FRAMING THE INCLUSION OF THE OTHER IN THE EUROPEAN YEARS' PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS[1]

Abstract: *European Years, through the promotion of annual issues, have been considered a solution to frame the reality as European Union would like to be perceived. The question that may be raised is the following: does this choice of the yearly issues which are supposed to be implemented in each European Member State, as embodiments of the Other, reflect a real or an imaginary inclusion within the European public space? In order to answer this research question I will analyse the promotional materials of the European Year for Active Aging and Solidarity between Generations (2012) at the macro-level (the European Commission) and at the micro-level (a Romanian organization). The theoretical framework will focus on the integrated socio-cognitive analysis of ideologies (van Dijk, 2000), seen as social practices of a particular group or community.*

Key-words*: visibility, involving, Web 1.0 & Web 2.0.*

Introduction

European Years can be considered a means of putting into practice the European syntagm, "unity in diversity": unity by choosing the same issue that is going to be implemented differently (diversity) by each member state. The goal of the European institutions is to stir the awareness of European citizens towards a particular issue. The implementation of these European themes at the macro and micro levels is achieved through social campaigns which "are often driven by *reform* efforts, actions that seek to make life or society or both better, as defined by emerging social values" (Dozier et alii, 2001: 232). It is clear that social campaigns are focused on the inclusion of the other (the citizen perceived as an organizational stakeholder) within this coordinated effort of improving the life of the community.

Each annual European issue is chosen according to the data provided by Eurostats and Eurobarometers. On the occasion of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012 EY), the European Commission has carried out an extensive survey (Eurobarometer 378) on active ageing in order to understand the citizens' views and attitudes towards older people. The findings showed that in January 2010, 17,4% of the EU population was over 65 years old and that 18,8% of the Romanian population is between 50-64 years old, 11.9% is between 65-79 years old, and 3,1 % is over 80 years old.

Within this context of population aging, social campaigns have been a solution to informing the European citizen, to making him/ her change his/ her attitude and behaviour.

Starting from the integrated socio-cognitive analysis of ideologies (T.A. van Dijk, 2000), seen as social practices of a particular group or community, I will analyse the verbal and visual messages sent at the macro and micro-level in order to promote the European issue of active aging and solidarity between generations.

1. European Years Web 1.0 & Web 2.0 – a means of national visibility in the public space

Defined as "the sphere of private people come together as a public" (Habermas, 1989: 27) and as "a realm of freedom and permanence", the public sphere

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changes with different social formations (Mitchell, 1994: 363): the Greek marketplace, the medieval German commons, the feudal court etc. W.J.T. Mitchel (1994: 364) considers that

> [...] the template of the public sphere might be described as a theatrical/ architectural imagetext, an openly visible place or stage in which everything may be revealed, everyone may see and be seen, and in which everyone may speak and be heard.

The visibility that Mitchel talks about implies a reciprocal perception between participants, a practical intersubjectivity, a reciprocal awareness, and an interweaving of actions as signs of social cooperation (Chambat, 2002: 68).

Nowadays the social formations specific to the public space have changed. They have been greatly influenced by the evolution of mass-media. McLuhan's famous syntagm ("The Medium is the Message") has turned into Baudrillard's syntagm ("Mass(age) is the message", 2007), focusing on a condemnation to "a «magical» practice and to a «spectacular» consumption". This semantic change (Pătruț, Cmeciu, 2011: 24) from medium to mass(age) can be explained in terms of the shift from traditional media system to new media which has brought about a cyberdemocracy (Graham, 2008: 48) where "the globally internetworked digital media" prevail (*ibidem*). While Web 1.0 is known as "The Read Only Web", Web 2.0 is known as "The Read Write Web" (O'Reilly, 2005). These features of Web 2.0 constitute the ingredients of the virtual public space (Goldberg, 2011) where online participation through user generated content seems to prevail. Social media with its challenges (reach, accessibility, usability, immediacy and permanence) also hide some drawbacks: fragmentation, information overload, polarization (Dimitrova, 2007). Another problem, that may arise from the democratized media implied by social media, is the metamorphosis of every human being into a possible online publisher.

