The Role of Media in Transforming Outlooks on Environmental Issues. A Comparative Study of Lithuania and Sweden

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crossref http://dx.doi.org/10.5755/j01.ss.73.3.789

Abstract

Environmental issues on media channels are current topics these days. The governmental policy as well as the media come together to influence how people perceive, interpret and act on environmental issues.

So far little has been researched on the subject of the environmental communication across the Baltic Sea. By comparative research on media coverage of environmental issues in Lithuania and Sweden, the paper aims at analyzing the role of media in facilitating learning in the society about environmental protection on the two different sides of the Baltic Sea. The research findings have revealed that in Sweden media coverage is rich with environmental content, thus the level of awareness in Sweden regarding the environmental issues is high and people are environmentally active. To compare, in Lithuania education of the society related to environmental issues is the main goal leading to the sustainable development and the rise of the environmental activism, which is currently comparatively low.

Keywords: modernization, postmodernization, media coverage, environmental issues, socio-cultural context, mass media.

Introduction

Media are used in the context of mass communication as the channel which fulfills the linear model of information’s transmission. It affects how people perceive and understand the world. The main idea of the media theory by McLuhan (2003) is the ‘medium is the message’. The quote implies that a medium affects the society in which it plays a role not only by the content delivered over the medium but by the characteristics of the medium itself. Schultz (2004, p. 87) claims that media provide a contact with a social reality and give people access to the events which they cannot experience. Media offer a public sphere for everyone where people can articulate their opinion and interests both at a distance and in the local community. Communication will succeed if the messages are encoded in a way suitable for human perception.

The increasing role of the media, according to Juraiitė (2008), in many cases tend functionally to replace political parties. Media can facilitate the public in learning about the world, debating their opinions, reaching informed and consolidated decisions on further actions.

Teun A. van Dijk in ‘Power and the News Media’ (1995) notes that in the study of mass communication, there has been a continuous debate about the more or less powerful effects of the media on the public. The literature on the influence or effects of the mass media is vast, but it is beyond the scope of the current study. On the other hand, comparative research related to the role of media in facilitating environmental learning in the Nordic and Baltic countries is still rare, as the socio-cultural context in Sweden and Lithuania is different and this makes the research relevant and up-to-date. Geographically, the two countries are not so much afar, but the outlook towards environmental issues and, consequently, the public behaviour is different. What are the reasons for that?

The aim of the study is to analyze the role of the media in developing the attitudes and constructing the behaviour related to the environmental activism in Lithuania and Sweden. The element of environmental education linked to environmental activism is crucial in this research.

As transformation of outlooks and behaviour is a complex issue, to answer the research questions, several research hypotheses have been raised. First, it is assumed that the Swedish public is oriented towards self-expression values towards the benefits achieved by the sustainable development and ecology, while the Lithuanian society is oriented towards survival-values concerned with the economic growth and mass consumption. Second, media play an important role in creating that context which in its turn provides the conditions for transformation and change.

The article consists of several parts. To understand the role of media in transforming the act of thinking and moving the society towards a new thinking pattern, the
following research pattern is used: first the context, namely, the short history of environmental cooperation around the Baltic Sea is introduced, then the theoretical overview of the value and belief systems in materialist and postmaterialist societies regarding the environmental issues is provided. Next, the construction of public opinion on environmental issues through Environmental Public Agencies as opposed to new media channels is discussed followed by the discussion of the role the different media channels play in forming the public opinion on environmental issues. The theoretical discussion is followed by the empirical part, the aim of which is to compare the scope and scale of environmental issues covered by the popular media portals, one from Lithuania the other from Sweden.

The empirical research is based on combining the qualitative and quantitative research methods: document analysis, content analysis and participant observation. Participant observation and document analysis was carried out by one of the authors while working in Stockholm at IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute during the period of two months in the fall of 2009. The content analysis has been used to research Delfi and Aftonbladet – the two similar in content and structure internet news portals which are among the most popular in Lithuania and Sweden. The data from the Swedish www.aftonbladet.se and the Lithuanian www.delfi.lt were collected during April 2010. All articles that deal with environmental issues have been considered. The following elements have been counted: a number of environmental stories; a number of environmental stories under specialized news sections; a number of pictures that illustrate the environmental stories; a number of online ads. Later the collected data have been systematically analyzed and discussed.

Gillespie and Toynbee (2006) point out that analyzing media texts helps to understand the power of texts: the way in which power relations are encoded in texts and how texts exert power over us and in society. Part of the power comes from the way in which media texts represent and construct knowledge, values and beliefs. This explains how and why texts function ideologically. In analyzing media texts patterns of changes and continuity in media systems of representation are explored.

