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CHAPTER 9 TRANSFORMATIONS OF PUBLIC SPHERE AND CHANGING ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETY

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Post-Communist Transformations of Public Sphere: A Model for Analysis

Structural changes of the public sphere are one of the important dimensions of post-communist transition. The relevance of the theoretical framework developed by Habermas in his classical work concerning the transformation of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989/1962) for the analysis of the contemporary processes in the post-communist countries was expressed by Habermas himself. As Habermas says,

"The transformation occurring in the German Democratic Republic, in Czechoslovakia, and in Romania formed a chain of events properly considered not merely as historical process that happened to be shown on television but one whose very mode of occurrence was televisual" (Habermas 1992, p.456).

The same is true for the Baltic states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. But it was anticipated that in the process of moving away from totalitarian society towards political democracy and market economy, structural changes in the public sphere will have different sequence and direction compared to the classical model of transformations described by Habermas. The post-communist transformations of the public sphere could be described in an ideal form as a way from the centralized mass production and distribution of communist ideology and "manufactured publicity" (Habermas 1989, p.211) towards rebirth of the autonomous political public sphere, characterized by diversified agenda of national or subnational debates on the public issues and creating growing opportunities for personal choices and individual interactions.

The focus of our research is on realization of this model during different phases of post-communist development. We are interested how changes in the media are related to different contextual (cultural, social, psychological, political and economic) factors. We assume that media and the public sphere are interrelated: on the one hand, restoration and development of democratic political institutions is directly influencing performance of the media and their role in society, on the other hand, if media become a forum for public debates,

it will contribute to diversification of discourses, growing reflexivity and self-confidence of the new social actors and will stimulate participation of citizens in political decision-making. That means, in the process of transition media are going through structural changes and alternate their roles, but at the same time they are themselves agents of transformations in the public sphere.

During the last decade successful economic reforms, rapid Westernization of international trade and cultural contacts, dramatic social changes and complicated ethnic problems in Estonia have been in focus of political and sociological analysis of many researchers (see e.g. Furtado & Hechter 1992, Dawisha & Parrott 1994, Drechsler 1995, Laitin 1996, Linz & Stepan 1996, Raun 1997). Media have played an active role in all these processes. The whole media system, as well the forms of public discourse in the media, changed completely in the last 5-6 years. Relationships between changes in the media and processes going on in economy, political and social system are manifested in Estonia in a very transparent mode.

In order to understand these relationships, we have analysed these changes comparatively, using data collected in all three Baltic states, in other post-communist countries, and also in the Nordic countries. (see Hoyer, Lauk & Vihalemm, 1993, Lauristin, Unt & Vihalemm 1994, Lauk 1997). For the historical comparisons we can use the sociological data from the surveys of the Soviet period which are available in the Estonian Social Science Data Archive.

Periodization of the Transformation in the Media System

Karol Jakubowicz (1995, p.79-83) has presented a general framework for description of the changes in the media during the transformation process, taking into consideration mainly changes in the political control, legal environment, ownership and journalistic professionalization. In his analysis the political dimension is strongly emphasized, whereas the cultural and social dimensions are only mentioned. We shall describe post-communist changes of the public sphere in a broader context as a) changes in the media system, b) changes in the structuration of society and emerging new social actors and new institutions of the civil society, c) changes in the position of the cultural agencies, d) changes of the political agencies and development of the institutional infrastructure for the representative democracy and rule of law, e) changes of the economic structures, f) changes in the people's attitudes and motivation for participation (see Table 1).

The role of the mass media in the transition process have not remained the same. The changing public role of the media in Estonia as well as in the other Baltic countries could be related to the different stages of the political and economical transition as follows:

- pre-transition stage: democratization from the top without deeper changes in the economic and political structures, liberalization of the control over the media (1985-1987);

- 1st stage of transition: destruction of the centralized political power by the new mass movements, mobilized and supported by the media; rebirth of the political public sphere, integrated by common national values and goals (1987-1991);

- 2nd stage of transition: restoration of the political institutions of the independent nation state and parliamentary democracy, dissolution of the mass movements into political parties, gradual emancipation of the media from the state as well from the political parties (1991-1994);

- 3rd stage of transition: stabilization of the new political structures, privatization and commercialization of the media, deconstruction of the national values and segmentation of the public sphere into different ideological, political, economic and cultural discourses; the media system developed towards a diversity of channels and different modes of performance (1994).

