

THE REFLECTION OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN MASS-MEDIA

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Abstract

The media coverage of social problems, including the social inequalities, of the ways in which they can be solved, of the implementation manner of the state's social policies regarding this field, and live quality in general, represents one of the major objectives of mass-media. Therefore, journalism has to ensure the right of every citizen to information, to promote opinion pluralism, to ensure the unhindered movement of ideas, conceptions, theories and to create a favourable environment for the control on behalf of the authorities of the activities of the public authorities, therefore stimulating the continual development processes of the democratic principles of socio-politic cohabitation. This type of activity legitimates journalism as an important form of social engagement, efficient information and communication means, an ideal instrument for the training and study of the public opinion.

Keywords: *journalism, mass-media, press institutions, social inequalities, social problems, social mission, social role, life quality, media coverage, social engagement.*

The purpose of mass-media in modern societies is to oversee the environment, to present a multi-facet reflection of reality, the analysis, explanation and interpretation of the phenomena and urgent issues, which affect human existence. Under this aspect, press institutions represent both an efficient information tool and a public debate arena, where a large range of opinions, ideas, points of view, positions or conceptions appear. This form of social engagement represents a major direction of the editorial policy of any press institution and it emerges from the fundamental social mission of mass-media. This social engagement of the media consists in introducing objective information, unbiased analysis and pertinent comments and it justifies the existence and involvement of the media in all fields of life.

In order to achieve its social mission, the press is also involved in the mediation activities of social problems and in those of constructing / modelling social dialogue. They are included in

the category of the social activities, absolutely necessary for the natural development of any democratic society, and they can be achieved by cumulating some general functions of the press, that, taken together, project the informational space, where they confront each other and different points of view and opinions about major interest issues become public. Therefore, one of the major roles of mass-media consists in its contribution to changing some concrete situations, in the practical resolution of the conflicts and in solving social problems. Under this aspect, the press becomes a support for the circulation of ideas in the space of the public debates, an intermediary (which ensures mediation in the process of message broadcasting from one source of information to the receptor) or, in other words, an instrument to project reality. The major social consequences of mass-media, which can be both positive and negative, depend on the purpose and the way in which this instrument was used. This aspect becomes visible, especially, in situations in which the press gets involved in reflecting and mediating social problems.

Often, social problems occur, expand in size, intensify their action and amplify their impact and effects in periods of major changes, economic or social crises, or transition from one system to the other. The role of social journalism in such particular situations also grows, due to its potential of reflecting, explaining, or debating the issues that social groups, or the society in itself, are confronted with, therefore catalysing on the process of its resolution. The researcher M. Guzun claims that the Republic of Moldova, as all other societies that have broken off from totalitarianism, accepting a route conducive to democracy, is going through a crisis, meaning a

difficult time to pass, but this has already become a permanent state, when a clear or apparent lack of order appeared in all the states' vital sectors, the legitimacy and the historical perspective are also questioned. "The changes that generated significant mutations in the economic, politic, cultural and spiritual sectors, destroyed the dynamic and the existing equilibriums, the order of the things is intimidated" (GUZUN, 2008). We want to add that these changes also affected the social field, and therefore, together with the existent social problems, new issues appeared, specific to this period of transition, that could be identified and placed in the company's agenda, especially due to social journalism. One of these issues is the continuous degradation of life quality and the amplification of social inequalities.

Despite all the statistics presented by the state's dignitaries, using various state institutions in order to prove the growth or the stagnation of the population's well-being, the quality of life in Republic of Moldova decreased significantly over the past five years. One indicator for this is the amplification of the impoverishment of the population and the growth of inequalities. S. Târa claims that "modern societies developed some much more complex forms of inequalities that ancient societies, three of them being significant here: it is obvious that we are dealing with a material, economic inequality, determined by wealth or by the revenues of the people, which are subsequently reflected in the lifestyle, living conditions etc., then we can notice a social inequality (of prestige or social status) and we are obviously dealing with a political inequality, meaning a different potential of influencing the decisions taken at the level of society" (ȚARA, 2013).

In our opinion, the genesis of all types of inequalities is due to the material inequalities. Material inequality generates more serious effects in transition societies, such as the Republic of Moldova, because the process of gaining fortunes, private properties has a chaotic character and is usually opaque, uncontrollable and even illegal. "The years of independence for the Republic of Moldova determined important changes in all aspects of the citizens' lives. The social changes took place in the background of the economic crisis and therefore the gross social

product decreased to more than half. Unemployment rate went up, income level went significantly down, social infrastructure degraded, the educational system become worse as well as the state of the national culture and the issues related to personal security" (MOCANU & MOCANU, 2009). In such societies the economic inequality generates an increase of the disparity between the achievement possibilities of various social individuals. This statement can be exemplified by the access to the educational system. Children from middle or higher class families have access to prestigious schools that offer higher quality educational services, whereas those from poor families have access only to the mass education. As a result, the knowledge and competencies of the students from elite schools are much higher than those of the children who graduate a normal school and this significantly reduces the chances of the latter to climb the social scale and ultimately to influence the political act and the decisions that are taken at the community and society level.