**Introducing the context: environmental cooperation around the Baltic Sea**

Environmental cooperation around the Baltic Sea has got a long history. The Baltic Region undoubtedly consists of the states bordering the Baltic Sea. But historically, the notion of the Baltic Region has been changing. The low standard of environmental protection in the Soviet period created a demand for more action-oriented international commitments with the serious attempts made in 1988, mainly by Sweden and Denmark (Hjorth, 1996). The new atmosphere for cooperation was created with the new political situation in 1989. The Baltic Sea was no longer the border between the Soviet regime and the Free World.

Let us consider the development of environmental policy in Lithuanian, as one of the former Post-Soviet country in the context of the Baltic Sea Region. With the restoration of the Lithuanian statehood in 1990, the government set about the task of suspending the deterioration of the quality of the environment, of improving the interaction of human activities and nature of initiating a rapid transition to sustainable development (Kaminskaite and Liubiniene, 1996). At that time environmental protection was not a priority field. It suffered from the lack of environmental laws. But the foreign policy of independent Lithuania has been oriented towards international cooperation. The cooperation in the environmental protection issues manifested itself through joint projects. From the very foundation of the Environmental Protection Department of the Republic of Lithuania in 1990 it was understood that effective activities in environmental protection were not possible without the experience of developed countries. Thus Denmark, Finland and Sweden were among the first countries with which the international agreements were signed and projects initiated (Kaminskaite and Liubiniene, 1996). The studies of that time have already revealed the changing attitudes towards environmental protection. Still, even though the system of universal values is in the process of constant change, the attitudes of people could not have been changed overnight (for the more extended study see Liubiniene, 2003). According to the theory of Inglehart (1997), the changes in the economy act as stimulus of change of value system. The research of the period (Baltic Survey, Sodertorn Series No.2, 2001) has revealed that Lithuania, as well as Latvia and Estonia belonged to the group of countries where the system of social security was in the process of development. People needed to protect themselves against basic hardships (for more details of the Baltic Survey see: Liubiniene, 2004).

The other studies of the period have made an attempt to analyze how much importance the environmental issues have been getting in the mass media in Lithuania. The research ‘Construction of Public Opinion on Environmental Issues in the Media’ (provided by Juraite, 2002) attempted after more than a decade of political independence to analyse a relationship between relatively free mass media and people’s thinking and saying about the environment in the postcommunist society. Though the mass media played an important role in transforming environmental outlooks in the modern society, but the study indicated the lack of understandable and accurate environmental information. Local issues have been dominating over global in public and media environmental discourses. The quality of news, educational role of the mass media, environment as a priority, media power remained among the same arguable issues as 12 years ago.

Later on Balzekiene, Telesiene and Rinkевичius (2008) have made an analysis of public perceptions and mass media discourse of climate change in Lithuania in the research ‘Climate Change: Social Risk Perceptions and Mass Media Discourse Configurations in Lithuania’. The results indicated that the mass media have treated the topic of climate change as not particularly relevant to readers. In public discourse climate change had a very low status as compared with many other social, political and economic...
issues. In mass media climate change has been presented as a global, serious threat and important current event more to other countries than to Lithuania. Thus, the research has revealed that there was no difference if ten or two years have passed after the restoration of independence, as considerable scepticism and opposition continued to exist for the environmental activism from the mass media in Lithuania.

Value and belief systems in materialist and postmaterialist societies regarding the environmental issues

The current research is based on Ronald Inglehart’s (1971, 1990, 1997) theoretical framework of value change. Many authors (Dunlap and York, 2008, p. 531-532) emphasize that it is the theory of postmaterialist values developed by Ronald Inglehart that has been most widely used to account for the emergence of environmentalism, green political parties and Citizen concern for the environment. It is also noted that Inglehart’s theory of value change has provided important insights into the basic social changes over the past several decades, though it has become both widely endorsed and often criticized on various grounds. Studies that follow the basic principles of societal development as outlined by Inglehart, e.g. Dietz, Fitzgerald and Shwom (2005) suggest that environmentalism emerges when basic material needs are met and that individuals and societies that are postmaterialist in their values are more likely to exhibit pro-environmental behaviours. Inglehart’s work is focused on contrasting a set of values that are said to reflect a materialist orientation with those reflecting what he calls a postmaterialist view. Those who are living in nonindustrial or industrializing countries are more likely to have materialist values that prioritize economic and physical security, such as ‘fight rising prices’ and ‘strong defence forces’. Those in postindustrial nations are more likely to have postmaterial values that reflect and increasing emphasis on needs for belonging, esteem, and selfrealization. This is the reason why Lithuania and Sweden have been chosen for the comparative study – Lithuania as the materialist and Sweden as a postmaterialist society.

