

Identity formation in social networks websites: facebook and the interaction between young individuals in the cases of Slovenia and Catalonia

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Abstract

This paper lays down some theoretical framework for further research to be made on the subject of how identity of young Slovenian and Catalan users is forming within the social networking website Facebook. The author pursues his interest based on observation of how communication and thus interaction between users is changing and how this is reflected in everyday practices. In so doing he tries to identify the connections between the individual, society and technology, as these are more and more interwoven, and we cannot think one without the other in the contemporary globalised world.

Keywords: new media, social networks, social communities, Facebook, Slovenian communities, Slovenian identity, Catalan communities, Catalan identity, popular culture, World Wide Web

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1. Introduction

We live in times where it is increasingly harder to separate our everyday practices from technological tools, development of which is constantly growing. Everyday practices are defined by our social actions, in other words interactions with other individuals and subjects. This presupposes a mediating tool for sharing our thoughts and beliefs in the form of symbolic meanings. We call this tool language and it is mainly associated with the spoken and written word. But more recently people are interacting by various means of communication channels based on technological innovations.

The here proposition aims to establish a theoretical and conceptual frame for further research on the relation between technology and social interaction, more specific the impact of new media on the web on everyday practices and communication of individuals. Research will be conducted on the case of young Slovenian and Catalan users of social networking website Facebook.

Researching a topic like the change of communication and interaction within web based social networks seems like a hard nut to crack. Not because of the difficulty, but because of the vast impact that this phenomenon has on the science community and everyday users, thus resulting in a multitude of researches, texts and related content. It is this material that has to be conquered at first and in so doing trying to identify what has been already done and what not. Of course, there are always small variations that can be identified and pursued, but the other problem is the pace of the development and change of technologies and the uses of them. Now I am attempting to analyse the use of Facebook in Slovenia and Catalonia, because it seems that it is at the moment the most used application for social networking. *Yesterday* it was MySpace, *tomorrow* it could be Netlog, ... or something else. With certainty we can say that Twitter is the emerging (and in a way already established) next thing, and at the same time it is being speculated what will be the next one, though the latter has not even shown its full potential. My point is that in its basis it is necessary to set aside these daily processes and developments, and construct a theoretical framework within which the latter can be analysed and explained in their own turn (technological dimension), from the view of the users (social dimension) and its importance from the scientific

view. It is in this manner that I shall attempt to provide some perspectives on this complex problematic.

2. Statement of the Problem

The reason why I have decided to research these is bound to my personal experience as a user and a spectator of other users, and the ways of how they have utilised these applications and tools in their own manner. The problem that has to be mentioned here is with no doubt the difficulty of analysing something that is changing with rapid speed when comparing to the past. These changes are to be seen in the realm of technology as also society as they are more interconnected as may seem at first sight. Facebook, for instance, has changed its appearance and functionality twice in the period from when I have become a user and from when I started to grow interest in it. The number of Facebook users is growing exponentially, seeing the rise from 150 to 200 million users in less than half a year¹. The Twitter phenomena is seen by an increasing number of new media critics as even more promising when redefining the interaction and communication practices. What pace of changes can be expected in the future can become more clear when considering and reviewing the history of these technological tools for interaction. Let us take a quick look at it on the case of Slovenia².

After the Netscape and IRC revolution in the early nineties of the 20th century, when people started to get familiarized with new notions and terms of “virtual reality” and “space without place” the rise of Internet users in Slovenia began to rise and gather on popularity. The e-mail became a way of communication to be used more frequently and IRC was the new interactive tool of meeting new people. The next step was blogging and was in a way the first possibility of presenting itself online without previous technologically based knowledge and interacting with

¹ See *200 milion strong* (8. April 2009) <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=72353897130>, *A great start to 2009* (7. January 2009) <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=46881667130>, *Our first 100 milion* (26. August 2008) <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=28111272130>

² Information gathered from daily online media such as www.siol.net and www.rtvsllo.si, and the book Oblak, T., Petrič, G. (2005): *Splet kot medij in mediji na spletu*. Ljubljana: Faculty for Social Sciences.

the readers and other bloggers. But the usage of social networking websites in Slovenia has mainly begun with the MySpace application. The users have mainly been young individuals with the aim of presenting themselves with their interests bound to popular culture, more specifically popular music. For the past year the communication via MySpace has decreased on the account of Facebook. The popularity of the later can be seen also in a broader cultural sense and off-line communication. For example, when trying to uphold contacts with new people it is becoming common to ask if the other person is on Facebook and not for the email address as two years ago or mobile phone number as five years ago. When photographing self or friends, users also refer to certain photos as “Facebook photos” in the sense that they are appropriate for uploading and is expected that they will draw attention and will be commented on.

Apart from incorporating English expressions to the vocabulary of young Slovenian users, the use of social networking websites enabled them to communicate in slangs and dialects that normally don't have or are not know in a written form. This trend can be seen as positive in as far as it fosters local and group identity, and encourages grammatical creativity. Even more, one can argue that social networking can be seen as a new moment in popular culture and has to be thus treated also as such.

3. Significance of Research

As stated above, tracking the usage of social networking websites for a few years I have come across some interesting developments in the field of communication between users, the transitions of changes into everyday usage outside the virtual environment, the impact on group identities and its embeddedness within the relation between culture and technology. Thus I have observed how users of web applications (not merely web based social networks, but also communication tools as MSN messenger, Gtalk, Skype etc.) have become creative in how they used them, how they communicated and interacted with others, played with the language and dialects, their names, and so on, evoking in me questions on how this is affecting their identities, and what significance technology has in their everyday life. Even more, what significance this has for society as whole. In this manner I have decided to narrow the research subject according to temporal and geographical relevance, thus first choosing Facebook over numerous other social

networking websites, as it is the most used social networking website at the moment (globally and in Slovenia)³.

Further on, considering that these media are becoming an important part in the process of the construction of one's identity (as the significant others beside parents and peers), the educational dimension of new media cannot be easily dismissed. Because the average age of the users is lowering and the process of identity creation in the early stages is of high significance for a person's future relations with people and the place in society, my target groups are users in late school age, adolescence and early young adulthood regarding Erikson's psychosocial stages⁴.

Beside the age parameter my aim is to approach this research from the cultural view, especially the relation between culture, identity and language which has a more intense bond within smaller communities that are defined by the later three. The decision for selecting Slovenian users has been made on the basis of the number of native Slovenian language speakers (a mere population of two million residing in Slovenia and a few thousand more out of an approximate half a million scattered around the world as Diaspora) and the future of their identity and culture regarding phenomena like new media as more foreign words and expressions are being daily used. For similar reasons I have decided to make it a comparative study with Catalan users, as many correlations can be drawn between both cases.

When interpreting culture as a dynamic and organic formation that is in the process of constant redefinition, the influence of other cultures is but a positive thing, as the culture has to be formulated in these relations. Further on, for small communities of people the role of preserving the national body and its culture was from the beginning bound to the language. The history of the Slovenian nation is a history of a small ethnic community that has strived to achieve the status and recognition of a sovereign people. Formally, this has been achieved mere 19 years ago, but the path was the one that made the Slovenian people what they are, that made their culture what it is, a unique heterogeneous formation that consists of a multitude of cultural expressions. After

³ Considering the fact that Jennifer Almjeld, in her dissertation on *The Girls of MySpace*, written in august 2008, states the importance of the then leading social network, this makes the relevance of researching Facebook even more clear, as it also points to the fast pace of change in the field of social networking on the web. Almjeld, J. M. (2008): *The Girls of MySpace: New Media as Gendered Literacy Practice and Identity Construction*. Doctoral Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, English/Rhetoric and Writing.

⁴ Erikson, E.H. (1980[1959]): *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: W.H. Norton and Co.

the independence of Slovenia there was a lot of talk about the so-called “common Slovenian cultural space”, and the interpretations about its meaning differed from those who thought of it as of Slovenia and Slovenian communities in border countries, to those who percept it in a wider term by including all Slovenians around the world. The Slovenian national identity has been and still is synonymous with the Slovenian language and the individuals who have nurtured and developed it in the history ⁵.

Although the Catalan language is spoken by more people than the Slovenian, in comparisment to others, the difference is rather neglectible⁶. Catalan speakers do not have their own state, as was the case before with Slovenia under Yugoslavia, and Austro-Hungarian and Frank Empire before. They are also of similar age according to the first written texts, namely the *Forum iudicium* from the second half of the 12th century and the *Brižinski spomeniki* from approximately the 9th century⁷. In both cases the concern of preserving the language and with it the cultural identity, especially under contemporary globalized influences is imperative.

⁵ See Pagon, N. (ed.), Čepič, M. (ed.) (2003): *Nacionalna identiteta in kultura*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za civilizacijo in kulturo – ICK; Meden, A., Brglez, A., Pagon, N. (2007): *Vezi in razpoke skupnega slovenskega kulturnega prostora: o rabi kulturnega prostora in družbenega časa*. Ljubljana: Institute for Civilization and Culture - ICK, 2007; Vodopivec, P. (2006): *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države: slovenska zgodovina od konca 18. stoletja do konca 20. Stoletja*. Ljubljana: Modrijan.

⁶ As mentioned above, around 2 milion Slovenian speakers and around 7 milion Catalan speakers (See *La llengua catalana en l'actualitat*. Institut de Sociolingüística Catalana. Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992.) and 6.215.281 counted in Catalunya in populaton cencensus 2001. See official webpage www.idescat.cat for more updated information.

⁷ Ibid., p. 11. Also Vodopivec, P. (2006): *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države: slovenska zgodovina od konca 18. stoletja do konca 20. Stoletja*. Ljubljana: Modrijan.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Considering the variety of social life and its phenomena, especially in contemporary times, it is difficult, even pointless to conduct the research with merely one set of theoretical tools and paradigms. This is even more true of the here proposed research subject, namely identity formation within new media by means of communication and interaction, and the application and influence this has in other spheres of society. When trying to access how human communication is changing, we have to determine what does this act stand for, who is conducting it and what are the reasons for its realization. In this first field of thought it is useful to utilise concepts created in the field of anthropology of communication, linguistics and semiotics, starting with basic presumptions of how human communication began, for what reasons and what have been the consequences. As we shall see, the evolution of human communication is based on shared intentionality and common conceptual ground, which are also the basic elements for the formation of a community.

The second theoretical strand shall try to highlight the problem of identity, its creation and embedednes in the wider social environment. To better understand the behaviour and functioning of individuals, which is not reduced merely to that which is in line with costs and interest, I will try to define the concept of identity, which has today more than ever, a huge weight. In so doing I am groping in fields of psychology and social psychology, with which I will spend just as much attention as it is necessary to understand the consequences of the social impact on individuals. The concept of identity is central to my thinking, because we can better understand how individuals in society act. Throughout the hereby paper it will become clear how different stimuli affect the development of individuals, especially in the younger years. As will be shown below, the concept of identity is not easy to explain, and I will expose those interpretations that are relevant to the present discussion. Also noted at this point has to be, that we will be operating at the level of theoretical, ideal types, such that are trying to highlight certain aspects of identity, but not fully explain it.

It will become clear that identity is not static, but a subject to constant change. It is an ongoing process, which is the result of the individual's making sense of his place and role within society. Individuals thereby pass through different phases, different levels of development in our lives,

and each of these has its own characteristics. In the end I shall try to relate identity to technology, new media, more specifically social networking sites, and popular culture.

Next theoretical tool to be used builds on the theory of institutions, which is complemented with interpretations of association of people, behaviour of individuals in the peer interactions, the role of formal and informal rules, the functioning of organizations etc. The resulting thinking should serve as a primary device in interpreting the broader social field by understanding the operation of individual institutions in society, in other words their role within it. For such an explanation it is required to treat individuals acting by socio-economic circumstances, therefore, we shall assume that the behaviour of individuals in society can be examined and interpreted on the basis of benefits or costs that we have in relation to the other, when entering mutual interactions. According to this model, which assumes an ideal-type Homo Economicus (hereinafter referred to as HE), acting of which is rational and driven by self-interest, the actors in society will behave in such a way that will minimize the costs that arise in interpersonal exchanges. This concept is particularly useful in understanding the development of technological innovation, and defining the functioning of individuals and organizations in capitalistic societies, which is also the context within which I shall represent individual topics. Following that I shall highlight the importance of technological innovation for the development of society and the individual's functioning within it. In doing so, I will pay special attention to the Internet and World Wide Web and try to identify and highlight some of the advantages and the problems. Above all, I will try to indicate their link to the area of popular culture and role in the emergence of virtual communities.

1. Communication

In this segment we shall try to identify the basic communication acts between individuals. These should later on serve as useful concepts when analysing historical and contemporary communication acts that emerged simultaneously with the development of technological media. At first glance we can differentiate three types of communication used in web based social networks, but as I will argue, the more used is which is not written or spoken, but a communication which is based on gestures, pointing. As we shall see, this communication act is based on intention and presupposes a common referential social and cultural knowledge base. Much has been written on the subject of communication, and mainly theories, as also in other cases, have reflected the challenges of that specific socio-historical era, when they have been conceived.⁸

Origins of Human Communication

Communication in contemporary new media (including web based social communities) encompasses various types of human communication that predates it. Language as a code of symbolic meanings is thus just one of them and many correlations to pre-language communications acts can be found in interactions on the web. But which are these practices that language was built on? Michael Tomasello's book *Origins of Human Communication* provides a useful and graphic evolutionary theory of the development of human communication, and can thus enlighten some aspects relevant and useful for the here present research subject. In his explanation of the evolution of human communication, he is also pointing to the incentives and dynamics of human society formation. In this manner let us look at some of the main ideas and findings that will be applicable later when analysing and interpreting communication in web based social communities, as it will be clear further on, Tomasello's emphasis in the communication act as *intentional communication* is very useful for explaining interactivity of new media.

⁸ See Mattelart, A., Mattelart, M. (1998): *Theories of communication: a short introduction*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.

Tomasello builds his hypothesis on the basis of *human cooperative communication*, which presupposes *shared intentionality*, the basic cognitive skill of which is *recursive mindreading*. Let us see in more detail some of the main concepts brought about by these hypotheses. He hypothesises that human communication evolved from natural to contextualised, and that this can be seen also ontogenetically, on the case of the evolution of infant communication. And for communication to take place certain conditions had to be met in order for parties involved to understand each other.