G. Runceanu stated that "modern economic theories support the idea according to which income inequality has a negative impact on economic development. Moreover, inequality is closely correlated to a series of social indicators, such as the general health status, the level of education, the children's welfare. One can understand the fact that as income inequality grows, various social problems arise, such as the reduction of life expectancy, the reduction of children's welfare (and of the population in general), which in its turn leads to a decrease in educational performance or even school dropout" (RUNCEANU, 2015).

One of the consequences of the material inequalities is "the destruction of the social mobility and of the chance equality. Basically, a major part of those who are born poor and in poverty, and have poor parents, will grow as adults and will die poor, and there are important chances that their children will repeat the same evolution" (Ingerisidemoni, 2015). The impossibility of an efficient recruiting of the most suitable people in certain social positions represents a problem in the natural development of all social subsystems and the sustainable development of the society as a whole.

Inequality hinders both the reduction of poverty and economic development, its effects becoming stronger and more destructive. "Inequality weakens democratic culture, patriotism and the solidarity among citizens, undermines democratic institutions and rule of law, and creates a very difficult to overcome social gap, the economy is trapped by those 1%, resources are not at all fairly divided, income distribution is completely unbalanced, social security, health, education and public budgets are profoundly affected and reduced, the politic class, the wealthy and their servants hold the state prisoner in order to ensure the perpetuation of an oligarchic system, dominated by extractive and not enlightened elites" (Ingerisidemoni, 2015).

The continual degradation of life quality and the more and more emphasized social inequality have become a reality in Republic of Moldova, a fact which is also reflected in the inland media products. *A reference to this kind of problems as an autonomous field of knowledge or as a situation associated with the impact of the problems of unequal social treatment inevitably leads to resorting to other aspects of this impact, among which those of economic, social or even political nature.* This thing offers journalists the possibility to establish a correlation between events, in order to establish a connection between facts and the interests of other social actors, in order to analyse the decisions of the governors established with the purpose of reducing inequalities, efficiently assess decisional factors, and forecast problem development. The coverage of social inequalities is done in order to:

- Inform the society about the quality of life and the current state of affairs in the society of Republic of Moldova;
- Analyse the ways in which social inequalities manifest and to forecast their impact and potential effects;
- Monitor the actions of the decision making factors regarding the reduction of social inequalities;
- Publically debate the most serious issues and to identify the optimal solutions;
- Promote social equity and to propagate socio-responsible attitudes towards certain social categories;
- To train the population in order to change its mentality and to develop a culture of civic involvement.

Although in the media in the Republic of Moldova there are issues related to social inequalities, it seems that the interest for these problems has been decreasing over the last period of time, as proof of the fact is the relatively small number of materials dealing with this phenomenon. The analysis of the ways of approaching the social inequalities in the local press highlights a series of shortcomings which, in our opinion, considerably diminish the impact of such materials on the Moldavian society. These ones include:

- the predominant coverage of current actions generated by the social inequality, at the expense of complex analysis of existing problems. The focus of journalists on daily issues in a way «monopolizes» the media environment and the public environment respectively, determining the focus of public attention on sporadic, scattered cases, but not on the actual issue. Thus, the predominant coverage of events becomes a negative media practice in this context; it replaces the reflection of the real issues that need to be set on the public agenda and debated as it greatly affects people's lives;
- the dominant use of informative genres, at the expense of the analytical ones. The topics on social inequalities are largely capitalized through news and reports, sometimes interviews, sometimes of interviews (if the issue is approached by an expert or a governmental factor). From the press, practically miss the analysis, the editorials and comments, so necessary to the awareness of the extent of the problem. Only the backed up analysis are able to highlight the state of things and the real dangers, to catalyse the active involvement of both decision-makers and citizens in solving social problems;
- the superficial approach, which usually is reduced to the presentation of factual data but without correlating them, without explaining the concurrence and to put them in favorable contexts to the understanding of the problems and the awareness of these risks;

- the fragmented reflection of social inequalities. Journalists usually exploit events generated by social inequalities at the time of their peak, and very rarely when they are brought up afterwards. Fractional reflection undermines the media's potential to present the events multi-facetedly and the dynamics of their evolution. At the same time, it does not give the public the opportunity to create an integrative, overall view of the complexity of the problems in society;
- the non-consistent, occasional approach to social inequality. Journalists usually turn to these subjects either when something out of the ordinary, sensational takes place, or on the eve of some special days like the World Day of Social Equity, the International Children's Day, the International Day of Homeless Children, the International Day of Non-discrimination Day, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, The European Equal Opportunities Day, the Equal Opportunities Day for Women and Men, etc. Most of the materials that discuss the social inequality as a phenomenon appear in the local press during exactly in these periods, and for the rest of the time they are virtually missing from the information flow.

Despite these shortcomings, the domestic journalism also outlines some positive trends in approaching the social inequalities, for example through media investigations. Out of more than one hundred journalistic investigations that occurred in the last two years in the local press, most of them concerned certain aspects of economic or social inequalities. Also from this perspective, the media campaigns are a strong point of the domestic journalism. Of the about 50 media campaigns organized by Moldavian media institutions between 2015 and 2016, about half of them were designed to combat social inequalities or solve social problems.

