

# Reframing Nationality through Local and Regional Social Practices – Europe Direct Bacău Relay

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**Abstract.** Paraphrasing the famous European syntagm “unity in diversity”, we will introduce another syntagm, namely “nationality in diversity”, thus laying an emphasis on the strategies (social practices) adopted by each of the thirty one Europe Direct relays in Romania in order to achieve their goals. Having as theoretical background the four semiotic systems (represented participants, interactive participants, composition, modality) of social semiotics (van Leeuwen, Kress, 2001, 2005), we will interpret the 2009 campaign promoted by Europe Direct Bacău as an alternative interweaving of cognitive, affective and behavioural effects.

**Keywords:** Europe Direct Relay Bacău, (European, national and/ or local) identity, framing theory, social semiotics.

*“Europe’s culture is a reversible fabric, one side variegated, the other, a single colour, rich and deep” (Alberto Moravia<sup>1</sup>)*

The Europe Direct Networking might have the same binary representation of a reversible fabric because beyond the multicoloured quantity of information and advice about the European Union’s policies awaiting to be disseminated, there will always lie the intention of changing the citizens’ attitudes and behaviours towards European issues. We consider that all five hundred and thirteen Europe Direct relays (running in Europe in 2009) imply both communication and representation (Kress, 2005), two important layers in social semiotics and which draw on a multiplicity of semiotic modes.

## 1. Reshaping the European concept “unity in diversity”

The concept “unity in diversity” – a syntagm promoted within and by a united Europe – is meant as a reestablishing and reconsideration of the Europeans’ diversity without hindering the identity patterns and yet without underlining the differences. This process of a possible destruction might have as outcome the expression of intolerance, violence or resistance by those who pretend to be the cultural hegemonic power.

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<sup>1</sup> Alberto Moravia (1907-1990) is one of the leading Italian novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main themes of his novels are social alienation and existentialism.

From the very beginning, we should go beyond the two words that mould the present European discourse, namely “unity” does not lead towards uniformity, and “diversity” does not imply segmentation, but, on the contrary, the more diverse the human ecosystem<sup>2</sup> is, the more fertilizing the dialogue between the European citizens turns out to be.

A diachronic perspective on the concept “unity in diversity” is not a finding of the today’s Europe. Its roots are to be found within the organic perspective on universe, belonging to the Greek and Roman civilizations, to the Medieval culture, to the Renaissance, to Romanticism, thus, to a whole history of culture which places understanding of the human being within the context of its existence. The 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, through their technological and scientific growth, prove that an integrating approach is the solution to the maintaining of “the health” of each field of activity, as a part of the whole which moulds knowledge. This plea for the adding of the suffix “bio-” to all disciplines (politics, economics, culture etc.) renders the fact that Europe’s healthy state is provided by the healthy progress of each of its nations and communities. Actually, this coincides with the definition offered by Antonio Negri (2008, p. 30) to biopolitics which, through life, is “the power governing not only individuals, but also humanity constituted of populations”.

It is obvious that the paradigms beyond this concept – equilibrium, harmony, tolerance – sustain the idea and the state of interrelation, but the concept itself is the attribute of a human community within a solid ecosystem. Whereas “unity in diversity” has as its referent the interrelations in nature, nowadays the European discourse highlights the significances through a bringing to surface of the cultural values of each community as distinctive identity markers.

If we take into account the social, political and cultural context of globalization with its dissolution of borders, its exhaustion of international law and its need to dominate a *beyond* (Negri, 2008, p. 57), “unity in diversity” should not be interpreted as a hegemonic model, but rather as a state of “co-working” in order to mould a healthy European body. The input of this process of cooperation implies a change in mentality which should rely on destroying the handicap of the margin, of the differences between the East and the West. But this destruction does not involve oblivion, but rather taking into account the voice of the minority as well. This principle of “the European project”, which Leonard Orban, paraphrasing Alberto Moravia, labels as “a reversible fabric”, on his speech on October, 3, 2007, is a means of shaping “nationality in diversity”<sup>3</sup>, a syntagm which should dominate a new European identity.

We consider that “nationality in diversity” does not promote the power of the One, but the power of the multitude, as a core element of the new grammar of politics in postmodernity (Negri, 2008).

