Concept of Power in Castells Communication Theory

Assoc. Prof. Kire Sharlamanov, International Balkan University
Assoc. Prof. Bejtulla Demiri, International Balkan University

This article tries to follow re-conceptualization of the one of the most important concept in the history of the sociology, proposed by Manuel Castells. Namely, in the light of historical chances of the social context and what Castells calls network society, re-cenceptualization of power and power relations took place. This article tries to point out the concept of power as proposed by Castells and consequences that followed.

Index Terms— Manuel Castells, Power, Communication, Mass self communication, Network society, Media polity, Social movements

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1 INTRODUCTION

Through history, communication and information are constantly a source of power and counter power [2]. History consists of eras of domination and social change. In his book, Communication Power, Castells [3], asked the question, where power lies in the networked society and his answer is an unequivocal, it is in communication [4]. The communication establishes relationships in which power is crystallized and institutionalized [3]. Thus power is crystallized in "power relations" established in communication and as such tends to be institutionalized. Castells primarily deals with the role of communication in social networks and media manipulation as a lever through which the networked society creates power i.e. "power relations".

Castells distinguishes between four types of power (networking power, network power, networked power, network-making power). Network-making power is the most important kind of power in the network society. Within the network-making power, the power is in the hands of the programmers and switchers. Programmers have the power to create networks through programming and reprogramming them. That in some sense includes control over objectives for which networks are created. Switchers have the power to link networks and ensure cooperation between them by sharing common goals and resources to establish and maintain cooperation. Castells gives numerous examples of programmers and switchers that gain power and counter power [5].

According to Castells, the global social network that is based on digital social network is a source of power and counter-power in contemporary society [4]. Castells, analyze relations of power and counter-power in terms of contradictions between the multinational multimedia networks corporations, media policies focusing on scandals and rebellious media politics.

The struggle for power in modern global society is between global multinational multimedia networks corporations. This battle takes place on the level of development of media policies, framing and contra-framing of political campaigns. Those processes are well illustrated by Castells in the shaping of public awareness in the United States before, during and after the war in Iraq, political scandals in Spain in the 1990s, control of the media and censorship in the United States, Russia, China, the global movements against global corporations, environmental movements etc. [3], [4].

2 THE CONCEPT OF POWER IN CASTELLS THEORY

The concept of power, that is accepted by Castells is the one defined by Weber. According to Weber, power has relational, asymmetrical dimension, which means imposing the will of one over another social actor [2]. The sources of such power may be different and not exempt oppression, domination, violence and the threat of violence, asymmetry, and the construction of meanings that lead the actions of social actors [3]. Power relations are framed by the dominance and are embodied in the institutions of society. Power according to Castells is a feature of every social relation and it operates through social action. Power relations are the basic relations in the time continuum of development of society and in different spatial dimensions in which societies are dominated by different cultures that exist in them. Throughout history, societies have been shaped as a result of the struggle of power, coercion, violence, assimilation and domination. In its explication of power according to Fuchs, Castells calls for Foucault and Giddens [4]. As Fuchs, noticed power in Giddens's structuration theory, is not necessarily a reflection of coercion, oppression, and asymmetry but reflects transformative capacity and as such is a fundamental aspect of society [4]. Therefore no power of coercion, but the free cooperation shape societies throughout history and even more it is possible to create social systems without the power of coercion. That emphasizes Castells, when he says that the creation of opinion (the impact on public consciousness and thought of individuals) has always been a more effective mechanism of power than torture [2].

In the network society there is a plurality of power and different types of power are dispersed in different networks. There is not a certain social group that monopolizes all social power, although groups which have greater financial and political resources have more chances to control significant parts of society [4].

3 POWER RELATIONS IN NETWORK SOCIETY

Wherever there is power there is contra-power or wherever there is domination there is attempted juxtaposing dominance. Under contra-power Castells implies the capacity of social actors to challenge and eventually change the power relations established in a particular society [2]. As noted by Castells [2] power relations between social elites and marginalized groups seeking social change in modern networked society have changed, as arguments Castells, use

- Media policies that produce a crisis of political legitimacy in most of countries in the world
- Segmented, customized mass media as a key factor in the production of culture
- Emergence of what Castells, called mass self communication
- Use of one-way mass communication in combination with horizontal individual mass communication produced the emergence of social movements around the modern global networked society [2]

As an indicator of the change of power between social groups and transformation of the networked society Castells cites several trends:

- The state as traditionally the most important source of power in the process of globalization has lost its power by limiting the sovereignty of decision making. At the same time a process of deregulation of the economy also aims at limiting the power of the state
- A second factor is the concentration of business and market segmentation, which leads to economy of oligopolistic type
- The third process is competition between communitarianism and individualism in the cultural and political spheres. Communitarianism finds its foundation in religion, nation, ethnicity, territory, gender and so on. Individualism spread over many forms as market-based consumerism, networked individualism and individual autonomy
- The crisis of legitimacy also weakens the position of the state and those who act on its behalf at the expense of the increased influence of citizens [2]

4 NEW TECHNOLY FOR COMMUNICATION AND MASS SELF COMMUNICATION

Castells defines communication as exchange of meaning through sharing information. Meanings can be understood only in the context of social relations in which sharing of information takes place [3].

Castells distinguishes between interpersonal and mass communication, where interpersonal communication involves interaction between two individuals, while mass communication involves sending messages to a wider audience. Good examples of mass communication are books, newspapers, film, radio, television [3]. Historically new form of communication that appears with the development of technology for communication and the internet and cell phones is mass self communication.

5 MASS SELF COMMUNICATION

Communication system of industrial society was mass media characteristized by them one-directional distribution of messages from one center to audience who receive such messages. Networked society is based on the horizontal global communications network, which includes the Internet as a relatively old technology from 1969, but with a significant growth of users from the 1990s onwards and mobile telephony that in 2006 reached 2 billion mobile phones. With possibilities of new technologies, people create their own networks [2].

According to Castells, the development of Web 2.0. as a basis for the development of social networks has led to a new form of communication between individuals in modern society, and that is mass self communication. This is mass communication because it has the potential to acquire a global audience. These forms of communication are posting video on you tube, blogging, writing email that is dispersed to a large number of email addresses etc. At the same time such communication is individual, because the message is generated by an individual, which defines the potential audience i.e. those who receive the message [2], [4]. Interpersonal communication, mass communication and mass self communication, coexist, they interact and complement each other.

Castells analyzed the economic operations of ten global multimedia networks (Apple, Bertelsmann, CBS, Disney, Google, Microsoft, NBC Universal, News Corporation, Time Warner, and Yahoo) and found that the trends show an increased economic concentration, using a variety of different platforms, segmenting audiences and synergy of the economy. These two trends of economic concentration and segmentation of the audience are at odds with one another and suggest the dialectic of network society [4].

According to Castells, the Internet in modern society is a focus of conflict between global multimedia networks that are trying to put it in the service of their business interests and creative audience that is trying to communicate freely. On the one hand, are corporations that serve mass communication through individual sponsorship of sites, creating paid sites, paid portals etc. On the other hand, Web 2.0. empower consumers to produce and distribute its own products. This gave autonomy to the communication entities. Global multimedia corporations attempt, but do not achieve full control of communication practices, although manage to control communication channels [4]. Serious motive of global multimedia corporations to control communication channels is profit. A notable feature of the emergence of the internet, according to Castells, is that the public sphere in general has evolved from institutionalized space in which citizens are relatively passive communication entity within the communication space in which citizens are active and autonomous communication entities [2].

As Fuchs noted according to Castells, the citizens have individual autonomy in mass self communication, but he nowhere explains what he means in terms of political connotation [4].

The concept of autonomy is not explained. Hence, autonomy could be understood as Kant understood it, as the autonomy of the will and supreme principle of morality; or the way in which Hayek understands it, as true individualism, which allows capitalism to set by itself, a spontaneous order, which should not be intervened by artificial political rules; or as John Stuart Mill implies that autonomy is freedom of mind and discussion and accordingly would include freedom of speaking and association. It's unclear if Castell's understanding of autonomy is less individual and more social in terms of equal participation and representation in the government or postmodern autonomy with a multitude of entities with their own positions [4].

Web 2.0./3.0. are platforms that are mostly used for networking, building virtual communities, content sharing, cooperation in the production and sharing of information, interactive blogging. These are platforms that are more systems for communication and cooperation, rather than systems of cognition. From an economic point of view, the sites that run on web 2.0 / 3.0. platforms work on a commercial basis. They are strictly consumer / audience oriented and most of them are profitable [4]. With this in mind, many may wonder how many sites, working on Web 2.0./3.0. platform are autonomous from capital. The contents of many of the sites were set in order to attract attention of the audience and the companies that advertise, that make a profit for the owners of the sites. However there is a difference between traditional mass media and the internet. In comparison with mass media, audience of the Internet and social networks is very active. While in the traditional networks, the audience passively follow the content, the Internet and social media audiences produces / manufactures a significant part of the contents that leads to the democratization of communication. Therefore we could agree with Castells, that Web 2.0./3.0., gives us the opportunity to have a space of autonomy from the power of capital and the state, but they are not given automatically, rather we should to struggle for it [4].