Therefore, the journalistic products about social inequalities are important and present as they bring on the public agenda and highlight the issues that directly or tangentially address the quality of life and the possibilities for social achievement of individuals. Their impact on the consumer of media products is very high, as a problem of this kind is, first of all, a social one, and the social information is what people are the

most interested in. The effects of journalistic material on social inequalities are not necessarily direct, but they are always strong and long-lasting. In order to increase their impact and their effects, it is necessary to review the coverage strategies, techniques and tactics so as to ensure a complex media coverage from at least some perspectives, such as:

- the perspective of their impact on the human factor, focusing primarily on the safety of individuals and living conditions;
- the perspective of quality of life management and of the risks, which includes the strategies, the social policies and the actions taken by the central or local public administration in order to improve them;
- the economic perspective, which involves analyzing the expenditures needed to solve the existing problems or to prophylate them
- the social perspective, which involves analyzing citizens' perceptions and the degree of their potential involvement in solving problems.

A prerequisite condition for the efficiency of the act of creation, which can produce results, is, in our opinion, the specialized professional university training in social journalism. The specialization involves the organization of the didactic process on narrow branches, in our case, the concentration of the university studies, especially on the practical part of them (the practical classes), on the valorisation of the social reality. This goal can be achieved by appropriating and applying: (1) of the journalistic and sociological methods of assessment and, subsequently, the social reality investigation; (2) of strategies, techniques and media tactics to approach the reflection topics; (3) of development mechanisms, policies and existing laws in the field to create the journalistic context in which the journalistic material will be placed. The specialization in the field of social journalism must be not only a goal of university studies, but also the continuous professional training of journalists.

Another condition of principle is to change the emphasis in the process of publicizing the social inequalities. It is necessary to move from the simple surveillance of reality and from the neutral information of the audience about the existing inequalities in the debate on social

issues, through the involvement of the decision-makers at all levels, as well as of the ordinary citizens. At the same time, it is necessary to involve the media in building a social dialogue and mediating the reality through the involvement of the governmental, non-governmental and the business environment.

In this context, we mention as condition of the principle the importance of knowing the informational needs and expectations of the target audience, determined largely by its social representations. «The representations are cognitive assemblies that influence the norms and values of society» (DEAC, 2008) and have the role of establishing an order and allowing the individuals to orientate themselves in the social environment. «Increasing the efficiency of mass media can be achieved by knowing the social representations existing at the level of individuals in a community. (...) Knowing the differences the existing between the representation systems, specific to communities even within the perimeter of a single society, the media can conceive messages more suited to the characteristics or perceptions of a community, so that the message is easier to understand and, at the same time, to reduce the number of interpretations that can be associated with it» (CHERECHES, n.d.).

Also, a pre-requisite condition is the promotion of social journalism and the development of the specialized press segment in this field, of a major importance being media products meant for different social categories are of major importance. But the specialized media can not be developed without state involvement. Thus, subsidizing this category of press by the state must become a common practice of any government. However, the practice in question, along with other constructive practices in the field, provides access to information for disadvantaged social categories and thereby contributes to their involvement in the lives of their communities. The social journalism is an absolutely necessary activity, as its impact and its effects can change things for the better both at the decision-makers level and at the level of the masses and can ensure, alongside the policies in the field, the sustainable development of society - a concept that promotes social equity and improving people's lives everywhere.

In conclusion, in order to be truly effective, the media institutions must reflect, monitor and evaluate the quality of social processes, how people are involved in actions designed to eliminate inequalities, and how to implement social policies of the state in this area. From the perspective of this approach, journalism must manifest itself as an instrument for disseminating information. The information forms the communicative flow in which the socio-political and economic life of society is reflected, including the social actions and policies aimed at liquidating the economic and social inequalities. At the same time, the journalism must also manifest itself as an instrument of expertise in the actions of power. Through its public debates which it initiates and the analysis it achieves, it creates the favorable conditions for monitoring, appreciating and even correcting how state institutions and policy-makers are involved in and act to reduce or even eliminate inequalities. «By directly reflecting on social issues, as well as the mechanisms for solving them, the journalism monitors the actions of the ruling forces, thus ensuring the control of the institute of power. But at the same time, articulating the interests of some or other forces, the journalism, under their influence, changes its goals and strategies of publicizing the social practice. (...) The mass media institutions and the journalists who promote quality journalism «will plead for democracy without supporting private opinions» (CHARITY, 1995).

Therefore, the approach of the social inequalities in the contemporary press manifests itself as an activity that sets in the informational circuit materials about the problems directly or tangentially related to the quality of life, to the economic, political and social discrimination of the individuals, in particular, of the social categories, in general. At the same time, it also manifests itself in the form of analysis of social inequality and strategies to combat it, of policy instruments for redistribution, of economic development and social mobility. As part of the social journalism, the media approach to social inequality issues is, ultimately, a complex task that can only be successfully achieved by combining the efforts of specialized journalists and the experts in this field.

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