### ***1.1. Europe Direct Rrelay – an embodiment of “nationality in diversity”***

This project of a network of European relays, meant to establish a direct dialogue between the European Parliament, its commissions and voices spread within a diverse geographical space, builds up a discourse of alterity which promotes metamorphosis, the changing from one state into another. Actually it is an instance of a twofold becoming: at the intra- and inter- European level. The

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<sup>2</sup> The human “unity in diversity” has its analogy in natures, in the ecosystem which allows the living together of species. The more diverse this ecosystem is, the more powerful and durable its survival is, as the outcome of the species’ diversity. The interrelation that this system establishes in the depth of its existence brings to surface the richness of variations through diversity. If within the European space, diversity is encouraged, then it is this very act of its promotion, of the metaphorical finding of the creative saps which assures a healthy survival. (see Doina Cmeciu (2008). Unitate în diversitate. *Ateneu*, nr. 6 (466), p.2.)

<sup>3</sup> In the *global village* we have been living in, multiculturalism and multilingualism become important traits of the individual’s existence within the borders of a country. The interrelation at the cultural, political, and social levels raises the problem of position and of the Romanian-European citizen’s role within the world’s diversity, on the one hand, and of his/her desire of highlighting the identity of national values within a space which imposes a complex relational network, on the other hand. Within this web, the identity form presented in terms of alterity (Romanian – Romanian-European) has as its reference another mentality. It is not a mere opposition or a feeling of belonging to a rich community (the possessor of power) or to a poor community lacking power, but rather it is a process of belonging, of changing from a state of development to another, through the conscious assuming of a new responsibility.

individuals' mobility, through its economic and cultural motivations, is linked to the need of shaping new codes. This implies both the analysis of differences and the desire of acquiring, of establishing new communication bridges in order to create a real dialogue.

*Nationality* lies within each of the 27 community spaces which intend to make themselves listened to, looked at and acknowledged for their identity values. The objective of all the Europe Direct relays in Romania is to reshape a responsible, active Romanian-European citizen who might turn out as a model within this new reality of mobility and flexibility of labour. Beyond this common objective, the differences between us (the ED Relays) in terms of strategies and tactics are meant as a positive construction promoting vigour and strength within this network which keeps on going due to all the productions of subjectivities (Negri, 2008, p. 37).

## **2. Europe Direct Bacău relay – communication and representation**

We have mentioned that we are the dwellers of an ever-changing and ever-renewed social reality. It is obvious that every activity that we perform is based on the way we use the “resources” (van Leeuwen, 2005: xi), bearing in mind a twofold purpose:

- on the one hand, to produce communicative artefacts and events. The very mission of ED networking, to distribute information and to provide counselling for European policies, should not be interpreted as an elementary communication model which implies a transfer of information under the form of a message from the source (EU) to the transmitter (ED relays) through a channel towards some receivers (European citizens)

- on the other hand, to interpret the artefacts and events. This is a form of semiotic production in the context of some specific social situations and practices. It is clear that the understanding of ED relays' mission implies an understanding of the twofold nature of semiotics (Eco, 1979), as a theory of codes and as a theory of sign production. As we have mentioned above, communication is a surface layer of ED relays, the underlying intention being that of going beyond a mere handing in of informative materials. The purpose of the campaigns could be metaphorically represented as a flow from raising the awareness about European issues towards a change of the Romanians' mentality of outsiders of Europe and through their active involvement in different events towards a (re)storing of their attitudes and behaviours, in other words, towards a reconsideration of their identity.

The theoretical background is that of social semiotics (van Leeuwen, Kress, 2001, 2005) with its four semiotic systems: represented participants, interactive participants, composition, (multi)modality.

### **2.1. ED Bacău relay – participants**

In order to understand the diversity of participants that take part in the ED Bacău Relay, we should make a distinction between representation and interaction. The former concept involves both the desired and the perceived image, whereas the latter implies the relations created between the internal and the external publics (Seitel, 1992, p. 12). Promoted by James E. Grunig (*apud* Coman, 2007, p. 23), the situational theory in public relations has the aim of pinpointing the publics of an organization according to the situational context and of finding the most efficient communication means with the respective publics.

