

**GLOBAL COSMOPOLIS: RESPONSIBILITY,  
INFORMATION AND MEDIA**

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**Abstract**

*Alternative futures oriented to contemporary global problems solutions and risk management are related to citizens' ability to learn how to become global (cosmopolitan) citizens. Important conditions for that should be analyzed within the processes and conditions shaped by globalization of media and communication. This learning has not been institutionalized so far (as in the education), and it is a result of rather indirect social interaction. Individuals are embedded into complex network of the global information flows and, at the same time, they are members of their national and local communities. Cosmopolitan individual is a virtual member of a global community. Social analysis with ethical reflection should study with more attention global media as one of the key globalizing actors shaping the public space of communication with the power to form and deform cosmopolitan participation.*

*Keywords: media; globalization; citizenship; participatory*

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## **Introduction: new global agenda setting, citizen participation and learning**

Contemporary globalization of social life is characterized by growing interdependences of human activities and their risk consequences. This means that human learning also consists of information about risks and consequences of social interaction within the global arena. We learn about new *global problems, risks and danger* and, through this learning, we are confronted with the normative ideal chance of becoming the global, co-responsible, solidary world citizens. As the recipients of certain, still growing, amount of knowledge about increasingly global world, we are, time to time, exposed to various definitions of global agenda and urged to participate in the global responsibility or to act as the responsible global citizens.

In the overview, we shall first deal with the growing global interdependence which brings the pressure for the reflexivity of the global consequences of production and appropriation of scientific and technological knowledge. Secondly, global agenda of cosmopolitan citizen participation in wider moral-social responsibilities of the powerful social actors creates new collective identities or solidarities, but also reflexive individualization and social learning. Such ethical cosmopolitanism could act in direction of critical challenge toward powerful established institutions and decision-making bodies.

Thirdly, empowering or participation depends also on the open process of knowledge and information, mediated through information communication media. Strategic role and power of the media influences the shape of a potential cosmopolitan moral agenda and is itself becoming an object of moral-social reflection. The last aspect concerns critical issues in ethical-social responsibility of the media corporations.

### **Global risk agenda, globalization, interdependence and cosmopolitanism**

In local and national societal contexts, many citizens participate in political and social movements. Social movements also operate on the global level. Global movements are concerned with global and local processes of change and their impacts, their political agenda deals with questions such as how governments can best co-operate to counter global environmental degradation or deal with the economic insecurities resulting from the volatile global money markets. We speak about the global agenda. Planetary biosphere provides the most obvious example of the shared global nature of many problems. Growing environmental problems “are connecting lives of people in very different societies. It is ultimately impossible to hide oneself away from these phenomena altogether.”<sup>1</sup>

Problems of common interest provide new foci of identity and collaboration between citizens of distant countries. That means thinking about us collectively while identifying with all humanity, the growing multicultural awareness, the empowerment of self-aware social actors, and the broadening of identities. For instance, more people articulate strong conviction that everyone has certain rights as a human being. They express moral outrage, when these rights are being violated and demand them to be universally protected. This involves a clear break with even the recent past. For example, existing model of *dominance-dependence interrelationship* is challenged by choice of sharing the governance of our planet. At the same time, it does not eliminate old famous power practices. Nations and cultures are more willing to recognize and accept cultural diversity, and increasingly regard co-operation around a set of shared val-

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<sup>1</sup> Steven YEARLEY, *Sociology, Environmentalism, Globalization*. London: Sage 2006, p. 28.

ues and structures as possible, necessary and desirable.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, new “nationalisms” and particularistic reactions are also growing.

Subjective force of *reflexive individualization* is also very important for critical assessment of the social action and its wider social conditions. This widening of reflexivity is partly linked to the development of *mass education* and the wide dissemination not just of scientific knowledge but of the *principle of doubt* on which scientific method is built. These have provided keys to citizen empowerment such as the access to specialized systems of expertise, professional training and the means to acquire various kinds of lay expertise. Suitably armed, reflexive citizens may challenge the truth claims put forward by governments, corporations and the scientific community itself.

The tendency to criticize powerful institutions is often paralleled by the intense disillusionment with the consequences of modernity and material progress together with the unchecked powers of military, technological and scientific institutions which now seem to threaten the viability of the planetary biosphere. As Ulrich Beck pointed out, we live surrounded with vast *new risks*. Also endemic uncertainty is what will mark lifeworlds and experiences of most people in near future. Here Beck speaks about “precarious freedoms”, denoting basic ambivalence between individual self-fulfillment’s cultural script and the new “political economy of uncertainty and risk” – so that the reflexive biography of the individual can become the breakdown biography.<sup>3</sup> It also seems that in a global risk society democratic culture and political freedom stand in contradiction to the political economy of risk.<sup>4</sup>

Important characteristic of the world risk society is the extent to which decisions bound with the scientific, technological-economic dynamic are

