

## **The Role of Media in Social Integration within the Danube Region**

**Yoanna Pankova<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** This work analyses the importance of media as a perpetrator, influencing the pace of social integration. The article explores the differentiation in the way various media present events and the power of its influence. **Prior Work:** Study of Social integration, **Approach:** Survey among various media and its impact, **Results:** The results of the research show that the role of media is crucial for the subsequent attitude of citizens of the Danube region. It depends on the minimized or exaggerated impact of various issues, presented by it. The news media, as a global informative actor in shaping citizen`s acquaintance on various topics, is crucial player in the process of integration. **Implications:** The significance of media`s influence is effecting not only the attitude of citizens but also the tourism development. **Value:** With the emergence of printing and broadcasting media, their impact on the fulfilment of social unity is constantly emerging. Due to that fact it is necessary to explore the various types of media and their influence.

**Keywords:** media, integration, citizens, tourism, disability

### **1. Introduction**

Media has the strongest influence on the citizen`s perception of the surrounding world. It keeps the population informed about various issues, events, activities and gathers their opinions. In this decade of technology the spread of information is growing at a rapid pace. The development of mass media can be observed since the 15th century with the first printed media through the recordings, cinema, radio, television, internet, mobile phones. They all aim to reach a large audience and spread a certain message. Today it is also used as a source of entertainment, education and gives the opportunity to exchange thoughts with the world. The growing popularity of social media is easily noticed not only within the Danube region but all over the world. It is largely used by people of all ages as a tool for information, therefore any kind of negative influence on the media has to be eradicated. Today`s media has to unite the world and promote social integration, not to provoke conflicts or discrimination. Being well informed and not

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD student, University of Ruse, European Studies and International Relations Department. Address: 7000 Ruse, Pleven 1 str., Bulgaria, Tel.: +359888494077. Corresponding author: dbebenova@uni-ruse.bg.

manipulated means that citizens are able to make the right decisions and obtain the knowledge they need.

## **2. Related Work**

### **2.1. Media coverage**

The problem of media coverage of the subculture of people with disabilities can be regarded as a particular aspect of the relationship media and culture. The relationship between these two phenomena of society is the subject of constant comment of Academic Discourse - analyse issues related to the impact of media on culture with the ability to shape it. Media has a decisive intervention on the evolution of culture by imposing a certain type of culture. The role of mass media might be observed in the interaction between culture, socio-political and economic factors.

Positive view of the role of media organizations as a basis for provoking a new democratic social order is achieved with the democratization of the media.

There is an opportunity for a wide range of individuals and communities to access the media. On the other hand, movements that ignore the public domain subcultures - ethnic, racial, age, people with disabilities and others, begin to assert themselves in the public domain through a number of political, legislative and social initiatives. They draw attention to the political, economic, social, academic and media institutions. Expectations regarding the media as a place where cultural changes happen quite naturally tied to redefining their attitude towards subordinate cultures.

### **2.2 Media Freedom**

The media in the Danube region are facing a lot of issues, concerning the political and economic situation. They all lead to corruption, minimized criteria and on the other hand there are the blackmailed and humbled journalists. The media editors within the Danube region are often described as a marionette, serving the political parties. This is the exact situation in Serbia, where journalists are obliged to follow the interest of the ruling parties. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is seen as even worse because of the influence of ethnic representatives in the private media.

In the eyes of much of the civil society, the status of Bulgarian media as the fourth power is compromised, and many of them "unceremoniously" serve to political and economic interests, followed by criticism by many international organizations. Therefore, the new generation of active citizens accept the press, radio and television as part of the status quo. This is one of the conclusions of the report "The media in Bulgaria: Map of the problems," prepared by the "Media Democracy"

with support from the Open Society Institute in connection with the problems of the media environment in Bulgaria in the past years.

The result is a public mistrust of local media, the citizens are not aware of all the data they need and are often manipulated. The solution of the current situation is the establishment of media freedom in the region. There are also cases of a lot of proposals and initiatives led by different organisations and associations but when it comes time for them to be supported and approved by the government they all fail. The main goal is to meet European standards and eliminate any pressure and influence.

### **2.3. Media and Disability**

Another issue, concerning the media is the way it portrays people with disabilities. In the media they are referred by expressions of the type: disabled, blind, deaf, disabled people, sick people, people with disabilities and others. The media categorize people with disabilities in terms of the dominant culture that carries on a process of imposing labelling and stigmatization. Stigmatization of people with disabilities is an ancient practice aimed marking of people disapproved from community status. Refusal or rather lack of interest of the media to refine their language leads not only to maintain a totally negative towards people with disabilities categorization, but also leads to loss of contact, to the exclusion of people with disabilities and disintegration.

Across the Danube region many countries undertook actions to improve the way disabled people are portrayed. Examples are the Budapest Association of People with Physical Disabilities, National Council of Disabled People's Organisation of Slovenia. Since in Slovenia 10% of the whole population are with disabilities, the way they will be portrayed is crucial for their social integration. According to the Final report on the German Activities of the Project "Disability NGOs and Media Working in Partnership" "the general attitude towards people with disabilities in German society is characterized by benevolence. This feeling is deeply rooted in a charity approach. The overall public tendency is that non-disabled people are not uninterested in disability issues, but they are not willing to meet people with disabilities on equal terms." In Germany most of the public and private broadcasters are autonomous and independent, but nevertheless political representatives and members of disability NGOs are part of the broadcasting board.

