



Audience Interactivity and Participation

Interview Essays with Civil Society Representatives

Working Group 2 of the Cost Action „Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies” aims to establish a dialogue with members of CSOs that are dealing with the notion of the audience and issues related to interactivity and participation. The interview essays aim to give members of CSOs an opportunity to contribute to the debate on contemporary issues concerning the audience and to voice their understanding of audience interactivity and participation.

“Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies” is a large network financed by the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) framework. The main objective of this network is to advance state-of-the-art knowledge of the key transformations of European audiences within a changing media and communication environment, identifying their interrelationships with the social, cultural and political areas of European societies.

Within this Cost Action, Working Group 2 “Audience Interactivity and Participation” aims at looking at the possibilities and constraints of mediated public participation, the roles that new and old media institutions and professionals play in facilitating public participation and in building citizenship; the interlocking of mainstream media and non-mainstream media and their production of new hybrid organizational structures and audience participation.

Effect of Audience Participation in CSO Communication

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Croatian civil society and media from the perspective of two civil society organizations

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EFFECT OF AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION IN CSO COMMUNICATION

(interview essay)

Background of the interview essay

In the context of interactive and participating audiences and civil society organizations in this essay the focus is on a relatively new, but more and more determining journalism organization, *Átlátszó*. *It operates an investigative journalism portal, atlatszo.hu, but it also offers a safety leaking platform, MagyarLeaks (it is practically the Hungarian WikiLeaks).* The aim of the interview essay was to review the role of audience participation in the life of an CSO aiming transparency in Hungary. The question arises how a CSO may use and profit from the participatory presence of different audiences and reach its goals beside the mainstream mass media channels. The interviewee, Agnes Urban, beside her scientific and academic expertise in the field of media economics, is a co-founder and expert at *Átlátszó*. She has a wide overview of international and Hungarian media practice, and she is an active player in the civil society organization life in Hungary.

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Introduction of Átlátszó Center for Investigative Journalism

Átlátszó Center for Investigative Journalism is a watchdog NGO based in Budapest, Hungary, that combines investigative journalism and civic activism to promote transparency in Hungary. Atlatszo.hu publishes all its relevant findings on the internet, and organises transparency campaigns with the involvement of the public.

Átlátszó Center states that mainstream media in Hungary so highly depends on economic and politic interest groups, that it is often no more journalist, but the owner who decides what can be published. The actual media landscape is under the power the politically controlled Media Authority due to the new Hungarian media law, public service media is controlled appointees of political parties. In this situation of the very limited freedom of press in Hungary, however there are many facts (taboos, corruption etc.) to be uncovered by the independent media. Átlátszó Center for Investigative Journalism was created to produce exclusive investigative reports, but also help and defend whistleblowers, who wish to shine light on corruption issues or other misuses of power but cannot turn to the mainstream press. Atlatszo.hu staff is a growing group of anti-corruption and pro-transparency journalists, IT-specialists, lawyers, experts and their supporters. Atlatszo.hu is primarily interested in materials concerning Hungary, while we do not refuse to publish significant materials outside of their primary scope.

(Source: <http://atlatszo.hu>)

Interview

What does audience interactivity and participation mean for you from professional point of view?

Participation of the audience and interactivity is a continuously evolving phenomenon. It had some antecedents in traditional media, but its real field is obviously the online services. In the 1990s the online forums brought a new experience to media, a few years later UGC (user generated content) was the buzzword. Today social filtering is in the focus of researches: social networks mean a new distribution channel for media content and it is still a question how it influences the value chain.

In your opinion at what level are the different organizations using the interactive and participatory communication strategy possibilities?

Usage of interactive media is already a necessity in daily business. It is not media-specific, none of the companies (at least in consumer markets) can avoid the direct communication with the consumers. Its usage became widespread among political parties, civil organizations, etc.

If they are using it, how do they use it? Please explain a good case!

A new Hungarian investigative journalism portal, atlatszo.hu has been launched in July. It produces investigative reports, accepts information from whistleblowers, files requests of data on the basis on freedom of information laws, and starts freedom of information lawsuits in case of refusal. Atlatszo.hu publishes all its relevant findings

on the internet, and organizes transparency campaigns with the involvement of the public. It also builds on so-called crowd sourcing: in the case of some stories atlatszo.hu partly passes the work to its audience, e.g. the portal published the list of sold properties in the central district of Budapest. The prices were incredible low and the buyers in some cases were related to the Municipality (e.g. employees of the City Hall). Users were asked to help identifying names from the list, and it worked, some names from the list were identified by the visitors of the portal.

