

1 Introduction

In spite of environmental policy convergence within the EU and of environmental problems like climate change or natural hazards affecting peoples globally more and more, a common debate tackling environmental issues has not really been established within the EU public sphere yet. The different countries have all own environmental traditions and specific cultures of understanding and communicating what 'environment' represents. A key-role in shaping public sphere and debate about environmental issues in Europe is played by the mass media. Those media, however, tend to prevalently address national audiences, so they have their own language and their own ways of communicating what environmental issues consist of.

This is even truer for the medium 'daily press', still used for delivering in-depth information about the background of environmental issues. At present, the daily press is undergoing major transformations and the future of newspapers, on paper and also online, is uncertain. The notable agenda-setting function pointed out by McCombs and Shaw (1972), however, the fact that the mass media do not necessarily tell us what to think, but do tell us what to think about, is still valid. The contents of environmental press coverage present significant differences, both between languages and between journalistic and media cultures, that need to be accounted for. A common basis for discussion or at least a greater awareness of cultural differences in this respect are necessary, if common problems concerning the environment have to be tackled democratically, thoroughly and together.

With these premises, the author carried out the present research study that explores the ways in which the national quality daily press of four European countries (Italy, Germany, Sweden and Great Britain) deals with environmental issues, and portrays thereby which themes and stakeholders take the floor. Through a both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of selected articles from eight newspapers, common features and differences in form and content are pointed out, thereby showing how in the European Union different Cultures of Environment and different Cultures of Communication coexist, and how they result in different cultures of environmental communication. Interviews with journalists who cover the environmental news for their newspapers add sharpness to the picture. Among other criteria, the daily quality newspapers were chosen for representing the main political orientations in each country. The year 2006 of the following newspapers was analysed: *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Goteborgs-Posten*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*. After presenting the outcome of the empirical

study, some normative insights about environmental communication and a typology for environmental press coverage are provided, thereby addressing the question whether good environmental communication is possible, measurable, or applicable, also in the light of culturally diverse European publics and of fragmented public sphere.

The study was deliberately organised in a way that makes it possible to be adapted to other media and other cultures as well. It has the methodological ambition of bringing together concepts from different disciplines. In particular, the concept of 'culture' underlying the study is drawn from disciplines like cultural anthropology, philosophy, communication and media studies, linguistics, and social sciences. The perspective on 'culture' here adopted wants to both account for the long process of a culture developing its own practices, e.g. its language, the role its public sphere plays, the way its media develop and its communication peculiarities. And also, it wants to account for the very way a culture has of looking at its own natural environment. The best 'measurable' way of conjugating those two aspects – how a culture reflects about its own environment and what it communicates about this reflection – is to take a closer look at the media (why the daily press was chosen is dealt with later). The concept of environment, on the other hand, is borrowed from sustainability research and environmental studies (research areas of interdisciplinary origin), whereas the concept of communication is seen through the lens of communication science and media or journalism studies, which also provided the tools for the empirical part of the research.

1.1 Reasons for Carrying out this Study

If one looks back to the last three decades, some global major developments concerning mankind's approach to the natural environment are visible. The United Nations, especially after the milestone summit of Rio in 1992, have continued providing a perspective for tackling environment related matters. This perspective can be summed up with the idea of 'sustainability', a principle first stated at the end of the 1980s and currently still a milestone of the UN strategy for environment. In addition, on June 25, 1998 the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, also known as the Aarhus Convention, was adopted and has been ratified since then by 44 countries and the EU¹. The subject of the Convention is new in its kind: for the first time, an international agreement ascribes to every person rights to environmental information and protection². The Convention aims at allowing for greater democracy in a delicate multi-faceted matter like the environ-

1 The complete Convention can be consulted on the UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) website, see <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ratification.htm> on 25.11.2009.

2 <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/> on 25.11.2009.

ment. Thanks to the effects of its implementation in the signatory countries, more participation and knowledge about environmental decisions or abuses is possible. For instance, journalists, companies or environmental NGOs raising awareness on controversial issues have been all taking advantage of their right to consult databases and reports, have subsequently informed the public, and much dissemination of information was thence possible, as a prominent consequence of the Convention.

These milestones help catch a glimpse of the normative global framework embedding environmental issues: transparent and comprehensive information should be granted to the public, and all actions should be carried out by integrating all fields of human activity into the bigger idea of pursuing a good future for present and future generations.

