

Transforming Culture Industries: From Consumerism to Socialization

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The concept of culture industry has experienced many changes and interventions in its comparatively short history. It emerged after the Second World War (Adorno&Horkheimer, 1947)¹ as a critique of propaganda and mass entertainment enabled by the new technological possibilities to reproduce, broadcast and distribute contents quickly all over the world. The critique of the term and of the concept of culture industries was based in the confrontation between the cultural (representing creativity, artistic freedom of expression, sensitivity, etc.) and the economic (production, trade, marketing, etc.). It generally reflected new linkages and relationships that started to be established between these areas. As both concepts became ever more interdependent and intertwined, the interpretations of the relationships between culture and industry developed to erase dichotomies such as ‘elite versus mass culture, high versus popular culture and fine arts versus commercial entertainment’ (UNCTAD, 2008:11)². Culture industries have been ever more interpreted as industries that produce cultural goods and services and therefore combine the cultural and the economic. This point is particularly elucidated by Frederic Jameson who states that ‘...cultural issues tend to spill over into economic and social ones’ ...’finally collapsing the cultural into the economic - and the economic into the cultural’, and that ‘Economics has in this sense become a cultural matter’ (Jameson, 2001:3)³.

The distinctive profile of culture industries is developed through particular and manifold relationships between the cultural and the economic that depend not only on the cultural area of creativity and invention (e.g., music, painting, writing, design, etc.), but also very much on the type of production, marketing and selling of cultural products and services. In recent times the profile of culture industries ever more relates to the reactions and contributions of the consumers and users of cultural products and services.

Such developments may be called ‘transformation’ since the culture industries have indeed been intensely transformed from their very inception. Understanding and interpretation of culture industries evolved very fastly from the critique of propaganda and mass entertainment to gain a positive evaluation assigned to (industrial) production of symbols, meanings and contents that are distributed through markets and consumed by masses of population. A rather ‘neutral’ approach to culture industries has been put forward by Garnham who finds

¹ Adorno, Th. & Horkheimer, M. /1947/ (2006) *The Culture Industry*, London: Routledge

² UNCTAD (2008) *Creative Economy Report 2008*

³ Jameson, F. (2000) «Globalization and Political Strategy», *New Left Review* 4, July-August 2000

that culture industries are using the typical forms of industrial production and organization to produce and distribute symbols (Garnham, N., 2005)⁴.

The products of culture industries are standardized as much as possible but also ever more changeable in order to adapt to the particular cultural contexts, habits and expectations of consumers. This process is linked to their socialization, as well as to the socialization of new cultural values and cultural developments in general. The transformation of culture industries has been constant and it has evolved according to different tastes and demands developed by particular cultures. Cultural contexts that influence such transformations of culture industries also imply their relationships with the creative industries in the sense that creative industries 'have broadened the scope of culture industries beyond the arts'⁵ and towards commercialization. Such broadening stresses the particular role of social media that now strongly influence cultural consumption and cultural socialization. The hypothesis expressed here is that the main cultural changes are induced by culture industries, through new technologies and social media in particular, and that they are reflected in the specific, but rather general, cultural contexts (of national and ethnic cultures). As such contexts influence the culture industries' developments, the culture industries are transformed to enable interaction with specific, particular cultural values.

a) Cultural / Creative Industries

According to the UNCTAD's "Creative Economy Report 2008" the creative industries have, by broadening the scope of culture industries beyond the arts, enabled the spread of commercial activities in the areas that 'until recently were regarded purely or predominantly in non-economic terms' (UNCTAD, 2008:11). It may be interesting to note that culture industries themselves also contributed to the understanding of creative industries as an economic activity in different areas of production. These are therefore regarded as being integrated into the creative economy from the moment of their inception. They 'comprise tangible products and intangible intellectual or artistic services with creative content, economic value and market objectives' (UNCTAD, 2008: 13). They constitute a 'set of knowledge-based activities'. It is 'the creative content' that links culture and creative industries that are ever more based in the use of the same generic information technologies.