The main participants whose image is represented bear a twofold nature:

- all-issue public (Grunig, et alli 1992, p. 139): the University of Bacău (the hosting structure) which is the internal, active and responsible public;

- single-issue public: the Town Hall of Bacău, the County Council of Bacău, the Town Hall of Slănic-Moldova, the *Repere* Association for European Integration). All these four participants are partners of ED Bacău Relay, thus an internal and active public, but they are not in charge of all the events.

Even if the idea of organizing the ED Bacău Relay is around a hosting structure, this management of participants does not imply the dominance of verticalization through its hierarchical signification. The network created within the spirit of ED Bacău relay is one of cooperation, of developing an expression of the common.

Within this representation of joint agreement, there should be focused the idea of interaction with the external publics. There could be pinpointed four types of interactive participants who qualify as single-issue, (inter)national, supportive publics:

- students, pupils, young people from Bacău. They might become a primary public through their volunteer actions.
- teachers, professors from the urban and rural regions, the public administration, the NGO public and private managers. They take part in the workshops, festivals, summer-schools or conferences organized by the ED Bacău Relay.
- Eurodesk network, the Information Bureau of the European Parliament, European Information Multiplies for Rural Regions, the Center for Consultancy European Cultural Programs, the National Agency of the Roma, Department of Ethnic Relations (the Government of Romania, Europa InterCluster – the European Agency for Cluster Cooperation. They provide informative materials on European issues.
- the Europe Direct relays from Lecce (Italy), Bialystok (Poland), Zielona Gora (Poland), Edinburgh (U.K) and Dobrich (Bulgaria). They represent the international link between local values and values belonging to “the another”.

This diversity of publics for the ED Bacău Relay proves the importance of multitude as a production of singularities. Each type of the above-mentioned participants comes with its own cognitive frame on European issues: educational, social, economic, cultural or international perspective.

## **2.2. ED Bacău relay – composition**

In sociosemiotics, composition focuses on the display of two types of relations (rejection and attraction) and of two basic information structures (centered and polarised). We will adapt this semiotic concept to the strategies developed by ED Bacău Relay which should act as attraction vectors for all the publics involved or for potential publics.

There has not yet been drawn a unique definition of the concept “strategy” since it has a multidimensional and situational character. Mintzberg (*apud* Moss, 2004) makes a plea for an alternative definition formed of five P’s: *plan*, *pattern*, *ploy*, *position* and *perspective*. Focused on a certain action, a strategy can turn into a manoeuvre which might reject a competitor. As a pattern, a strategy involves, besides planning, the shaping of a behaviour. As position, the strategy is a mediating force between the organization and the environment. This brief outline of the concept of strategy proves that the organization (ED Bacău Relay) should act as a center around which all types of apparent polarized strategies should spin.

We will mention at least three such strategies which constitute the backbone of the ED Bacău Relay composition:

- activities of disseminating the information. The front-office desk has as its main aim the informing of the external and internal participants.
- social events. The caravans, the festivals, the celebrating of some European days constitute some events which might act as centripetal vectors.
- scientific events. Conferences, workshops, summer schools and student groups are the events whose main participants are the ones coming from the academic life.

### 2.3. *ED Bacău relay – (multi)modality of local and regional social practices*

The strategies turn into reality through tactics which we will link to production processes. Paul du Gay (2006, p. 7) considers that production processes become cultural phenomena because they turn into a complex of signifying social practices which will shape certain ways of cognition and behaviour in an organizational context. We should be aware of the fact that each production is based on a hierarchy of effects. In the case of ED Bacău Relay, the model applied involves a flow from cognitive effects through affective ones in order to reach some behavioural effects. The raising of awareness about the importance of the local dimension within the national and European context is achieved through the putting into practice of the social practices promoted by Europe Direct Bacău Relay. We will provide a twofold analysis to these local social practices: on the one hand, a number of events and of the media, on the other hand, an analysis of the names of these events.

Multimodality has the advantage of de-centering a particular element that provides meaning. It aims exactly at this “blurring of boundaries among different semiotic dimensions of representation” (Iedema, 2003, p. 33). ED Bacău Relay accomplishes through its diverse events (caravan, summer schools, festivals, conferences and celebrating days) to provide several ways of “packaging” the European information according to the target-publics. There have been taken into account the academic, the economic and the social layers, all of them being “wrapped up” into the cultural layer which, after all, is the reversible fabric, that Alberto Moravia talked about.