Historical Background: Cultural Public Sphere and Resistance to Totalitarian Regime

The conditions for existence of a public sphere under the communist regime as well the nature and forms of a civil society in East-European countries before the collapse of the communist system are in itself quite controversial issues (see Gellner, 1994). The possibility for existence of a true civil society in these conditions could be strongly disputed (see Arendt, 1958). If all public and private communication channels were under control of a secret police, the free formation of the opinion-shaping associations, as the most important elements of the civil society was made impossible. There could not exist any rational-critical political discourse. A political public sphere, which by the definition given by Habermas is "a sphere of criticism of public authority" (Habermas 1989, p.51), and had no place for development in that type of society.

But still there is plenty of evidence that since the "thaw" of the 1960s cultural media (theatre, literary and art criticism, poetry, cultural magazines, etc.) in most European communist countries developed a quite open political discourse. This cultural public sphere was used by people as a substitute for non-existing political public sphere. The existence of these alternate communication structures created the cultural space within which were developed the ideas and supported values of national resistance. Recent history of East- and Central European countries is full of examples how effective were cultural channels in spreading messages of opposition all over the nation. Our data from surveys made in 70s and 80s about lifestyles and cultural consumption habits in Estonia (Hion, Lauristin & Vihalemm 1988) have shown extremely intensive use of the 'high culture' by the majority of Estonians. The strength

and efficiency of the popular movements in the Baltic countries was deeply rooted in traditions of cultural resistance created by the people who had lived through the centuries under foreign rule and had learnt to maintain own culture despite all oppression. These traditions formed cultural and social capital that was kept alive during the Soviet period. The cultural sphere "served as a special sanctuary, a different world, which, although influenced by Soviet ideological standards, preserved a mechanism of self-regulation and natural evolution" (Hoyer, Lauk & Vihalemm 1993: 214). In the cultural media journalists used complicated forms of indirect expression: metaphors, analogies, allusions, parodies. Readers learned to read between the lines, to catch hints and draw parallels. Often critical ideas about Soviet reality were expressed in the form of art criticism. It is well known phenomenon that the cultural papers and magazines like "Literaturnaya Gazeta" or "Novyi Mir" had enormous popularity namely because sometimes on their pages were published the most courageous ideas about society, history, about the state of Soviet economy. The same tendency characterized cultural press in Estonia.

It could be argued that in the cultural public sphere had been formed a communicative network, which functioned as an alternative to the political public sphere and had played an important role in the collapse of communism in 1989 and in the rebirth of the civil society in post-communist countries.

In the preservation of national culture that distinguished Estonians and other Balts from their Soviet rulers, a specific role was played by differences in language. The native language of Estonians as well Latvians or Lithuanians was a secret code that allowed ironical interpretation of Soviet (Russian language) slogans and drew a clear dividing line between the two communities, "we" (Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians) counterposed to "them" (Soviets) whose mother tongue was alien. Efforts to preserve Estonian language in education, science, literature, journalism, and the permanent fight against forcible Russification of public life and culture formed the most important area of cultural resistance to the Soviet regime. In this struggle for cultural survival, certain traditional institutions of civil society, such as the Native Language Society, the Environmental Protection Society, Horticultural associations, Societies for studies of local history, and choirs had vital importance (see Aarelaid-Tart & Tart, 1995). Preservation and protection of national cultural and social capital was a significant resource used by Estonians and the other Baltic nations for creation of the mass liberation movements. The energy of cultural resistance which had been accumulated during the years of Soviet power was released in those movements. During "singing revolution" this cultural energy was transformed into political force.

The Changing Role of Mass Media as Agencies of the Public Sphere

The role of media in rebirth of political public sphere did not remain the same throughout the whole process of transition. During the pre-transition phase of

Soviet reforms, Gorbachev's TV-performances were continuing the traditions of Communist Party's "representative publicness", which like the public performances of monarchs, were not representational "for" but "before" people (cf. Habermas 1989, p.8). In the next stage political public sphere was born with the help of the mass media. Using opportunities created by "Glasnost", media themselves began to play a role of an active political agencies. Environmentalist movements and popular fronts in the Baltic countries were born in 1987-88 with the direct participation of journalists, leading discussions on TV.