Values, which may act indirectly on the decisions about the environment through their influence on norms or beliefs, do not act alone and do not influence all decisions. The values-beliefs-norms (VBN) theory of environmental concern and behaviour emphasizes the indirect links between values and decisions about the environment. The theory suggests that values influence the worldview about the environment (general beliefs), which in turn influences the beliefs about the consequences of environmental change on things people value, which in turn influence the perceptions of the ability to reduce threats to things people value. This in turn influences the norms about taking action (Dietz, Fitzgerald and Shwom, 2005).

Inglehart (1995, p. 68) claims that countries with objective environmental problems strongly support environmental protection; however, within a given society those people with postmaterialist values are still much more likely to support environmental protection than are those with materialist values. Additionally, support for environmentalism tends to be influenced more by rising postmaterialist values than by rising pollution levels in these societies.

Inglehart and Welzel (2010) support the view that the postindustrial phase of modernization brings increasing emphasis on individual autonomy and self-expression values. Although economic development tends to bring predictable changes in people’s worldviews, a society’s religious and historic heritage leaves a lasting imprint. The core concept of modernization theory is that economic development produces systematic changes in society and politics. If so, one should find pervasive differences between the beliefs and values of people in low-income and high-income societies (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010).

Within the framework of these theories it is useful to discuss environmental activism as a value in Sweden. The first environmental protection agency was found in Sweden forty years ago and the parliament was the first, who initiated an environmental protection law. Since the 1970 environmental issues have been recognized as important political issues. During these years Sweden kept solving environmental problems with technological challenges, legislations and environmental movements. Currently, around 75 percent of public transport is running on renewable fuels or renewable energy. The majority of people are riding bicycles instead of cars. Also, employers promote the use of public transport by giving annual travel cards. Stockholm has prepared a plan how to win the city from automobiles and give it back to people and cyclists, for example, by developing more bicycle routes and underground. Stockholm lies on fourteen islands where people live so close to the ecosystem, where each element of the system plays a significant role. Therefore, it is no surprise that Stockholm has been elected as the green capital of Europe in 2010, where the engineering, architectural and infrastructural decisions are taken considering the human environment, sustainable living and development.

On the contrary, considerable scepticism and opposition exists for the environmental activism from the business and political leaders in Lithuania. Only the minority of Lithuanians has grasped the subject matter of environmental activism and sees nature as a value, something to be appreciated and protected. There are only few debates in the public sphere concerning the human activities as harming the nature, affecting the climate change and discussing the prevention actions that are needed to be implemented on a wide scale immediately. As Rinkevicius (2000) has pointed out in a case study of Lithuanian environmental policy, the legacy of Lithuanian’s five decades under the Soviet rule has made it doubtful whether (neo) Marxist ideology and hence its theoretical approach to environmentalism were in line with the social values, beliefs, and expectations prevailing among the members of the Lithuanian society in the period of transition.
The period of transition is over now. The rapid shift towards private ownership, market economy and parliamentary democracy has brought a lot of changes. But people have not developed an intellectual understanding of environmental activism yet. According to Lucas (2010), Lithuania relies too much on history, not enough on the present. Lucas observes that Lithuanian officials in the early 1990s tended to neglect the boring-but-important reforms of tax, public administration and property rights that their northern neighbours were pushing through. History should be the study of the human past and a way of providing outlook on the problems of the present, but not a dwelling in the memories of the past event.

Small businesses and people who rely on their vehicle for work didn’t prepare themselves for high world oil prices and taxes forced on the country by the EU. Lithuanians have to limit their everyday transportation by cars. People on fixed income or low pay are unable to cope with high fuel prices. They organize protests in petrol stations and request for lower prices. It is not the first time the public is dissatisfied with the price of the fuel. According to ‘Baltic Survey’ in 2010 there were 51.3 percent of Vilnius residents who went to work or university by car (far more than in other European cities), 36 percent went by public transport, 11.6 percent on foot and 0.8 percent by bicycle. Also, employers like to provide their employees fuel cards as employment benefit. Under the given circumstances it becomes hard to change the car for a bike. The mayor of Vilnius has promised to complete the development of bicycle routes and to update 76 kilometres of the old routes. He has promised that 2010 for cyclists will be a turning year: improved cycling network will be available for all citizens. But mayors change and their promises remain unfulfilled.