Are they using it at a goal oriented way in their communication strategy? Or is it a case where the participatory audience is the basis of the existence of the organization?

The above mentioned case of atlatszo.hu portal is a good example, it would not work without continuous participation of the audience. Of course a single portal is not enough, usage of social networking sites (Facebook) is integral part of the strategy. Atlatszo.hu launches now its presence on Twitter and Tumblr.

What are the difficulties, limitations, risks of the interactivity and participation based communication strategy? Please explain an example!

It is interesting that one of the first difficulties that atlatszo.hu have faced, came from the technology: one new case launched at Friday morning attracted so high interest and visits at the webpage that the server could not serve the requests and

the webpage collapsed. Still the borders of technology may affect the functioning of the communication; it is crucial but not easy to face an unexpected interest, cumulated in time from our interactive audience sharing the information.

Of course the real question how this project can be financed in long run. We build our business model on donations of private persons and foundations. Even the technological costs are manageable, costs of content creation are very high. It is not clear yet, if it will be a just the hobby of some civils in long run or a significant player on the Hungarian media market as a professional portal.

Regarding the Hungarian practice, where (market players, other organizations, individuals, education, advisory companies etc.) can we identify the highest know-how to prepare and launch a communication strategy based on audience interactivity and participation?

It seems now that non-profit organizations are real pioneers in this field. They are highly innovative, perhaps because average age in these organizations is relatively low. I have negative experiences in the case of governmental institutions, municipalities and other state offices. Media companies and business corporations are highly different: there are companies with professional communication strategy and there are others with poor performance.

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environmental association

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CSOS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

(Interview essay)

Introduction

This essay is the result of two interviews with two representatives of the following environmental associations: Legambiente (the main Italian environmental association, founded in 1971: www.legambiente.it) and Greenpeace Italy (a leading global NGO: www.greenpeace.org/italy/it/) The interviewees were asked to explain the relationship between their organizations and new media, the difference between digital and traditional media as well as the influence that media in general have on their own audience and their own business.

CSO's structure presentation.

Legambiente is pervasively embedded throughout the country. It has a pyramidal management structure (headquartered in Rome, and articulated in regional and provincial circles). This allows centralized and delocalized management. One of the association's motto is: *think global and live local*.

Greenpeace has a global organization that promotes specific campaigns in order to win them, while if they would extend the action on the whole ecological problematic, the risk will be to loose energies and resources without reaching the main goals.

Greenpeace's fundraising policy implies that they address exclusively individuals or companies, refusing contributions from governments. This results in reduced

budget if compared to other associations. This is the reason why they need to invest resources in campaigns that are most likely to be successful.

Audience participation and feedbacks.

Legambiente

“An important aspect in using new media is not only related to a matter of increasing membership (in that case, the web allows faster proceeding), rather it deals with the opportunity of amplifying the message towards the entire civil society, creating a deeper awareness of issues related to ecology and environment. Therefore the more civil society takes care of certain problems, the greater are the possibilities that they bring them to the political arena”

The widespread local organization of Legambiente allows a continuous dialogue among members and a deep awareness of local realities and related environmental issues. The web has given unprecedented opportunities to sustain that organizational structure and to make it more effective. Civic initiatives are always declined into the specificities of territorial needs. At the same time, some local initiatives can acquire a national meaningfulness or they can be extended to other similar local contexts. The Web has increased opportunities for horizontal collaboration and for easy networking among the circles.

Greenpeace

“The traditional activist of Greenpeace has some distinctive features, if compared to

other associations. There are several ways of participation: from a stand in the street, to chain oneself in front of the multinational as a sign of dissent, or risky actions with high social and media impact like climbing buildings or intervening with inflatable boats. Greenpeace activists belong to two categories: traditional (they are volunteers acting in the squares or in public demonstrations) and online activists (or cyber-activists). Normally, traditional activists of local groups interact with each other by circulating information, commenting on news; in that case, new media are essential in channeling and sustaining communicational exchange. We leave open space for online debates, obviously with the exception of impolite comments. We don't want to apply censorship and we encourage debate from several points of view”

For the 40th Anniversary a commemorative video produced by an activist of a local group of Greenpeace has been published on Facebook and YouTube. This is an example of grassroots participation.

The introduction of CSOs interactivity in communication strategies.