Human cooperative communication

The basic human communicative act is gestural in nature, and is the basis for others who build on it. Put in another way “the linguistic “code” rests on a nonlinguistic infrastructure of intentional understanding and common conceptual ground, which is in fact logically primary.”⁹ What is supposed here is that for communication to be effective we need a common ground with others within which we share concepts and meanings. These have been, and are, created by means of cooperation when trying to satisfy three basic human communicative motives¹⁰:

- requesting (I want you to do something to *help me* – requesting help or information; individual imperatives or requests, and cooperative imperatives or requests),
- informing (I want you to know something because *I think it will help or interest you* – offering help including information), and
- sharing (I want you to feel something so that *we can share attitudes/feelings together* – shared emotions or attitudes).

According to this humans are in nature altruistic beings, as they know that they can expect the other to help, because the other can expect help from you. The main postulate here is that “human beings *cooperate* with one another in species-unique ways involving processes of shared intentionality.”¹¹ Shared intentionality is a behavioural phenomena and is social “in the sense that the agent of the intentions and actions is the plural subject “we”. ... Scaled up, we may even get

⁹ Wittgenstein, L. in Tomasello, M. (2008): *Origins of human communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, cop. p. 58.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 72.

to phenomena in which “we” intend things together in such a way that they take on new powers.”¹²

The motive of sharing is directed into deepening our common ground, and in this sense both parties assume that it will be in their individual and mutual benefit to communicate and cooperate. This can be tracked back to Grice¹³ and his communicative intention, as he realised that there is an intentional layer necessary to motivate the receiver about the referent and the social intention of the communicator.

Referring to the Gricean communicative intention the communicator wants his communicative act to be a part of perceptually copresent joint attention of both parties. Further on, such communicating publicly creates expectations of cooperation and social norms, violation of which cannot be acceptable. Communication between humans is thus a means of creating socially acceptable practices. We can call this culture, as it is the informal form of sharing interest. “... when humans see that someone is attempting to communicate with them, they want to know what he is attempting to communicate at least partly *because* he wants them to (and they trust his cooperative motives), and they choose a response – for example, complying with a request or accepting offered information or sharing enthusiasm about something) at least partly *because* that is what the other wants them to do.”¹⁴

Common ground can be therefore defined as an intersubjective context or joint attentional frame. The critical point to common ground is that it takes people beyond their egocentric perspective on things. Direct personal common ground (general common ground) can be replaced by being part of a particular culture or society, thus knowing what others should know (guessing).

Basic communication acts are gestural and there are two basic types on how humans’ gestures are used to make reference:

1. directing the attention of a recipient spatially to something in the immediate perceptual environment (deictic gestures) – *attention-directing* or *pointing*

¹² Ibid., p. 72.

¹³ Grice, H. P. (1989): *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press.

¹⁴ Tomasello, M. (2008): *Origins of human communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, cop. p. 94.

2. directing the imagination of the recipient to something that, typically, is not in the immediate perceptual environment by behaviourally simulating a action, relation, or object (iconic gestures or depictive, imagistic, characterizing, representational, symbolic) – *pantomiming* – most common uses are¹⁵:
 - to indicate that *this* is the action I want you to perform, or that I intend to perform myself, or that I want you to tell you about
 - to request or otherwise indicate an object that “does *this*” or an object that “one does *this* with”

“To communicate nonlinguistically, humans use the pointing gesture to direct the visual attention of others, and they use iconic gestures (pantomiming) to direct the imagination of others. These to types of gesture may be considered “natural” communication as they exploit, respectively, the recipient’s natural tendency to follow gaze direction, and the recipient’s natural tendency to interpret the actions of others intentionally. These simple gestures communicate in complex ways because they are used in interpersonal situations in which the participants share conceptual common ground as interpretative nexus, as well as mutual assumptions of cooperation.”¹⁶

Ontogenetic Origins

Tracking communication to its basics, Tomasello hypothesised that skills and motivations of shared intentionality are important for cooperative communication to emerge ontogenetically. Tomasello provided evidence for supporting his hypothesis of the creation of a cooperative infrastructure and how it is connected to shared intentionality. The experiments of infants’ pointing therefore demonstrate that they do understand how cooperative communication works, thus communicating within the “context of common conceptual ground, and for cooperative motives”¹⁷. Even two out of three basic communicative motives can be traced back to infants’ pointing, namely whining as requesting, and face-to-face dyadic exchanges of emotions (protoconversations) as expressive declaratives of sharing; informing motive, he says, does not¹⁸.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 322.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 137.

The latter does not happen before they reach third first 12 months, as they “do not yet understand others as rational agents and they have not yet begun constructing the kinds of joint attentional frames and common ground that enable them to make reference to the world in meaningful ways for other persons triadically.”¹⁹ As they progress in interacting with others pointing becomes insufficient and they create iconic gestures with symbolic representation for further interpersonal communication. Though for these they have to acquire skills in imitation and symbolic representation, mostly through playful purposes. Further on, such pantomiming competes with acquiring language skills, as they are both based on presenting abstract entities, and pointing therefore stays present throughout the process. “These are all extremely important facts evolutionary, as they suggest to us, among other things, that when humans began to use vocal conventions they replaced not pointing, but pantomiming.”²⁰

The infant “first learns to participate and form with other shared goals, and this enables her to understand what the other person is doing (in terms of his goals and intentions) and why he is doing it (in terms of why one plan was chosen, in the current situation with its particular contingencies, and not another).”²¹ Children start learning new words within these collaborative interactions, trying to understand how others use sounds to direct attention to within space of their current common ground, therefore these joint attentional frames can be seen as “hot spots” for language acquisition.²² For children to learn, meaningful social engagement is needed for them to understand what this sound is related to. “The reason is that “arbitrary” linguistic conventions can be acquired only in the context of some kind of conceptual ground with mature speakers, often in collaborative activities with joint goals and joint attention, and this only becomes possible in human ontogeny at around one year based on species-unique skills and motives for shared intentionality.”²³

“The ontogenetic transition of gestures to concessional forms of communication, including language, also relies crucially on the shared intentionality infrastructure – especially joint attention in collaborative activities – to create the common ground necessary for learning

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 141.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 153.

²¹ Ibid., p. 157.

²² Ibid., p. 160.

²³ Ibid., p. 165.

“arbitrary” communicative conventions.”²⁴ This transitions thereby also demonstrates “the common function of (i) pointing and demonstratives (eg., *this* and *that*); and iconic gestures and content words (eg., nouns and verbs).”²⁵

Phylogenetic Origins

Tomasello’s proposal is that cooperative communication originated and was used only in activities that were collaborative, thus enabled pursuing joint goals by joint attention forming common conceptual ground²⁶. “...it seems difficult to imagine how joint goals and attention, not to mention mutual assumptions of helpfulness and the communicative intention, could have arisen in contexts in which we were all operating solely for our own benefit or in competition.”²⁷ His point is, that a common cognitive infrastructure for collaborative activity could not had arisen if humans would act on competition and deception, as is assumed by economic theorists. Thus we can identify three basic motives for human communication:

- mutualism (granting of requests),
- reciprocity and indirect reciprocity (offering help by informing), and
- cultural group selection (sharing of emotions and attitudes).

Out of these motives as adaptations for collaborative activities shared intentionality has arisen, of which recursive mindreading is its basic cognitive skill.

Grammatical Dimension

Gestural (natural gestures) and linguistic (communicative conventions) communication are basically similar regarding the communicative intention and general motives (requesting, informing, sharing). But informing linguistically “prototypically involves events and participants beyond me and you in the here and now, as they concern things about which the recipient is currently ignorant.”²⁸ This creates at least three new communicative challenges:

²⁴ Ibid., p. 323.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 324.

²⁶ As we shall see later on, this is an opposite stance as suggested by economists and theories of interest.

²⁷ Tomasello, M. (2008): *Origins of human communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, cop. p. 191.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 271.

- Identifying – “In terms of identifying, there are myriad different constructions that are used to identify referents using multiple elements ... the most complex of these – because they involve identifying a referent using an event – are relative clauses”²⁹
- Structuring - “In terms of structuring, all languages have complex constructions that relate events to one another and to participants in complex yet systematic ways.”³⁰
- Expressing – “In terms of expressing, there are special constructions designed to indicate different speech act functions (motives) such as questions and commands”³¹

If we suppose that communication is a tool for human interaction, then we can state the following stages of it:

1. Natural communication (gestural: pointing and pantomiming)
 - a. Pointing
 - b. Pantomiming
2. Arbitrary or culturally mediated communication (language)
 - a. Spoken
 - b. Written

We shall closely examine the characteristics and significance of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in the segment of explaining the relevance of technology for the here proposed paper.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 287.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 288.

³¹ Ibid., p. 288.

2. Identities

These here-discussed topics concerning identity have been chosen to clarify aspects relevant for the hereby problematic. They are in no way all-encompassing and all explanatory, but they can pose a basic ground for further thinking and research. Within them we will try explain the basic terms with which it will be possible to operate in the following discussion and construction of methodology.

We are always a sum of identities that help us make sense of the social world in which we live. These identities can be seen as a product of different cultural spaces, either micro spaces or subcultures, or spaces that encompass a wider community. In this sense we are all connected thru interests that we share, be it locally or globally. For instance: I am Ahac, I am a Prekmurec, I am a Slovene, I am a European, I am a human, I am a fan of certain types of music, I like certain types of food, I like to travel, I like to cook, etc. These are all preferences that I relate to and they enable more successful interaction with those that share the same attributes. These identities are all interwoven, as for an example a descendent of Slovenian immigrants in Argentina is as much a Slovenian, as much he is a Argentinean, a member of the local community, a member of a global subculture of ... It are these differences that we all share and that we are all connected with that we have to take as a starting point and basis for teaching and educating individuals, especially young ones. Further more, in the present we live in a world that is driven by technology and information's, and every day we are facing new applications that bring people together when looking for others with same or similar interests of certain aspects of ones identities.

Psychological characteristics

Ericson's Development theory

As a starting point of conceptualising the development of identity let us consider Erikson's development theory³². This stems from the epigenetic principle, when "each new stage in the

³² Erikson, E.H. (1980[1959]): *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: W.H. Norton and Co.

course of life adds something specific to all the following stages referring to the former"³³. It is a similar idea, as developed by Covey, Merrill and Merrill³⁴ in their book *First Things First* that is generally useful for understanding individual's everyday perception and practices in it. They explain their concept with the metaphor of "days of the week", which describes how you cannot perform the "seventh" day, if you did not previously carried out the "first six". In this way, every individual is accumulating experience through the "days" of his life, which is reflected in the accumulated knowledge and behaviour in the "days" that follow.

Erikson stresses the particular *processes of tuning* the individual; this therefore being a constant adaptation of internal processes to external and vice versa. In this manner advocating the relativity and complementariness of the process of establishing and creating the identity, since both, the internal and external process, are dependent of each other. Ule calls this "*regulation of mutuality*". An individual's identity is thereby an expression of controlling one's self with the external influences of society, in other words the impact of significant others. In this case "I" is a "crucial sintetisizing mental function, which by a growing up child eventually merges selected significant identifications to a realistic notion of it self and its roles in society"³⁵.

Identity builds on crisis situations of the individual and their solutions. Each new upgrade of identity is the result of learning and results in the dismissal of the situations that have upset the previous non-conflicting notions of the world, within which the individual is enabled to function without obstruction. Any anomaly, which disrupts the current, we might also say romantic, picture of the world, and therefore also its place within it, requires a re-redefinition of the situation and its embedednes in the environment. Identity is therefore being developed through periods of growth, crisis and the solving of the latter, which are again the basis for new growth. Thus we are talking about the adjustment of individuals "constructed" internal notion of oneself in accordance with the roles they must play within the society.

³³ Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče. p. 127. Citation translated by the author.

³⁴ See Costingan, J. T. in Jones, S. (ed.) (1998): *Doing Internet research: critical issues and methods for examining the net*. Thousand Oaks [etc.]: Sage.

³⁵ Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče. p. 128. Citation translated by the author.

Erikson refers to eight basic *identity crises*, out of which for the purpose here those are important that explain child and adolescent crisis (namely the ones in which significant others, namely parents, peers and the media, play a vital role).

The *third identity crisis* encompasses the child's spirit of initiative and feelings of guilt, and because in this period the reference persons in particular are the parents, he tries to identify with them. Among other things, at this stage the child is learning to communicate, develop the language, symbolic communication, on the basis of which he builds on all life and is as such vital.

The *fifth phase* is the period of adolescence, which inevitably also contains the crisis of adolescence. At this stage, the individual begins for the first time to create identities in relation to the wider social environment and not only in relation to the immediate family circle. In interaction with his peers he is seeking confirmation of his own individual identity, and thus differentiating from family identity and seeks his own expression. He begins to place himself inside social functioning, in which he is imposed by an increasing responsibility to being assigned with social roles. "A positive solution of the crisis requires from the individual that he accepts himself, his whole psychophysical personality, but also acceptance of other people, recognition for his actions and support in his efforts to integrate to society"³⁶. The success of every crisis resolving, therefore, depends on the success of solving the previous crises, which means that it is very important in which kind of an family environment he is growing up, as this provides him with a base for further social inclusions.

In short, it is a dialectical method of solving the crisis, which involves a positive thesis, negative antithesis, and "an expected way out in the form of synthesis, the content of which is partly determined by the relevant institutions in the individual's social context"³⁷. Individuals never experience the resolving of identity crises independently of the social environment, as they are always an expression of interactions that they have with people. The crisis of identity is therefore a crisis of personal interaction, as well as they are the reason for the latter.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 131. Citation translated by the author.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 132. Citation translated by the author.

Identity status in adolescence

In addition to the upper identity development four identity statuses in adolescence defined by James E. Marcia can be related to the means and efficiency of solving adolescent crisis³⁸:

1. *Identity Achievement or adolescents with developed identity* are those who have successfully resolved their identity crisis. Their view of the world is unique; from it stem their own values, self-esteem and risk tacking in pursuit of goals. Such an individual is autonomous in its operations and resolving of identity crises, and in so doing he also gets to know himself. He is socially and family-integrated, but on own terms.