The role of Environmental Public Agencies (EPA) in construction of public opinion on environmental issues

The Swedish Environmental Public Agency (EPA) was established in 1967. Their strategy focuses on the quality and accessibility of data about environment. The agency sends out daily email newsletters, on the website people have a free access to the latest reports, press releases, news and picture archives which are always up to date. Information is related to various global issues from nature conservation and wildlife management to climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. The Swedish EPA has got a library. At the EPA library Swedes are given access to even more environmental information.

The Lithuanian EPA was established in 2003. The agency works on providing access to information regarding environmental situation in the country. However, only local issues are presented. The key information is provided on air pollution, water analysis, waste management, and chemical toxins. For example, the website contains very detailed information on air quality but the information may be too complicated for visitors to understand. The website is more of a source for environmental workers to find expert environmental information.

According to a report ‘The Swedish Forestry Model’ (Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry 2009, p. 2), the most popular Swedish outdoor activity is forest walking. According to Tourism report of Lithuania, (Statistics Lithuania, 2007) there have been 19.1 percent more countryside tourists in 2007 in Lithuania than in 2006. Countryside tourism in Lithuania can be compared to the Swedish tradition to spend their summer holiday at summer-houses in the countryside. People who can roam freely in the forest or spend days in a countryside generally acquire knowledge of, and affection for, wildlife and the natural environment, get familiar with the forestry practices. Personal experience helps to avoid a prior discrimination between humanity and nature. It is important to have a possibility to observe the surrounding environment and gain knowledge through interaction with it. When people have a close contact with the nature, then they are sure to take action to protect it and behave in an environmental friendly way.

Imperative knowledge concerns the question of experience and the world. Advantage of imperative knowledge is that it involves five human senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Virilio (1997) points out that as ‘citizens of the world’ and inhabitants of nature, we often forget that we also inhabit physical dimensions, the scale of space and length of time of the life-size.

Imperative knowledge can be also gained through more creative media such as exhibitions, experiments, alternative art or dynamic design. For example, there was a MANNA exhibition in Stockholm in 2009. The exhibition was about food, environment and people’s hidden dependence on nature. The exhibition was based on the latest environmental research and focused on ‘urban’ food, like hamburgers and sushi. The goal was to show the food production system and the global trade system that people are all a part of by using a visual and educational approach. The visitors were also guided back in the production chains in order to show how many hundreds of litres of water are needed to produce a single bottle of beer or a cup of coffee, etc. Among living plants, 3D-models and thought-provoking texts, visitors were able to see, smell and taste their way to new insights on the connections between food and the environment.

On the other side of the Baltic Sea, in Vilnius (the capital-city of Lithuania), there was another kind of an experiment called ‘Velocinema’ held in 2010. It was a cinema which was powered by human muscles. At the movie theatre there were 8 bicycles installed connected to the electrical generator, which was charging the car battery. From the battery the energy was conveyed to the power converter. This technology generated 220 volts to power up the movie project. At the theatre 8 persons were pedalling and generating electricity while the spectators had the possibility to watch the ‘ecological’ cinema. The goal of this experiment was to bring peoples’ attention to the problem of electricity use and the fact that we often ignore ways we can save energy instead of wasting it.

National agencies such as Swedish EPA and Lithuanian EPA play mediator roles in the decision making process. The main part of information which is coming
from the government may not be always available or is difficult to access, thus the agencies make it accessible and available. National agencies are important promoters of innovation. They are the ones who have to transmit a new approach to a society.

Environmental instruments differ from country to country. For example, the Swedish government promoted ‘environment-friendly’ cars during the program launched in 2007. The government granted 10,000 SEK to individuals, free parking or congestion charge exemption. As a result in 2008 Sweden managed to reduce total carbon dioxide emissions from road transport by 2 percent, partly thanks to measures that have encouraged wider use of biofuels and more fuel efficient motor vehicles. In 1991 Sweden enacted a carbon tax for use of oil, coal, natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, petrol. The carbon tax prompts to move from fossil fuels to biomass. Pollution was considered too expensive so there was a need to find energy efficient alternatives. According to ‘Swedish Environmental Objective’ (The Environmental Objective Council report, 2009, p. 4), Sweden has managed to cut its emissions of carbon dioxide by 24 percent since 1990, partly by switching from fossil to renewable fuels for heating. The Energy Agency has helped by providing the country’s local authorities with the know-how they need to promote greater sustainability, both in their own use of energy and through energy and climate advice to the many households that want to play their part. The goal for 2050 is that Sweden should have no net emissions of carbon dioxide at all.

