwritten regulations for a good functioning of the team?
16. In what project phase do you consider the team starts to work efficiently? Why?
17. Do you consider the project teams you have worked with have reached your performance standards? If not, why do you think so? What should have been done? If yes, what were the factors that helped them reach performance? How long did it take? Did you contribute? How?
18. What do you consider to be the three most important factors for project success?
19. What values do you try to pass on to the project team?
20. What are the most frequent challenges in managing a project team? What did you do to overcome them?
21. How do you see yourself in relation to the team? How do you think the team members see you? Do you think your team members take you as an example/model? Do you see yourself as a model? Why?
22. How do you motivate team members/what do you think motivates them?
23. Do you think team members should have autonomy in decisions regarding their responsibilities or do you prefer to keep a close control? Why? When do you think team members are ready to take decisions on their own?
24. Do you take into consideration your or your team members' emotions when you take a decision related to the project? Example? If not, why?
25. When working with new teams, where members don't know each other, what do you do to help them become a cohesive group? Do you encourage informal talks/meetings?

26. What do you communicate to the team at the project closure? Are there any specific procedures or events?
27. How do the team members feel at the end of a project? What about you? How do you help them overcome these feelings?
28. Do you think that there are different stages in the development of the team? If yes, what do you consider these stages/phases are?
29. Are you familiar with the model forming-storming-norming-performing-adjourning? If yes, do you apply it in project management? How?
30. Are there any questions that you consider to be relevant or do you want to add anything?

Book review

Oana ȘTEFĂNIȚĂ

Review of *Acces și echitate în învățământul superior din România* [Access and equity in the Romanian higher education] by Remus PRICOPIE, Valeriu FRUNZARU, Nicoleta CORBU, Loredana IVAN, Alina BÂRGĂOANU; București: Comunicare.ro, 2011, 116 p.

The Romanian education system has lately undergone a series of new policies, changes or issues determined by a lack of adequacy with new requirements imposed by an ongoing evolution, by the increased interference of technology and internet in our lives, by the new tendencies we are exposed to as a consequence of the globalization process. Nowadays, when education has a crucial role in the knowledge-based society, the rate of factors that create issues in the education system has increased and aspects as school abandon, lack of interest for school, poor performance, inappropriate attitudes towards the education system, decreasing time allocated to school preparation, reluctance in continuing studies, are gaining ground.

In order to provide solutions, to create motivating policies, we need to identify the causes, the factors that have an impact on the mentioned aspects and treat the source, make changes within causes, not within consequences. The study *Access and equity in higher education in Romania* provides an in-depth analysis of the most important factors for having a useful radiography of the educational system. As graduation proves an essential factor in EU's policies for developing a knowledge-based economy, for having a trained workforce with a high level of education that can manage on a competitive labor market (p.13), the research carried out by the authors is relevant.

The book is part of a larger research conducted through a SOPHRD project "Instruments and mechanisms for facilitating access to higher education based on partnerships between central and local education establishments and social and economic actors", developed by the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, in 2009-2012. The overall objective is to see to what extent the education system in Romania is able to function as a key element of progress and socio-economic, sustainable development by ensuring a fair access to higher education programs to children from all social areas (p.15).

The study is structured in two sections, one dedicated to the research conducted on high school students and the other one, to the analysis on university students. The methodology used within the research consisted in sociological surveys applied on 2500 high school students from the whole country and 1402 students from state universities in Romania, comprising various study fields. The authors focused on identifying the way in which pupils and students relate to education, the factors that determine both categories to leave school, factors that determine students to continue their education by achieving a Bachelor degree and then a Master degree, the way in which dropout intention evolves in time. All these aspects were correlated with variables that might constitute causes for direct or indirect changes, such as gender, family income, family support, parents' education, urban or rural area, type of city (small, medium, large), distance from home to school, school performance, grades, access to internet or education profile (vocational, technical, humanist, exact sciences). Within the research, there were also analyzed variables as acquisition centrality, the role of acquisitions in

the pursuit of happiness, the role of possessions in defining success, thus reaching the area of moral values and insight perceptions.

The book contains valuable data, in depth correlations, specific measures, providing verifiable and concrete material for further analyses that can be used in developing new policies or solutions, programs to respond to the identified causes or to factors that lead to irregularities in the educational system. Therefore, it provides essential data both for scholars, researchers in the field of education and for institutions, organizations or individuals that are involved in elaborating educational programs and policies, that aim to modernize the system, to bridge its gaps and improve the educational offers so as to reach European or global standards in quality and performance.