2. *Identity Foreclosure or adolescents with an adopted identity* do not resolve their identity crisis through their own exploration of them self, but adopt the means to do so from significant others, mainly parents. "This is a shortened process of identity creation under the patronage of adults and the transmission of traditions, patterns of behaviour from parents to children"³⁹. In this way, they complete their identity crisis sooner than others and "look well-organized, focused, friendly, good behaved, conventional, authoritarian, inflexible, accept moral values at the level of law and order, and are obedient and conforming"⁴⁰

3. *Identity Moratorium or adolescents in moratorium stage* are still resolving their identity crisis through research (in this context, they are the opposite of adolescents with an adopted identity). In so acting they try to distance themselves as much as they can from current influences of significant others, and seek their own expression in themselves. We can place them within youth sub- and-contracultures.

4. *Adolescents with identity diffusion* are those individuals who were not able to explore the end of their potential, and do therefore withdraw to solitude, or give them self up. "They are very

³⁸ Marcia I. E. (1966), *Development and validation of ego identity status*. I. Personal. Soc. Psycho!., 3:551-8, State University of New York, Buffalo, NYJ.

³⁹ Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče. p. 138. Citation translated by the author.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 134. Citation translated by the author.

sensitive to stress, are confirmative to external requirements, have a low level of self-esteem and the lowest level of the development of moral assessment"⁴¹.

Educational moratorium

Within the above mentioned youth moratorium status in modern societies a transition occurs from the psychosocial moratorium (traditional adolescence) to the educational moratorium⁴², which means that adolescence is increasingly becoming a period which is not only defined by the transition to adulthood, but also the process of education. The reason lies in the increasing differentiation and complexity of society, which requires early directions and appropriate education to continue the life and career paths. In this sense, youth is a socially institutionalized moratorium, which differs this period from the period when the person is living as a child within the family environment. Youth styles are being developed in youth moratorium, within which they are experimenting with different possibilities of expression. This is possible because the individuals are not yet firmly tied to everyday practices of social roles in the workplace, family, etc.

The transition from traditional to industrial society has enabled the educational moratorium to extend, beside that the differentiation of society with its demands for specialization caused a set of educational methods, and therefore the possibility of vast choices. The major role for young people in this period play "educational institutions, peers and the market/industry for young people. The control of the young is indirect, abstract, and takes place in the long term. The rate of youth cultural autonomy is high. It is embodied in popular culture."⁴³ This is a period that is both playful and serious. Thru interaction with others individuals test themselves in different social roles, and gradually build their identity on the basis of these experiences. Communicating, sharing experiences and finding common interests are therefore essential for them. Educational institutions, youth consumption and mass media basically allow all this. It is a period of searching for one self through social relations, music, sports, entertainment industry, technology etc.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 135. Citation translated by the author.

⁴² Zinnecker, J. (1981): *Porträt einer Generation*. In: *Jugend*, 81, Schell, Jugendstudie, Hamburg.

⁴³ Ule, Mirjana (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče. p. 139. Citation translated by the author.

Postadolescent status

The transition from adolescence to the post-adolescence identity status also depends on solving the previous adolescence identity crisis. It is characterized by higher criticism and reflection of social roles, as also of society that provides the latter. Post-adolescence identity crisis is expected to occur in adolescents, who continue schooling into the third decade of their life, which makes the nature of both crises quite different. The individual has already created to some extent his own identity expression within the adolescent period, but given the current placement in society, to which he looks from an even more critical point of view, he is forced to redefine it again in post-adolescence. At the same time he is aware that he is coming to the closure of the moratorium phase of adolescence and youth in general, which causes discomfort. He is being awaited by responsible adult social roles, which especially with the individuals who with the prolonging of education extend their period of detachment, resulting in even greater identity crisis. All of this of course depends on each individual and his life path, or the development of resolving of identity crisis, which indirectly includes the influence of family, social environment (especially peers), and social institutions and values that the latter transmit. Post-adolescence is therefore defined by the tension between self-esteem and demands of society, division between omnipotence and self rejection, and youth-centricity and rejection of socialization and cultivation⁴⁴.

The biggest role in post-adolescent crisis play societal expectations, which are the product of historically institutionalized formal rules and informal constraints. What value system they have, how this is institutionalized, and how these external pressures affect the individuals therefore depends from society to society, or culture to culture. The institutional framework is therefore not a negligible variable, considering the development of individual's identity and process of solving identity crisis. The first can also not be overlooked when considering the impact on family life, let alone in defining the educational system and policies that regulate social institutions, such as the media, market, and more.

Individuals in post-adolescence evaluate their development within social and cultural contexts with a growing critical consciousness, which can lead to rejection of the latter, or rejection of

⁴⁴ Keniston, K., (1968): *Young Radicals*. Harcourt Brace, New York.

their own self-image. In so far, the playing with life-styles in post-adolescence is more binding than in adolescence, because the individual is aware of its position in society and wants to overcome it. This leads to identity crisis, because the individual must begin to adapt to social norms and values at the expense of the previous freedom of changing between group and subcultural affiliation. It is therefore a transition from being playfully opposing the dominant system through subcultural practice into the integration of a dominant system (this claim is not so one-sided, since this opposing can also operate within the system of social dominance, and is as such not opposition in the true sense, but merely a reflection of image – for example, "subcultural" practices that are incorporated into mainstream popular culture). This transition gives the individual a feeling of helplessness because he must define his interests anew and redefine his position in the social surroundings. His social functioning in this period already announces guidelines for the transition to adulthood.

In post-adolescence a shift of the individual's tensions, which he previously had with the family, transfers to the society. Based on their own experience post-adolescents begin to understand "parents as complex persons, which are determined by their social and historical situation, and partly by their aspirations and obsessions. Young people are aware of the scope of family traditions, family destiny, family culture and direction of family development. The question of creating their own way of life, everyday culture, way of development poses to them"⁴⁵.

Identity and socio-cultural context

Having considered the psychological aspects of identity development, let us look at the *interactionist* or *symbolic-interactionist theory*, which perceives identity as socio-culturally determined, because "only in the special process of symbolic gestures and meaningful activities of individuals, and in the process of internalization of expected responses of other people on ones own doing, the internal space of the individual in which he recognizes himself as a person and a member of a certain community is being formulated"⁴⁶. Individuals, therefore, begin to establish their identity, their *self*, when they are capable of the internal conversation with themselves. They

⁴⁵ Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče. p. 146.
Citation translated by the author.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 88. Citation translated by the author.

have to be capable of symbolic conceptions, perceiving themselves in the position of others. The major role here is assigned to the language through which individuals establish symbolic relations to relevant objects and subjects, so called *significant others*. Identity is therefore a construct that arises from interactions with others, who mediate the representation of us back to us. How significant others perceive us consequently influences our own perception of us, which is why the "socialization of individuals is not merely a unique internalization of social and cultural norms in the individual's subjective structure, but an interpretative practice, which covers the life history of the individual"⁴⁷.

According to interactionists, the human is a symbolical being, because he is able to communicate with the use of symbols, in this way posing a conscious relation to himself. He is the one that produces symbols, gives them meaning, and in so doing he plays an active role in making sense of the world around them. As such, he is not only the subject of cultural determination, but also an active maker of cultural patterns. The individual co-creates the inter-subjective world with others, while using different symbolic tools, among which one of the most important is language. "The process of forming and structuring the subject and the identity runs its course with the processes of daily appropriation of the world"⁴⁸. It is a process of mutual influence of individuals on social reality, and vice versa, in which the individual evolves his social roles and legitimises them within the society. At the same time this process has an impact on the creation of the self-awareness of the individual and his identity when faced with different problems and when solving them. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann⁴⁹ defined this process as *social construction of reality*, since it is an inter-subjective product. Identity is not something that the individual creates independent of his social activity, but is to some extent defined just by the latter. Within social functioning he internalises symbolic interaction with others in order to build an increasingly complex picture of himself.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 156. Citation translated by the author.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 157. Citation translated by the author.

⁴⁹ Berger, P. L., Luckmann, T. (1967): *The social construction of reality: a Treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. 1st Anchor Books ed. New York [etc.]: Anchor Books: Doubleday.

G. H. Mead

The main representative of the theory of symbolic interactionism is G. H. Mead, who has also defined and introduced specific terms of this theoretical direction and the relationships between them. For Mead identity is linked to the ability of accustoming to roles of others or being able to objectify oneself in this process. In this way, the individual establishes a critical position towards himself from which he evaluates and discusses himself in a reflective manner. Through this internal conversation he becomes aware of his existence and place in the world. Such dialectic relationship to himself is possible only through the accustomisation of those forms and methods of interaction, which are available for him from the significant others. It is an appropriation of the world of others, that is, those who play a significant role in individuals' lives. In the beginning these others are parents and the family (primary socialization), and later peers and role models (secondary socialization), etc. Mead, therefore, points out to the importance of the game in child's upbringing as pre-practices of role-play in society. First the child acquires the ability to understand himself as different when compared to others (understands the diversity of perspectives) thru the individual child's play (*play*), and learns the diversity of these views by positioning himself within group acting thru children's games (*game*). When he establishes a common set of rules of the game with others, he begins to differentiate himself from them and begins to establish his own identity. Throughout this process the *personal me* or "*I*" (Mead sometimes names it personal identity), *social me* or "*Me*" (social identity), and the reflexive relationship between the two or *Identity (self)* appear at the same time⁵⁰.

For Mead, identity is a continuous process that is taking place when the individual is placing himself within group operations with symbolic exchange. As such, it is not static, but the expression of purely subjective instances or objective, social impacts. It is the synergy of the two components, the social self or Me, which is defined by the ability of accustoming to other people, and the personal self or I, which is inaccessible to social determination and social control. The latter is the answer to the first, thus to the then socially mediated idea of the role of the individual in the eyes of others. The reflexive consciousness (Mind) is the one that allows the individual to evaluate his own actions, and the impact of the acts of others to the individual, in a knowingly and reflexive manner.

⁵⁰ Mead, G. H. (1962): *Mind, self and society: from the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago.

Lev Vigotsky

But Mead's theory of identity lacks the treatment of the irrational mental activity, because it considers only the cognitive self-reflexion of the individual. The contribution of Lev Vigotsky and his emphasis on the importance of language as a means of mediation between the different parties in an interaction is therefore more than relevant. In his book *Thought and language*⁵¹ Vigotsky names the activity of the rational creation and use of signs as *signification*, and states that this is what most decisively distinguishes humans from animals. Signification occurs outside of the individual, only when the child makes use of meaningful signs in interaction with others he also internalizes it as he actualises it. Through this active creation of meanings and the ability to communicate with signs, be it language, physical or any other means to influence others, we begin to be aware of our otherness towards others, which is the basis of building an identity. First, the child must integrate meaningful thinking and speaking through symbolic meanings, only then he is able to develop a conversation with others. Thinking is initially expressed as a conversation with oneself (*social speech*), out of which Vigotsky assumed that the child is a social being from the beginning on. For Vigotsky, language is the one that allows the development of the individual self-awareness when internalising the reality of the dialogue with others and transforming it into thinking. "Only language systems of symbols allow systematic accostumbration to other people, sustainability and continuity of conscious anticipation of reactions of other people. This allows continuous communication between people, permanent social relations, social institutions, processes of socialization and the transmission of traditions and knowledge to new generations and joint work of people."⁵²

Social constructivism

Social constructivism goes one step further and stresses the importance of society as a whole in shaping of identity. It defines social reality as a product of interaction of social actors. For communication to be effective, they must share an inter-subjective world of symbols and meanings. Individuals perceive the world around them through daily interaction with others,

⁵¹ Vigotsky, L. (1986): *Thought and Language*. MIT press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁵² Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče. p. 161.

Citation translated by the author.

through the thinking that this interaction generates. Therefore, it is perceived through language, as it is the one that allows self-reflexion. It is the one through which we are able to talk to ourselves. Language is also directly linked to culture and cultural production, for with it the individual can "express himself with means and terms of culture to which he belongs, and in so doing interprets himself in accordance with the operation of other people"⁵³. Language is an expression of cultural activity, and is an indirect shaper of identity. For the development of identities two processes are therefore important. The first is primary socialization, which is determined by the core family. It is the most important, since thru it the individual acquires a frame of reference through which he continues further socialization. The other is secondary socialization in which the child is affected by the social world outside the family. "Identity is therefore composed of a relatively stable core, which is a residue of an adopted identity in the childhood and a set of relatively fluid half-identities with their own sub-worlds"⁵⁴. This core is the expression of the individual's subjective identity, which is subject to continuous redefinitions of the objective social identity, required from social roles. The individual therefore constantly strives to find balance between these two. "The subjective perception and feeling of oneself can never completely coincide with the image of himself that the individual creates on the basis of stands and expectations of other people and institutions. Tension and conflict are continuously present and are constitutive of the subject, as they always force him to new social action and to re-defining his role in the social reality "⁵⁵.

Social constructivism thus emphasizes the importance of interactions between individuals (which gives the language), as it constitutes the social world. We are at the same time, the creators of this world and its product; in this sense this process is autopoietic.

Stigmatised identity

Not insignificant for this discussion is also Goffman's theory of the *stigmatized identity*, which assumes the identity of the stigma⁵⁶. In this case stigma is the *social identity*, which is defined by

⁵³ Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče. p. 95. Citation translated by the author.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 174. Citation translated by the author.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 96. Citation translated by the author.

⁵⁶ Goffman, E. (1984): *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled Identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

others and the individual leans his relation to himself on it. Social identity is composed of a *virtual social identity* as a social expression of belonging to a specific group and the *current social identity* as the expression of its own perception of belonging. Individuals, however, have also a *personal identity*, which is defined by individual's characteristics (they characterise him as a unique person with unique biography). Again, also this one is socially constructed and is, according to Goffman, divided to the virtual (identity recognised by others) and current personal identity (as the individual perceives the identification of others). Identity as a whole can therefore be seen as the result of joint social and personal identity, that is the relationship between identification and differentiation of the individual in relation to other people. Goffman however adds a third instance, namely the *identity of self*, therefore, one that reflects the individual's perception of himself or herself. Identity of self is the one that cares for the reflexive processing of the other two, and their offset or balance. In this context, every individual conducts an identity policy of coordination between the aforementioned components of identity crisis, which caused the imbalance.