The current Lithuanian regulatory environment system may be characterized as predominantly bureaucratic. Ecological practices in this country are ineffective. In 2009 a Member of Parliament Birute Vesaite proposed to install post-consumer PET packaging collectors in supermarkets. Obviously, she hoped that the law would stimulate the recycling business in the country. To make recycling more efficient and encourage people to take initiative, the above law would have been helpful. Other EU countries including Sweden have already adopted this regulation. People know that secondary raw materials are recyclable waste. It is easier, cheaper and less to pollution prone to produce new objects from recycled materials. But for any recycling program to succeed, consumers must become educated, motivated and promoted so that identification and collection of recycling becomes a routine activity.

In Lithuania people are accustomed to mass consumption and they want to buy more goods. Current condition of waste management in Lithuania is a critical environmental problem which calls for improvement. Storage of waste in landfills is the main way to get rid of one’s litter as the system of waste collection and recycling is ineffective. When victims of vertical stacking cannot cope with quantity of litter they have to try to switch to quality and rethink options. For example, in 2013 Lithuania will have the first waste-to-energy plant. It will use municipal and industrial waste and biomass as fuel.

Different media channels forming the public opinion on environmental issues

The most important channels for communication about environmental issues are mainstream and alternative media. By mainstream media, Cox (2006) means major television and cable news and entertainment programming, commercial film, large-circulation newspaper, magazines, advertising, and radio news and talk shows that carry news and information about environment. Alternative media are such as the Internet news services, Web TV, blogs, independent journalists, and environmental groups. Different organizations choose different mass media channels for communication. The majority of the organizations see alternative media as the most important channel.

In Sweden from the governmental agencies to social movement of activists, from the Swedish EPA to Greenpeace everyone is concerned with online activities. Greenpeace chooses a more lively and self-motivated technique of communication on the alternative media. The central channels for communication are social networks such as YouTube, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Alternative media are a space for information transfer, sharing the knowledge, and the support of each other’s ideas. Action taking is being made easier. According to Jamison (2001), Greenpeace was a pioneer in a kind of ‘high-tech environmentalism’, making use of computers and sophisticated communication techniques in order to raise awareness about a few highly charged topics: nuclear fallout, seal and whale hunting, and oil pollution. Moreover, the use of the alternative media channels allows producing glocal contexts. As Fornas et al. (2007) points out the increasing globalization has gradually extended the contexts of media use to virtually global audiences, giving rise to glocal contexts, where global, national and local levels merge.

Sweden is a network society where the main social structures and activities are based on online information. The distribution of online information covers processes of production, experience, power, and culture. Castells (2009) indicates that the processes of the social transformation summarized under the ideal type of network society go beyond the sphere of social and technical relationship of production: they deeply affect culture and power as well. Cultural expressions are abstracted from history and geography, and become predominantly mediated by electronic communication networks that interact with the audience and by the audience in a diversity of codes and values, ultimately subsumed in a digitized, audiovisual hypertext. The network society goes further than the information or knowledge society. 81 percent of the total population were the Internet users in Sweden according to the statistics in 2007. The average of TV viewing time per person in Sweden was 2 hours and 21 minutes according to the same statistics in 2007.

Meanwhile in Lithuania the mainstream media is the more popular communication channel than the alternative media. In 2007, the vast majority of the Lithuanian
population declared that they were watching TV (97.9 percent). The average time spent by a TV was 3 hours 22 minutes (Juraite, 2008, p. 125). According to the statistics, TV is really popular among the Lithuanians, but the problem is that the environmental activism is very low on TV. The environmental stories on the mainstream media in Lithuania face a tough competition for the time and financial resources. TV retains a high level of control over the presentation of their programmes. ‘Nature’s patrol’ is the only TV programme devoted to environmental problems on the national television which is a non-profit public broadcaster. The program is shown once a week which is not enough to cover all environmental issues. The Internet as an alternative media is currently being promoted by the government. Only 48,7 percent of the total population in Lithuania were the Internet users according to Information Technology in Households (Statistics Lithuania, 2007). Lots of projects are being launched e.g. ‘Libraries for Innovation’ aiming to achieve a considerably better use of information technologies among the Lithuanian population especially among the rural population and the social risk groups.

Environmental issues covered by the popular media: Delfi and Aftonbladet News as examples

The current study summarizes the results from the empirical content analysis focusing on the coverage of environmental stories in Delfi News and Aftonbladet followed by a more general discussion about the implication of the results in terms of the underlying cultural values and different ways of constructing public opinion on environmental issues.

