

## Internet and Interculturality

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Sociology of knowledge is suited to enrich the debate on integration and modern forms of interculturality. Also it seems reasonable to me to deal with this question not only by looking at public discourses. It is much more important to take into consideration the concrete interaction at the workplace, in housing areas, in organizations and institutions and to analyze these. As a third point I believe that the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, which is interested in everyday practices of actors on site, does not exclude but adds to the perspective of a structural theory. Additionally it seems reasonable to distinguish between integration in everyday life and symbolic integration, which is offered by religion, politics and also the mass media. And of course I understand the social construction of reality as a „struggle in which some interpretations of reality will prevail over others“(Soeffner/Zifonum 2005: 3).

More precisely: the culture of a society and the entire knowledge of a society connected with it are always just the preliminary result of the permanent struggles about the 'real' interpretation of reality, which take place at every social place of society. This societal knowledge is elaborated in cooperation with others as well as against them. The old and the young, the women and the men, the artists and the scientists, the established and the outsiders, the believers and the no believers, the traditionalists and the modernists, they are all actors within the struggle about the 'right' interpretation of what we understand - due to our own biographical situation in the world – as 'the nature', as 'the society', as 'ourselves' and as 'the others'. And of course it is always the locals and the strangers who take part in these struggles.

„Strangers' are according to this understanding all those who do not originally come from 'here', but who come to either stay for a short time (like travellers or tourists), or for a longer period of time (for studies or with a time restricted working contract) or even to stay forever (due to political emigration or work migration). According to this understanding also those who have left us for a shorter or longer period of time to live out of our ken, our horizon to study or to work there, and who then have returned to tell us about this world or merely to say that there are worlds outside our world, they do belong to the group of 'strangers'. Those home comers bring the strange with them, not only because they have it in them but also because they tell about it and behave in a strange way: they eat differently, do things in different ways and regard other things as real.

All of these strangers due to their behaviour and due to their interaction with us have changed our knowledge about the world and our self-conception. These interpretations of the world changed by strangers are now our own ones but they contain parts of the strange within them - either implicitly by boundary work or by explicitly complementing the own. Thus the social reality of a specific culture permanently receives impulses not only from within but always and necessarily also from outside by strangers of all kinds. But the ways of contact to strangers and its amount have changed quantitatively as well as qualitatively.

Culture is not and never has been a system based on specific, consistent and systematically ordered axioms/sentences. Talking about a culture as an entity is an

idealization poorly supported by data, a fiction by scientists, which facilitates work, but which obscures – if not turns invisible - the growing diversification of culture

The much-described process of globalization and the compulsion to contact (Soeffner) as a consequence thereof accelerates the process of diversification and interference of the cultural. A thousand new flowers have grown – as Mao Tse Tung would have said. And these new cultural blossoms are not the result of a bilateral, but of a multilateral negotiation about societal knowledge.

Actors involved in this process of negotiation do not only fall back upon old and new media but also use these strategically on behalf of their purposes. The classical mass media, like radio, newspapers and television still serve as media of integration offering symbols and symbolic order. Because of the worldwide opening of the television market these mass media do not only offer *one* order solely. They present more and more symbols and symbolic orders of every kind und every scope as an offer to the households and allow us to stroll along and eventually take it.

The hybrid medium internet plays a special role in negotiating societal knowledge in a further globalizing world for around the last two decades. The internet is the result as well as the (co-) creator and accelerator of globalization. On the one hand it shows characteristics of a mass medium and is being used as such by some people. On the other hand the internet shows all of its advantages only if we regard it as a medium of communication allowing single actors to push cross-border information and other actors to pull information of all kinds according to their own preference and choice.

The actors using internet hail from the whole world and it is not always identifiable which culture, which nation or which gender they belong to. They appear as ‘thick’ or often also as ‘thin’ identities in the net. The issues they communicate might come from themselves or from others. Especially in hypertexts own ideas and someone else’s are compiled and passed on and often it is not possible to distinguish the own and the foreign knowledge.

The internet and also the culture created by its use therefore are neither homogeneous, nor integrated, nor do they form a whole. In contrary: internet culture is heterogeneous, not integrated and diversified. For this reason internet is possibly useful for transportation of symbolic orders but never adequate for carrying these through. Something special about culture in the internet is its independence of a territory or a state. This has been stressed by Andreas Hepp several times.

Internet culture is translocal and the internet as its medium, including all of its formats and all of its chances for communication, is possibly the medium most independent from a territory. Although it needs a place it is not dependent on a state or a nation but it demonstrates a high degree of ‘geographic scattering’ (Strauss 1994: 194).

It helps creating new forms of translocal core worlds and thus again and again contributes to the disintegration of existing cultures. It can further be used by different groups to maintain and cultivate cultural communities even across thousands of miles. Japanese groups in Germany by various and speedy internet connections to their home country are able not only to cement their own community in Germany but also to keep and to continue with their traditions. Thus their cultural identity can be conserved.

By help of the internet anti-nuclear activists, aficionados of chess, but also fans of Michael Jackson are able to create communities, to coordinate their activities aiming at certain goals and thus to enforce their own movement.

Consequently the internet is characterized by a development in opposite directions: at the one hand it helps to conserve and strengthen existing boundaries, but at the other hand it provides measures for the creation and the consolidation of new cultures. At least according to my view this does not result in the emergence of a consistent and integrated global culture. But nor does it result in what is called 'glocalization' (Robert Robertson) – if 'Glocalization' is understood as the adoption of a global culture spiced up by local colour or as the accumulation of the local in a way to catch up with the global.

In contrast to that I believe that interculturality will create completely different new forms and matters and these various forms will coexist, compete but also live together. The global and the local will be mingled indistinguishable in this form of the intercultural. The question about the strange and the own will become increasingly irrelevant. Possibly the internet already embodies this interculturality. And maybe within a few decades the question will be why for such a long time sociologists had believed devoutly that all members of a society should be integrated into one culture. Thank you very much.