EUROPEAN MEDIA PLATFORMS: ASSESSING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXTERNALITIES FOR EUROPEAN CULTURE

Reporting

Project Information

EUMEPLAT

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Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project

The aim of the project is to analyze the relation between media platformization and the shaping of a properly pan-European culture. To which extent digitization is helping, or rather jeopardizing European identity is a main issue, which will be studied through the lens of media production and consumption, with attention placed on:

- Similarities and variations among media markets to be understood as an overlapping between different geo-cultural patterns by means of secondary data analysis [WP1];
- Possible rise of a common European public opinion, for which it is necessary a first-hand analysis of a sample of social media contents. Here the most relevant topics have been selected: health, environment, economic crisis, and Europe itself, according to the last EuroBarometer report [WP2], to which two themes have been added: gender, due to its cross-cutting relevance; and migration, as it used to be the most polarizing issue, before the Sars-Cov-2 outbreak [WP4]. Besides the methodological differences – with WP4 including a qualitative inquiry on the representation of critical themes - the synoptic observation of data will provide an assessment on the state of European public sphere, or the lack thereof;
- Positive and negative externalities of platformization, which include in the first case possible enlargement of the public sphere [WP2,WP4] and alleged success of European contents in VODs [WP3]; and in the second case, the fragmentation of the audiences [WP1 and WP3], the hegemony of American platforms [WP3, WP5], the spread of unreliable news [WP2];
- Definition of future trends – or better, of current trends expected to last in the near future - and identification of the main priorities which will require attention, to be translated into recommendations to policy-makers [WP5]. The research will follow a grounded approach, so as to put into question some main problems – i.e. the power of algorithm - that will play a main role in the shaping of the future agenda.
As to the impact of the EUMEPLAT project on society at large, we are aware that digital platforms are but a part of the overall system: as a matter of fact, Europeanization depend on endless different factors, including regulation, policy-making, material culture, division of labor, urban demography, economic exchanges, physical encounters among citizens, and the more. The importance of platforms has been growing in the last decades, as they are impacting many of the above-cited levels, including job market, housing, sociality, or commerce. Going back to Manuel Castells’ definition, the media may not be the holders of power: but they are the place where power is disputed and takes place. We also believe that the information cascades following recent crises are making their relevance even more visible.

**Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far**

Along with the transversal work-packages, the project Consortium has been mostly working on the following main strands:

1) the secondary analysis necessary to reach an advanced knowledge of the state of European media systems. By considering the time-span 1990-2020, and by adopting the classical comparative framework as laid out by Mancini and Hallinn, we have organized both scientific literature and market data according to regional models: Mediterranean, Central European, Eastern European, and Nordic. Main results will be published at the beginning of 2023 in an Open Access Springer book, edited by Stylianos Papathanassopoulos and Andrea Miconi [D1.1 D1.2].

2) the operational definition of Europeanization: based on an extensive literature review, a semantic map model has been adopted, so as to define the main axes around which Europeanization processes evolve [D1.6]. In this case, both scientific articles and conference papers have been successfully submitted. The top-down way to Europeanization has been also studied for what relates to the European media regulation, in the period 1985-2020 [D1.4]; while the possible Europeanization from below, and the role of people’s agency, will be accounted for in WP5, as expected.

3) an extensive analysis of the social media discourse in the ten countries is currently being realized. For WP3, the methodological procedures to be applied have been discussed and the first data about video platformization in the ten countries are being collected. The identification of counter-measures for tackling disinformation and the work on the externalities are in the making, in their turn.

**Progress beyond the state of the art and expected potential impact (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far)**

As to the beyond-the-state-of-the-art knowledge progress, two aspects will be considered. The first one is the limited strength of the convergence process, which from the 1990s onwards has been considered the dominant tendence. While technological innovation does allow for the rising of a single digital market – to put it in the words chosen by the European Commission – other processes are following a different, if not opposite direction. At the economic level, media markets are fragmented, and the same can be told for cultural markets – with audiences still being attracted by...
national and global, rather than from European forms. The first data related to YouTube and Tik Tok and to the most watched Netflix and Prime movies [WP3] suggest similar evidence, despite the widespread idea of “Netflix creating a common European culture”, as one could read in The Economist on March 31, 2021.

Two consequences have to be considered. Firstly, as Europeanization is a process to be interpreted more in relativist than in essentialist terms [see D1.6.] we bear witness to some reversal of the same process, in terms of de-Europeanization. What is more, the delinking between Eastern and Western European media markets – after the 2008 downturn – is the single most relevant example [see D1.1]. The importance of such delinking – especially seen from the perspective of these months – has been underrated, as it may affect the overall European stability.

As to the big picture of Europeanization, we believe that the semantic map we proposed is a precious tool, for both theoretical investigation and field-work application [D1.6]. After selecting the main approaches based on scientific literature, the relevant categories have been organized along three main axes: the discursive-material, encompassing all combinations between representations of Europe and material performing of its belonging; the politico-spatial versus socio-spatial, which extremes are the plain physical territory and the well-rounded, abstract notion of citizenship; and the relativist-essentialist, able to capture the tension between pragmatical and fixed definitions of what Europe is, or should be. The application of the map for the refining of WP2 and WP4 methodologies has proved to be useful, and the same can be told for its presentation in form of scientific papers.

Another task expected to provide advanced results is the aggregate analysis of data related to movie markets. Whilst the data science team at Ca’ Foscari University produced an ad-hoc dashboard, methodologically speaking we opted for the geographical visualizations, so as to reveal hidden patterns in the way the media have re-shaped European territory. We realized some experiments [D1.5] but we will make a large use of the same technique in the next two years, for taking together data coming from several sources – theatrical movies, video platforms – and make it visible the relations between media clusters and European geo-cultural patterns.