Considering the point of environmental education through the media, it should be noted that Aftonbladet launched a large and sustained campaign under the banner of ‘Klimathotet’ in 2006. The slogan of the campaign was ‘climate threat - do something now’. The content of messages was focused on what might happen if the Earth’s temperature rose by 1-5 degrees. Aftonbladet’s reporters updated the site with articles, pictures and charts. According to the study ‘The media and climate change 2008’ (Swedish EPA, 2008, p. 2) conducted by PR agency Westander on behalf of the Swedish EPA, the feedback from the readers on ‘Klimathotet’ was enormous and Aftonbladet had collected 300.000 names of individuals who made a promise to do something to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions. The campaign was a great success. During these years all the major Swedish mass media including Aftonbladet put a great effort into their climate reporting, and their reporting was strengthened by the extensive international impact it has achieved. The word ‘klimathotet’ was included in a list of new words by the Swedish Language Council. As a result today the level of awareness of the society on the issue of climate change remains high and people are more prepared to take actions.

In 2010 an environmental new project ‘Darom 2010’ (‘Let’s do 2010’) was launched in Lithuania. The main idea of the project was to promote the environmental thinking, active citizenship, social participation, strengthening local communities and people’s perception of equality. People were invited to get together and clean up their surroundings such as parks, alleys, streets, backyards, etc. According to project leaders the project was largely successful because of its wide coverage on mainstream and alternative media in combination. Delfi was active in spreading the news about the Project and the Project itself was nominated as the best non-commercial organization on the Internet of the year.

The current survey was conducted during April 2010. It aimed at finding out the possible relationship between the media role and the environmental activism of the people. This was done comparing the numbers of articles that dealt with environmental issues, as well as the content of the topics covered during the period on both news portals. The following elements were counted: a number of environmental stories; a number of environmental stories under specialized news sections; a number of pictures that illustrate the environmental stories; a number of online ads related to environmental issues.

The study has revealed that the most discussed topics on Delfi dealt with renewable energy, Nordstream, Belarus Nuclear Power Station, solar, wind energy and biomass. The most important issue to Lithuania is that the new economic conception ensures energetic independence, and connects the Baltic region to Europe. Lithuania keeps requesting the EU funds for the post-closure maintenance of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant and for the construction of electricity connections with the Western Europe. Another popular topic is energy efficient household appliances and energy saving way of life. Delfi reports about environmental issues which are widely discussed in political or economical sectors and are close to the society because they have a direct impact.

The news topics on Aftonbladet are more diverse. For example, environmentally friendly cars with good fuel economy and lower CO₂ emission, energy efficient household appliances, new economically efficient light bulbs which may be harmful to health, Chinese oil tanker stuck in the coral reef, the tragedy of Aral Sea disappearance, etc. Aftonbladet reports global environmental issues which are discussed in a glocal context.

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>No. of environmental stories covered by Delfi and Aftonbladet during April 2010</th>
<th>No. of environmental stories under specialized news sections</th>
<th>No. of pictures that illustrate environmental stories</th>
<th>No. of online ads</th>
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<tr>
<td>Delfi</td>
<td>Aftonbladet</td>
<td>Delfi „Ekologija ir gamta“</td>
<td>Aftonbladet „Klimathotet“</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1</td>
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Regarding the numbers of environmental stories under specialized news sections ‘Ekologija ir gamta’ and ‘Klimathotet’, we see the huge difference in Delfi (90) and Aftonbladet (1). Education of the reader has already taken place in Sweden therefore the amount of messages under specialized news section is quite low. The content of messages has been changed from ‘educational explanation’ to ‘daily news’, because the readers are already aware of the importance of news related to the environment. The reporters are talking about environmental issues in other sections of the ‘general’ news.

Delfi’s news section ‘Ekologija ir gamta’ was launched at the end of 2008. The majority of stories are focused on local environmental issues. The messages which support the local environmental attitude are more suitable for the ‘know-nothing’ readers. The content of messages does not seem to worry the reader as it covers general topics rather than serious issues and facts. Delfi’s news section and an amount of stories can be a large, elaborately prepared information ‘banquet’ for many readers accompanied by entertainment. The majority of stories provide an optimistic outlook on environmental activism in Lithuania which may bring good results in terms of education of audiences on ‘green’ topics. To consider the Swedish example of Aftonbladet campaign ‘Klimathotet’ it might be supposed that the media is able to transform the outlooks and attitudes towards the environment.