⁴ Garnham, N. (2005), «From Cultural to Creative Industries: An Analysis of the Implications of the 'Creative Industries' Approach to Arts and media Policy Making in the United Kingdom», *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 11(1): 15-29

⁵ UNCTAD (2004), *Creative Industries and Development*, TD(IX)/BP/13, 4 June

b) Social media and culture industries

All contemporary cultures are heavily mediated. This mediation that enables wide communication is the result of the usage of new technologies, global cultural trends and overall globalization processes that have incited dynamic cultural interactions through multicultural relationships and contacts.

Cultural mediation heavily depends on the development of media and the dominant type of communication they promote.

Until recently the concepts of culture and creative industries have primarily corresponded to 'industrial media', now commonly referred to as 'traditional', 'broadcast' or 'mass' media⁶. Although both industrial and social media may reach small and large audiences, the difference is crucial in the sense that social media are online contents that transform monologues (broadcast from one source) into dialogues and multilogues (parallel communication of many subjects). Benkler (2006) describes the underlying economic, social and technological characteristics of social media within the concept of 'network information economy'⁷. In practical terms, such a concept links all social aspects of human existence (production and economy, communication, exchange, etc.) into networks, and thus provides for the links among contents, values and types of communication, which brings forward cultural changes and incites the creation of new cultures. Néstor Garcia Canclini (2001:188) therefore notes that "...the culture industry is more interested in constructing and renewing the simultaneous contact between broadcasters and receivers than it is in the formation of historical memory."⁸ The 'industrial reorganization of culture' does not 'replace traditions, nor homogeneously massify them, but rather changes the conditions for obtaining and renewing knowledge and sensitivity'. In this respect cultures are remodeled 'in terms of commercial investment... although the symbolic changes cited cannot be explained only by the weight that the economic acquires' (Garcia Canclini, 2001:190).

The remodeling of cultures, supported by functioning of the "network information economy" is indeed carried on and expressed through the development of culture industries and the production changes that such development implies. It does not discard memories and cultural

⁶ Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

⁷ Benkler, Y. (2006) *The Wealth of Networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven, London : Yale University Press

⁸ Garcia Canclini, N. (2001) *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for entering and leaving modernity*, University of Minnesota Press

values, but it reinterprets them in a new way that enables their fast and global distribution and consumption, which eventually leads to the final cultural oblivion⁹.

The dominant type of communication promoted by social media enhances consumption of culture and creative industries products by promoting p2p reviews of cultural and creative products and thus helping their marketing and wider, global usage. They may also enable discussions and criticism of the contents produced by culture and creative industries. When it comes to production, social media could directly influence processes of production of cultural and creative products by enabling potential buyers and users to directly suggest how such products should/would be designed, which are the contents that they would promote, etc. The relationships among the culture and creative industries on the one side, and social media on the other, have not been researched enough to enable more consistent in-views into the nature and effects of their eventual interactions. Social media could therefore be primarily treated as a highway to promote culture and creative industries products, while their influence on processes of production and consumption of culture and creative industries' products could hardly be documented.

It could be nevertheless claimed that social media provide for links between consumerism and socialization¹⁰. Culture and creative industries' products consumption is subjected to critical evaluations that include analyses of their wide distribution and optimization of their influences on individuals and groups of people. Social media invite the users to start discussing all aspects of cultural products, be these music and audio productions, films and video productions, exhibitions, theatres, festivals, etc.

In this respect socialization is tightly connected to cultural consumption and to the change and dynamics of cultural development. From the mid-20th century processes of socialization imply the strong and visible influences of mass media and peer groups in transmitting social and particular cultural values. Social media do provide the missing link between consumerism and socialization. They support an ever faster and cheaper distribution of culture industries products and services, and they also provide for easy involvement in the production of cultural products (e.g. computer games, music, etc.). Consumers influence processes of production by suggestions and comments on contents of culture industry products and by the promotion of their particular cultural values. Social media enable anyone to reach global

⁹ Švob-Đokić, N. et al. (2008) *Kultura zaborava*, Zagreb: Jesenski & Turk

¹⁰ Definitions of socialization include a wide range of processes such as learning (of customs, attitudes or values of a social group, community or culture) and adjustment to a group. The type of (cultural) consumption as an input in socialization is rarely discussed. See: Dictionary.com's 21st Century lexicon (2003-2009), Dictionary.com. LLC; The American Heritage & New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy (2005), etc.

audiences or to transfer to local levels the contents and products that are globally distributed. Processes of communication are fast and may be permanently open. They thus influence the culture industry products, which, when once finalized, hardly change.