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<sup>2</sup> Howard V. PERLMUTTER, “On the rocky road to the first global civilization.” *Human Relations*, 44, 1991, no. 9, p. 898. See also Robin COHEN – Paul Kennedy, *Global Sociology*. London: Macmillan 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Ulrich BECK, *World Risk Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1999, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt BAUMAN, *In Search of Public Space*. Cambridge: Polity 1999.

still organized at the level of the nation-state and the individual private enterprise. This contrasts with the risky impacts which *make all members of a world risk society*, dangers grow through being made anonymous, and the rules of responsible control “normalize” the death of species, rivers and lakes. This vicious circle of crashing institutional control of dangers, their legitimization and their permanent material reproduction describes Beck by the notion of “organized irresponsibility” where the state administration, politics, industrial management and scientific research *negotiate* criteria of “rationality and safety”.<sup>5</sup> Global dangers legitimized as the unintended consequences are political explosives which threaten the very basis of their rational control, so that organized irresponsibility is the problem of deep *institutional crisis* of the industrial modernity.

Our lives have become more insecure, we have more (also precarious) freedoms and more personal *responsibilities* for managing our lives while engaging in the critical appraisal of established institutions because our survival and that of our planet depends on this. The capacity for reflexivity has also increased among the most disadvantaged citizens in many developing countries, because spheres of global are not so remote to most humans. Citizens everywhere are challenging the state power and forging links with their counterparts in other countries. This is so partly because of realization that governments are often ineffective in the face of “currency crises, pollution disasters, terrorist attacks, ozone depletion and a host of other problems that transcend national boundaries”.<sup>6</sup>

*Global information media* remind us of the growing transnational *interdependency*. Transnational power base of non-state organizations and increasingly inter-connected global citizens’ networks is taking shape. Many of those involved are highly critical of the established order with potential for the formation of effective *global alliances from below* between

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<sup>5</sup> BECK, *World Risk Society*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> James N. ROSENAU, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990, p. 337.

various groups who seek alternative futures of more democratic, responsible, fair, just or more egalitarian world order.

Our allegiance to the particular, local cultures in which most of humans remain rooted are altered by comparisons (“relativisations”)<sup>7</sup>, with and understandings of other cultures: we need to judge and decide on how we feel about other cultures in the light of our participation in the global, particular and local. There is an increase in the *interpenetration of the local and the global* by each other. People can respond to the new reality by *selection, adaptation* or *resistance*. In the selection there is often a borrowing or modification of global by its contact with the local: Robertson depicts this process as “glocalization”.<sup>8</sup> Adaptation enables to participate in the global and the local simultaneously, while growing knowledge of the global may serve to intensify feeling of loyalty to the local. Knowledge of the global brings also a resistance to it which can be eventual result of negative impacts of the global on the local.

Global agenda setting is at the same time social process of construction the “world risk society as cosmopolitan society” as Ulrich Beck puts it: “its axial principle, its challenges, are dangers produced by civilization which cannot be socially delimited in either space or time.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Information and the global society of networks, communicative space, mediation**

Interdependencies and interconnections bind localities, countries, companies, social movements, professional and other groups, as well as individual citizens, into an ever denser network of transnational exchanges and memberships or participations and affiliations. These networks tran-

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<sup>7</sup> Roland ROBERTSON, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage 1992, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Roland ROBERTSON, “Glocalization.” In: ROBERTSON, R. (ed.), *Global Moer-nities*. London: Sage 1995, p. 26–43.

<sup>9</sup> BECK, *World Risk Society*, p. 19.

scend territorial borders, rupture cultural and economic self-sufficiency. *Knowledge and information* are key drivers of these global networks and main factors of participation empowering: the power of knowledge flows “takes precedence over the flows of power”.<sup>10</sup> Information technical media as the internet introduce participation in horizontal politics of “globalized space”.<sup>11</sup> Networks of globalized space enable people to share perspectives, provide information and mobilize resources or create non-territorial or virtual communities that can be alternative political spaces constraining hierarchical organizations of a “real world” politics. On the other side, large numbers of people still do not have access to computer networks, and are dependent on information provided by *news media* – the press and mostly TV.

As global problems, risks and dangers are generating global communities – ad hoc (temporary) risk communities – so the civic participatory politics of globalization from below (for example non-governmental organizations, social movements) using communication networks can (potentially) become “third power”, counter-balancing nation-states and transnational enterprises, as outlines of “global citizenship”. Cosmopolitan citizenship could develop alternative forms of political action, but the *political site* of the world risk society is not the street but the television, as Beck puts it, and that means also that the direct politics has to *rely on symbolic politics of the media*.<sup>12</sup>

These symbols *are socially produced* and the central question is *who* discovers and *how* symbols disclose or demonstrate structural character of the problems as well as creating the capacity for action. This is one side of the problem: positive and constructive chance to create participative

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<sup>10</sup> Manuel CASTELLS, *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell 1996, p. 469.