This new situation was ambiguous from the viewpoint of democratic principles: charismatic leaders of the mass movements often used authoritarian mechanisms of power, they took over forms of old "manufactured" public sphere created by mass media, and fulfilled them with new ideological content. They built up power relations, based on popular support and direct mass participation. The influence of new ideas was to the large extent expanded using the hegemonic position of these mass movements in the media (see Hoyer, Lauk & Vihalemm 1993, p.224-226).

The emancipatory effect of restored private ownership and development of representational forms of democracy led to the growing independence of the media during the second stage of transition. Media now created a more open and neutral public space where different interests and viewpoints could be publicly expressed and negotiated. The main obstacle for the democratic development in this stage was too slow development and weakness of new social actors. At the third stage of transition, the commercial interests of the privatized media become separated from the public interests to such a degree that the question could be raised whether all publicly relevant issues, needs and interests of all social actors are fairly represented in the public sphere.

During the process of transition, the authoritarian concept of media-state relationship was gradually replaced in Estonian media by a liberal concept. Liberalization of the press was completed during the second phase of transition. Not only almost all papers were privatized and hundreds of new ones were established but also generational replacement of journalists was very rapid (see Lauk 1997). Attachment of the young generation of journalists to the Anglo-Saxon model of liberal journalism changed co-operative relationships between new political elite and media, rooted in the memories about common participation in national movement, into the relationships between power and its watchdog. Emancipation of the media from the governmental control is one of the challenges for all new democracies in Eastern Europe (see Splichal 1994, Jakubowicz 1995, Paletz, Jakubowicz & Novosel 1995, Downing 1996). Regulation of the media had shifted from the political and cultural field towards the economic field. This has given ground for the criticisms against the irresponsibility of media driven by the commercial interests. Estonian media nowadays have not yet clearly defined their public role in a market driven society.

Changing Social Context of the Media

Among the significant social changes after liberation some of them were of the special importance for the development of the new media. Differentiation of incomes has broadened social cleavages between opportunities of people looking at their everyday life, including their access to different channels of political and cultural communication. As the result, the audiences of the national printed media of the general interest decreased significantly: in 1995 circulation of dailies had dropped 3,7 times compared to the 1990, circulation of weeklies decreased twice, circulation of the local papers 2,5 times. At the same time hundreds of the new channels were invented during the last 5-6 years, incl. local radio stations, commercial TV stations, satellites and Internet. We can speak about the rapid social and cultural segmentation of the previously quite homogeneous audience.

At the same time the other important social process influenced changes in the media system and content. In the course of the liberation process Estonian national elite was reshuffled: previous establishment lost partly their positions, partly converted their political and social capital into economic one and disappeared from the lights of the public scene. Only small part of the Soviet time political establishment preserved some public position. New elite was formed partly from the ranks of the Soviet time cultural and political opposition, partly recruited from the young generation which in the case of Estonia very rapidly entered all spheres of public life. Differently, from the national democratic traditions of the Estonian press, new printed media, especially leading newspapers and new magazines of general interest, overtly addressed their content to these new elites, whereas new commercial channels (gutter papers, sex magazines, commercial radio and TV- programs) are targeted towards the 'mass public'. In this way, growing social polarization of the audiences is matched with the growing cultural polarization of the media contents.

New Forms of Public Communication

The forms of public communication in new Estonia are not limited any more with the mass media and state controlled organized public events, like it was 10 years ago. We would not understand the whole process if we will not take into account the growing possibilities of social interaction in various forms of associations, clubs, studios, galleries, festivals, seminars, etc. Some of these institutions are restored in their traditional forms, i.e. pre-war educational and cultural associations, student corporations, political parties. But there are plenty of new forms, including the (post) modern computerized networks, rapidly growing in numbers. At the end of 1996 the number of the Internet users in Estonia was among the highest in previous communist countries: 20 000 or 1 per 75 inhabitants. The study of computerization in Estonia carried out

by UNDP in 1997 showed rapid development of the new communication technologies: now more than 10 % of adult population are using computers every day more than three hours (Postimees, 11.06.1997). To what extent these new opportunities for interaction between people will also mean expansion of the political public sphere, is still open.