Within the study there are provided useful findings that serve to enrich the theoretical background in the area and to represent a base for practical changes and measures. Some interesting findings referred to students' beliefs that for succeeding in life, the most important factor is ambition, followed by: a united and supportive family, intelligence, determination, trust, thus giving value to personal attributes and not to relations or money. Moreover, education and school performance were mentioned in a high percentage. Respondents consider also that for succeeding in life it is essential to graduate, to have higher education. However, in contradiction to their statements, they spend few hours reading, preparing for school, studying and much more on the internet and with friends, these percentages being worrisome and drawing attention to present changes in our society.

The study emphasizes the problem regarding the competition that the internet represents for school in terms of being a primary source of information and a base in acquiring general culture. However, students with high grades rely on books and school to develop their knowledge. The gender variable provides some differences as well, as girls tend to have higher grades, spend more time in preparing for school, value books and school more as important factors for succeeding in life, and intend in higher percentages to apply for college and then for postgraduate studies. Furthermore, they are less exposed to dropout. The main reasons for dropout include lack of money, family problems, long distance from home to school, the need to work for supporting the family, the sense of uselessness of the syllabus and the things learned in school, the perception that faculty does not increase the chances to find a better job, difficulties in integrating within the school community and conflicts with professors or colleagues. In addition, students valuing more the role of possessions, of material rewards in defining success face an increased risk of considering dropout. Poor income, lack of information, resources and family support, residence in the rural area, low school performance, high demanding criteria for admission, long distance from current residence are some of the factors that negatively influence the decision of applying for college. These factors should therefore be taken into consideration when searching for solutions to increase the rate of those applying for higher education programs.

The research also focused on the influence sources that intervene in deciding to continue the studies and choosing a study field. Family's opinion is rated the highest, then the opinion of friends, colleagues. Students also voiced expectations for professors and class teacher to get more involved in this process and provide consultancy, although students with high performance tend to consider only their own opinions. When selecting a faculty, students value more criteria, such as: the study field should be able to provide a better future, should be in high demand in the professional area, or should teach interesting things. However, in the end, criteria as state university, low taxes, easy criteria for admission and distance from home be-

come equally important. The differences are maintained in the case of those with high performance in school. Other findings show that students tend to be satisfied with the theoretical background achieved during faculty and less with the practical one, with the taxes and the chances to find a job, emphasizing the need for a better correspondence between education and practice, between theory and the requirements of employers.

These are some of the main findings of the research, which can be found in the book, detailed, explained, documented and integrated in theoretical models such as the explanatory model for the risk of dropping out in the case of high school students and separately, in the case of college students, or the causal model regarding the intention to apply for college. These models are highly important for further research in the area or in identifying and creating responses to certain causes.

The authors provide a useful insight covered with empirical data and figures that lead the reader in discovering key factors that should be taken into consideration in every policy and measure within the education system, factors that provide essential information regarding the access to higher education and the equity involved in the process. Thus, the book offers a key when trying to improve the quality of the educational system, eliminating the inequities, encouraging youngsters to complete their education by graduate and postgraduate studies, when trying to increase the value conferred to education and its role in ensuring success.

The study provides also models that can represent the base for scholars in advanced studies and for practitioners that elaborate solutions, measures, projects and programs in the education field. However, the study is also a valuable source of information for students and individuals interested in the education system, in its gaps, characteristics and specifics. Furthermore, the research can contribute to finding causes and then solutions to improve the quality of the educational offers that should integrate the need for a better correlation with the labor market. It also offers an output which can serve to justify public policies in the area, which can highlight the lack of information in the system both at the level of beneficiaries, and at the level of those providing the educational programs.

This advanced research should represent a leading study, a guideline for further motions, policies, motivation campaigns and awareness campaigns regarding the role of education, the ways to solve the problem of inequity and access to higher education. Moreover, it should attract attention on the impact of internet, of transformation processes at the levels of nowadays society, on the need to constantly adapt the education system so as to increase its appeal and find measures of integrating books, culture, school in the new technologies so as to reach a large segment of possible beneficiaries. A society that is continuously changing requires also continuity in the research areas, which should constantly contribute to adaptation and improvement of all educational processes.

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All manuscripts are subject to a blind review process before publication. The author(s) name(s) should not appear on any page except the title page of the submitted paper, and electronic identification data should be removed before submission.

Important Dates:

The Journal is issued three times per year, in April, July, and December. Here are the submission deadlines:

- April issue: **March 1**;
- July issue: June 1;
- December issue: October 15.

Submission

Submissions must follow the Guidelines for Authors, available on the Journal's website (www.journalofcommunication.ro/guidelines). For further inquiries, please contact the editor, dr. Elena Negrea, elena.negrea@comunicare.ro.

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