Since culture industry production and consumption is not fully open to *ad hoc* interventions, it needs to be mediated through a specialized area of traditional or industrial media. The communication processes they incite may last long, while the social media allow for immediate and recent communication.

The conceptual framework for interactions between culture industry and social media is provided by the concept of long tail culture, elaborated by Chris Anderson¹¹. Anderson claims that the new technologies provide for the infinite choice of cultural values and works which can be accessed easily due to their stocking in memories and availability of such memories to most of the interested users. This author however covers only Western cultures (mostly American), since they have access to technological means and can create large memory stocks of cultural values and works. Other cultures – those that are not digitalized, easily mediated, etc. – still have to depend on their own memories and their values may be transmitted in different ways and by other means. Their ‘social media’ are either traditional media or, in some cases, folkloric and traditional types of communication. The ‘long tail culture’ has, in this respect, many different appearances that depend on local cultural contexts.

c) Creative/culture industries and cultural socialization in Southeastern Europe

Southeastern Europe displays very different types of socialization, communication, medialization of cultures, as well as different types of cultures themselves. Development of culture industries is a rather new phenomenon in all Southeastern European countries. Although it progresses quickly, particularly in the areas such as music, literature, production of TV programs etc., the spread of new technologies and the rise of the information society are very uneven in the region. All the societies of the region mostly depend on the import of culture industries’ products and on the continuous raise of consumerism.

In the Southeastern European countries the spread of new technologies appears to be comparatively slow and diversified. According to the data cited in 2008¹², the number of

¹¹ Anderson, C. (2006) *The Long Tail. How Endless Choice is Creating Unlimited Demand*, Random House Business Books

¹² Primorac, Jaka; Jurlin, Krešimir (2008: 71-89) «Access, piracy and culture: the implications of digitalization in Southeastern Europe», in : Uzelac, Aleksandra & Cvjetičanin, Biserka (2008), Eds., *Digital Culture: The Changing Dynamics*, Zagreb: IMO

personal computers per capita ranges from 1 computer per 100 users (Albania) to 19 computers per 100 users (Croatia), while the broadband subscribers range from 5 per 100 users (Croatia) to less than 1 in most countries of the region (Primorac, J. & Jurlin, K. 2008:74). The increase in the number of Internet users in the period 2000-2007 has been huge, with Albania topping the growth with 18 748% increase (2008:76). Nevertheless the usage of ICT is still low in comparison with Western European countries, while the software piracy rates are rather high.

Both cultural consumption and cultural production in the region are deeply marked by the increased usage of ICT and by piracy approaches. The levels of prices of all ICT and telecom services are higher than in the EU countries, which impedes faster ICT usage. The internet basket price of monthly gross national income (GNI) per capita ranges from 1% in Greece to over 10% in Macedonia, and the relationship between other ICT prices is similar.

The development of culture industries and consumption of culture industries' products relies mostly on traditional technologies of reproduction and on industrial media (broadcast or mass media, particularly TV). These media provide for a wider reach and easier accessibility of contents and various other culture industries' products, but they do not provide permanent interactive exchange among consumers. Consumers cannot intervene in the contents they consume. Industrial media create a rather passive type of consumption of cultural industry products. Such consumption tends to support and ensure heavy imports of contents and general cultural values, which does not favor creativity, but rather imitation and adaptation to different tastes and habits. That is why the locally developing culture industries may be more easily adapted to domestic needs and cultural choices and tastes (e.g. production of local music, domestic soap series, etc.), but they are losing the chances to become globally spread and incite interest among foreign audiences. This completely eliminates or strongly diminishes eventual global competitiveness of the emerging culture industries.