From the above-presented theoretical explanations it can be argued that identity is a product of the individual's appropriation of the symbolic world, which is transmitted from significant others in the process of socialization. It is a product of interaction with others, thus culture and its manifestations. The culture of a specific community provides us with a frame of reference to perceive the world, and thru life we are (in)directly co-creating it.

“Identities in Postmodernism”

And what is happening with the development of identities in a postmodern society? Strinati attributes the disintegration of collective identities to effects of capitalism and rapid social change that they cause. As a result identities of individuals are becoming fragmented and are fighting within the set of different possibilities of expression⁵⁷. In such an environment there are no more solid bases, which would give individuals a sense of security. Everything is subject to change. Identity has to be built and redefined constantly in order to search for meaning in today's world, which is saturated with life's choices. Saturation also refers to the impact of technology, which's pace of innovation is too fast to have a beneficial effect on humans. In this confusion we are

⁵⁷ See Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 238.

increasingly turning to the opinions of others. The meanings of life are scattered all around and it is dependent on the individual, which and where he will look for. "Who or what we are is no longer so much a matter of personal essence (beliefs, feelings, etc.), but of how we are constructed through a variety of relationships, interactions, etc."⁵⁸. It is therefore a shift in the way of life, which was previously defined directly thru interpersonal relations, but is now flooded with different ways of communication and receivers. The latter are also represented by mass media, as they transmit to us "life experiences" that we would normally acquire in interactions with others. Social reality is therefore also constructed by mass media. They are part of the inter-subjective world, his product and its creators at the same time.

Consumerism performs the role of the provider of security, which reinforces individuality, but only on the account of the inability of establishing a coherent and stable identity. Negative effects of individualisation of youth entail a regression of youth culture and youth scene from agents of youth solidarity, cultivation of collective critical reflection and social innovation into media of entertainment, relaxation and production of youth artefacts and fashion styles. The integration of the individual into society, with the assistance of layered and class group identities is no longer necessary, because this function is more efficiently taken over by modern communication media, different life styles, which combine individual and group features, and a new division of society on the successful and unsuccessful groups, who cross or cut across traditional social divisions and belongings. Mass media and consumerism therefore "do not create underlying sources of identities and beliefs, but because there is no other reliable alternatives, popular culture and media serve only as an available reference framework for the construction of collective and personal identities"⁵⁹. However, we should not only address the individual as an object under influence, but it is necessary to recognize the ability of critical reflection in evaluating the impact of society upon him. Therefore, the impact of mass media and popular culture is never so strong, that the individual would blindly subordinate himself to it.

Postmodernism is a self-relating process, as it draws from itself. It creates a reality in which it functions. We could say that popular culture in the postmodern era is a self-relating formation

⁵⁸ Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, p. 249. Citation translated by the author.

⁵⁹ Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 239.

and is subject to its own recycling. And if so, then we can deduce the position of the individual and the development of his identity at this time. Identity is no longer a homogeneous whole, but is a set of different identities, which are the product of different relations in everyday life. It is a *tamperdness*, which is not yet the final identity, but its previous phase. Such an identity is only an answer to life choices and opportunities, but not the expression of scatteredness. "Cultural identity addresses us, that the question of who we are or from where we are coming is not so important, as the question of what we can become, how we have been represented, or how we would like to represent ourselves."⁶⁰

Postmodernism is therefore reality and fiction at the same time. Reality as it is current, and fiction as it creates currentness in the past, present and future. The modern society is so complex and differentiated, that it has lost its linear development to which an individual can attach a feeling of stability. We can thus argue, that self-relating and recycling give postmodernism a point of reference that has replaced the linearity of the modern, thus providing the individual with a referential framework for making sense of the social world.

⁶⁰ Hall, S. in Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, p. 191.

3. Technology and Culture

Technology is a very commonly used term in contemporary everyday life, from which we can make a general statement that technology and culture today are interconnected. This has even more credibility when we consider the origins of both words and the evolution of their meaning. A useful demonstration of the latter can be found in Murphy and Potts's book *Culture and Technology*⁶¹, where they are considering different aspects of their interactivity. They start with making distinctions between technology, technique and culture, whereas the first is also the youngest one by use. They say that "[i]f the current meanings of the word are a relatively recent development, its components are ancient."⁶² Thus *tekhne* was used for describing art or craft, and *logos* for many other things, amongst others word and system⁶³. With the dawn of science in the 19th century the word came to signify mechanical and industrial arts, and in the end came "to describe the overall system of machines and processes, while 'technique' refers to a specific method or skill."⁶⁴ But it is even more than that. Its notion became so abstract, that we consider many aspects of our life as technological or being influenced or surrounded by technology. In other words, "in contemporary world" it "involves cultural, values, ideologies, ethical concerns" and "it is also shaped by political and economical determinants."⁶⁵

The term culture has had also significant changes in meaning thru history, beginning first with signifying cultivation within agricultur, later on in the 16th century the cultivation of mind and body, and in the 19th culture was conceived as "the intellectual or artistic side of civilization."⁶⁶ Today, there are two ways of seeing culture: in the narrow sense we speak of self-contained culture, such as Slovenian, Catalan or youth culture, or in the broad sense, as culture opposing

⁶¹ Murphie, A., Potts, J. (2003): *Culture and technology*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York : Palgrave.

⁶² Ibid., p. 3.

⁶³ Let us remember Tomasello's explanation of how language is changing thru history in a natural way, but is also used as a differentiating means between social groups. "All important words, especially widely used words such as 'technology' and 'culture', carry the traces of social change, which have operated around and through these words." Murphie, A., Potts, J. (2003): *Culture and technology*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York : Palgrave, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

nature, culture as a specific human phenomenon bound to human actions and practices. We can see how both terms have already had similar meaning as artistic and skilful practices, but today we can say with certainty that both are interacting, many times making it unclear where the line stands, as our everyday life is embedded in both of them. Even more, culture in the broadest sense cannot be separated of technology, as it is, and was, a means of passing from nature to culture, cultivating surrounding by the measure of the man.

In the following text, we shall try to present some of the aspects of how these two interact, thus trying to identify their contemporary relationship.

Actor-network theory

In his paper 'Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity' John Law proposes to start with the assumption that »interaction is all there is«⁶⁷ in order to begin understanding power and organisation. As we recall from above, this is the same position as the *symbolic-interaction theory* has on the formation of an individual's identity.

The social world can be interpreted as a product of its actors, who accidentally or deliberately create and change it, and is thus formed by a complex network of formal and informal rules by which they act. These rules stem from a particular order, or "state of things in which the multiplicity of elements of different types with each other is connected in such a way that by knowing some of spatial or time pieces of the whole we can learn how to create correct expectations for the remaining part, or at least expectations, which have a good possibility that will be proved correct."⁶⁸ If this Hayek's definition of order can be applied to the sphere of society, then the elements in society are individuals who, through their repeated interactions create expectations about how others behave. Any society can therefore be treated as a single spontaneous order, whose nature of interaction is its own and does thereby differ from others. In other words, different groups of people have their own ways of creating repeated interaction, resulting in informal rules and become a culture in the broad sense. But as Law points out, "the stuff of the social isn't simply human" and "we wouldn't have a society at all if it weren't for the

⁶⁷ Law, J. (1992), *Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity*. Centre for Science Studies Lancaster University, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Hayek, F., *Law, Legislation, and Liberty: Made Orders and Spontaneous Orders*. In Boaz, D. (1998): *The Libertarian Reader*. New York: Free Press.

heterogeneity of the networks of the social.”⁶⁹ He continues that social is a product of the human and the technical, which is true if considered that the origins of the term indicate a human ability of craftsmanship as stated before. But the relation between them is not merely of one-sidedness in as ‘the human is producing the technical’, rather it is a relation of two-sided interacting and influencing, thus constantly re-shaping both in its process. One example of explaining how society and technology are interdependent can be found in the *theory of institutions* conceived by Douglass C. North⁷⁰, which will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Actors in the process of creating orders are seen by the theory of institutions as humans and organizations, whereas ANT goes further and adds devices. And this could be seen as self-evident if we consider the part that technology plays in the interaction of people. But nowadays we are witnessing some new trends when it comes to interaction between individuals and the role of technology in it. We are talking about computer-mediated communication (CMC), which has some other end effects as can be seen at first sight.

Cutler highlights three basic understanding of the effects of communication technologies on society and relationships within it⁷¹:

1. adoption of new communication technologies results in changes of social relationships;
2. changed social context, consequently increase's types of relationships that are possible;
3. changed relationships are shown in new social roles.

These changes affect the ways we construct interactions with others, and how we perceive us. New means of 'constructing social reality' are being set up, with it our own identity construction of the individual. But it is not only how computers are mediating communication between people, as it is more and more about the communication between the computer and us. It is this phenomenon that changes the ways in which we communicate between ourselves, changes our informal practices, our culture. This is even more obvious if we look at the phenomena of web based social networks. The fact that we are interacting with non-human agents is nothing new,

⁶⁹ This heterogeneity is result of different interests that the members of a group share and because of that interact between each other. See also Law, J. (1992): *Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity*. Centre for Science Studies Lancaster University, p. 3.

⁷⁰ North, D. C. (1990): *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press.

⁷¹ Cutler, R. H. (1996): *Technologies, relations, and selves*. In Strate, L. (ed.), Jackobson, R. (ed.), Gibson, S. B. (ed.): *Communication and Cyberspace: Social interaction in an electronic environment*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, p. 317.

but in many cases we are not even communicating with people on social networks, but with the application, which presents us the user and his activity.

“Our communication with one another is mediated by a network of objects - the computer, the paper, the printing press ... these various networks participate in the social. They shape it. In some measure they help to overcome your reluctance to read my text. And (most crucially) they are necessary to the social relationship between author and reader.”⁷² In a similar way we can perceive mediation between users of social networks being conducted by the computer, the Internet, the application and the possibilities they offer for interaction. Today we are talking about social media, a term that encompasses the needed tools and the users, who are in this case media in their own. The users are the ones who mediate and have in this sense become more integrated in the reshaping of networks formerly of more technical characteristic.

The actor-network approach seems relatively useful regarding the here posed question of the impact of web based social networks on culture and society. Although its relevance is even more significant when combined with other theoretical explanations that explain specific fields of social phenomenon. Two have been mentioned here, namely social-interactionism when it comes to the construction of identities, and theory of institutions when explaining the social and cultural. And all three could be in a way summed to the following statement: “to the extent that "society" recursively reproduces itself it does so because it is materially heterogeneous”.⁷³ But let us examine more closely the relations between individuals, society and technology.

Theory of Institutions

Talking about the change of communication in web based social networks one also has to have an insight into the field of technology, the development and social relevance of innovations, and what is their cultural significance. In this manner let us consider using the theory of institutions developed by Douglass North⁷⁴, which is in many ways based on economic prepositions and

⁷² Law, J. (1992): *Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity*. Centre for Science Studies Lancaster University, p. 3.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁴ North, D. C. (1990): *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press.

should also be considered as such, but does provide some useful tools of explaining the dynamics of society.

Individual and society

The social world, which we accidentally or deliberately create and change, is formed by a complex network of formal and informal rules by which we act. Remembering Hayek's definition of order above, then any society can be treated as a single spontaneous order, whose nature of interaction is its own and does thereby differ from others. In other words, different groups of people have their own ways of creating repeated interaction, resulting in informal rules and become a culture in the broad sense. Within such an order there are (can be) other "smaller orders", which overlap in certain areas between each other. We are talking about the all-encompassing culture, shared by all individuals of a community, which can be detected in tradition, beliefs, moral beliefs, behaviour etc. At the same time, there are many sub-cultures within this culture, shared by certain persons in relation to their interest. Further on, the relationship between the dominant culture and subculture is not the expression of inferiority or superiority, but of different cultural practices of members of communities. For the definition of certain universal patterns of behaviour of individuals in different societies is therefore necessary to start from the causes for which men enter into mutual relations.

Constructing interpersonal relations

Perhaps it is worthy to briefly recall some of the early interpretation of forming communities: David Hume⁷⁵ provides an explanation, which is old but not obsolete. Each human, unlike animals, is not able to satisfy all of his wishes and desires, which are largely a reflection of possession of property, as we can be fully effective only in specific areas of activity and the creation of property rights, but not in all. We are thus entering into interaction with other individuals with the aim of mutual exchange of goods and services, and are talking about interpersonal exchanges and transactions between people. The sum of power of individuals is growing, opportunities increase as a result of the division of work, and exposure to disasters is being reduced. "Because of this additional power, capability and safety the society becomes

⁷⁵ Hume, D.: *A Treatise of Human Nature: Justice and Property*. In Boaz, David (1998): *The Libertarian Reader*. New York: Free Press.

beneficial"⁷⁶. According to this interpretation, we as individuals are entering into interactions due to our own selfish interests, which are not always immediately visible⁷⁷.

Now, individuals have interests that are not consistent with each other. In order to reconcile the different interests, certain means are to be employed, so that they will change the selfish interest of one side and turn it in behaviour that will be profitable also for the other. This is the task of institutions, since these determine the extent to which the personal self-interest is motivating human behaviour. Institutions will specify the responsibilities of each side, which is included in the trade, with relevant informal arrangements or formal agreements, so that both sides will be satisfied with the final outcome. If we consider *Homo Economicus* (HE), then this situation will be the one with the smallest cost to be incurred in the trade. In order for institutions to ensure the minimum cost, they have to conduct preliminary measurements of possible alternatives (both good as bad), in order to reduce the level of risk, and ensure the most effective execution of contracts. The relationship between the willingness of the good alternative and less good alternative is reverse in proportion, as it would first lead to greater damage than the other.

The same applies to the behaviour of individuals in exchange. Individuals will take less risk if he will take into account that all participants are selfish to the extent, that they will act on the expense of others in order to achieve their objectives. On average there are less of such individuals, but their actions are much more risky for others. Therefore, institutions must be, if they want to ensure efficient exchange, created with regard to HE, who will in line with achieving its objectives, act rationally and will, despite the possible interactions with altruistic individuals, behave as if all who only follow their interests are egoistic. Institutions should therefore ensure the freedom of the individual that pursues its own objectives, but does not penalize the interests of others.