Changing Agenda of the Public Debate and Changing Patterns of the Political Discourse

In the pre-transition phase ('Glasnost') weakening of the political control over media and inability to foresee the consequences of liberation from the part of the communist reformers in Moscow created conditions for the outburst of the oppressed and prohibited thoughts and experiences, for the expression of the hidden anti-regime feelings. In the Baltic countries it meant that claims for the historical truth and justice which were up to then expressed only in dissident leaflets and belonged to the mostly persecuted 'nationalist' discourse, suddenly fulfilled the mainstream media. For the external observers this change in the content of the media and attitudes of the journalists could be unexpected. Looking from the inside it was clear that even during the decades of the most strict censorship the media contributed to the preservation of the national feelings and values among the Baltic nations and helped to create a kind of hidden consensus based upon these values. How was it possible?

Soviet propaganda was so openly against the national values and undermined so absolutely the true historical experiences of Baltic people, that this created permanent conflict between the content of media and the inner life-world of the people. This conflict helped to maintain psychological autonomy of individuals and to preserve national memories. Russian-language Communist propaganda was a strong negative 'common denominator', which created among Estonians an atmosphere of the 'hidden national brotherhood': the journalists and the audience felt themselves belonging to the same language community, opposed to 'them', the ruling aliens. Belonging to the national community was supported by cultural institutions, e.g. traditional songfests (later during the 'singing revolution' this cultural tradition was transformed into the political manifestations). Media discourse was built up on hints, allusions and omissions, which had understandable meaning for the all members of the national language community.

Glasnost for the first time during Soviet occupation broke the rules of these language games. During the first years of perestroika people in the Baltic countries did not trust the willingness of Moscow to go on with the real reforms. The breakthrough came in 1988. From this point it became possible to express publicly in the plain language the bitterness of Soviet experiences and hopes for national liberation. Debates about the different ways to the common goal, i.e. national independence, fulfilled the content of newspapers and of the direct radio and TV broadcasts. Recent analysis made about the changed values

during the three election campaigns in Estonia showed that during the national elections in 1990 and 1992 the themes connected with the restoration of the nation state strongly prevailed in the public debate. Importance of the national (ethnic) political issues and emotional appeals to the national interests is however decreasing over time, while the importance of economic values is growing after 1992.

Modes of a rational - critical discourse are developing in the media together with more pragmatic, even cynical approaches to the current social and political issues. We can expect that in the course of the further economic and political developments in Estonia the ethnocentric dimension in the political debate concentrated on the issues of 'we' opposed to 'others' (occupants, Russians, aliens) will be gradually replaced by the left-right (socio-economic) dimension in society. It will stimulate presentation in the media interests and views of the various political, social and economical interest groups evolving among Estonians themselves. For example, with the restitution of the property rights of the pre-war owners, conflict of interests between owners of the dwelling houses and renters of apartments in the privatized houses had become a major public issue.

The structural changes in economy had created new tensions between the groups representing interests of declining economic structures (agricultural producers, industrial circles) and groups connected with the new areas of business. With the development of the political parties these conflicting economic interests are more often publicly negotiated as the policy issues. New topics in the public debate are taxation policy, models of social insurance, regional development and the rights of the municipalities, etc. At the same time during the last phase we can see the strengthening of the less democratic trends in the content of the media: with the growing commercialization of the media rational debate is replaced by 'selling' to the audience popular themes, personalities, and scandalous stories. Being under the growing economical pressure the media become more and more dependent on the expectations of the major clients buying advertisement space. They are less concentrated on the balanced representation of the different viewpoints and interests but prefer to present viewpoints and values of the new elite and to address their messages to the top ten percent of consumers.

Restoration of the Independent Cultural Field

As it was stated before, during Soviet time and also in the first stage of liberation movements cultural public sphere, cultural media were used as means for political mobilization. But very soon, already in the second phase of transition, when national movements were institutionalized in parliamentary forms and political activities lost their character of informal grass-roots movements, cultural elite and cultural media began to restore independent cultural field governed by own rules and values. Through the art forms and

commercialized mass media new Western post-modern type of culture was very soon introduced in Estonia. New ideas and new type of discourses replaced the plain language of political mobilization, used in 1988-91. Sacred national symbols lost their attractiveness as cultural values and were returned to the realm of politics. Ideology of liberation, targeted to the restoration of statehood as a central value, was clearly contradictory to the post-modern ideas. Deconstruction of 'great narratives' of national past began almost immediately after their realization in the form of official ideology in the newly restored Estonian state. Closing of national borders coincided with the unrestricted openness to the Western media, Western arts, Western goods and Western tourists. This opened for individuals multiplied cultural options on the global level, outside the national framework.