One might say that social networks can be looked at as a dialectical process in which individuals in exchange for their privacy, gain access to networks in which they freely communicate and become the target of global advertisers. On the other hand when you come to cyberspace, individuals have access to all information, ideas, including those that challenge corporate power. Accordingly, most of the social networks and sites, are not selling access to the network, but they sell already accessed the network of a third entity, companies that want to advertise. The relations between the companies that own sites and those who enter are not positioned on the principle of equality, but corporations are much more powerful than individuals accessing their sites. There are opportunities for individuals to set up their own sites, but there is considerable imbalance between financial and personnel resources of large corporations and individuals. There are isolated cases that Castells lists where one can see individuals that successfully rival big corporations in the struggle to win the attention of the audience, but these are just isolated cases that can't correct the general picture. According to Castells, social networks give to individuals the opportunity to overcome their power-

lessness. But he argues that it is only potential, for which there is no guarantee that it will be used in the right way [4].

According to Castells, with appearance of the mass self communication, it is no longer possible to have control over the production and dissemination of information as was possible with traditional media. Now it is possible to write and post a video, write a blog, and send email without being controlled. However, although anyone can produce and spread around information, all information does not get the same level of visibility and attention [4].

6 MASS COMMUNICATION

The most important channel of communication between the political system and citizens is the mass media, especially television. According to Castells politics is primarily media policy [2]. The media often tend to provide support for certain policies among voters that from the citizens are turning into consumers of the political market. It does not mean that the power is in the hands of the media, but in the hands of political actors that control mass media in order to secure support among citizens in the political contest.

It would be too much to say that the audience follows everything that is broadcasted through the media. The concept of the active audience is well established in communication research. The media have their limits in terms of impact on the audience. In the media market, its first necessary to have a specific audience. Then media is in daily competition for audience attention. In this sense, the media is trying to create and maintain certain credibility with the audience. There are also some limitations with managing incoming information to the media, which are associated with professional ethics of journalism [2].

According to Castells, it requires interdisciplinary collaboration in research on how uninformed and especially false information works as a form of communication power. In order to be effective, power must be accepted by significant number of citizens. Politics works with emotions, especially uncertainty, anxiety and anger. Mechanisms through which power uses mass communication are: framing, agenda setting, priming and indexing. According to Castells, these are the four most important mechanisms that are used by politics to influence public awareness. The first three mechanisms are classic mechanisms by which the media tries to manipulate their audience, while the last mechanism, indexing, relies on media information coming from powerful sources of information, such as the government or the ruling party. As a classic example of framing Castells cites the attempt to shape public opinion on the war in Iraq. The war in Iraq was framed (defined) as a war on terror and patriotic activity by encouraging emotions, especially fear in order to get support from the public. As Castells noted, successful counter framing was possible even after Hurricane Katrina and several scandals reinforced the impression of the weaknesses of the Bush administration [4]. Castells borrows the term indexing from Bennett and that according to Castells comes down to management, often narrowing of political awareness by the editors and journalists, and that appears as a result of the topics elected or avoided to

be presented to the citizens and the way they are processed [1], [2]. In addition, the media influence is evident not only by what appears as content in the media, but much more by what is absent from them. That what is not in the media, is not in public awareness.

According to Castells, the media have the power and capacity to shape public awareness through perception that they create for individuals and events. The media policy include: providing access to powerful actors in the media, creation of perception according to interests of powerful actors, dissemination of messages in certain formats using different technologies to measure the effectiveness of messages and financing of all those activities [3]. As tools for implementation of media policies tend to be used: sensationalism, threats, personalization, dramatization, fragmentation of information, negative stereotypes, attacks on political opponents and so on. These tools of media policies are focused on emotions [4].

However, Castells suggests that the media have their own language and rules. Television, for example works by creating an image [2]. The most powerful messages are those that are simple and stick to a particular image. The simplest message in politics is a human person. Extensive use of human persons as political imagery in politics brought us personalization of politics around leaders of political parties to be sold on the political market. With usage of proper media policies, political actors try to build credibility of certain political leaders their characters, policies etc.