⁷⁶ Hume, D.: *Justice and Property*. In Boaz, David (1998): *The Libertarian Reader*. New York: Free Press.

⁷⁷ Adam Smith said that it is useless to expect anything from others without receiving something for it. It is about a mutual giving and receiving of utilities, that creates a net of transactions between people. We can turn the selfishness of others to our own advantage as it serves as a n incentive for interactions between individuals. Smith, A.: *The Wealth of Nations: Society and Self-Interest*. In Boaz, David (1998): *The Libertarian Reader*. New York: Free Press. If we remember Tomasello's thoughts from the beginning, then this poses a different approach, if not opposite.

Institutions are the product of human needs and activities, through which the agents process available information's available, and in so doing form interactions between themselves. The institutional framework with its structure of rules will define the set of opportunities of how to maximize the profit or other objectives. Organizations and their entrepreneurs as systematic entities for achieving objectives are not only a function of institutional barriers, but also technology, income and preferences. As the institutional framework often does not provide means for effective pursuit of goals, they often modify and adapt it to their needs. Changes as a result of this adjustment can be gradual or revolutionary; in both cases the organization must hold sufficient bargaining power to affectively change the existing balance of power.

Behaviour of individuals in a institutional framework

The nature of organisations, their operations and efficiency can be explained by the behaviour of individuals within a specific institutional framework. At the beginning we identified the society as a spontaneous order, which is being established through repeated interactions of individuals. Such an order is not the product of a single man or group, and due to its complexity cannot be fully controlled. In contrast, organizations are a planned human product, and their function is to achieve the goals of individuals or groups. They are deliberately "created orders"⁷⁸, which allow more coordination of activities for the efficient achievement of objectives, and are as such embedded in the society. They allow us to adjust a given social order to our desires. The commands that come in from the top specify the function of carrying out tasks, goals, and certain aspects of various methods. But they are not overall sufficient for functioning as they have to be supplemented by informal rules that guide the individuals and give them a degree of freedom in carrying out its work. Key to functioning of an organization is thus a set of knowledge, which it generates, uses, builds, and passed on. The set of possible alternatives on how the organisation can operate, and its further path, thus increases with the possibilities of development of knowledge itself. In the case where the whole knowledge is in possession of the management at the top of hierarchy of the organization, the opportunities to develop skills are gradually reduced to the extent that the organisation becomes unilateral and ineffective in responding to changes in the surrounding area.

⁷⁸ Hayek, F.: *Law, Legislation, and Liberty: Made Orders and Spontaneous Orders*. In Boaz, David (1998): *The Libertarian Reader*. New York: Free Press.

Organizations therefore possess the so-called *tacit knowledge*⁷⁹, which is only partially transferable, and which we acquire with experience within the same organization. Individuals gain such knowledge in different ways because of different initial ability, and organizations will continue to invest in those types of knowledge with which they can maximize their profit within the conditions created by the institutional framework. Incentives for the acquisition of pure knowledge are a result of the structure of monetary rewards and penalties, and the tolerance of society to advance knowledge. The latter affects the way we perceive the world around us, rationalise it and how we act in it.

The importance of tacit knowledge for the organization lies in finding new markets, and their evaluation. The degree of tacit knowledge that organizations possess, will determine how they will react to new situations and how efficiently they will implement measurement of costs and contracting. The institutional framework provides the border edges, on which it is possible to maximize the objectives, but indirectly this also defines the kind of knowledge and information agents need to pursue these objectives.

For organizations operating in the market, different formal rules differently encourage tacit knowledge to solve problems more effectively, thus measuring the costs and contracting. The institutional framework with the rules and conditions for entry will determine the regulation of entering the market. In this manner it will require and determine the structure of governance and how the organization should act in order to achieve its objectives. Because of these constraints of choice while acting within the formal framework, the organization will have to develop the necessary tacit knowledge, which will provide unique problem-solving and will differentiate it in relation to competing subjects. If this will lead to more efficiency, the organisation will also be more socially accepted, if not it will eliminate itself.

We can conclude that the stability of the institutional framework depends on the interconnection of formal rules and informal constraints, as they are the reason for institutional change. Without informal restrictions, which are being set up as a result of repeated interactions, and are

⁷⁹ This term was coined by Michael Polanyi.

represented as practices and habits, society would be chaotic. These are the constraints that establish order in the individual communities, as they give meaning to everyday situations and rationalise them. Simple, small communities are based on personal connections, and informal constraints are a sufficient condition for smooth functioning of individuals. They will not afford deviate behaviour because they will be sanctioned by the community (in an extreme case also excluded from it).

Restructuring and efficiency of institutions

The transition of a community⁸⁰ is a process of "restructuring of institutions", which means implementations of new formal rules in the form of laws, conventions, agreements and the Constitution, which is adopted by the new community. The success of the transition then depends on how the new formal rules, which provide new incentives, are adopted by individuals who behave according to the prevailing informal constraints. It is the *culture* of a community as a set of informal rules that is not subjected to the policies that would directly change it. Formal rules should thus reflect the historical need for stability of a society, and can therefore not be the subject of transplantation of formal rules from other legislations, because communities differ in their informal restrictions, which they have weaved over time, and which they keep changing and adjusting.

When it comes to the effectiveness of institutions, it is necessary to say that North used the term efficiency "to define the conditions under which the existing set of limitations provides for economic growth."⁸¹ "The path of institutional change outline two factors: the increasing returns and incomplete markets, which are characterized by high transaction costs"⁸², but there is always more paths of the development of a community, which is partly based on the historical heritage and its informal constraints, and the current set of alternatives offered by the institutional

⁸⁰ For more on the disharmony of new formal rules and old informal restrictions see an essay by Svetozar Pejovich, in which he compares different situations of former socialist states of middle and east Europe after their transition, and for that uses the interactionist thesis. Pejovich, S. (2003): *Understanding the Transaction Costs of Transition: It's the Culture, Stupid*. Washington D.C.: Mercatus Center, George Mason University.

⁸¹ North, D. C. (1990): *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press, p. 99.

⁸² Ibid., p. 102.

framework. Based on the *concept of path dependency*, as a way of "conceptual narrowing the range of choices and integrating decisions in the course"⁸³, the current state of the respective communities can be explained, and why, despite the ineffectiveness of development, they continued its path.

Entrepreneurs (economic, political and, in my case, technical) are those who, within the framework of restrictions, are trying to maximize profits in those border areas where it appears that the institutional framework provides the most. In such a practice they allegedly follow the most profitable alternatives. These border problems require a solution, which depends on the relative bargaining power of participants. Border adjustments are based on previous institutional solutions, and the tacit knowledge of agents. Thus, intentionally or unintentionally, they are causing changes and are changing the institutional framework, which restricts them. They are also restricted with incomplete knowledge, which is the reason that they often pursue options other than the most socially efficient. The problem arises when solving of problems is based on a short-term basis, which can lead to inefficient economies. Once entrepreneurs choose to tackle the short-term solutions solving, they are developing it with additional training and to compete with it with the competition. This consolidates the path that was outlined in the resolution of the current problem, but did not envisage or taken into account the resulting potential consequences. Border solutions of problems that the opposite parties will address with different negotiating power within different societies companies will always be necessary.

Mass Culture Theory

In modern society individuals are easy prey to manipulation and exploitation by institutions such as mass media and popular culture, because they give a false morality. This was the premise of the theory of mass culture that was created at the beginning of the 20th century. At this point shows that it is necessary to define the concept of mass culture and problematise it.

Strinati⁸⁴ determines that the community of people in the period of pre-industrialisation functioned very simplistically. The then current values were generally accepted and approved and

⁸³ Ibid., p. 106.

⁸⁴ Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge.

have therefore allowed the society to be hierarchical. Likewise, culture (both in the narrow and broad sense) was separated and institutionalized in a similar way. Elites were in possession of the arts (culture in the narrow sense), with which they identified, and in accordance with it lived it (culture in the broad sense), whereas the people found their equivalent in the form of popular folk culture, which was a direct reflection of their life and as such, did not look for deeper meanings in the creation of itself. In the age of industrialization, however, the situation changed. Change of the formal framework led to a change of informal interpersonal interactions, which had to be respectively adjusted. Individuals became alienated and the only way of integration into the alternative community was facilitated by mass media⁸⁵. Mass culture was therefore created by the people at the top of the hierarchical scale, and not those at the bottom of the scale. Thus it did not offer the possibility of active engagement, but only consuming and unconscious subordination. Atomized individuals are subject to manipulation of mass media in the market due to a gap, as a consequence of the lack of values and the concrete living guidelines. People in a mass society lack what links them in another instance (e.g., the nation), therefore, a "common interests, work, traditions, values and sentiments"⁸⁶.

Through the prism of the institutional theory, it can be argued as follows: since the mass culture does not offer the possibility of active engagement of its consumers in its creation; this culture will therefore not be accepted because it is not the product of their informal interactions. Theory of mass culture, therefore, lacks an adequate explanation about the behaviour of individuals, since there is no insight into their operation, nor did it adequately analyze and anticipate consequences as results by the emergence of mass society and popular culture. They discussed it in a dialectic relationship opposing their elitist⁸⁷ and have in so doing generalised all other cultural practices with the term mass culture. They speak about it as of a homogeneous culture in which there is no place for diversity, and is under the influence of mass media and consumerisms. With its consumer-oriented acting mass culture was supposed to refuse intellectual efforts of individuals to create their own views on specific issues, simplified them, and in this way created

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁸⁶ MacDonald, D. in Strinati, Dominic (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 13.

⁸⁷ At this point it is necessary to make attention about the creators of the theory of mass culture. They identified with the so called »high culture« and have as such looked down on mass culture, people's culture. In this context, mass culture theory is elitist, as the makers of it have set the criteria of valuation and taste.

its own social reality for the mass society. Mass culture is "a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions. It mixes and scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenised culture"⁸⁸. MacDonald also notes that mass culture is thus democratic, since every individual within it is the same. In so far as the first arbiters of cultural distinctions have been elites, mass culture does not distinguish, but is accessible to all.⁸⁹

Mass culture could be quite easily equated with Americanization, since the U.S. embodies the concept of a consumer-oriented society of mass production and consumption of cultural products⁹⁰. A meaningful interpretation of the effects of Americanization would be as follows: popular culture, which is exported by U.S. consumer-oriented society can be a threat to local cultures, in as far as we perceive individuals as passive consumers. First, this would mean that we neglect their ability to rationally and reflectively assess (identity of self) the selection of those goods, which will serve to fulfil their desires. Secondly, this would advocate the success of transplanting formalized forms of cultural expression to persistent informal practices that are the product of the interaction of consumers.

It can be argued that the products of popular culture allowed the emancipation of certain groups of people when they offered a point of reference, with which they identify easier than with the then prevailing social performances. The emergence of new social strata in the urban centres has requested the creation of new cultural products, which offered these groups them appropriate ways of consumption to meet their interests. Over time, these methods of consumption have

⁸⁸ MacDonald, D. in Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 16.

⁸⁹ Mass culture may have had been considered as egalitarian in a certain point in history, but this is not true anymore. Parallel with it new cultural practices have emerged acting within the consumer market. Such have been artistic avantgards that drew from it in a critical stance and presented an artistic answer to it. (Strinati 1995: 19). Second, mass culture enabled the creativity of young people when adopting certain cultural patterns, symbols and practices, their combination and creation of new meanings (cultural bricolage). These are the findings of Hebdige, who speaks of "positive" influences of Americanization. Hebdige, D. in Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 34.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

become formal and normal. At the same time, this meant a shift in the field of aesthetic classification of cultural expressions, which previously served the higher layer.

From the above it is clear that the theory of mass culture lacks a valid interpretation of the social and cultural change⁹¹. This is because the product is thought of intellectuals who do not come from the ranks of consumers of popular culture, and their assessment is in its basis very biased and elitist, because the distinction and assessment of cultural expressions is always a reflection of the historical origin of the ratio of power of individual groups within a certain company.

Semiotics

If *structuralism* works fairly static in its design⁹², since it assumes a universal network of cultural elements, and it depends which of those are included in certain cultures, then *semiotics* as a science of signs and symbols excludes this. Systems of signs are historically and culturally conditioned, which places any culture on its own interpretation of the scope of the world. Similar signs may occur in different cultures and have different meanings for members of these cultures. These means result from the cultural context of each community and its historical development. It is thus a diverse organization of knowledge, reflected in the symbolic systems. "The reality is always constructed, and made intelligible to human understanding by culturally specific systems of meaning"⁹³. If we return to the understanding of culture, as executed from Hayek's definition of the system and the reason of entering interpersonal relationships by Hume, then this show that the individual group of people interpret the world, and accordingly organise themselves regarding it, in the context of meeting their needs, which are largely subject to the environment. Different communities thus create appropriate cultural practices, which think the world and give meaning to it. And it is this cultural subjectivity that semiotics aspires to explain. It is interested in the production of meanings that are hidden in the abstract world of culture, as a product of social activities.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 45.

⁹² See Lévi-Strauss, C. (1993-1994): *Structural anthropology*. London, New York: Penguin Books.

⁹³ Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 109.

The theorist, who has predominantly marked the field of semiotics with the introduction of some concepts, was Roland Barthes, which, among other things, has dealt with the role of myth in society. According to him, myth is a reflection of reality in as far as we consider its historical specificity and social construction. It is a reflection of certain class interests and as such does not represent reality, but it wants to change it and adjust it to the needs of a particular social class. Its importance is produced, not spontaneous. "Myth is a system of communication, that is the message," is a "mode of signification, a form", is a "type of speech ... conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message"⁹⁴. Myth is the second order of Barthes' semiotic system, because it relates to the first order of signification, as defined by Saussure. Myth as a second order of signification is a meta-language, because it uses various symbolic systems of the first order of signification. If we try to apply this to the field of popular culture, it may be said that the first order of signification represents symbolic systems of film, music, fashion style, etc., as their means are determined by the context of popular culture, which includes all these meanings, and can be therefore considered as myth. It seems that we encounter a slight problem, namely how to define popular culture and its individual elements within globalization. But global popular culture, in contrast to previous territorially determined cultural practices, also provides the context of globalization. According to Barthes, (global) popular culture thus adapts reality to a specific social class (ie. in the capitalistic societies, therefore, the logic of capital). If this is true, then myth is not hiding, but distorts the reality in such a way that we are aware of it. "In myth the meaning is distorted by the concept"⁹⁵. Not only that mainstream popular culture builds on capital, but is also constantly repeating it and putting it to the forefront (it is Adorno's *social cement*).

