

Media promotion of a National Cultural Identity

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Abstract

The promotion of a National Cultural Identity by the Media and the treatment of other cultural trends as something above the social context are focused on. The need for change in media attitudes towards the representation of culture concentrating in the entire cultural activity in a given place and a given time period is elaborated.

Excluding cultural trends from the wider presentation of culture by the media results in the promotion of only a small part of cultural creation and such an attitude leads to driving away an important part of contemporary cultural creation from the social context and erasing it from what shall appear as past cultural creation in the future; such a practice leads to the diminishing of the real cultural wealth of a country. Furthermore, the dissemination of only a fragment of cultural creation results in the manipulation of what really exists by the media and in shaping a different image than the real one.

The need for change in media attitudes towards the representation of culture concentrating in the entire cultural activity in a given place and a given time period is elaborated. The importance of EU funding of the Media is also highlighted. The extent to which the Media take advantage of this support and their focus on new funding priorities are focused on. Another aspect examined is the fact that with the advent of the economic crisis in European countries, alternative ways have to be found to promote culture apart from its financial backing. Examples from action taken in Cyprus in this respect are presented. Research undertaken regarding radio programs in Cyprus and the moral obligation of the Media to care, are also focused on.

Key words: National Cultural Identity, Cultural trends, The Social Context, European Commission, Cyprus Television Authority, Local Authorities, Private Sector.

Introduction

Media Promotion of Cultural Activity that directly represents the State usually promotes the idea of a National Cultural Identity which very often relates to the promotion of an Ethnic Identity rather than the promotion of a Cultural Identity. This Ethnic Identity most often represents the dominant ethnicity's identity in a country, ignoring the identities of minority ethnic groups. National cultures excluding groups through the media can be interpreted as a condition of myopia against what really exists in the cultural landscape of countries.

To confront such an attitude, the European Commission has funds against the exclusion of minority cultures from the social context. To give an example, projects financed by the European Union in support of the Roma community and its culture were highlighted at a conference in Brussels, organized by the European Commission on 10-11 March 2010. The event was part of the Commission's contribution to the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, a wide-reaching initiative by the EU aiming at eliminating the suffering of groups that have been discriminated against. Experts on the Roma culture talked and shared their knowledge and an exhibition of projects that have helped to integrate the Roma into society was presented.

However, very often, member states do not take advantage of the EU funds and continue policies and practices focused on the promotion of a national culture.

1. The treatment of cultural trends as something above the social context

Apart from ignoring the identities of minority ethnic groups, the promotion of a national culture can also result in treating other cultural trends and emerging talents as something separate from and above the social context and in creating a gap between elite and pop culture, between the culture for the selected few and the culture for the masses. Such a practice undermines the importance of creativity, inspiration and its benefits and discourages the dissemination of all cultural products which provides equal opportunity to everyone to meet the entire cultural creation at any given time period.

Inspiration results in the launching of new cultural products, which stem out in the framework of the environment and time period in which the creator resides and works, sending strong messages about individual experiences, memories, knowledge, the training of the artist and their effects on his/her creativity, as well as the historical, geographical and social background in which he/she resides and creates.

Excluding such cultural trends from the wider presentation of culture by the media results in the promotion of only a small part of cultural creation and such an attitude leads to excluding an important part of contemporary cultural creation from the social context and erasing it from what shall appear as past cultural creation in the future, diminishing the real cultural wealth of a country. Furthermore, the dissemination of only a fragment of cultural creation results in the manipulation of what really exists by the media, in shaping a different image than the real one. If we take into account a definition of culture given by Williams, (1965), which states that “culture is the description of a separate way of life in which specific meanings and values are not only expressed in the arts and education, but also in institutions and everyday behavior”, institutions such as the media have undertaken to play the crucial role in enabling individuals to get acquainted with cultural creation. Thus what they make known is what shall prevail as a cultural trend, always having in mind the media’s strong impact on shaping opinions and leading popular thoughts. The media with the use of programs on culture, represent an important part of a country’s cultural image thus they cannot treat culture as a product that they either wish to promote or not.

2. EU funding for the Media

Under the new EU Framework Program for Culture – Creative Europe – the December 2013 call, in the Culture strand, invited proposals for cooperation projects, literary translations, networks and platforms. In the Media strand, the program funds film project development, TV programming, distribution of European films and supports film festivals. The general objectives and funding conditions are: for cultural and creative organizations (not individuals), for projects with a European dimension, funding for transnational activities,

activities promoting cross-border circulation of works of culture & mobility of cultural players and all funding activities must include an audience development dimension.

The issue is, however, that the Media have not only to seriously take into account the support offered by the EU, focus on the new funding priorities and apply for the available funds, but also change their attitude towards the representation of culture concentrating not mainly in National Cultural Activity but in the entire cultural activity in a given place, at a given time period. This shall in its turn lead to the public's exposure to other cultural activities and accumulation of information about other than national cultural activities.

3. Alternative ways to promote culture apart from its financial backing

One of the issues counter to the proposed action, however, is that with the emergence of the financial crisis of the recent years in many European countries, the area of culture has suffered the most. The representation of cultural activity is often regarded as a luxurious practice at a time when individuals and institutions are struggling to survive. Are there ways to stop this tendency and find alternative ways to promote culture apart from its financial backing?