Globalization of the media is playing an important role in overcoming the limits of the national ideology, strengthening democratic developments and creating new choices for individuals. At the same time growing commercialization of all media contributed to the spread of hedonistic values among Estonian population (see Vihailemm, Lauristin & Hillve 1997).

Media and Changes in the Cultural Values

Globalization of the mediated world, expansion of Western mass consumption standards and values of the post-modern culture is going on through the media. According to the results of our survey, the impact of real socio-economic situation on the development of the Baltic value system, which plays still a crucial role, is in contradiction to the mediated world. The Western style of advertising, TV series, etc. follow mainly the "post-industrial" hedonistic and self-directed values. At the same time the impact of the mass media and consumption culture is growing. The younger the generation, the higher it evaluates the hedonistic values (*pleasant life, comfortable life*), self-enhancement (*self-realization, self-respect*), openness to change (*exiting life*) and higher status (*power, wealth*). It indicates the start of post-materialist development and change of the type of culture into more individualistic. The influence of globalization process on the post-communist cultural development had been very controversial, creating a strange mixture of the national traditionalism with modern industrial value-pattern centered around dimension *work- wealth- technology*, and the post-modern consumption culture (see Vihailemm, Lauristin & Hillve 1997).

The example of the Baltic countries demonstrates the inner cultural controversies of the East-European liberation process. On the one hand it is a process of national rebirth, revival of the national (collective) values rooted in the common national history. On the other hand, post-communist transformation means liberalization, rise of the individualistic value-orientations. Changes in the media and in the political and cultural public sphere are directed towards the rapid Westernization of Estonian society.

Table 1. Societal Changes in Estonia 1987 -1997

	1987-1991 The Breakthrough (Singing revolution)	1991-1994 Laying the foundations of Estonian State, launching radical economic reform	1994-97 Economic and cultural stabili- zation
Political Changes	strong political mobilization, abolishment of the power monopoly of CP; shift of the political leadership to the new political mass movements; birth of political parties	restoration of statehood, constitutional reform; development of the multi-party system; administrative reforms; new national goals connected with "return to Europe"	professionalization of politics, delegitimation of political institutions, formation of the populist opposition to radical reforms; development of international relations aimed at integration with EU and NATO
Economic Changes	beginning of the rapid economic decline, hyperinflation, food stamps, shortage of fuel	"shock therapy": currency reform, privatization, restitution of properties; rebirth of banking system; growing consumption; turn to the West in foreign trade; tax reforms; creation of an elementary safety net	stabilization of economy; final stage of privatization and land reform; decreasing inflation; emerging financial market and real estate market; living standard slowly growing
Social Changes	Soviet time establishment is loosing positions; rebirth of the civil society; focus on division of society on the ethnic grounds	rapid social differentiation; emerging of the new economic elite; decline of living standard and growing regional differences	segmentation of society; growing gap between "winners" and "losers"; increasing poverty as a major social problem; criminality and corruption; decline of birth rate and decreasing life-expectancy

Cultural Changes	political activation of cultural elite; re-invention of national history; national symbols dominating in the cultural field.	cultural elite leaves politics; separation of the cultural and political public spheres	"post-modernization" of culture, marginalization of "old" cultural elite, increasing influence of globalized consumer culture, decreasing role of national values
Changes in the media and public sphere	involvement of media in the mass movements, birth of political pluralism; the first wave of new press; peak of public interest in the media	emancipation of the media from political parties; privatization of the press; birth of commercial broadcasting; decrease of audiences and mushrooming of new channels	liberalization and commercialization of the press, concentration and economic competition on the media markets; increasing role of advertisement agencies and public relation companies
Psychologi- cal changes	high expectations, trust in charismatic leaders, outburst of strong national feelings, identification with the common goals	"transitional shock" and growing disillusionment; growing self-confidence, individualism, and optimism of youth opposed to the conservatism and disappointment of older generations	decline of national feelings; growing mistrust in political institutions; increasing cleavages between the life-worlds of people belonging to different strata of society, growing consumerism

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