In the European Union, there is a high degree of convergence in environmental policies, widely demonstrated and investigated (Holzinger et al 2008a: 98ff. and 2008b or Knill & Lieferrink 2007). Convergence, or increasing similarity and harmonisation of policies, now affects many environment-related sectors: from industry (Neubauer 2008) to water matters (Kampa et al 2008), from waste (Busch & Jörgens 2005) to climate change (Albrecht & Arts 2005). In strident contrast to such harmonization at a political level, there is a lack of common debate on the other side. The question of whether European public sphere(s) as an arena for such debate exists, whether it can be demonstrated and what are its or their forms of existence is still open, unanswered and much debated in the scientific community. This however shows that there is not a clearly visible supranational, European *Öffentlichkeit* – quoting the Habermasian original term – counterbalancing the events happening at a political level and co-determining them, as much as national public spheres do it nationally. As environment is a loaded issue concerning many powerful interest groups and trespassing borders between countries, cultures and communities, the way it is communicated and the contents of the communication reaching the public are worth investigating.

That public sphere(s) is or are desirable for a democratic Europe goes for itself: many scholars have pinpointed the reasons for a weak or non-existent EU public sphere, or shown the different forms of existence of public sphere(s) in Europe. Harrison and Wessels (2009) deal with the interaction between the EU and its media in creating or not creating this common sphere extensively through a series of articles. In particular, in one of them Stevenson points out how the stress for achieving what he calls a “cosmopolitan Europe” “...is less a matter of a shared identity but more the ability of divergent media to inform and respond to citizens’ initiatives on matters of common concern” (2009: 33). If different publics or news reporting tend to become increasing similar thanks to globalised diffusion of journalistic contents and practices, that does not affect subtle nuances that are so difficult to seize: the perceptions of media users seldom trespass the borders of

nation states, especially as long as the majority of EU citizens will use their national language as a main instrument for communication (see also Kraus 2004 on the role of languages for the EU). Mono collects different ways for normatively measuring public sphere, e.g. by focussing on systems or actors that make it up (2009: 89) and in this respect also reminds the relevance of the language variable and the role it plays (29). She reminds that scholars found out that different languages are not merely preventing a European public sphere to arise because of the lack of a common ‘interaction tool’. On the contrary, it is languages themselves constituting societies and ultimately nations, too, since a common language establishes the sense of being a community and sharing symbols, both societally and politically: “the problem of (...) convincing the public”, for instance, “is therefore always a linguistic-semiotic problem” (31).

The primary reason that motivated this study is, therefore, investigating the way environment is communicated in the media of different cultures (being language one of the main constituents of a culture), the different environmental communication(s) that exist, at least in the daily press, what they have in common and what their differences are. This investigation provides a useful tool for an in-depth examination of the nuances of environmental communication in a specific culture or media stakeholder, and it can also represent a memory of the current situation. Future applications of the study also have been foreseen, as it provides a model for individuating types of environmental communication and a final normative idea of what good environmental communication looks like.

Last but not least, the last reason for writing the present study is the lack in research studies on a similar topic that combine several disciplines, cultures and languages. The attempt to show how combinations of different disciplines, cultures and languages can be very fruitful has been here deliberately undertaken.

1.2 An Introductory Remark to the Chosen Methodology

The study deals with the concept of ‘public sphere’ only marginally, and rather puts the emphasis on the concept of ‘culture’, both in its meaning, and at a methodological meta-level. The meaning of ‘culture’ explains the factors that have an influence on environmental communication in the daily press. The meta-level for understanding ‘culture’, on the other hand, consists not merely in reflecting about the acceptations of the term itself. Rather, it accounts for an awareness of the radical influence disciplinary, cultural and linguistic bias has in carrying out scientific research and tries to make it explicit as much as possible.

The approach chosen is therefore cross-cultural, interdisciplinary and multilingual; and, in addition, comparative, empirical and explorative. This long row of adjectives is extensively dealt with in the chapter concerning methodology and methods underlying the study. To slightly anticipate already what they mean here:

behind the research study, comparative in its core, some methodological innovations have been opted for. The combination of diverse disciplines is per se not necessarily innovative, and interdisciplinarity in scientific studies has been itself defined and investigated since the late 1970s already (Laudel & Gläser 1999: 20ff). The present study borrows definitions and methods from several study fields. Beyond the disciplines and approaches already mentioned, semiotics, as well as some statistical methods, are used for the empirical part, while some simple notions from combinatory set theories, library science and sociology of scientific approaches helped draft a systematic bibliographical research approach.