Legambiente

“New media and social media are highly appreciated and extensively used by Legambiente. The starting point has been the website, which continues to be the main tool of communication online. From the birth of Web 2.0, we tried to be present on the major social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, ...). In order to exploit all the potentialities of Web 2.0, we have created a partnership with C6 TV (a Web TV based in

Milan) to create a “green TV”: *6PianetaTV* with videos dealing with environment and ecology” said Mr. Petitto.

“One of the main problems of using social networks is technological backwardness in Italy. In terms of use, social networks continue to be considered primarily as a tool of entertainment. We face a generational divide, with volunteers acting at the local and regional clubs that are not able to use ICT; thus, we have to do some sort of training to overcome our (internal) digital divide.”

Contents posted on the website and on the social networks are scientifically reliable, in tune with Legambiente's mission: to be a scientific environmental association. Any aspect or issue that is made public, is supported by scientific analysis or accompanied by scientists' contributions.

“Credibility of the Legambiente's brand has been translated to the web, making our sources and information highly reliable”. The fundamental purpose is involving people and triggering their engagement, most of the campaigns are based on this purpose.

Greenpeace

“For many years Greenpeace has been considered an *advocacy hero*. With the web, Greenpeace is considered an *Empowerment hero*, who seeks to use new media potentialities for empowerment”. They have created a dynamic professional group that tries to follow the rapid evolution

of a flexible technology like the web. There are new positions: webmasters for online campaigns, webmasters for digital fundraising, a coordinator for new media.

The Importance of community networks and social media (twitter, facebook, ...).

Legambiente

“The greatest achievement through the web was the referendum on nuclear power and public water in the June 2011. Mobilization took place mainly on the net and then took the form of a very high participation rate to the referendum. This was the Italian version of Obama communication style”.

Greenpeace

“Some people think that online campaigns can change traditional business, but I think its role can be better understood as an improvement. We shouldn't abandon our precedent know-how in communication; the integration is the fundamental solution” said Andrea Pinchera.

The transformations of communication with new technologies.

Legambiente

“Social networks are important amplifiers of the message, but traditional media continue to be a milestone in the communication. Being visible in press, radio and television continues to be crucial, because these media allow messages to be spread in the whole society. They are faster and concise.

Despite the importance of communication on new media and traditional, the classic “face to face” marketing is ‘irreplaceable’ said Mario Petitto.

Stands in the squares and other forms of direct communication allows a local embedding of Legambiente. To manage communication on traditional and new media, Legambiente has set up two positions in each circle: the press agent and the communicator. Depending on the size of the circles, often the two roles can be managed by the same person.

Greenpeace

Greenpeace has a strong tradition in using new technologies. Already in 1993, they used email to communicate between offices in the world, in a safe and fast way. The web has not been used exclusively as an informative channel, but also as a “space” for main organization’s activities. “An emblematic example was the campaign against Apple, where we have asked to the company to change the dismissing process for old PCs and make it more environmentally friendly. This campaign has been created only through the Web. We continue to invest in the old media, which, however, have changed their agenda. The impact of actions is often measured through the presence of a related news in the homepages of major newspapers online. A news in the following days is not very common because newspaper considers only recent events. Since mid-2000 in traditional media there has been an increase of news dealing with our campaigns, but the online echo is definitely stronger.

Changes in audience practices. *Legambiente*

“Another problem in using social networks is the belief, very common in Italy, that putting an “I like it” on Facebook may correspond to genuine participation. We have an example with our traditional ecological campaigns, which have seen an increase in participants (eg, Clean up the world) but if we had taken into account all the “I like it” on Facebook, the number should have been higher. The web is used to maintain a relationships with members through newsletters and email; it becomes fundamental in mobilization e promoting campaigns.

Greenpeace

“I do not know if activism has increased or narrowed in contemporary digital media environment, but we try to integrate the two media worlds, to make sure that classical model doesn’t get lost but instead continues to grow” said Mr. Pinchera.

