

Digital mass culture vs. political culture in information society from the theory of culture

Summary

Despite its immense potential for humanity in terms of communications and almost infinite access to information and knowledge, the social reality of the 21st century reveals symptoms of a crisis. The world proves not to be as safe, predictable and based on rationality as it was believed to be for decades by the supporters of the concept of the information society. The development of the global computer network accompanied by the growing importance of digital mass culture does not guarantee stability and development of the information society. Unhindered information flow and unlimited communicational possibilities do not only foster the circulation of noble thinking and high values, but also significantly strengthen the darker side of human nature. Indisputably positive ideas and opinions can be found side by side with radical ideas which gain equal importance or sometimes even more significance and impact.

This book is devoted to the connections between the digital mass culture of the 21st century and the culture of the information society from the perspective of Jerzy Kmita's socio-regulatory theory of culture. This relationship is presented with reference to the sphere of culture which is highly important, as it determines the society's form and stability, i.e. social, political and legal awareness (identified here as political culture). This publication describes the social (primarily the cultural) reality of the 21st century and provides answers to questions on the nature of cultural transformations that can be observed, as well as on their social consequences. The key issue here concerns the structure and the workings of this complex mechanism of the mass culture impact on political culture. Utilising Kmita's approach serves as a heuristic solution which enables reality to be mapped and therefore to reveal the most important phenomena, processes and relations. The framework of the theoretical notions provided by the social-regulatory approach makes it possible to describe the cultural dimension of the information society, whose key stimulators are new technologies, digital mass culture and ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) logic. Political culture has been subject to the deterministic influence of mass culture with Information and Communication Technologies providing the main platform of this impact.

The assumptions made in this publication correspond to technological determinism and they identify the new technologies as being at the heart of processes that determine the nature of the contemporary world. This publication is intended to retain its critical approach and it attributes to market values the role of the ultimate factor determining the

activity of the powerful mass culture production sector. This way mass culture, due to the popularity of new technologies in almost all spheres of human activity, naturally becomes the key factor determining reality. In the sphere of information society's culture this leads to a particular kind of unification. This is to do with a particular way of thinking and perception of reality, communication and consumption behavioural patterns and ways of participation. All those become unified on a global level and are functional with regard to the ICT communication requirements and consumption demands of digital mass culture (the requirement of functionality is meant here with regard to the structural context).

How does digital mass culture and ICT logic contribute to the creation of a collective consciousness reality? Mass media (as a platform of mass culture and determined mainly by ICT these days) have become an extremely important institution, permanently present in the contemporary political process and having a profound influence on its form. ICT have an impact on politicising their users, allowing for a virtually unconstrained exchange of any kind of opinion. Nevertheless, the concept of citizens "enlightened by information" actively taking part in the political process, which was so characteristic for the initial visions of the information society, seems not to reflect the present reality. Information and Communication Technologies significantly foster the process of unifying political culture with mass culture. All the processes described here result in elevating the digital mass culture to the level of the dominating culture in the information society. The laws of logic so typical for digital mass culture, which have long been present in various other fields, are strengthened this way from a structural point of view.

This kind of domination, one of whose many effects is the growing importance of an engaged (spontaneous and magical) attitude of ICT users, can be seen as a threat to the political culture of the information society. One such consequence might be, for instance, the process of pop-culturalisation of various political phenomena, an example of which is the colourful phenomenon of celebritisation of politicians. Another consequence might also be the growing need in political culture for a utilitarian approach, reflected for example in the growing demand for simplification and universal acceleration (so that the action brings results in the shortest time possible). This tendency can be related both to contacts between an individual and administration and to the voter-politician relation. The improvement of public opinion polls, which tend to be more frequent and more reliable, can strengthen the eternal dependence of a politician on popularity indicators. This may push the politician even more towards programme-based, ideological and moral relativism, and elevate popularity to the status of the ultimate political priority, a goal in itself. This would mean minimum activity, planning and long-term initiatives, forsaking attempts to solve problematic issues, etc. Important changes can be expected in ideological issues, although this does not necessarily mean the end of ideology. The process of pop-culturalisation of political culture sheds new light on the widely discussed issue of propaganda and the persuasive message.

Translated by Rob Pagett