Castells, constantly draws attention that communication structures are used by powerful actors, but also can be used by the actors on the margins for production of contra-power. The question that Castells leaves unanswered, according to Fuchs, is whether contra-power uses the same approach as the power (scandals, stereotyping, attacks) [4]. In doing so, however, Castells gives the example of the Obama campaign, which is an example of networking electoral campaigns, which exceeded trivial attacks from opponent campaigns, without addressing the same way.

7 ELECTIONS CAMPAIGNS

Although there are quite a few theorists who insist the limited influence of the media on audiences, Castells refers to a series of studies since 1990s that show some effects of the media, especially when they are using emotional messages on voting behavior of citizens [3]. Using emotions and scandals is characteristic of the media in the digital age or the network campaigns. Network campaigns are characterized by establishing a network of horizontal relations between supporters and the management team of the campaign. Such campaigns use digital media to maintain relations with voters. The campaign of Barrack Obama from 2008 for example, used social networks, Facebook, You Tube, specialized sites like My BarackObama.com that aimed to establish personal ceonnections with voters [5]. Networked connection allows organizers of the campaign, to make segmentation by groups of voters, and practically under the same general campaign to run sub- campaigns for different groups of voters. It allows campaign organizers, to send different messages to different social groups.

Also, , networked campaigns allow organizers of the campaign to become the official source of information and thus to bypass traditional media. For a long time, the organizers of the election campaigns competed to place information in the traditional media. Networked campaigns give possibility to publish information on the official website of the candidate or political party, which later can be taken by traditional media. Thus allows political actors to send their messages to public quickly and easily [5].

Media policy is not limited to election campaigns, on the contrary it is a constant and fundamental dimension of politics practiced by the Government, political parties, political leaders and non-governmental organizations [3]. In the network society trust and credibility of the political actors transform into votes in the election. Hence the need to attacks the very credibility of political opponents, which produces media policy of scandals. The production of scandals is part of trivialization of the politics and their delegitimization.

8 MEDIA POLITY OF SCANDALS

Media policy of scandals has two important effects on the political system: it influence the electoral process and the decision about whom to vote by reducing the credibility of one of the candidates who is involved in scandals. In many cases it results with apathy of the electorate. The second effect is to vote for a rival if he/she is perceived as the embodiment of certain moral values. But because everyone has certain flaws, it usually ends by putting all politicians in the same basket, resulting in distrust in electoral promises, political parties and leaders. The crisis of political legitimacy is the result of media policy of scandals. It seems that media policies stimulate distrust in democratic processes. This should not be understood as accusations of the media, which is partly controlled by political actors, and scandals are based on leaks of information from the actors in the political process [2].

According to Castells, in almost all EU countries with exception of Scandinavian countries, we can see a crisis of political legitimacy. He relied on a survey of public opinion made between 2000 and 2002 that was done by the Secretariat of the United Nations and the World Economic Forum, in which nearly two thirds of citizens think their countries are not guided by the will of the people. More specifically percentage for the US is 59%, while the EU 61%. More recently research Euro barometer, the Study for Democracy of UNDP in Latin America, World Value Survey, Gallup etc. show the same trend. This partially explains the phenomenon of voting against a party rather than vote for another party. Hence phenomena of voting for the lesser evil, the protest vote, vote for the third option etc. Hence the social mobilization and social protest in response to the dominant processes in the political arena [2].

9 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Social movements are permanent characteristic of societies; they accept the values, organizational forms and features of the societies in which they appear [2]. Social movements in the networked society use global communication structure. Social

movements are the product of global communications structure, but only use it to achieve their own interests. They are grounded in a particular society, think locally but act globally in opposition to the power relations and the dominant networks of power. According to Castells, the movement for democratic globalization has old anarchist ideals – autonomous free citizens and individuals who coordinate their existence that is self - governed. Thus one could say that these movements have an ideal of society based on free associations and mutual contracts of certain social groups [4]. According to Fucks the movement for democratic globalization is a modern universal social movement, which is the sum of a multitude of movements that exist in the contemporary global society [4]. That unity in differences covers more significant movements like the anti-war movement, environmentalist movement, gender and sexual movements, movements for human rights, etc.

Castells points to several trends in social movements:

- Social movements are against corporative globalization
- Establishment of autonomous communication networks that challenge the power of the global media industry controlled by governments and business
- Development of autonomous forms of political organization in political campaigns
- Rapid political mobilization through the use of mobile phones and the Internet that changes the political relief. It becomes very difficult and almost impossible for governments to hide information from the public interest and to manipulate them [2].

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