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ACTIVATING THE AUDIENCE IN TIMES OF COMPASSION FATIGUE (interview essay)

In times of a growing occurrence of natural and technological disasters, civil society organizations in the field of relief help and fundraising are increasingly facing difficulties in activating and sensitizing the audience. According to the somewhat nebulous and still understudied notion of *compassion fatigue* (Moeller, 1999; Tester, 2001), an overexposure of audiences to (mediated images of) human suffering results in a ‘diminishing capacity to mobilize sentiments, sympathy and humanitarian forms of response’ (Cottle, 2009: 348). For CSOs, audience participation in the sense of donating or organizing fundraising events is however vital to support and finance their operational activities but it is also heavily depending on media exposure and coverage. Philippe Henon, press and communication manager of *UNICEF Belgium* as well as of the *Belgian Consortium for Relief Help*, reflects on the threats CSOs are currently confronted with in relation to audience activation and participation in the event of a disaster. This interview took place in 2009 and is part of a series of interviews with Belgian spokesmen of national and international CSOs that are working in the field of relief aid and development (see Joye, 2010).

The issue of compassion fatigue

Q: Scholars are often referring to the issue of compassion fatigue in the case of disaster reporting. When communicating on humanitarian crises, are you confronted

with such a lack of interest and compassion on behalf of the audience?

A: Throughout the years, people have certainly become more passive or numb to the repetitive shuffle of stereotypical images such as starving children that so often pop up during disaster reporting. Some crises are also difficult to 'sell' to the audience because they are invisible and slumbering underneath the surface or because they are related to civil war or domestic disturbances. The latter often tends people to shirk their responsibility. Having said that, I immediately need to qualify the current climate of negativity by pointing towards the amount of charity donations we receive. In my experience, people are still willing to give money and help the other in need. But we need to do more effort to get the audience's attention and raise compassion. It is difficult to foresee future developments and particularly the impact of the current financial and economic crisis, but we have some indications that people tend to react slower to our calls and that the average amount of money donated has slightly dropped.

Q: How are you then dealing with a potential threat of compassion fatigue?

A: In order to regain the audience's attention, you need to be creative and look for alternative ways to communicate your message, next to the traditional news media. At *UNICEF Belgium*, we are for instance working with ambassadors. These national celebrities are carefully selected and are asked to be the face of the organization or of a specific campaign. While we are seldom successful in raising the interest of the popular magazines and mainstream talk shows with our standard press releases

and conferences, the celebrity endorsed campaign is. This allows us to reach a much larger audience and it certainly pays off in terms of audience response. When an ambassador is interviewed in for instance a gossip magazine, we always notice a substantial increase in the number of visitors to our website. The downside of this, is the fact that you lose part of your message as you inevitably need to make concessions to the format and the objectives of these mainstream outlets. In general, the message needs to be simplified and less detailed. Another important issue is the tone of your message. To avoid compassion fatigue, you cannot just dwell on graphic images or negative stories alone. That would only result in audience reactions such as 'nothing can be done' or 'it is hopeless, why bother to help?'. In other words, it is very important to strike the right balance between the undeniable negative nature of a disaster event and a positive message in the sense that there is still hope or that people's contributions are genuinely making a difference, especially in the long run.

Audience participation and media exposure

Q: How important is media attention in attracting funding and audience interest?

A: Media exposure is vital to our fundraising and relief help campaigns. In order to get the message across to the public, we are basically depending on the media. There are a number of factors that determine the amount of media attention such as the proximity and the intensity of the emergency event. News media are generally not keen on covering permanent or slowly developing crises such as famine or drought.

This is again an example of a situation in which you need to look for alternative ways to communicate. As mentioned earlier, celebrities are an effective means to break into the news and attract large audiences. In the case of a relief aid campaign, it is critical for us to reach audience segments and contributors that are external to our traditional supporters. The popularity of our seven celebrity ambassadors has proven to be very helpful in getting the *UNICEF* story closer to the general public. As such, they can advance not only the public's interest, but also their generosity and solidarity. In general, media exposure is important in attracting public interest and donations but we can also rely on the support of our regular contributors.

Q: Next to press releases and the ambassadors, which other communication channels do you use to activate the audience?

A: In our contemporary society, it is important to take advantage of social media such as Facebook or YouTube to mobilize the audience and to generate traffic to our main website. We also make use of short commercials. Some years ago, we had a lot of success with a 'fish out of the water' clip¹ that depicted the popular cartoon figures of the Smurfs during a bomb attack on their village. It supported a campaign that focused on the impact of war on children. Our initial idea was to use real life footage from warzones, but that would have been too shocking and at the same time repetitive, hence potentially resulting in compassion fatigue and audience inactivity. So, we took that symbol of a happy-go-lucky and carefree childhood, the Smurfs, to make our point. Although it was initially targeted

to only Belgian audiences, the commercial was rapidly picked up by a journalist of *The Independent* and the campaign eventually attracted massive media attention from international media organizations, including *BBC* and *CNN*. In a sense, it was however confronting for us to realize that people were more touched and emotionally moved by fictitious cartoon characters than they are by real life images and people in need.