The multilingual dimension of the study did not only affect the empirical study, but also the bibliographic research for relevant academic studies and all meta-aspects related to it. Very few media research studies draw from sociology of scientific knowledge, library science or mathematics in systematically organising multilingual bibliographical research, and they seldom account for more than one language when carrying out a content analysis or interviews. In addition, both in establishing research networks and in carrying out research studies, personal acquaintances and suggestions from established scholars or research groups usually give inputs to knowledge transmission and use of academic sources³. This research study wants to actively counterbalance this pattern and the unusual system for the retrieval of bibliographic references (in addition to traditional methods of carrying out research) aims at providing for more interdisciplinarity⁴ and more equality in opportunities of being visible or quoted even for less popular academic studies, especially for those written in less 'important' languages. To sum up, a system was developed to (at least) consider the greatest possible range and number of sources, and only afterwards did the researcher select and draw from those she thought relevant.

In a language, the valuable thing most of the time people are looking for and emotional about, and which the mass media make wide use of for the production of news articles, films, programmes, is the 'ineffability of the untranslatable'⁵: put in simple words, those things that cannot be translated into another language are the most charming and difficult to grasp, they characterise cultures and define borders between them, are the ones more likely to make communication interesting, and at a meta-level have an influence on research carried out about specific topics, too. "Most of the literature on the media is highly ethnocentric, in the sense

3 http://www.nemo-net.eu/index.php/Main_Page, and Brandes 2009.

4 The term interdisciplinarity is to be intended as in Parthey, 1999: 251 and does not refer to the multidisciplinary composition of a group of researchers who have competences in different disciplines. On the contrary, it indicates the situation where a single researcher has a „lack of knowledge to process a problem, which results in the search for methodological transfer from other disciplines“ (own translation; all translations that follow in the study are own translations by the author, unless explicitly stated).

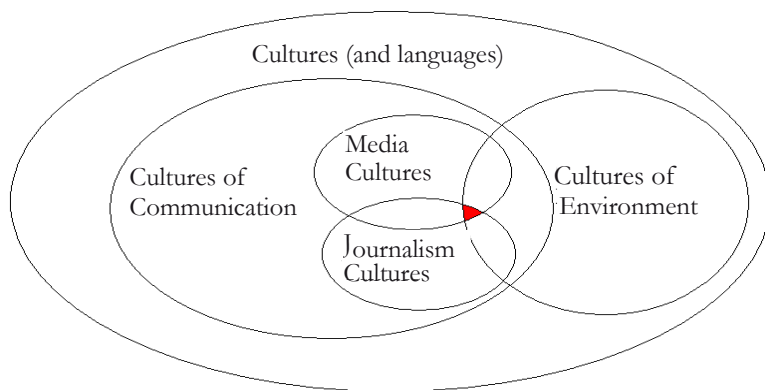
5 See Eco 2003, on the theme of translation imperfection.

that it refers only to the experience of a single country, yet is written in general terms, as though the model that prevailed in that country were universal. This, at least, is true in the countries with the most-developed media scholarship, including the United States, Britain, France, and Germany. In countries with less developed traditions of media research, another pattern often emerges: a tendency to borrow the literature of other countries – usually the Anglo-American or the French literature – and to treat the borrowed literature as though it could be applied unproblematically anywhere” (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 2). The two scholars believe this fact is a limitation for research, since for instance it leads to mistakenly perceive important aspects as ‘natural’ or ‘given’ and wrongly take them for granted. Here as well, the author argues that language knowledge of researchers is an important factor for scientific ‘ethnocentrism’, so special emphasis was put on drafting a methodology for the study explicitly addressing the problem (see Chapter 5).

To conclude with, this study explores differences (and common traits) of environmental communication without especially focussing on climate change, as its coverage is regarded here as a sub-theme for environmental themes in general. Environment is regarded as a general issue, to provide an academic framework for other equally urgent sub-themes that may or may not emerge in the future news agenda, as climate change has done since 2006: for instance, biodiversity, use and distribution of land and of natural resources, or waste management, to name but a few.