Analysing the numbers of pictures that illustrate the environmental stories, we have observed that Delfi has a strategy to illustrate every story with an image. This explains such a big difference in the number of pictures – 107 in Delfi compared to 21 in Aftonbladet. The image is not necessarily taken from the scene of the event. Usually, illustrations are being bought from image agencies. But the event or object cannot be separated from the information. The images illustrate texts in order to render their meaning imaginable. But when fake images illustrate texts then texts lose their meaning and especially events or objects in the images. The objects are not equal to themselves anymore.

Regarding the numbers of online ads, it was observed that Aftonbladet was more active in advertising. There were 8 ads of environmental content observed during the period, compared to 3 in Delfi. The number of online ads with various eco-products indicates that consumers are willing to buy ecological and environmental-friendly products in Sweden. This might indicate that advertisers are willing to pay for environmental online ads on Aftonbladet because the audiences are interested in their eco-products. Additionally, companies are willing to present themselves as concerned for the environmental impact. Consumers are persuaded to think that there is a less harmful relationship between the product and the environment and that they are also supporting sustainable business.

**Discussion**

In the context of Inglehart’s theoretical assumptions regarding trends in societal development, we have been expecting differences to be found in regard to media coverage involving environmental issues on outwardly similar news portals. The unexpected finding was the content of articles. In Sweden the global environmental issues are given priority, whereas in Lithuania – local concern is the most important.

The editors as gatekeepers come to a decision whether given news will be distributed and judge the value of environmental stories. The editors shape how the media set the agenda, influencing the public and policy makers to pay attention to what they feel are important issues of the day and have emotional impact, though not generally dictating how the public or policy makers are supposed to think about the issues. As it was observed, non-environmental stories dominate the front page of a tabloid rather than environmental stories in most cases in Lithuania.

A vast number of pictures illustrating the news may serve as a proof that the current Lithuanian culture is characterized by extreme visualization. It supports Donskis’ (1996) ideas that the image replaces the printed word and sound, or at least tries to coexist with them. Images occupy more and more content of the medium. The fragmentation of reality is evident when separate parts come to life and begin to operate without a whole. The culture loses any integrative style. Therefore, the text is deformed from a long explanation of the information to a targeted short message. The Lithuanian society is affected by the ‘visual’ media. Visual culture also means that the number of online picturesque ads should be great. But here again the difference comes as to the content of these ads.

As scholars argue, ads never intend solely to sell a product, but to sell you a meaning associated with it (Corbett, 2006, p. 175). According to ‘The general public and climate change 2008’ report (Swedish EPA, 2008, p. 26) 68 percent of people in Sweden respond that they often (24 percent) or sometimes (44 percent) make the actual choice to opt for a product or service they believe to have less negative impact on climate. 23 percent respond that they rarely do so and only 7 percent respond that they never do so. The content of online ads is related to news. Cars, bicycles, real estate, housing appliances, WWF organization in wildlife conservation - are the main eco-products or services promoted. The meanings and power relations are seen by the synchronization between stories, online ads and cultural contexts. This is in line with Baudrillard’s (1995) idea who says that today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising.

On the contrary a low number of online ads with eco-products indicate that consumers in Lithuania are not very conscious about the sustainable consumerism. The content of online ads was not related to news. Online ads of ecological cosmetics and social project ‘Darom 2010’ were the only ‘green’ ads promoted on Delfi. The main reasons
which prevent the majority of people from living in an environment-aware way are: (1) environmentally friendly alternatives are often more expensive; (2) there are few eco-products alternatives to choose from; (3) people lack information on how to choose eco-products.

In addition, it should be mentioned that the situation is changing very rapidly. During the research period many issues have already changed and thus some updates regarding the current situation should be added. Moreover, the facts illustrate that the media do play a significant role in transforming the outlooks towards the environmental activism in Lithuania. Currently the amount of specialized information portals about environmental issues in Lithuania has rapidly increased. The specialised news section ‘Ekologija ir gamta’ in Delfi has developed into the independent project funded by the European Union ‘Grynas.lt’. It deals with the problems of environment, its preservation, responsible consumption and sustainable living. It seeks to increase public awareness, educate and encourage environmental activism. Starting from the end of 2010, the qualified editors and journalists have been working together with nature scientists and urban theorists on this project. The readers have become more educated and sophisticated, thus they are able to understand more complex and diversified environmental issues. As a result articles introduce more global environmental issues than before.