Technological development, innovations and new media

Technological innovations such as, for example, the steam engine, enabled the manufactural production of goods and with it the industrial era. Consequently, they created jobs, which encouraged people to move the bigger cities that were centers of industrialization. In this way, the

⁹⁴ Barthes, R. in Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 34.

⁹⁵ Barthes, R. in Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 115.

transition (this required a restructuring of institutions and the introduction of new formal rules) from the traditional society into a modern society, has been marked by changes that have been represented in the new (alienated) relationship to work, the establishment of new social classes, and consequently modified the relations between human beings. But this move was not related solely to the socio-economic shift; rather it was a "relocation and pre-orientation of political, social, intellectual, cultural and economic benefits, criteria and sources"⁹⁶. All these changes have led to a redefining of identities in the process of making sense anew of their role in the wider social reality (informal cultural practices had to adapt to a new formal framework and thus needed more time).

From the pre-rural environment, which was defined by the type of work, gave greater importance to the function of family and local communities, and in which moral values were based on religion, social life has moved to the area of urban "culture" (as opposite to "nature" and life in accordance with it), scientific progress, secularisation and alienation. This was fertile ground for the development of mass culture in which individuals act as atoms of society, and "who lack any meaningful or morally coherent relationship with each other"⁹⁷. Previous relevant organizations, such as the village, family and church have lost their importance, but these were those who gave the individuals a strong basis and safety in the course of his life⁹⁸. In these border areas new institutions entered and provided individuals with a sense of belonging to the broader society. Among these the biggest role is carry mass media, which also allow practicing individuality and social belonging. These last two have marked the emergence of modern individualism, which is

⁹⁶ Traweek, S. (2000): *Faultlines*. In Reid (ed.), Roddey (ed.), Sharon (ed.): *Doing science + culture*. New York, London: Routledge, p. 23.

⁹⁷ Strinati, D. (1995): *An introduction to theories of popular Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 6.

⁹⁸ Racional and complex social systems have taken the place of traditional ligatures. (Dahredorf, R. in Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, p. 10.) In relation to Homo Economicus, the latter came into full being in the modern age, as life's practices became submitted to rationality and calculation. But this rational position produced irrational behaviour in everyday decision making, as people have replaced traditional "religious" explanations with new "scientific" ones, and we are more and more believing in things we are able to perceive with our senses. Without a doubt, "blind faith" in media mediated information has some ground in it. These informations are in most cases correctly presented, but not also correctly verified. If we paraphrase, "it is the package that counts, not the content".

again marked with bigger reflexivity and depersonalization as a response to alienation and loss of meaning, therefore the individual began to search for the latter in group belonging.⁹⁹

Technological innovations are those that define social functioning anew, thus creating the context of thinking and making sense of the world within a specific community. In today's time, this phenomenon is increasingly present, as we are witnessing an increasing technological development. It is almost impossible to separate the impact of technology from social acting in contemporary times, especially considering what impact technological discoveries such as fire, the wheel, the steam engine, Internet etc. had and have on us. The development of the latter enabled the emergence of the personal computer and telecommunications¹⁰⁰, as they contributed to the occurrence of (technological) globalization. These two innovations have become the subject and tool of popular culture alike as a result of their increasing.

With the help of the personal computer people became technologically emancipated and equal to a certain extent (the use of personal computers is still subject to the logic of capital, but also here we are witnessing changes with the development of inexpensive computers for children and their education by the association One Laptop Per Child¹⁰¹). Soon personal computers will not only be boxes on our work tables, but an integral part of normal objects and appliances, which are daily used (glasses, house, refrigerator, car,...). They changed the nature of our work, communication and organization, and thus marked social functioning in general. They are switched in our lives to the extent that we no longer can function without them. We take them for granted, as many

⁹⁹ See Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče.

¹⁰⁰ Telecommunications have provided ground for actions of first »hackers«, who have demolished the existing boundaries in that they figured out how the proces of calling over the phone works, and began to call for free (hack) to various telecommunication syste. See <http://www.webcrunchers.com/crunch>. This knowledge, especially the incentive for individual initiative, has been used by the next generation (for instance co-founder of Apple Steve Wozniak and The Homebrew Club) in order to change and develop electronic circuits to such an extend, so that they made first personal computers, which used a relatively small amount of space, compared to the first IBM computers and those before them.

¹⁰¹ See <http://laptop.org/en/>

technological innovations, which have initially been on the peripheral area of the existing system¹⁰².

The interconnectivity goes also further as technology and human practices are becoming more and more interdependent. Lets take the newest products of the Apple Company that gave it a boost to the leading player in this field. The centre product is the iPod as a portable multimedia device, which is more than that. It is also a status symbol, fashion accessory and identity extension. The online store to accompany it, iTunes gradually redefines the field of online piracy and illegal trafficking, and is thus getting closer to the idea of Kusek and Leonhard¹⁰³ on the accessibility of cultural products via a common and overall accessible payable database on the web. iPhone, the newest product, represents the next stage in the convergence of technological products, beside making phone calls and searching over the web it is also making use of the iPod applications in an aesthetic and functional package. It is possible to state that technology is embedded in human culture and is becoming popular culture.

To understand the specific qualities of new media on the web a short overview of previous forms of communication is required to put them into a broader socio-cultural context. Starting with the basic and first form of human interaction¹⁰⁴, the gestural, and later on, the oral communication, the relations based on it are direct and personal. The historical follow up to that form was the written word, which enabled the thoughts and ideas to be materially preserved, time and space independent, and in the end it has enabled cultures to reflect on their language more systematically. In opposition to the oral experience of interaction, the written communication is in a larger manner impersonal. This again changed with the invention of the telephone, as direct and real-time communication on long distances was possible.

¹⁰² The demistification of the computer in England can be related to BBC, as they realised the potential of its functionality. In this manner they launched a series of promotional commercials, and thus helped to institutionalise it. In order for them to become socially acceptable, their user functionality had to be fulfilled.

¹⁰³ Kusek, D., Leonhard, G. (2005): *The Future of Music: Manifesto for the Digital Music Revolution*. Boston, Berklee Press.

¹⁰⁴ Tomasello, M. (2008): *Origins of human communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, cop.

With the rise of media, starting with the newspapers the dissemination of information's became an everyday practice and enabled the formation of nations, what Benedict Anderson's¹⁰⁵ terms "imagined communities". The communication in this case was generally one-way and indirect. Later on, in the case of the radio, the possibility of calling to a radio show presented a more upgraded form of two-way communication. With television the interaction again decreased when we consider that one could not communicate back in the same form (visual picture) and via the same tools (camera) as the networks use.

But let us make a distinction as to which media we can label as new. Flew¹⁰⁶, for instance, is questioning what are new media or what defines them as "new" comparing to "old"? He emphasises that the definitions always depend from the socio-cultural contexts and their use in communication. Many authors have come to the conclusion that in contemporary times it is not substantial for one to try to define "which medium is new", but rather to determine "what influence it has on the social and cultural context"¹⁰⁷. For new media to develop and get accepted there have to be incentives for their creation. It is in this sense that we can perceive new media as digital media (traditional media in the digital form included), because of the simultaneous development and practical use made possible by technological innovations.

It is with the creation and development of the personal computer (PC), as a basic tool or appliance on which new media work that a fruitful ground for further incentives and inventions was established. As with all major inventions a sum of variables has to synergise to enable them. North¹⁰⁸ is talking about "border spaces" where room is created within the societies formal frame of rules for (in this case technological) innovation's to take place. For example, without individual innovators (like Gutenberg) and its users (printing houses) specific segments of technological production (printed media) would not have developed, thereby excluding the

¹⁰⁵ Anderson, B. (1991): *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed., London.

¹⁰⁶ Flew, T. (2005): *New media: an introduction*. South Melbourne, Oxford, New York : Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Flew, T. (2005): *New media :an introduction*. South Melbourne, Oxford, New York : Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹⁰⁸ North, D. C. (1990): *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press.

development of contemporary cultural production (newspapers, magazines, books, etc.) and its consumer exploitation (women magazines). In this sense, modern man is not just a *social being*, but also a *technological being* as it are the technological innovations that make his everyday activities possible and broaden them regardless of space and time. And as there was little discussion about merely compatible new technologies a few years ago, today we are confronted with their increasing interacting convergence. The biggest digital media that at the same time offers its space to other media and enables the development of new is the Internet and the World Wide Web based on it.

At first, research of the World Wide Web was directed to providing insight to the virtual and real lives of people, groups, events and other activities presented on the web¹⁰⁹. What could be examined was the functionality on the grounds of usability, their purpose (presentational, informative, to some extent also interactive) and their current state (up-to-date, active or serving merely as an archive of past activities). Although the Internet based Web was regarded as the most democratic (because a larger population had the possibility of presenting itself) of all media up until then, the communication was still directed one-way, from the creator/owner of the web site to the spectator/user. With the upgrade to Web 2.0 this has changed as it enabled individuals to add, supplement and change contents. These features create incentives for individuals to interact, merely uphold contacts or create types of public debate, and it is this later segment that is important when the educational role of new media is considered, because it can serve as a tool for practicing and promoting active citizenship (individuals have the possibility to play an active role when it comes to dispersing and falsifying information's). Thus web users can be active in various ways:

- as creators of content (blogs, microblogs as for instance Twitter, wikis),
- as contributors to posted content (in traditional media on the web, blogs of other people, wikis), or
- as editors of texts and feeds (Netvibes, iGoogle etc.).

¹⁰⁹ See Jones, S. (ed.) (1998): *Doing Internet research: critical issues and methods for examining the net*. Thousand Oaks [etc.]: Sage.; GAUNTLETT, David (ed.), HORSLEY, Ross (ed.) (2004): *Web.studies*. London: Arnold.; WHITTAKER, Jason (2004): *The cyberspace handbook*. London, New York: Routledge.

Most of the social networking websites include all of these features that are also one of the reasons for their popularity amongst its users.

World Wide Web and the Internet

At the beginning it would be reasonable to set a distinction between the Internet and the Web, which are often mixed in everyday conversations and its conceptual use. The Internet is a technology that allows networked computers to communicate, and we can trace its beginnings back to the development of ARPANET network (used for information about possible Russian attacks on the U.S. during the Cold War) and the efforts of communication between MIT hackers (the first, which establish a virtual community), computer enthusiasts, CERN scientists, etc. World Wide Web is one of the communication networks, based on the Internet, and was created as a tool for scientists, who with the help of the protocols and agreements reached easier transfers of data. Its advantage is in its simple utilisation, based on these protocols, and is therefore accessible to the general public (either users or creators of online products). A unique feature of the functionality of the Internet is hypertextuality, that when reviewing online content allows for the crossing to other related topics, and thus enables new forms of direct and rapid interaction, and establishment of new structures and virtual networks. This creates conditions for faster knitting of social networks and the creation of virtual communities, which is another feature of the Internet: interactivity (i.e., these two are key particularities of the Internet as an information and communication system¹¹⁰). Not a negligible feature of the Internet is also that it allows the user active participation in the process of creating, updating and refinement of online content. The continuous emergence of new content causes novelties on the Internet to replace earlier, older content, but which despite their “non-relevance” are not without value. They exist as tangible artefacts, which may serve as a tool for insight into previous interactions of specific communities. World Wide Web has thus the unique feature of current transformation, whereas we can observe this dynamic process in a continuous static state. These features make the Internet interesting for social researchers, as they offer new forms of communication and the resulting social relationships and the consequences of its impact as a technology on society in general.

¹¹⁰ Oblak, T., Petrič, G. (2005): *Splet kot medij in mediji na spletu*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, p. 19.

Different people will use World Wide Web for different purposes, depending on their interest. To some it serves only as a tool for rapidly receiving e-mail, others will search for the information they are interested in, again, the third will be use it as a means of informing others on their activities or the activities of some interest groups, whose members are. Web can be therefore treated according to its purpose: as a social network, as (mass) media, or as an information system¹¹¹. Today, all three areas of use are more or less covered; the use also mainly depends on the familiarity with the technology and its handling. It is also more likely that the World Wide Web as a medium will be used by young people, growing up of which has been marked by its simultaneous social enforcement. The conditions for this have been created by the web of technology, phenomenon of globalization and popular culture. All three fields have influenced each other and created conditions for mutual development. Internet became a more widely socially acceptable technology because of informal practices of communication, which are the possibilities and potential of forming a new market and encourage the exploitation of consumer industries, this is the World Wide Web continue to use the city as well as consumer and services. In this context the Internet opened a new space to maximize the profit, and developed new ways to serve this market logic for this purpose.

Due to the use of the Internet for commercial purposes the initial efforts of the authors of the World Wide Web today are fading (the World Wide Web Consortium guidelines are subject to the logic of capital, as they are more concerned with the protection of data transmission, then with the spreading of the Internet amongst the people, which should be their priority¹¹²). Thus, the web production faces problems of commercialization and popularization for purposes of consumerism, which may have unpleasant consequences for bona fide users of the Internet, searching for specific content. One of these problems is a result of hipertextuality and the use of online search engines. The problem of the latter can be seen in the ranking of found web pages, which is based on the number of related links on the website. Oblak and Petrič note that a content shift took place in the World Wide Web, a "controversial situation", as the links become

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 37.