These events should be sent into the social world through media. Within the frame of the European flexibility of persons, media contents, technologies, or of ideologies, the replacing of Marshal McLuhan’s famous syntagm “The Medium is the Message” seems appropriate. In the book *In the Shadow of the Silent Majority*, Jean Baudrillard (2007, p. 64) introduces the syntagm “Mass(age) is the message”. The consequences of the mass and the media being one single process imply the shaping of “a cultural market of information” (Baudrillard, 2007, p. 117) which can be achieved not only through language, but also through “a massage” of the senses. In the case of the 2009 information campaign promoted by ED Bacău Relay, the traditional means of information (newsletter, publications, promotional materials) combined with modern technologies (CD-s, DVD-s or web page) offer a centering on the visual and the hearing senses. Whereas the former media appeals to the internal and more conservative public, the latter has a greater impact on the younger generation who prefers a virtual means of communication.

The uniformity of one side of the fabric (the source-concept of culture) through one single colour, rich and deep should always rely on the variegated side which renders the concept “nationality in diversity”. In the case of ED Bacău Relay, this multitude is achieved through the titles assigned to the different events:

- the celebrating days: Water Day, Global Health Day, Earth Day, Europe’s Day;
- the summerschool: The Growth of Competitiveness within the European Space through Clusters;
- festivals: Be creative! Be EuropActive!; European Identity through traditions, The European citizen and (bio)diversity;
- workshops: Innovation in social tourism and its role in Europe, Active European citizenship and the Lisbon monitoring platform; Social inclusion – a common commitment in the European space; the European day of languages; Local public administrations in the European space.

We will analyse these titles through the framing theory (Hallahan, 1999). Considered “a critical activity to the construction of social reality” (Hallahan, 1999), framing plays an important role because it makes some elements more salient than others through a process of defining the problem, of diagnosing the causes, of making moral judgments and of suggesting remedies (Entman, 1993 *apud* Hallahan, 1999). This is actually the purpose of the summer school and of the workshops which frame present themes, such as competitiveness, social tourism, active European citizenship and social inclusion. The debates will be structured on a binary opposition between pros and cons of these social issues. Beyond some mere topics on a paper these issues come of a sign of acceptance that some

problems, such as destructive competition, high-class tourism, passive citizenship or social rejection, should be acknowledged and solved. It is exactly the issue of accepting the *another*, of not labelling yourself as the One, and after all, of accepting the multitude. We consider that this reframing of the situations of all social classes should start with the reevaluating of oneself. ED Bacău Relay accomplished this on twofold layers:

- on an intrapersonal layer: “Be creative!”, “Be EuropActive!”. At a pragmatic level, these two titles have an urgent behavioral effect through the imperative mood which assigns a deontic modality of authority and responsibility (Palmer, 1990, p. 16).

- on a glolocal layer: “Water Day”; “Global Health Day”; “Earth Day”; “Europe’s Day”. The celebration of these particular days implies a return to nature and, actually, of reconsidering Claude Levi-Strauss’s relation between nature and culture (1975), not as a dichotomy, but rather as a relation of inclusion. In a global society governed by biopolitics the production of culture cannot flourish without a solid preservation of natural resources and bodily energy.

### 3. Conclusions

The aim of our paper was to introduce a new syntagm, namely “nationality in diversity”, within the European cultural framework. The European Direct Networking, through its relays, seems to sustain the necessity of emphasizing the idea of the multitude. Within this context of rejecting “the One”, we analysed the campaign promoted by Europe Direct Bacău Relay in 2009. Our approach took into account some semiotic systems:

- Participants which we dealt with from a situational perspective on publics. The core of this relay is the University of Bacău, which should be perceived as the internal, active and responsible public.

- Composition implies the combination of strategies in order to reach all categories of publics. The ED Bacău Relay will use activities of disseminating the information, social events and scientific events.

- (Multi)modality deals with different tactics used in order to go beyond a mere activity of informing. Taking part into the celebrating days, the summerschool, the festivals and the workshops is a first step towards a surpassing of awareness raising and towards a flow into a changing process of attitudes and behaviours

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