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¹ URL for the YouTube clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa8MjjMajEA&feature=related>

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Audience Interactivity and Participation

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Croatian civil society and media from the perspective of two civil society organizations (interview essay)

Contemporary media and civil society seem to be connected and mutually dependent, no matter how civil society is defined. Researchers and theorists have studied this relationship in a number of ways and found either positive or negative impact of media on civil society and civic participation. Media malaise theories suggest that media consumption, primarily television, leads to highly passivized and individualized society, which at the end results in decline of social capital (Putnam 2000, in Livingstone, Markham 2008), and therefore smaller potential for active engagement in public issues. However, regardless of the potential negative role media has in declining social capital, it is undisputable that civil society cannot spread significantly and perform without media. As Castells noted: „...if communication networks of any kind form the public sphere, then our society, the network society, organizes its public sphere, more than any other historical form of organization, on the basis of media communication networks“ (Castells 2008: 79). Mobilization theories and research that came out of this model show positive correlation between

media exposure and participation (Strmbek, Shehata 2009; Livingstone, Markham 2008).

Emergence of the new medium, internet, and its wide-spreading usage could also be seen in the light of these two opposing models. Internet provoked enthusiastic predictions that it would facilitate new forms of participation, especially in a form of Web 2.0. Internet offers interactive communication much harder to regulate and is seen as a medium with potential to produce a global public sphere (Castells 2008). It surpasses geographical obstacles and provides communication which hides actor's race/gender/social status. It enables users to easily create and publish content, not just consume it. Therefore, it is potentially a very democratic medium which could enable the formation of rational debate on public issues. However, inequality in access to this medium brings a sobering effect to these views. Individuals or groups on another side of digital divide lack resources to use this informational and democratic potential. Secondly, most internet users are from a younger population which shows lower interest in public issues. This brings us to the paradox of interactive audiences (Peruško 2008) - audiences that have greater competences to use interactive media show interest mostly in entertainment content, while the audiences that seek information on public issues lack the technical competence for this new medium. And lastly, internet is seen as a tool for businesses to expand its activities and offers new means of advertising. Audience participation may not have such a democratic form- it can also be commodified and disciplined in order to attract new and strengthen current consumers (Burwell 2010).

This essay aims to shed light on the role of media in civil society and civic participation with an emphasis on new media based on experiences and attitudes of members of civil society organizations (CSOs). For this purpose two interviews were

held in September 2011 with representatives of acknowledged CSOs in democratic/ human rights realm whose activities get good media attention¹. Eugen Jakovčić is a media campaign coordinator in Documenta² and Saša Šegrt is an executive director at Transparency International Croatia (TIH)³. The initial idea was to organize a focus group with five CSOs but this couldn't be managed in the time frame.

The interviews showed that both CSOs are very satisfied with their relationship with media and pay high attention to the way they communicate with media and the public. Communication with public is important to legitimize their role and activities and media is an important asset in their work because educating or sensitizing public is also a part of their mission. There are several ways in which they try to achieve greater media coverage of their activities. Press releases and conferences are standard ways in which they present their work and they both emphasize the importance of establishing firm contacts with journalists who are interested in the topics they deal with and who will be more inclined to write about their work. Documenta representative revealed interesting ways in which Documenta makes its communication more successful. They realize the importance of educating not only the

1 If CSO's public recognition is taken as one of the indicators of media coverage, results of a survey conducted by Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences could serve as a good reference (Franc, Kunac, Lalić, Šakić, Šalaj 2006). Although war veteran's CSOs are recognized the most (39,2%), human rights CSOs are also well recognized in public (15,1% of the respondents mentioned human rights CSOs). Survey was taken on national representative sample of 1008 adults in 2005.

2 Documenta is a centre for dealing with the past (war crimes and other war incidents between 1941-2000 in Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslavian states).