"connective tissue, a necessary condition for the World Wide Web to exist as a hypertext system"¹¹³.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

For the individual the web offers the possibility of distinct individual presentation on the Internet, which does not require specific skills that would allow him to do that as that was the case in the beginning (think of social networking websites like Facebook). Additional methods of communication are various forums and blogs, which are based on the basis of IRC¹¹⁴ (within those new meanings and symbols have been created, and which are still present in more advanced versions, such as MSN Messenger, Gtalk, etc.) as one of the networks of the Internet, which has evolved parallel with the World Wide Web. We are talking about "emancipating potentials of hypertext"¹¹⁵, as the individual is enabled to generate his own identity expression and communicate with likeminded people, with whom he or she shares interests, thru search on the Web. The advantage of the virtual space¹¹⁶, for individuals within by the Internet is that they can generate own representations of them (with their alter-egos or fiction identities) through which they communicate with other entities. Individuals can be members of several communities, a characteristic of belonging in a postmodern age, which is non-binding, free, to a large extent subject to change and therefore more volatile. Primarily virtual communities differ from "real" in space defined by fiction and intangible¹¹⁷. Nevertheless, the communities that arise within this framework, are real, as far as they formed by persons (or their representations) driven into mutual interaction by interest. With the help of communication individuals within these communities co-

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 47.

¹¹⁴ Short for Internet Relay Chat.

¹¹⁵ Oblak, T. in Petrič, G. (2005): *Splet kot medij in mediji na spletu*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, p. 32.

¹¹⁶ Virtual space, created by the Internet, is in many aspects comparable with the real geographically limited one, in as far both offer possibilities for mutual interaction and creation of communities. Although, virtual communities are, in comparison with those that are formed on the basis of human interaction in real space, more fluid and in a greater degree marked by constant change. Maybe because of the difference of the individual and his identity on the web, or because of the different structure and time (both are conditioned by technology), or different channels of communication. Costigan, J. T. In Jones, S. (ed.) (1998): *Doing Internet research: critical issues and methods for examining the net*. Thousand Oaks [etc.]: Sage.

¹¹⁷ When we step into it, it is recognisable to us to some extent thru visual web presentations, though we can never mentally grasp it as a whole because of its complexity.

create, make sense and redefine the (virtual) world, thus reinforce the very existence of the dynamic nature of the community. Therefore "the complexity of mutual co-creation of the inner world of the subject and the outside world of culture"¹¹⁸ reaches new dimensions in the age of media and technologies, such as the Internet.

Online Social Networks

Social networking websites are web applications with which individuals set up and preserve social contacts and in so doing use different tools for interaction. Such are Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, Frinedster, Virb, Tagged, Hi5, Joost, Del.ici.ous, Flickr, Flixter, Last.fm, Netlog, Netvibes to name just a few, as there are numerous ones more differing in time of creation, purpose and functions. With these it is not only about one-way communication between users as it was distinctive for first forms of online websites (that is not true for online communications in general if we consider the use of e-mails which entail messages directed to specific receivers), but about the convergence of many applications for creating a personal profile on the web. Some have options of correlating and connecting between each other thus enhancing the effectiveness of communication. For example, a post on Twitter can be a synced with the Facebook status and can contain links to posted videos on Flixter, photos on Flickr or music on Last.fm. Another example is the possibility of inserting blog feeds, Facebook widget, MySpace profiles, Twitter widget, email inboxes, search engines etc. to the Netvibes personalized start page which can be also made public as your own "universe". These are just a few examples of how new media on the web are becoming differentiated yet on the other hand integrated into a vast network of web 2.0 online applications.

Communication within these social network websites is mostly indirect and not in real-time, which enables users to manage their time and interactions in personal ways. Updating statuses mostly contains the users current activity. This phenomenon of indirect communicating derives from talking to oneself, in other words playing with own creativity. The communication continues and becomes interaction if the message intrigues the receiver. And in this case it is the message that is searching for the receiver. For instance, playing with the grammatical features of one's personal name and the associations to it that one has in a specific moment and environment

¹¹⁸ Ule, M. (2000): *Sodobne identitete: v vrtincu diskurzov*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, p. 280.

can result in different interpretations of message receivers according to their previous socio-cultural practices (be it Slovenian, Catalan, peer or interest groups).

Communication within them consists of written text, visual and audio material. The record of the written language has changed as it has narrowed down to a letter or a few letters according to the pronunciation of the language spoken. A specific language has emerged on this ground, which is known within the global community of web users including smiles or emoticons and other new sign compositions that have been meaningful within the virtual space and are now being transferred and used in a broader sense. In contrast to this, certain real life actions are taking place within these virtual social networks (virtual owning of other users or sending virtual drinks in Facebook, or even start-up of enterprises or virtual concerts within Second Life) and can be interpreted in sociological and anthropological terms.

The case of Facebook

As already said in the introduction part, Facebook is the most widely used social networking website to date and has been growing in numbers of its users exponentially in the past one year. The reason for it can be found in the easiness of its use as comparing with, for example, Myspace, where the user has more freedom of expression regarding creating and manipulating the visual background and spatial adjustment of information boxes. Facebook on the other hand is in its basis the same for all users, what he or she can manipulate is in a larger degree bound to content, as the users has the option to select different “boxes” with selected information, such as music, maps, videos, texts, and other custom made applications. Creativity is fostered and encouraged as users have the possibility to be playful on a regular daily basis or even more frequent and present that to the outer world or their friends. Even more, the user has the ability to follow his or her “friends”¹¹⁹ in what they are doing, where they are, what their current interest is or with whom they interact.

¹¹⁹ The term “friend” in Facebook has to be problematized. In many cases it is inconceivable to refer to all of the people with whom the user is interacting on Facebook as friends, as these can be in hundreds and thousands. It depends from one person to another of how and for what they use Facebook, as it can be used for upholding contacts with persons in distant areas of the world, practicing communication with friends, fun and creative use, provoking, tracking information, etc. There seem to be numerous ways of use, almost as much as there are users, which is why in some cases “friends” are really friends, and in some most of them are merely people someone met, or not even that, as they connected on the site thru a friend or just by pure interest. What can be perceived as a positive side to it

Another possible reason for the popularity of Facebook can be related to the word-to-mouth process as new users open up accounts to be connected with their friends who already use it, and because of the current “hype” around it present in media, as also in everyday interaction with others¹²⁰. What is interesting in the case of Facebook use is that it offers various ways of communicating and interacting, starting with simple gestures like poking, using different tools of making attention to one’s interests, posting photos, music and videos, texts and blurbs, place that one has visited and favourite applications etc. In a way, all kinds of communication are possible (except of direct verbal), from indirect (updating ones status or posting a favourite music video) to direct (posting directly on a “friends” personal page, inviting people to join groups, attend events or communicating with others the chat application). The popularity has stretched so far, that one can find the option of posting a specific content on the websites of mainstream media, blogs and companies.

As said these are just a few thoughts on how Facebook appears to be relevant for study. Some research has been done on how it is used in student communities on campuses, the issue of privacy and even regarding identity issues, but as far as know not in the specific cases of how its communication tools are related to the construction of identity of young Slovenian and Catalan users, and how this is related to the issue of preserving and evolving of language and cultural identity of them

Relevance of presented theoretical framework for the research project

The presented theoretical stands from above cover a wide area of social and humanistic thought, and offer many perspectives on how to interpret the here proposed research subject. Starting with Tomasello and his evolutionary theory of human communication we can see how these basic

is, that one can get to know people better by using Facebook, when in other situations in non-virtual environment one would maybe not even interact with them. Or you get to know the people you already know from a different view, thru their presentation, status changes, or music posting on the site. These are just a few cases to have in mind when thinking about relations on Facebook and thus “friendship”. This provokes academic as also laick thought of what a friend in today’s society refers to.

¹²⁰ In some cases of griups it can be said, that if you do not have a Facebook and other social networking website account relevant in a specific culturally regional area, you do not exists. This is even more true within the younger population of users. See Livingstone, S. (2008): *Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression*. New Media Society 2008; 10; 393.

communication acts are used in Facebook. For instance, some Facebook users are using attention getters that are “such things as *ground-slap*, *poke-at* and *throw-stuff*, which serve to attract the attention of the recipient to the slapping, poking, or throwing communicator.”¹²¹ Tomasello further on says that “the “meaning” or function of the communicative act as a whole resides not in the attention-getting gesture, but rather in the involuntary display, which the individual knows the recipient must see in order to react appropriately.”¹²² The fact that “[p]ointing, in particular, as a complete communicative act, is so utterly simple” so “that it raises the question of how it could communicate so richly”¹²³ has even more relevance when applied to directing attention within Facebook, as users can do it in various means, using their statuses, links and videos to enhance it. It can be also argued that incentives for entering social networking websites, and thus joining and creating virtual communities is within them, are closer to those, that came about in the dawn of human socialisation (those that Tomasello talked about), then those that take the individual as a merely rational being following its egoistic interests, Homo Economicus (as stated by economic and early society theorists)¹²⁴, exactly because of used means of communication. The majority of communication is based on sharing or making attention to specific content, and can be thus perceived as altruistic, not egoistic¹²⁵. This reflects also how users are constructing their identities when doing so. Applying theories of the formation of identity (or identities), it is all about discovering and unveiling of personal identity in relation to others with the help of web tools, new media and technology. It is about the development of human activities, sometimes on the account of alienation from nature and typical forms of social interaction. Without doubt we can talk about the changing of human nature, thus the nature of socialization, mutual interaction and, last but not least, the perception of the world around.

Law’s actor-network theory is a good starting point when trying to identify how Facebook as a technological tool for interaction is related to the formation of a one’s identity and community, and vice versa, how the users are defining what is relevant to them and what tools these

¹²¹ Tomasello, M. (2008): *Origins of human communication*. Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, cop., p. 27.

¹²² Ibid., p. 28.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 107.

¹²⁴ We cannot exclude motivated actions based on profit, but in general this is not the case.

¹²⁵ Although it could be argued that even altruism is in a way egoistic.

applications should have. The social of today's youth can be said is constructed also by social networking websites, and the latter are inherent to their everyday practices. From this point of view we can talk about Facebook as a mass media that has become an element of popular culture and is transforming both as we speak. It is restructuring the boarder areas of North's institutional framework, beginning as an informal tool of a specific group of students, and evolving to such an extend that it is embedded in the formal framework of global society, as it is integrated and used in mainstream media, business, politics and education.

SUPPLEMENT: EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES ON IDENTITY

Gender and new media

Here I intend to determine what are the applications of new media, especially web based social networks, on the concept of gender representation. On this ground further empirical work will be possible, thereby identifying which applications are used by which genders (is there a significant difference in the use by men and women) and what significance do they play for their users.

According to theoretical explanations of the socio-cultural construction of identity, the gender identity is but a part of many identities of the individual. It is being constructed through the interactions with people and social institutions, and is thus culturally dependent. Traditionally the role of gender has been defined within a predominantly patriarchal society (at least in the western society), thus identity construction has also been conducted in this manner. The social identity or the social perception of the role of gender has become a part of the individual's personal identity, and he or she made a contribution to this construction of reality. The roles became even more (re)defined with the emergence of mass media, as representations became more unified and reached more people at the same time, especially in the case of television.

Subcultural practices that began to flourish after the Second World War provided new and various means of expression, amongst them also experimentation within the realm of gender, as "youth culture" distanced itself from "parent culture". But in a sense it was still a type of continuity involved. Mass media provided included these expressions into their content, but still in a manner related to consumption. Especially at the end of the 20th century, youth oriented

mass media “offered” a multitude of stylistic expressions based on previous subcultural practices, but as Cheung says “the mass media do not allow ordinary people to represent themselves in their own terms. Rather, ordinary people are represented by creative personnel of mass media, perhaps in stereotypical ways: the stupid teenager, the helpless disabled person, or the sexually available woman, for example”¹²⁶. In short, feedback in general was not possible. Nowadays the scope of the impact of new media on identity creation is both exciting and frightening. The above is still true in many aspects, but we are more and more talking about the emancipatory role of new media or social media, then one-way directed mass media. The possibilities of creating oneself and co-creating the social world with the use of technology have are numerous. Let us consider but a few in the following examples.

Amy Bruckman¹²⁷ examined how MUDs or »text-based multi-user virtual-reality environments« have been used by users for exploring their own identity when swapping or presenting themselves, and thus acting, as a different gender. MUDs conventions on when it is acceptable to talk about real life varied from community to community, but altogether they showed “the ways in which gender structures human interactions, and, more importantly, the ways in which MUDs help people to understand these phenomena by experiencing them”. She continues, “Gender swapping is one example of how the Internet has the potential to change not just work practice but also culture and values.”¹²⁸ Users of these MUDs have had the possibility to experience this role change by exploring the social constructions of gender roles, and not only observe it. As she shows on the case of Peter, he was practicing his social identity in real world and a part of his personal identity, which was a result of primary socialization when living with his mother, in the virtual world in the form of a representation of a female. He was able to express a part of his identity, which he normally couldn’t.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Cheung, Charles: *Identity construction and self-presentation on personal homepages: emancipatory potential and reality constrains*, in Gauntlett, David, ur. in Horsley, Ross, ur. (2004): *Web.studies*. London: Arnold, p. 58.

¹²⁷ Bruckman, Amy: *Gender Swapping on the Internet*. Proceedings of INET '93. Reston, VA: The Internet Society, 1993.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

¹²⁹ A contemporary version of such identity exploration in virtual environments can be practices in Second Life with the use of an avatar, thus also being able to construct it with physical characteristics (in MUDs the characteristics have been read, not visualised).

Another way of exploring one's identity are personal websites. Charles Cheung¹³⁰ differentiates personal websites by the self-exploration intent or identity statement, and states that they are a significant social phenomenon, as they have emancipatory potential¹³¹. They allow their creators to avoid self-presentation failure by presenting themselves apart from the "acceptable selves" defined by social settings and audiences. In Goffman's terms, they can present themselves without being superficially labelled with a stigma. "The core problems of our self-presentation in everyday life are that we lack enough control over (1) what 'selves' we should display in a particular social setting and (2) how well we can present them. The personal homepage, however, can 'emancipate' us from these two problems"¹³². Individuals can thus present themselves as they are according to their preferences, taste and interests, no matter how they look, regardless of their physical disabilities etc. They have the possibility to promote their 'content' without having to think about the 'package'. Even more, one can explore who he is and "re-establish a stable sense of self-identity".