1.3 State of the Art(s)

Several areas of research have been looked at, on the basis of the cognitive assumption of the image below showing where the present study can be situated. Providing relevant references to all the areas of research implicated by the picture would be too lengthy, so the initial parts of Chapters 2, 3 and especially 4 present the pieces of research the author could most profit from.



Picture 1: The scope of the study and the areas of research relevant to it

1.3.1 *Cultures (and Languages), Environment and Communication*

Research on culture(s) has a long history in several disciplines and the following chapters are aware of it. This study refers to the differentiation between the today most accepted meanings of the term ‘culture’ (in the other languages of the study the term is semantically equivalent) and exploits the duality of ‘culture’ as a ‘group of people or national community’ and ‘culture’ as a ‘way of doing something’ in the wording of the title already.

As for cultures in the first acceptance, from a communication science perspective, studies like those by Hanitzsch (2004), Balcytiene (2006) and Albrecht (2008), for example, respectively deal with journalism cultures in several Asian countries, in Lithuania and in Russia. In this respect, studies like these can be included into the big group of implicit general comparative studies, or they can be described as explorative studies portraying the journalistic peculiarities of a specific national community. The term ‘cultures’ as in the second acceptance, on the other hand, has recently gathered momentum within media and journalism studies. Before, ‘culture’ (not in the sense of ‘group of people’) used to refer to arts or other intellectual activities and fashions, as in ‘pop culture’ (Dahlgren 1992 and Baughman 1992). Lately, ‘journalism cultures’ as ‘ways of doing or perceiving journalism’ are mentioned increasingly since the 2000s and are investigated in studies like e.g. those by Biressi (2008), Hepp (2008) and Lünenborg (2008, the latter two in Hahn and Schröder 2008). Some studies, like the present one, use both acceptations and take advantage of the semantic ambiguity: Melin (2008) combines gendered journalism culture and the comparison between two countries/cultures, the Swedish

and the British one. Bohrmann et al (2007) collect a series of contributions addressing journalistic cultures sometimes intended as different countries, sometimes as different ways of making journalism. ‘Culture’ may also refer to languages and the whole universe of ideas behind the linguistic aspects, too. This latter, previously unmentioned acceptance is borrowed from linguistics and is acknowledged to have had great influence on the planning of the study and its empirical aspects. The next chapter provides more insights about the different ways of investigating cultures.

Research on environment related issues is also being performed by the most diverse disciplines, the social sciences concentrating on how it is constructed or understood, and the natural sciences rather focussing on how it changes and functions. The breadth environmental matters have can never be stressed enough. Apart from scanning through the studies about environmental policy convergence in the EU, research about different environmental traditions in the countries analysed has been looked at, and this was done by following the normative approach environmental science studies often adopt, especially as far as sustainability research and human or cultural ecology are concerned (interdisciplinary by nature). That approach motivated the definition of ‘environment’ here adopted. Environment in the European press, and not ‘nature in the European press’ is dealt with, because the interaction between people and nature is perceived as relevant and the term ‘environment’, as explained in Chapter 3, bears this interaction within its meaning. It is EU citizens who cause changes in their environment, and their representatives who decide on it. So looking at communication about nature is not enough, it is the human culture-specific communication about interacting with nature that is relevant for the present study. Among the few attempts of looking at environment and the media taking the cultural and language variable into consideration, the completed UNESCO/INST project called ‘Das Verbindende der Kulturen’ (Hess-Lüttich 2003) can be mentioned. It contains contributions about media and environmental communication both from an intercultural and from an institutional perspective⁶. Recently, Icelandic scholars also dealt with this issue, that was debated in a 2010 conference titled “Preserving the Future: Sustainability of Language, Culture and Nature”, where some contributions addressed linguistic or cultural diversity in environmental education. In general, a research focus on culture and language coupled to environmental themes is more often pursued in countries whose language does not play a paramount role in the global scientific arena, i.e. non English, German or French speaking countries, or countries with a significant language diversity.