Pleading for a new social cohesion focused on unity and fragmentation and governed by new media and social media, Jan A.G.M. van Dijk (2006: 171) considers that the new type of the public space witnessed the shift from organic communities to virtual communities. Whereas the former communities are bound to time and place, highly depending on the physical contact of human organisms, the virtual communities are "associations of people not tied to time, place and physical or material circumstances, other than those of the people and media enabling them. They are created in electronic environments with the aid of mediated communications" (J. A.G.M. van Dijk, 2006: 166).

Informing, connecting, involving, mobilizing and interactivity are the main practices (Foot, Schneider, 2006: 216-219, Lilleker *et alii*, 2001) that Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 provide for an organization to make its social campaign visible. The 2012 EY website (Fig.1) uses the following items of the virtual practices:

- informing: Web 1.0 items (official positions on active aging, news, e-newsletter, upcoming events, campaign ads, facts & figures – Eurobarometer, Eurostat, FAQs);
- connecting: Web 1.0 items (link to competitions: six competitions – *Life Stories Challenge*, *generations@school Project*, link to initiatives, link to press and media, link to partners supporting EY 2012, link to European institutions: Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion);
- involving: Web 1.0 items (contact information other than mail, e-mail address, photos of 2012 EY events, subscription to e-newsletter, calendar, online polls);
- mobilizing: Web 1.0 (online distribution of promotional materials, register as volunteer – "Get involved!", register for award competitions);

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- interactivity: Web 2.0 (Wikipedia, links to SNS: Facebook, Twitter, promote via SNS).

Despite the fact that Web 2.0 items do not prevail, for example the 2012 EY does not have the item of rating facility specific to the practice of involving, the inclusion of the member states is achieved through the link to initiatives (Fig. 2). This online connectivity has a double role: a) to make each member state's initiatives framing active aging and solidarity between generations visible, b) to create a salience of the involvement of European countries in promoting this European Year. The 2012 EY website provides the possibility of uploading the initiatives within three main themes: employment, independent living, participation in society. The promoters are divided in 10 categories: business organisation/ network, civil society organisation, European Union institution, international organisation, local authority, national government agency, press/ media organisation, private company, regional government agency, trade union, university/ research institute. By July 2012, 38 links to European initiatives on active aging and solidarity between generations have been made visible. Four Romanian initiatives have been posted: two of them promoted by Romanian organizations (*My grannies are cool!*, *Volunteers – ambassadors of change!*) and two of them achieved in teams of European promoters (*Under construction III – supporting active aging & attracting young workers in construction SMEs* – 8 European countries, *Young and adults for a better life* – 11 European countries).

The analysis will focus on one Web 1.0 item of informing (the generic EY campaign ad and video) and on one Web 2.0 item of involving and interactivity (the website of the Romanian initiative: *My grannies are cool!*). According to Guy Cook (2008: 120), ads have a double role: (a) to mix the language of intimacy and power, and (b) to make private subject matters public.

2. European Years social practices – a theoretical framework

Being against the mere identification of ideologies as system of beliefs, Teun A. van Dijk (2000) proposes an integrated socio-cognitive analysis of ideologies based on a triangle (cognition, society and discourse). The novelty of this approach lies on the inclusion of the social practices of a particular group or community within the study of ideologies. Thus according to Teun A. van Dijk (2000: 49), an ideology is "the foundation of the social beliefs shared by a social group. Ideologies consist of those general and abstract social beliefs, shared by a group that control or organize the more specific knowledge and opinions (attitudes) of a group". It is obvious that ideologies should be closely linked to identity and otherness since they embed those elements which provide a group legitimation, identification and cohesion. This integrated socio-cognitive analysis provides six categories which supply the structure of ideologies (T. A. van Dijk, 2000: 69): membership, activities, goals, values/norms, position (group-relations), resources.

I will adapt these categories to the 2012 EY Web 1.0 item (campaign ad and video) and Web 2.0 item (Romanian platform) and I will use two types of groupings:

(1) membership & (2) position (group-relations): participants' / European citizens' identity defined through origin, appearance, belonging and their social position and networking;

(3) activities & (4) goals: the (virtual) processes performed by the participants, their final outcomes.