To take an example of recent practice relevant to the above question, in Cyprus, some actors have decided to establish their own workshops and small theatrical stages or have collaborated with other actors and created theatrical ensembles since the chance of being employed by theatrical organizations and groups is very limited. In some cases they have succeeded. In parallel, Cypriot musicians who had established a career in Greece and have experienced many difficulties due to the crisis there, have returned to their home country to make solo presentations in small venues like youth clubs, restaurants and other places which use live music to attract clients. Visual arts creators are also engaging in group activities like group exhibitions rather than undertaking the expenses of solo exhibitions. Municipalities are also renting places like big shops or coffee shops that have not been rented for a while to arts groups for performance purposes at lower rates. At the beginning of July 2014, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, have decided to develop the Nicosia Municipal Theatre which has been out of use since the 2008 unexpected and unfortunate collapse of its roof, into the Hall of Culture, a vision of several years, instead of having a new building constructed for the same purpose. The restoration of the building will lead to its preservation, its reopening and its reusing as a venue of hosting high quality concerts and musical performances amongst other activities. The Minister of Education and Culture in collaboration with the Nicosia Municipality and the Ministry of Communications and Works have been authorized by the Council of Ministers to take action and prepare studies regarding the exact amount of the restoration costs of the theatre, which will undoubtedly amount to a much lower sum than that of constructing a new building. The above are good examples of the collaboration of local authorities with the private sector in an effort to promote creativity.

4. Radio programs that promote cultural activity in Cyprus

The findings of research conducted by third year students of the Department of Journalism at Frederick University in Cyprus during their study of the course Radio Production III, regarding the programs on culture transmitted all over the island by radio channels during the second week of December 2011, (7-13 December), brought to surface the fact that the vast majority of programs that present and promote cultural activity are transmitted by the country's state Radio TV channel, the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC) and that private radio channels devote very little time and programs on culture, usually presenting daily and at times even weekly cultural agendas. Many radio channels do not present any cultural affairs at all, not even current cultural activities. This results in the creation of a false reality to their listeners, a reality which lacks any opportunity to enjoy artistic creation and any opportunity to express their opinion and exercise critique amongst different ways of cultural expression. From this perspective, citizens often pay a

high price in order to receive what private radio channels and the rest of the private electronic media transmit; the price of their intelligence and at the same time their dignity being underestimated. Against such a high price, since the beginning of November 2011, the Cyprus Radio-Television Authority responding to The European Commission's guidelines has appointed a special committee to plan a series of activities aiming at educating the public for the correct use of the Media.

5. The moral obligation of the Media

The Media carry a moral obligation; that of "caring" in the sense of informing about the truth and not distorting it but also in the sense of informing the public about all that there is regarding current affairs and not omitting facts. In this respect, promoting an image of a 'national culture' and avoiding coverage of cultural activity in its whole means choosing what to disseminate. As Baier, (1995), states, 'one leaves the opportunity to harm one...and also shows one's confidence that they will not make it. Reasonable trust will require good grounds for such confidence in another's goodwill'. Costley, Elliot and Gibbs (2010), share this position and go on to argue that 'if you accept the offered trust, you are in a privileged and powerful position; you are trusted not to use your authority to manipulate and exploit the trustee'. In the case of the Media, society is the one that trusts them rendering them extremely privileged and powerful. Is the application of 'care' by the Media to society in general a sentimental approach to Media practice? No. It is the responsibility of the Media to 'care' in the sense of not altering or omitting part of the truth behind what they disseminate. If they do so, they affect the context and form of cultural creation and create their own perception of the cultural product of a place or country at a given time period which dominates over reality and most importantly which shall be passed on to future generations that may wish to get informed or even study and undertake research on the cultural activity of the place or country at the given time period mentioned above.

6. Opportunities for everyone to make his/her work known

Fortunately, a positive and far reaching change is helping to combat the danger stated above. This change is the advent of online journalism, the social media and other facilities like platforms for visually sharing moments and interacting with people like instagram, where opportunities are open for everyone who wishes to make his/her work known to make it publicly known by posting it. The public can search for their own information on cultural affairs and get access to a rich variety of cultural activity throughout the world, interact with others online, discuss issues on creativity and new trends and react to the manipulation of the information that reaches them by traditional media practices.

However one has to bear in mind the fact that some dangers are apparent in social media postings like the lack of discipline among online users and artists are no exception to this. Additionally, the lack of editors can lead to the exhibiting of works of art that are of very low quality and in many cases the public do not possess the ability to judge between works that are of real value and works of a low standard. When such a situation is taking place, the presentation of the cultural identity suffers at its most and may even prove to be dangerous in the sense that works do not constitute real art but are just products or non-art objects or works that are copies of others' artistic creations. Such works are disseminated to the public misinforming them and again manipulating them.

7. Conclusion

Summing up, one has to be extremely careful when choosing how to get informed about his/her domain of interest. The domain of culture and the cultural product itself, is one that gives information and shapes the opinions of individuals about artists themselves, their way of thinking, their individual experiences, their attitudes, the environment in which they create, its values and trends and its historical background. Artistic creation can best be spread through good quality journalism. We all have to watch how the traditional and new media work in this respect and decide which ones to follow. A wise act is to try to derive information from several reliable sources and cross examine this information in order to avoid dangers explained above in this piece of work.

The huge responsibility of the media towards society is highlighted once again; their influential and instrumental role in increasing knowledge, socialization, common awareness and above all in disseminating true facts. Most individuals are not critical thinkers, they simply observe and in this respect manipulating them means harming them.

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