The next stage in online presentation are web based social networks. In her dissertation Jennifer Almjeld researched selected women profiles and their interaction on MySpace, where she identified some interesting points. She ascertained that "identity, particularly gendered identity, construction through composition is not a new idea, women have long explored and crafted the social and personal roles assigned to them via commonplace books, scrapbooks, friendship and photograph albums, and note passing". She continues: "parlours and bedrooms were once the site of much gender identity construction, online spaces now provide opportunities for users to perform and craft gendered identities alone or within a community. This sort of gender identification and experimentation can be seen in several new media practices including webpage design¹³³, blogging, instant messaging, and chatroom participation"¹³⁴. This being said, new

¹³⁰ Cheung, Charles: *Identity construction and self-presentation on personal homepages: emancipatory potential and reality constrains*, in Gauntlett, David, ur. in Horsley, Ross, ur. (2004): *Web.studies*. London: Arnold.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹³² Ibid., p. 56.

¹³³ Papacharissi, Z., (2002): *The self online: The utility of personal home pages*. Journal of broadcasting. 2002, vol. 46, iss. 3, p. 346.

¹³⁴ Almjeld, Jennifer Marie: *The Girls of MySpace: New Media as Gendered Literacy Practice and Identity Construction*. Doctoral Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, English/Rhetoric and Writing, 2008, p. 154.

media have not discovered ‘warm water’ when it comes to mediated identity construction, but have merely given it new and numerous means of expression.

“Although there are certainly some risks involved in sharing personal information online, generally speaking MySpace and similar new media practices offer women places to practice and perform multiple femininities in relative security. In this small sampling alone, young women are presenting themselves as jocks, scholars, tech enthusiasts, flirts, and friends. Just as hypermedia offers new opportunities for writing the self¹³⁵, it seems MySpace and other multimedia spaces also offer new ways to write feminine identity. “Rather than expect that there are no gender boundaries online or, conversely, that offline boundaries are simply recreated anew online, we theorize the two environments as influencing each other ... and also foreground ongoing contractedness of gender in both sites,” according to Kelly, Pomerantz, and Currie¹³⁶. Thus, the gendered identity construction rhetorical scholars have long identified in earlier women’s rhetoric’s is replicated and remediated in online spaces. While a girl might once have “realized herself through the scrapbook”¹³⁷ girls are now finding themselves and their place in modern teen society in online spaces¹³⁸. Although she determined these characteristics of gendered identity construction for MySpace, it can be also applied to other web based social networks such as Facebook, Friendster etc. Even more, they can be applied to other expressions of ones identity.

So is there any difference between the constructions of identity on- and off-line? As presented above, the identity is created through interaction between others, oneself and the environment in general. This interaction is being mediated, be it naturally or technologically. Or as Miller and Arnold conclude, “[i]t seems that what the Web and Internet provide are new ways of being in the World, but not in a way which is intrinsically mysterious or different from other aspects of being. We claim and construct identities in order to authenticate our experience as we did in

¹³⁵ Bolter, J. D. (2001). *Writing space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

¹³⁶ Kelly, D. M., Pomerantz, S., & Currie, D. H. (2006). ‘No Boundaries’? *Girls’ Interactive, Online Learning About Femininities*. *Youth & Society*, 38.1, p. 6.

¹³⁷ Buckler, P., & Leeper, C. K. (1991). *An Antebellum Woman’s Scrapbook As Autobiographical Composition*. *Journal of American Culture*, 14.1, p. 2.

¹³⁸ Almjeld, Jennifer Marie: *The Girls of MySpace: New Media as Gendered Literacy Practice and Identity Construction*. Doctoral Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, English/Rhetoric and Writing, 2008, p. 155.

infancy when we first discovered our separateness and along with it our identity [52]. The frames for action in cyberspace are not necessarily less (or more) problematical than in real life - because they are part of real life”.¹³⁹

In contemporary times of vast choices within this complex social world, new media provide a means of exploring, experimenting and stabilising one’s position. Of course, this is dependent of the use of these tools, but in general it can be said that they are widening the options of self-expressions, identifying one’s interests and receiving recognition. Within the discourse of gender many questions are being answered and many new are arising. Some male and female social constructs are being re-changed with these new tools of expression, most significantly the question of technology usage. Women are as important a part of new technologies and media as men, practically and theoretically, though in different and equally important ways.

Youth and social networking sites

The significance of the concepts introduced above, and placed in the contemporary virtual environment of the web, is evident in a research conducted by Sonia Livingstone¹⁴⁰ and presented in an article *Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression*. Livingstone’s conclusions on teenagers’ practices of social networking can be summed up as follows.

1. Teenagers are playing and experimenting with their identities within social networks and for them “self-actualization increasingly includes a careful negotiation between the opportunities (for identity, intimacy, sociability) and risks (regarding privacy, misunderstanding, abuse) afforded by internet-mediated communication”¹⁴¹ and thus the strategies of representing the self vary considerably.
2. Younger teenagers relished the opportunities to play and display, continuously recreating

¹³⁹ Miller, H., Arnold, J.: *Self in Web Home Pages: Gender, Identity and Power in Cyberspace*. In Riva, G. (ed.), Galimberti, C. (ed.) (2001-2003): *Towards CyberPsychology: Mind, Cognitions and Society in the Internet Age* Amsterdam, IOS Press, p. 92.

¹⁴⁰ Livingstone, Sonia (1998): *Relationships between media and audiences*. In Liebes, T. (ed.), Curran, J. (ed.): *Media, ritual and identity*. London, New York: Routledge.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 407,

a highly-decorated, stylistically-elaborate identity, wherein older teenagers expressed a notion of identity lived through authentic relationships with others (Livingston suggests that this shift may have implications for teenagers' experience of online opportunity and risks).

3. Teenagers perceive online risks critically, which is amongst others apparent in the differences between using identity as display or identity as connection. Also evident and significant is the fact of limited Internet literacy.
4. It should not be assumed that profiles are simply read as information about the individual (in some cases the "position in the peer network was more significant than the personal information provided, rendering the profile a place-marker more than a self portrait"¹⁴²)
5. Teenagers use social networking sites for only part of their social relations, and in so doing they are choosing communication channels according to what they are communicating and to whom.

This here paper has presented a condensed overview of the processes that are in progress in young individuals, as has also their significance within social networking sites. In this manner it is to be treated as a starting point researching the vast and rapidly changing field of the impact of technology on human communication and interaction, thus society and culture in general. As we have seen above social networking sites today are an important factor in the shaping of a young individuals identity. They are a part of the informal education and, thru the relation of technology and its use, they formulate ways of how individuals interact with others and thus perceive the environment that surrounds them.

New Media and Interculturalism

As Benedict Anderson¹⁴³ noted in his "imagined communities" the media represent an important role in shaping the national consciousness, generated through books and newspapers in the common language. Without the invention of the print, the national government, derived from national consciousness, therefore would not be possible. Marie Gillespie in her study on the role

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 399.

¹⁴³ Anderson, B. (1991): *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed., London.

of media in maintaining Diaspora formations with south Asians in London¹⁴⁴ notes that media such as television allow the comparison of cultural differences, and in this way individuals occupy a reflexive attitude towards their own culture in the new environment. The role of it is taken over mainly by young people who possess sufficient cultural capital to pass between the two cultures, and are in so doing in the process of continuous creative redefining of identity. Similar cases are happening everywhere in the world, where, due to the migration of people and their interactions, cultures mix. Even more so due to the influence of globalization and media. Some communities maintain their coherence with being active in media, and in so doing maintain and update a collective identity with referring to the primary reasons of immigration and looking towards the country of origin, which are often mythologized, since in this way, if we refer to Barthes, they create a meta-language.

New look at this process has emerged with the Internet and on it based World Wide Web. In addition to communicating between each other, Diaspora communities use the Internet, to present the successes in the history of their community, artistic efforts, scientific achievements, language learning, encouraging demonstrations and campaigns, writing letters on issues that are important for the community, etc.¹⁴⁵ Despite these advantages, the use of the Internet is still tied to financial capability, which may be visible within the web production and modes of communication (from the e-mail, blogs and forums, to online television and radio; of the lease to their own web server, etc.). Web representativeness of communities in Diaspora, therefore, largely depends also on the socio-economic parameters of the environment in which they live. However, modern communication technologies strengthen Diaspora identification and connections, whether they are based on real or symbolic connections around certain popular cultural products¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴⁴ Gillespie, M (2000): *Transnational Communications and Diaspora Communities*. In Cottle, S. (ed.). *Ethnic minorities and the media: changing cultural boundaries*. Buckingham [England], Philadelphia: Open University Press.

¹⁴⁵ Browne, Donald R. (2005): *Ethnic minorities, electronic media and the public sphere: a comparative approach*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, p. 44.

¹⁴⁶ Gillespie, M (2000): *Transnational Communications and Diaspora Communities* in Cottle, S (ed.). *Ethnic minorities and the media: changing cultural boundaries*. Buckingham [England], Philadelphia: Open University Press, p. 166.

If we turn back to postmodernism, we can define it as a self-relating process, as it draws from itself. It creates a reality in which it functions. We could say that popular culture in the postmodern era is a self-relating formation and is subject to its own recycling. And if so, then we can deduce the position of the individual and the development of his identity at this time. Identity is no longer a homogeneous whole, but is a set of different identities, which are the product of different relations in everyday life. It is a *tamperdness*, which is not yet the final identity, but its previous phase. Such an identity is only an answer to life choices and opportunities, but not the expression of scatteredness. Cultural identity addresses us, that the question of who we are or from where we are coming is not so important, as the question of what we can become, how we have been represented, or how we would like to represent ourselves.¹⁴⁷

Young users nowadays turn to new media on the internet for many reasons, but in all cases it is all about discovering and unveiling of personal identity in relation to others with the help of web tools, new media and technology. It is about the development of human activities, sometimes on the account of alienation from nature and typical forms of social interaction. Without doubt we can talk about the changing of human nature, thus the nature of socialization, mutual interaction, communication and, last but not least, the perception of the world around.

¹⁴⁷ Hall, S. de Gay P. (ur.) (1996): *Cultural Identities*. Sage, London.

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Objectives

1. To identify the effects of the social network website Facebook on the interaction and communication practices of Slovenian and Catalan youth.
2. To identify the effects of the social network website Facebook on the formation of both the individual and collective identities of Slovenian and Catalan youth.
3. To propose possible educational measures within the globalized world of technology for youth belonging to small linguistic communities.

Hypothesis

H: Means of interacting within the social networking website Facebook enable users to communicate “naturally” and “arbitrary”.

H: Use of applications within social networking websites by Slovenian and Catalan youth result in new forms of communication and interaction thereby creating new forms of languages, which are then used also outside the virtual environment in everyday life.

H: New forms of interaction changed the process of identity creation of Slovenian and Catalan youth, and their relation to the surrounding.

H: Slovenian and Catalan youth use social networking websites as a means to create new contacts, uphold previous ones, share, educate and/or inform.

H: Slovenian and Catalan youth perceive social networking websites as positive, whilst encouraging creativity and meeting new individuals with similar interests.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL EXPLANATION

My aim is to analyse the different tools that are employed in the social networking website Facebook used for communication between their users. The later thus have possibilities in using new forms of interaction, thus resulting in new ways of identity formation and a change of human behaviour as such, especially when taken in consideration that the age of (new) users is lowering. The mentioned applications and many similar other, are thereby playing an important educational role, which cannot be overlooked.

The proposed research interest is set as interdisciplinary. The highlights being sociology when considering how it affects the society, cultural studies when examining the effects of these applications as an element of popular culture in the shift of cultural practices, semantics when analysing the communication process and anthropology when defining the relation between man and technology.

The methodological part will be divided in three segments, employing different methods of acquiring and analyzing data.

1. Acquisition of relevant up-to-date data from users on their use of social networking websites:
 - a. A questionnaire will be drawn up in order to conduct probe interviews with selected users from Slovenia and Catalunya. Thus a balanced selection of users based on age (10 – 25 years) will be done. Expected results: guidelines for drawing up a questionnaire for a broader public base.
 - b. In addition to interviews with users, other one's will be conducted with specialists from relevant fields of research (linguists, web researchers, anthropologists, sociologists, IT developers, social media etc.), thus a selection of researchers according to the reviewed literature will be done. Expected results: supplementing the questionnaire with missing relevant points.
 - c. A draw up of a questionnaire based on the results from probe interviews and the conducting of questionnaires within a broader public of young Slovenian and Catalan users (10 - 25 years). To access the largest possible public, questionnaires will be uploaded to the web and specific relevant social network websites, making attentions to them mainly on school websites, by online

networking and viral e-mailing. Expected results: qualitative comparison of communication practices of users of relatively small communities trying to preserve their language; reasons and ways of using social networking websites according to age and residence in Slovenia in Catalonia.

d. Finally, a content analysis of messages, their intentionality and the use of signs within Facebook will be conducted. Expected results: identification of preferred used tools of communication.

2. Identifying the functionality and preferable use of selected social networking websites:

a. Analysis of the current version, and the previous one¹⁴⁸, of Facebook according to functions. Expected results: identification of development, change of communication channels and interpretation of possible uses according to theoretical concepts.

b. A comparative analysis of communication tools of social networks websites Facebook and other similar sites with socio-cultural relevance (MySpace, Netlog, Bebo, Hi5, Tagged, GenSpot, Twitter, Ning, Orkut, Friendster, GenSpot etc.) will be conducted. Expected results: identification of possible channels of communication and reasons of preferable use of specific social networking website.

3. Determining the social relevance of the research topic:

a. Analysis of media coverage of the Facebook phenomena and related developments in the field of social media will be conducted on a global scale, as also in Slovenia and Catalonia. Expected results: relation between use,

b. Review of work conducted by official institutions in Internet research in both Slovenia and Catalonia, thus analysing their work, researched segments and their goals. Expected results:

¹⁴⁸ I have gathered screenshots for them, but am missing the first version, in order to present a full evolutionary comparison of Facebook. Presumably this can be retrieved by already done researches or from the Facebook company directly.

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¹⁴⁹ When searching relevant material for the proposed research project, I have found much more material than could be overviewed, examined and integrated in this paper. Therefore, I am stating it here, as extended bibliography in order to point out that it will be used when continuing this presented draft.

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