### **2.4. Ethnic Minorities Portrayal**

Media influences social integration not only through presenting people with disabilities as disabled, blind, deaf, sick, but also through the presentation of ethnic minorities. In Bulgaria it is a popular fact that majority of the population lacks communication with the minorities, so the main channel of communication

between them remains the media. Through it the majority learns about the life of the minority groups.

The genre of texts dealing in one way or another with the “Ethnic” subject indicates that for the two largest minority groups in the country – Turks and Romas - media is focusing on political events for the Turks and on criminal and social theme for the Roma people. An experiment was made, in which when you search on google the combination of words “roma people” appeared a lot of media publications such as “Roma people robbed eight houses in Sofia”, “Three Roma people beat up and robbed a Bulgarian”, “Roma people robbed a village”, which is an example for their criminal portrayal.

Minorities Realities in the News is a project, which concerns the developing countries and aims to:

strengthen and deepen public understanding of EU countries on development issues, faced by minorities in developing countries, especially some of them which are also part of the Danube region - Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia;

improve and enhance the coverage of these issues in the media;

raising awareness among politicians, decision-makers in the development of the special needs of minorities and indigenous peoples in developing countries;

- a) increase and improve media coverage of these issues in the context of discussions on the topic of development during the period after 2015 and the ongoing European economic crisis.

## **2.5. Influence of Social Media on Tourism**

Media has an increasing impact on tourism development. Social networks play an increasingly essential role and are an integral part of tourism, important source of information and choices for holiday. And if in the start-up of Facebook mostly the younger generation passionately and selflessly shared and trusted of the published there today social media are popular among the older generation, including business and in politics. Mostly preferred by individual users channel of communication, social media has become an attractive tool for marketing and advertising for companies and institutions. Skilful use of social media in the tourism business allows you to create more compelling and easy to imposing image. Access to a large number of people without restrictions in time and space is guaranteed at a global scale.

Websites such as Danube.travel and The Danube Tourist Commission provide the citizens with well-structured information and activities, which may help you to explore the region, the culture, organise a round trip and find an accommodation.

The presence of numerous sources for comparing information makes sharing on social networks more reliable and objective. According to Forbes, “Trip Advisor is a leading online platform for travel-related reviews with 75+ million user reviews and opinions and 62 million monthly unique visitors”.

### **3. Conclusion**

In the previously discussed issues concerning the media within the Danube region we may conclude that many reforms are needed in all of the countries in order to promote a better social integration of all social groups, no matter their background. There are people with disabilities, there are minorities and better cultural understanding has to be established. As the media is a huge locomotive to the information and the perfect instrument to better instruction for the population, it needs to be free from any threats. It has to be used to educate, inform and update the citizens of the continuous reformations and modifications in our society. It doesn't need to be politically oriented or ethnically favourable. There is a need people to trust in the media, in order to continue functioning. Otherwise it becomes a useless instrument serving no one. Its outstanding informative and unifying power has to be used for the purposes it is created.

### **4. Acknowledgement**

We would like to express my deep gratitude to the network of Europe Direct Information Centres in Bulgaria who provided me with the information we needed for writing the paper, for the time they gave to do the research and send me articles about the issues concerning media, the Danube region, tourism, a summary of Danube cooperation programme, as well as useful websites.

### **5. References**

Taylor, Anne (2011). *Social Media as a Tool for Inclusion*. Canada: Stiles Associates Inc. Retrieved from: <http://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/social-media-tool-inclusion>.

Brown, S. M. (2007, April 10). *How are Ethnic Minorities Portrayed in the Media*. Retrieved from: <http://www.lifepaths360.com/index.php/how-are-ethnic-minorities-portrayed-in-the-media-5-23424/>

Buchner, M. T., Akademie, L., Innsbruck, U., Wien, U., Flieger, M. P. & freelance social scientist Prof. Dr. Ewald Feyerer, P. H. (n.d.). *Report on the social inclusion and social protection of disabled people in European countries*. Retrieved from: <http://www.disability-europe.net/content/aned/media/NL%20social%20inclusion%20report.pdf>.

Debbie, R. (2011). *How the media is demonising Disabled People in Europe*. Retrieved from: <http://www.enil.eu/news/how-the-media-is-demonising-disabled-people-in-europe/>.

Gazzola, T. H. (2006). *The Aspect of Culture in the Social Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities*. The European Centre for Minority Issues.

Koen, E. *The Image of the Minorities in the Central and Regional Media*.

Stoeva, B. (2004). *The People with Disabilities and their Rights in the European Union. Bulgaria and its Invisible Citizens*. Sofia.

Team, T. (n.d.). *Here's Why We Believe TripAdvisor's User Base Will Continue To Climb*. Retrieved from: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2013/03/08/heres-why-we-believe-tripadvisors-user-base-will-continue-to-climb/>.

Velikova, S. *The Media Image of the People with Disabilities*

Venelinova, N. (2013). *The Strategy for the Danube Space of the European Union as an Example for Making Projects and Integration of the Regional Identity*. Ruse.