The present study uses the term Cultures of Communication and deals with the term ‘communication’ in its broad meaning, ranging from the media, to jour-

6 http://www.inst.at/kulturen/images/programm2003_www.pdf on 20.06.2006.

nalism, to language. A similar approach in looking at communication phenomena is taken by political scientists and sinologist Lucian W. Pye, who, in the early 1960s, explained that „whether the focus is upon the mass media or the individual communicator [...], almost all aspects of communication have a relevance for understanding the complex process of social change and political development” (1963: IX). Chapter 4 especially focuses on research about communication, media and journalistic cultures.

1.3.2 Environment in the Media and Environmental Journalism

Environmental communication comparisons are not granted the same attention by the countries this study looks at. An overview of studies about environmental communication from a comparative perspective is provided in Chapter 5, when the methodological approach adopted is discussed.

Apart from those, there are several not necessarily comparative pieces of research looking at environment in the media or in general at environmental communication: in Italy, for instance, Borrelli, Marchetti and Belli have looked at environmental and science journalism and have carried out a study in cooperation with both the WWF and the Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and the Environment (ENEA). They found out that the biggest problem environmental and science journalists have to tackle in Italy is the lack of quality in the relationship between primary information sources and journalists, the fact that the mass media tend to be event-oriented and give the environment a marginal role, and try to reproduce a “television” model (Borrelli et al 1999: 360ff) where individuals are de-responsibilized and the talk tends to privilege generalization. Pollution is the topic most reported on, because it is the easier one to explain, it addresses the public more directly and because there are numerous sources available for reporting on it. Bonnes and Sensales (1998) had also found similar results and, comparing diachronically several Italian newspapers with different political orientations, found out that the cyclic trend of environmental issues in the news in general, demonstrated by the several European studies they mention, does not hold true for Italy in the case of 'left wing' newspapers, since in Italy the environmental discourse acquired a strong 'left-wing' political connotation in the 1990s.

In Germany, Edda Müller reminded of the acknowledged connection between environmental communication and the extent to which institutions produce information like e.g. press releases, and this connection pushes the environment significantly up on the agenda (1997: 385) and she analysed the links existing between environmental policy actors and the media in Germany – also there, like in Italy, event-oriented reporting in the media seem to be more privileged than in-depth background investigations (391).

From Sweden, a study committed by the Naturvårdsverket on Swedish media and newspapers in particular found out, already in 2001, that the climate question tends to be over-addressed, thereby “there is a danger of being “science-driven” and thus technical and statistical in reasoning and statements. It can scare people away and reduce the interest around the everyday consequences and conclusions on the climate issue” (Naturvårdsverket 2001: 22), so, in simple words, the climate issue brings also the danger of distracting from more local, everyday issues people can do something about, since it is so global, ‘scientific’ and abstract.

In the UK, Anders Hansen, who is author of a series of publications since the 1990s tackling the role of the media for environmental matters, investigates how environment is constructed and communicated, especially against the scenario of professionals informing about it and rather ‘reacting’ to events. Hansen interestingly acknowledges how the traditional communication science approach to environment in the media does not suffice, because it does not account for the cultural perspective (2010: 97ff), that is - in his words - the possible “cultural resonances” implied and the “cultural packages” used to ‘sell’ the environmental topics (107). The European Union overtly states its aim of integrating sustainable development and environment themes into all fields, and these fields are listed on its website. However, between “transport”, “health” and “migration”, there is no space for the “media”. The harmonization of legislation throughout Europe, once more, does not translate into harmonization for what regards the media⁷.

1.4 Research Design, Hypotheses and Questions

In the previous two paragraphs, the background for the present research study has been briefly presented. This paragraph aims at explaining how the present piece of research was designed taking specific premises and goals into account, how the research hypotheses and questions arose, and how the empirical part of the research was planned with the aim of providing at least partial answers to those questions, or suggest other possibilities for answering them.

These are the *premises*:

- a) European public sphere(s) for reacting to decisions taken at a European level is (are) desirable, whether nation-based or issue-based or in any other form.
- b) An environmentally sustainable development and a broad, sound awareness about environment related matters are desirable in Europe.
- c) Environment related matters surely affect all EU member states and decisions about them often are taken at a supranational level.
- d) The mass media represent one of the most natural and effective ways of fostering both a) and b) and have a key function in informing the public about c).

7 http://ec.europa.eu/sustainable/welcome/index_en.htm on 22.01.2011.



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-658-00951-9>

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