Conclusions

Educating the society about environmental issues is vital if one seeks to preserve the environment and seeks for sustainable development. Quality of life and a high level of environmental activism depend on value and belief systems of the society, which fosters the transition towards the quality of life.

Free and open access to information and the data might lead to the better knowledge and understanding of environmental issues. The media inform and educate the audience about a huge variety of environmental instruments which are used by the governments to implement their policies towards environmental protection.

The empirical research has provided a proof that the media coverage of the environmental issues resonates with the existing economic and socio-cultural context and may account for the differences found. Thus Sweden may be considered as an example of the network society where the main social structures and activities are based on online information. Swedish media are able to code the message in a glocal context. Due to the strong influence and the power of the media in Sweden today the level of awareness in the society regarding the environmental issues is supposedly to be high and people demonstrate environmental activism.

The Lithuanian society could be described as the Educating society. Traditional media remains predominate, though the alternative media rapidly gains popularity especially among the younger generation. In order to reach the public and educate the society all media channels should be involved. In Lithuania the majority of environmental issues are still focused on the local level. The messages which support the local environmental attitudes are targeting to educate the readers. Environmental activism is still low if compared to the Nordic countries.

References

Tai, kaip visuomenė supranta ir vertina aplinką, iš dalies lemia media. 

Santrauka

Medijų vaidmuo formuojant visuomenės požiūrį į aplinkosaugą. 


daug dėmesio skiriam aplinkosaugai, o Lietuvoje šią temą žiniasklaida pradėjo analizuoti neseniai. 

Šio straipsnio tyrimo objektas yra naujųjų portalų turinys ir jų poveikis visuomenėi skirtuose socialiniuose kontaktuose. 

Teorinėje straipsnio dalyje teorija analizuojama gilintis į keliais klausimų kategorijas: 

1. Tai suprasti ir ją vertinti. 

2. Aplinkosaugos problemų tyrimo kontekste, Lietuva lyginant su Švedija; analizuojamos modernistinės ir postmodernistinės visuomenės vertės ir požiūrių sistemos; aptaria socialinių institucijų ir organizacijų veikla formuojant vieną nuomone aplinkosaugos klausimais; įvertinamas socialinių medijų poveikis ir aptariami viešosios informacijos komunikacijos kanalai. 

Keliama hipotezė, kad Švedijos visuomenė yra orientuota į savirūsios vertės, susijusias su visuotinės gerovės vertės, tvarką ir ekologiška gyvensena, tuo tarpu Lietuvos visuomenė yra orientuota į išlikimo vertės, sieną su ekonomine plėtra ir mažinimu vartojimu. 

Empirinėje straipsnio dalyje analizuojami aplinkosauginių straipsnių internetiniuose naujųjų portaluose „Delfli“ ir „Afotnbladet“ skirtumai. 


Taikant turinio analizės metodą, įvertinė šie pranešimų aplinkosaugos tema elementai: straipsnių apie aplinkos apsaugą skaičius, pranešimų pateikimo laikų, naujųjų medijų informacijos įvertinimas.
kontekste, ir jie neapsiribojा tik nacionalinёmis aplinkosaugos problemomis.


Atliktas tyrimas patvirtino hipotezę, kad Švedijos visuomenё yra orientuota į saviraiškos vertės, sietinas su visuomenёs problemomis, o Lietuvos visuomenё orientuota į išlikimo vertės, sietinas su ekonomine plėtra ir masiniu vartojimu. Todёl galime daryti iёvadą, kad švediškoje tinklaveikos visuomenё aplinkosauginё savivoka yra gili ir dёl jёvaiёs medijų skleidzёs informacijos gausos žmonёs ne tik suvokia aplinkosaugos svarbё, bet ir aktyviai dalyvauja, savo veiksmis tausodami gamtё. O lietuviškoje informacinёje visuomenёje šiuo metu vyksta daug diskusijų aktualioms aplinkosaugos temoms, bet vyrauja vietiniо pobudю problematika. Populiariausias informacijos kanalas išlieka televizija, nors internetinё priezia iёranka vis platesnis visuomenёs skirtingai. Skleidzёs informacijos aplinkosauginё tema – lavinti visuomenё, formuoti jos nuostatёs aplinkosaugos klausimais ir skatinti veikti, patiens aktyviai dalyvauti kuriant tvarё visuomenё.

Raktiniai žodiniai: modernizacija, postmodernizacija, įvykių nušvietimas žiniasklaidoje, aplinkosaugos klausimai, sociokultūrinёs kontekstёs, masiniёs medijёs.

First received: August, 2011
Accepted for publication: September, 2011