3 Transparency International Croatia is founded in 2000 as a locally established branch of Transparency International. TIH deals with governmental accountability and suppression of corruption.

public but journalists as well. To achieve this, they held various workshops for journalists on issues of civil society and on issues their CSO deals with. They also realize that the messages they publish ought to be understandable to the wider audience and in suitable form, so that media would be more ready to publish them- the press releases they produce are short, interesting and in accordance to current issues interesting to the public. Flexibility, fast reactions and recognizing the right moment to get media coverage is also seen as important part of successful communication. Perhaps this is a sign of improved communicative strategies in Croatian civil society. Studies of civil society and media in Croatia showed discontent with CSO's communication strategies both from the perspective of CSOs and the media (Popović 2008). Media representatives criticized the CSO's „heavy“ discourse not understood by the wider public. On the other hand, CSOs saw a problem in media's misunderstanding of the role of civil society and in a sensationalist bias. Journalist education and adapting messages for wider public might be a way to avoid these problems. This also indicates that social movements, institutionalized in civil society organizations, have professionalized their communication and developed public relations techniques in order to gain positive media coverage. CSOs have now adapted the techniques of communicating with public similar as those of political parties. They „have provided the ‘permanent secretariats’ of movements that are in charge of the organization of events and actions, and of media relations“ (Garcia-Blanco 2006: 98). This trend of focusing on media and campaigning has undoubtedly helped CSOs to establish a certain status in and legitimacy with public, but has also brought to question the independence of their activities (Garcia-Blanco 2006).

As for the new media, although both CSOs point out the importance and potential it has, it seems that they have not grasped all the possibilities

these media offer. They have websites and profiles on social networking sites, but they mainly see internet as an addition to traditional forms of communication. For instance, Documenta goes on the web only after releasing messages through traditional media. TIH uses social networking sites only as another space to publish content and a reminder for the public to visit their website for news. Documenta uses the internet much more actively and emphasizes the importance of new media in providing greater support for their initiatives, the potential it has in transgressing geographical boundaries⁴, and new forms of civic participation it provides (online petitions, Facebook groups). However, they don't see internet as an important place to foster discussion on certain issues. Some authors have noticed the trend in political campaign websites that moved from using websites as a digital version of the print material to taking greater advantage in interactivity the internet offers (Janack 2006). It seems that interviewed CSOs still haven't found the way to fully explore this medium's interactive potential.

TIH is slower in coping with new media and also has a more critical view on news portals. As Saša Šegrt says: „...it seems to me that news portals haven't used all the possibilities they could have used...copy/paste journalism is very present, in other words, some text appears somewhere, either in print or somewhere else, and the next day it appears on news portals and vice versa...it doesn't mean that news portals are faster...“. She also thinks that the advantage that news portals have on print media in the form of audience feedback is not so promising: „...comments mostly don't have any relation with the text itself and we can often see obvious examples of hate speech...“. This is also one more example which shows that the role given to internet in fostering rational debate might

4 Documenta cooperates with CSO's from other post-Yugoslavian countries in establishing factual truth on war incidents and war crimes from 1991.-2000.

be too optimistic in some cases. Anonymity hasn't got only a positive effect by hiding social, racial, gender or other differences and therefore reducing bias in communication, but can also serve as a shield and remove inhibitions which usually prevent actors from hate speech. Documenta representative has a different view and perceives portals as flexible, more open, plural, and less burdened with strict editorial policy. However, they both agree on the significance of civil society media⁵. Civil society media cooperate and closely follow activities of CSOs. The role of H-alter, online news portal is especially emphasized because, as Saša Šegrt, also one of the H-alter founders says: „H-alter tried from the beginning to break the barrier of „preaching to the choir“... to interest wider public...“. Civil society media are recognized by mainstream media as well, mostly by news portals that transfer their news and ensure wider coverage of civil society issues.

The interviews show that CSOs invest much effort into communication with media and the public, however, more emphasis could be given to interactive aspects of that communication. Interactive component of the internet could have a role in creating new networks and social capital and influence political and civic participation (Skoric, Ying 2009; Kee, Park, Valenzuela 2009). More importantly, enabling audiences to participate and give feedback reduces the control on messages and makes the communication more accountable (Janack 2006). As TIH representative said, internet should serve as a platform where government institutions could publish all important information and where rational debate on public issues could be initiated by all interested citizens. This would give everyone the chance to directly influence certain policies or agendas.

5 Documenta and Transparency International Croatia representatives mentioned H-alter (<http://www.h-alter.org>) and Cenzura plus (<http://www.cenzura.hr>) as the most important civil society media in Croatia

This should apply for CSOs: interactive, non-regulated communication with public would make them more accountable and perhaps bring back some of the independence lost in the process of professionalization.

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