The spread of culture industries and their transformation in Southeastern European countries tends to take the direction towards localization and not towards globalization. This is clearly indicated by the types of products and communication these incite. In practical terms this means that the markets remain limited and rather small, that they are not regulated, that the productions are small scale and hardly industrially organized and that the cultural exchange mostly goes one way: from globalized markets to local consumption.

The Southeastern European local level is still strongly influenced by the systemic transition from socialism to capitalism (or, rather, 'wild' capitalism), which has created a particular context for the development of culture industries in Southern Eastern countries. Small and

rather disorganized markets were complemented by the raise of national and ethnic differences and efforts to affirm different cultural identities and establish political borders among nations and ethnicities. Affirmation of cultural identities and particular languages contributed to the changes in cultural tastes and habits. At the moment these are being gradually softened or have been already overcome by ever more functional and interesting possibilities of communication and creation of the regional media markets and cultural exchanges and cooperation. The remodeling of culture ‘in terms of commercial investment’ (Garcia Canclini, 2001:190) is no longer rejected as anti-cultural. However, the types of cultural consumption may often be ‘anti-cultural’ and reduced to vulgarization of cultural contents and values.

It is true that ‘cultures are accumulations that are constantly enriched through transformative practices’ (Garcia Canclini, 2001:274), and the Southeastern European cultural experiences may prove it. However, at this moment great cultural development expectations have not been justified. Although cultural production has diversified and has been growing recently (e.g. in music, in the production of films, audiovisuals, etc.), in many aspects it is neither fully adapted to local conditions nor does it express and follow local values and developments. It is not inventive or original. It is dominated by cultural imports and attempts to imitate such imported contents that follow demands of the global media formats.

Southeastern European cultures still remain in a transitory phase: they invest a lot in experimentation, communication and creation of remodeled cultural identities, but these investments are not yet paying off. The culture industries do grow in spite of very many organizational, conceptual and financial impediments. However, their growth and further development are hardly sustainable due to the fact that most growth initiatives are not the result of market and wide communications’ initiatives. They are rather dependent on the state support. In the cultural fields the states still hold the position of main investors and regulators. They invest in preserving of national memories, and not in cultural creativity and communication. As José Jorge de Carvalho says “All those promises of happiness by the culture industry... are basically the experience of the transitory: it helps people in an increasingly hurried and changing life ... to free themselves from the weight and the responsibility of the memory.” (Garcia Canclini, 2001:274) Southeastern Europe has not been freed ‘from the weight and the responsibility of the memory’; on the contrary, cultural developments are subdued to memories, and not open enough to creativity inspired by experiences of changing lives.

Culture industries may tend to bring and even support cultural oblivion since their products can be stocked in the infinite memories of cultural works and values, and revived through re-interpretations. However Southeastern European cultures have not discarded old memories or remodeled their interpretations through development of culture industries. Thus the transformation of culture industries in the regional frameworks is hardly visible. Although culture industries are slowly taking ground in cultural production, communication and consumerism, they can hardly compete with cultural imports. In this respect, the cultural socialization may be very important. If it occurs through social media, it may support culture industries development and transformation, as well as medialization of culture and regional spread of cultural values. Since these are the social processes, both the development of culture industries and of communication through networks may become essential inputs into the cultural transformation of numerous Southeastern European cultures.

The culture industries that develop and establish themselves in Southeastern European societies are marked by specific social and cultural traits. They do exist as small scale productions and, when not extremely imitative of global trends, they appear to be ‘smart’ culture industries able to employ new, ever more flexible technologies. They could thus provide for transformation and sub-specialization of all cultural productions that are in line with local needs and inspirations, which also helps the transformation of national and ethnic cultural contexts.

If culture industries in Southeastern Europe could develop through such adaptations, they may substantially increase cultural production; cultural consumption may grow, widen and intensify in the contexts of particular, small and identity specific cultures. The culture industries developing in Southeastern Europe could then stand in between the large, transnational global productions and highly individualized cultural consumption, offering a new, interesting, middle-scale type of cultural creativity that is supportive of different and ever more diversified cultural communities in the region. The cultural development of the Southeastern European societies might substantially benefit from such developments, and eventually produce new models that could be applied globally.

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