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Within this context of European Years seen as social practices, knowledge is grasped through communication as a process of building relationships (Codoban, 2009: 295). Otherness will focus on the communication relationships where the social actors, in our case the European citizens, are involved.

The analysis of the inclusion of the other in 2012 EY Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 items will include a twofold approach:

- otherness – macro-level: the narrative and conceptual representations of active aging and solidarity between generations at the European level (Fig. 3);
- otherness – micro-level: the narrative and conceptual representations of active aging and solidarity between generations at the Romanian level (Fig. 4).

3. The inclusion of the other at the European macro-level

The campaign ad and video of the 2012 European Year visually embeds two types of binary oppositions: (1) US (old people – physical appearance) versus US (old people – performing activities specific to young people) (2) US (old people) versus THEM (young people). The microactivities performed by old people, either by themselves or together with young people, constitute visual embodiments of the European issue of active aging and solidarity. The campaign ad (Fig. 3) depicts two types of social practices:

- in the foreground, an old lady playing and singing in a music band, the interaction being with an implicit audience;
- in the right-hand corner, four microactivities: guiding the young generation, painting a wall, diving, singing, the interaction being with an explicit audience/ young people and children.

The visual framing of old people behaving as if they were young is achieved through visual metaphors. The metaphor *in absentia conjoined* (Groupe μ, 1992) seems to prevail: the perceived element (the old lady) totally replaces the conceived element (the young people playing and singing in the music band) and the meaning transfer lies on concepts such as dynamism, and lack of a social stereotype that old people are passive beings. At the same time, the metaphor *in absentia in conjoined* used to visually frame the concept of active aging is based on a self-enhancing humour that is considered a relatively healthy and adaptive type of humour (Martin, 2007: 211) since it maximizes the quality of an old lady by visually placing her within the social context of young people.

The Atlas.ti software was used in the qualitative analysis of the 2012 EY campaign video and it highlights the relations through the networks created between code-code relations. As it can be observed in Fig.5, the two European issues (active aging and solidarity between generations) are framed as two clusters built on three types of relations:

- "is associated with" linking the EY issue to some abstract concepts. *Active aging*: start a career, be in charge of your life, have fun together, care for each other, live life at full. *Solidarity*: share experiences, commit to a good cause, making new friends, joining forces, broaden your horizons, be young at heart.
- "a part of", linking the abstract concepts to some concrete activities. *Active aging*: playing and singing in a band, driving automatic wheelchairs, playing playstation, caressing, swimming. *Solidarity*: working in a factory, helping in a canteen, spending time together, painting walls, learning to use a computer, singing.

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- "beneficiary of", the participants/ the generic European citizens performing the concrete activities. *Active aging*: old woman, old man & old man, old woman & old man, old man. *Solidarity*: young woman & old man, young woman & old woman, boy & old man, girl & old man.

As it can be observed, the inclusion of the other, as embodiments of the relation "beneficiary of", is achieved in two ways:

- as generic social participants who take part in the actions specific to active aging belong to the category of "old people" and perform actions either as single Actors or as a two-member group (the left-side part of the cluster in Fig. 5),
- as generic social participants who take part in the actions specific to solidarity between generations belong to binary oppositions (young versus old, the right-side part of the cluster in Fig.5).

4. The inclusion of the other at the national micro-level

The Policy Center for Diversity and Security (CRPDS) is a Romanian non-profit platform whose main aim is to work on the preservation of the Romanian cultural heritage and shared values. The European issue of active aging and solidarity between generations was promoted through a public campaign ("My grannies are cool!"/ "Bunicii mei sunt cool!") highlighting the values of sharing experiences between generations. The social campaign has an integrated nature[1]: (a) a website (http://www.buniciimeisuntcool.ro/) where users can generate content by posting stories, common passions, habits, and old objects that youngsters share with their grandparents; (b) the event ("Orchards for the future") of planting trees in two Romanian villages which will bring together children, teenagers and grown-ups; (c) a 24-minute feature ("My grannies are cool!") produced and broadcast in order to raise the Romanians' awareness on the problems of elderly people.