<sup>11</sup> James N. ROSENAU, “Governance and Democracy in a Globalized World.” In: ARCHIBUGI, D. – HELD, D. – KOEHLER, M. (eds.), *Re-imagining Political Community. Studies in Cosmopolitan Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity 1998, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> BECK, *World Risk Society*, p. 44.

politics of globalization from below using the platform of the mass media. The adversary side of this problem is to analyze and disclose the *nature of globalizing symbolic information power* of really existing media of communication. This nature is deeply inflicted by private commercial interest and the profit drive is central for global media giants deeply interconnected with other economic interests in a framework of global consumerist culture and advertising.

### **Strategic power of the global media**

The media are organizations that specialize in the communication of ideas, information and images of our environment, our communities and ourselves. The media also project images about “the others” and their communities. The media are doing all sorts of other things than “pure” reporting the news neutrally, whether the wider effects are intentional or unintentional. Messages carry the values of the news organization that produces it by the length, position in press page or place in the television running order. Decision-making forms are part of the media’s agenda-setting role, whereby they play a significant part in reflecting and shaping public debate. Important is also role of the gate-keeping process by which decisions are taken as to which news stories are chosen and which discarded.

Global media can shape, distort or undermine the global cosmopolitan citizenship with the same power of influence as they are currently serving to the TNCs through advertising and consumerist campaigns (big corporations are spending over half as much per capita to create corporation-friendly consumers as the world spends on public education<sup>13</sup>). The media can conflate fact and fiction, reason and emotion. Large media corporations may contrive to use this facility to project images and

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<sup>13</sup> See David C. KORTEN, *When Corporations Rule the World*. West Hartford, Conn: Kumarian Press 1995.



ideas to their own particular – namely profit interests – rather than to the national, international or cosmopolitan interests of the global responsible citizenship.

Some corporations have achieved a near monopolistic, complex and overlapping control of newspapers, film archives, television networks, radio stations and satellites. The integration of the programming, production, marketing and broadcasting functions in the hands of a small number of media corporations is also increasingly evident. And the combined ownership of different media gives such corporations a global reach that is sometimes seen as threatening democracy, diversity and freedom of expression. The media giants are often able to influence business, international agencies and national governments. The dominance of several big western news agencies means that news stories from many parts of the world either are not broadcast, or are trivial, misleading and ethnocentric. Those who own the means of communications can link together vast audiences and potentially feed them with similar and selective messages.

## **Conclusion**

Media giants, software companies and business interests are now trying to control Internet and commercialize new virtual information global spaces.<sup>14</sup> Will this space be successful in escaping the global power of media corporations? Or is this process simply a transnational copy of the national societal and local public spaces subversion?

The existence of mass communications media do not simply and automatically lead to multicultural understanding and mutual respect for other peoples: the pragmatic power, namely need to annex the media to consumerism leads to an appropriation of other cultures in the interest

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<sup>14</sup> See Saskia SASSEN, “Digital networks and power.” In: FEATHERSTONE, M. – LASH, S. (eds), *Spaces of Culture*. London: Sage 1999. See also CASTELLS, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 331–332.

of greater profits.<sup>15</sup> This is a double-edged feature of global cosmopolitan openness of the information society culture.

Media have a relatively independent life, where message is significantly changed through the medium of communication and it gives special power to the *technology* and to those who *own* it, understand it and work with it. We have to learn carefully what media are telling to us and what they are not telling us. Are they distorting the democratic political order, destroying all other ideas and ways of life than those amenable to the free market for goods and ideas<sup>16</sup> or co-opting and deforming oppositional alternative innovation ideas.<sup>17</sup>

Robert W. McChesney observes that western media culture games for commercial exploitation that we can look forward to the full scale commercialization of education, art and sports, the disappearance of notions of public services from the public discourse. The very concentration of the power of media leads to undermining public citizen participation. The main media markets are all oligopolies or semi-monopolies with severe barriers to the new entrants, the largest media firms established market power to dictate the content that is most profitable – advertising is major and public service to inform citizens is minor. Trends of commercial journalism are to make citizen into consumer, claiming to give consumers “what they want” that is a news they think is important to their lives. This can have in fact the meaning of “assisting” in a process of converting journalism into the type of consumer news and information that delights the advertising community.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Frances CAIRNCROSS, “Telecommunications.” *The Economist*, 13 September 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Ed HERMAN – Robert Waterman MCCHESENEY, *The Global media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism*. London: Casell 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Leslie SKLAIR, *The Transnational Capitalist Class*. Oxford: Blackwell 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Waterman MCCHESENEY, *Making Media Democratic* [online]. 2002. Available at: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu./BR23.3/mcchesney.html> [quoted 18. 5. 2007].

What are the real chances for greater public or civic cosmopolitan democratic accountability of the global, mediated communication when media are increasingly a private enterprise? The dilemma increases: do media serve to the private interest or to the public interest including participation on the global responsibility through process of learning new global risks to become cosmopolitan citizens? All these open questions make the risk-learning and civic direct participative politics of globalization from below based on TV and mass media reliance problematic.

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