Parallel Session 14: Science in daily press; a cultural question?

THE IMPACT OF SOCIO/CULTURAL HERITAGE ON MEDIA PERCEPTION OF SCIENCE IN CROATIA

Blanka Jergovic[1] & Mladen Juracic[2]

[1]*University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT UK, b.jergovic@hrt.hr*

[2]*University of Zagreb, Zvonimirova 8, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia, mjuracic@geol.pmf.hr*

Abstract

The impact of the socio/cultural heritage on media perception of science in Croatia is very strong, traditionally and after political changes in 1990.

The method of content analysis of Croatian newspapers is used, and comparison with indicators of socio/political assessment of importance of science (allocation for science and higher education, statements of high state officials, incomes in science etc) has been done. Results indicate that media perception of science highly depends on place of science in society defined by socio/cultural heritage.

Key Words: media, science, Croatia

Context

Political changes in Croatia in 1990 did not introduce immediate development of democracy and economic and social prosperity, as well as expected flourishing of science. Results of science policy changes are delayed. Therefore the beginning of 1990-ies still reflected negative science policy of the former Yugoslav state. In 1965, according to its scientific activity, Croatia shared similar position with Austria, Spain, Finland, Norway, Czech Republic and Hungary, and was more advanced than Ireland, Portugal, Greece, Turkey and Romania. Now Croatia shares the latest positions with Portugal and Romania (Šlaus, 1998, 39). The same negative science policy, that started with tightening of totalitarism after so called 'Croatian Spring' (failed attempt to introduce political and economic changes in Croatia in 1971), continued. As a result the share of Croatian scientists in world science production has fallen from 0,08% in 1990 to 0,053% in 1994. Croatia was on 53 position in the world, measured by ISI indicators, among 178 countries, between 1998-2002. Compared to the new 10 members in the EU, Croatia is following Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, and is better than Estonia, Latvia, Leetonia, Malta and Cyprus.

The percentage of GDP for science is 0,55. Having approximately 10.000 registered scientists this makes €14.848 per capita.

The coverage of science in Croatian media traditionally follows the importance of the events. The most extensive coverage has daily broadsheet *Vjesnik*, having also special pages on science. Other newspapers cover science in accordance to their perception of importance of events and prominence of scientists.

Objectives and Methods

The aim of this research was to compare the importance of science in society and in media, and to find out possible correlation inbetween. Indicators of importance of science in society are quantitative (financing) and qualitative (development strategies), whereas in media these are: number, layout and extent of articles (quantitative), and comprehensibility (qualitative). It included content analysis (397 articles: 298 in 2001 (214 high educating, 79 science), 64 from June 2002 and 35 from October 2003), open interviews with science journalists and editors, and comparison.

Results

Since Croatian independence in 1991, its declared priorities were knowledge and science, and its paragons were Ireland and Finland. However, opposing statements were present: *e.g.* president Tuđman's (1991-1999) about "genetically predetermined Croats", intellectuals as traitors and hirelings financed by foreign trusts (Soros etc); or one of pre-eminent former ruling party members (Ivan Milas in Parliament) about brain value of 2 DM. Today, there are no such statements, and science and education is, according to the budgetary funding, fourth most important sector. Share for science and research from 0,6-0,9% in 1990-1998 (Šlaus, 1998, 38) arrived to 1,19% in 2004 (Švarc et al., 2004), indicating that importance of science and research has been recognized in Croatia.

Croatian newspapers since formation of stable readership in second part of the 19th century are important part of the political life and depend on politics (Jergović, 2000, 82). This is felt up to now. During the socialist regime, as a whole society, science was atomized. The interaction science-citizenship was substituted with science-politics interaction (Šlaus, 1998, 37**)**. The result was obvious in printed media. After radical political changes in 1990, following the change of political agenda (war, current political events, restoration…) newspapers during 90ies introduced science topics. In 1996 *Vjesnik* introduces science section.

Articles on science are mainly of medium size (29%) or large (38%); mostly have medium (47%) or large headlines (38%) and photographs (62%). Almost 100% of analyzed articles are easy comprehensible. Sensationalism in divergence between headlines and article content is not present. Science is not ghettoised: *Vjesnik*, which only has science section covers science also on daily base and in supplements. However, articles published in *Science*, *Life* and similar sections are more prominent respecting size and layout. The weakest point is number of articles – average 1,5 daily, and on 'Croatian' science 0,8.

Conclusions

Media perception of science in Croatia follows its political perception. However, recent changes of importance of science in society (better financing, positive attitude of politicians toward science) are still not felt in media, characterized by poor interest in science, strong predominance of natural sciences, exclusive authorship of journalists (scientists write mostly in *Letters to editor*). More attractive articles in sections *Science* or *Life* suggest higher importance. This, notwithstanding meagre ghettoisation of science into sections, indicates that science is not important in other spheres of life (especially technical, social sciences, humanities). In favour of this conclusion goes also the indicated indifferentness of Croatian publics towards science (Polšek, 1998, 227-233).

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