As the European campaign ad and video, the Romanian website embedded members who are displayed on a binary opposition: US (young persons) versus THEM (our grandparents). This apparent opposition is solved at the pronominal level ("we-ness") by verbally and visually sharing experiences and photos. Whereas the European promotional materials focused on old and young people as type, the Romanian website embeds old and young people as occurrence, the names of the participants being a sign of lived experiences.

The website provides two types of activities:

- macroactivities: virtual posts (blog and facebook) as a means of active participation. By July 2012, there were 5 blog posts on issues such as the launching of the campaign, the event "Orchards for the future!", the event "Old crafts, new arts!", the launching of the platform www.mereutanar.ro, awarding the most influential women in Romania.
- microactivities: virtual posts of the grandchildren's stories about activities performed together with their grandparents. By July 2012, three stories were posted. Unfortunately the macro and microactivities on the "My grannies are cool" website are very scarce. This lack of interest can also be observed at the level of "likes" (n=16) that the Facebook page of this campaign has so far. At least two reasons can be mentioned for this low rate of involving and mobilizing: (a) using a virtual platform as a means of stirring awareness on the issue of solidarity between generations is limited to a one-way communication in Romania since elderly people

[1] http://europa.eu/ey2012/, accessed on July, 1, 2012.

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do not use the new media and social media applications; (b) using social media by young Romanian people as a means of promoting solidarity with the elderly people is not perceived as a way of highlighting one's social values since Romanians barely know how to integrate the old people in the society (61% of Romanians consider that people should have to stop working once they reached their retirement age – Eurobarometer 378, 2011: 13).

The performing of these activities is achieved by the use of two types of resources:

- macroresources: the website has four main entries (stories, fashion, objects, recipes) as means of mobilizing the young generation to share their experiences with their grandparents.
- microresources: items focusing on a shift from the private space to the public space by virtual communication. The "My grannies are cool" website provides three stories (three grandmothers: Comana – cooking, Vasilica – knitting, horse riding, Ioana – cooking, faith in God); objects (wooden icons, crosses, pots, old accessories, food), recipes (stuffed sour cabbage rolls).

Despite the lack of interest that the young generation in Romania has showed towards this social campaign so far, the visual representation of active aging and solidarity between generations at the micro/ Romanian level seems to follow the European trend of framing the old people by the use of visual metaphors. The logo of the Romanian campaign embeds a metaphor *in praesentia conjoined*: the perceived elements (a moustache and a pair of glasses) are blended with the conceived element (the English word "cool"). This self-enhancing type of humour is also highlighted by the verbal logo ("Bunicii mei sunt cool!"/ "My grannies are cool!") which combines Romanian words with the English word "cool", a word specific to the vocabulary of the young generation. But unfortunately despite these verbal and visual elements of mobilizing the young Romanians, they did not get involved in an active virtual participation in order to promote the European issue of solidarity between generations.

Conclusions

The inclusion of the other in the representation of the 2012 European issue of active aging and solidarity between generations is built on an apparent binary opposition between US (old people) and THEM (young generation). The social practices promoted by Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 items embed instances of "we-ness": activities carried out by old people accompanied by other old people or activities carried out by old and young people. Thus the keyword of these European issues is sharing, a keyword that can also be found in the Romanian campaign "My grannies are cool", but the young sharers have not been very active so far. The lack of interest that the young and old Romanians have showed towards the issue of active aging and solidarity between generations can be explained in terms of the findings of the Eurobarometer 378:

- 49% of Romanians consider that to combine a part-time job with partial pension instead of full retirement is less appealing, whereas only 29% find that involving in society after retirement can be more appealing. On the other hand, people from Sweden (90%), from Denmark (87%) or from Island (86%) find this possibility more appealing.
- 27% of Romanians are willing to continue working after they reach the age when they are entitled to a pension whereas people from Island (61%) or from Denmark (57%) would like to work after retirement.

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Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3



Fig.4

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Fig.5

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