MEDIAPOLIS AS A NEW REALITY AND COMPLEX RESEARCH PROJECT

МЕДИАПОЛИС КАК НОВАЯ РЕАЛЬНОСТЬ И КОМПЛЕКСНЫЙ ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИЙ ПРОЕКТ

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The article represents modern media, cultural and social realities in the context of the Mediapolis. European theorists, Roger Silverstone in particular, proposed this effective concept. In essence, it reflects the formation of a new environment for the individual, society, and for their media life. The Mediapolis represents a specific analogue of the real city taken in its media hypostasis. In the article behavior is considered as everyday practices of the individual. Taken together, different aspects of media life comprise the content of the research project "The Modern Russian Media-polis", the main directions of which are described in the essay.

Key words: *media life; individual; society; Mediapolis; everyday practice; research project.*

Статья отображает современную медийную, культурную и социальную реальность в структуре Медиаполиса. Это богатое понятие было предложено некоторыми европейскими теоретиками, в частности Роджером Силверстоуном. В своей сущности

оно отражает формирование новой среды обитания для человека и общества и для их медиажизни. Медиаполис представляет собой своеобразный аналог реального города, взятого в его медийной ипостаси. В статье медиаповедение рассматривается как повседневная практика человека. Взятые в совокупности различные аспекты медиажизни образуют содержание научно-исследовательского проекта «Современный российский Медиаполис», главные направления которого описаны в данном произведении.

Ключевые слова: *медиажизнь; человек; общество; Медиаполис; повседневная практика; исследовательский проект.*

The idea of Mediapolis in a research context

The growth of media as a human need necessitates nontraditional approaches for description and explanation. This especially modern phenomenon has been wholly expressed by the British scientist, Roger Silverstone, in the title of his monograph: *"Media and Morality: on the Rise of the Mediapolis."* The bright intellectual metaphor (the Mediapolis) incorporates multidimensionality and the real depth of the changes. Silverstone gave the following explanation for his choice of a vector of reasoning on present society, and the person within it: "We have become dependent on the media for the conduct of everyday life... It is quite clear that the media are not, cannot be, everything. Life is lived outside the media and for many, if not statistically most, around the world, the media, at least many of them, are absent, unavailable, irrelevant... Life is lived, in families, organizations and states without references to the media. We live. We die. My argument presumes all this. But it also insists on the significance of the media for our orientation in the world... in ways unimaginable before the electronic age" (Silverstone, 2007: 5-6).

This substantiation of the author's position attracts attention due to balanced estimations of the occurred changes (without the demonization

of the media channels that is characteristic in a number of publications), and the intention to search for solutions of fundamental questions in daily life, instead of focusing external factors, like politics and technology. The correlation of the media and morals is included in the name of the book, "Media and Morality".

Some researchers support the idea of the Mediapolis as an original form of civilization, and further interpreted it. They especially emphasize two related phenomena that are to some extent exemplary of the contemporary human condition: "First, a notion of media work as a set of behaviors, strategies and tactics, norms and values that co-determine with technology the outcome of the production of culture within and across media industries... Second, an appreciation of media work as a range of activities and social arrangements that a growing number of people – and the majority of teenagers – enact in the context of contemporary digital culture... that is: using media as media producers rather than or next to media consumers" (Deuze, 2009: 23-24).

One can find a dissertation devoted to the Mediapolis, but the author addresses this phenomenon through the very narrow thematic aspect of the mediation of child soldiers in central and east Africa (Bugay, 2012). The notable interdisciplinary workshop *"Mediapolis: media practices and the political spaces of cities"* was organized by the Department of Geography at the Open University (UK). In accordance with the program, the discussion was focused primarily on the political nature of cities and media (Mediapolis, 2008). These facts and similar ones substantiate the subject of analysis. Nevertheless, in general, the Mediapolis idea does not get complex multidimensional consideration and reflection in research literature.

This paper takes on several main questions. The first one is connected to understanding the Mediapolis phenomenon as a holistic entity, which is highly typical for today's social reality. At the next stage of analysis, we divide the concept into major subcategories (sides, aspects of analysis). The last task consists of defining perspective intellectual approaches on each side, including formulating research questions to be answered by

subprojects. There is no intention to answer all of the questions, because discovering and identifying problems seem to be more important. The paper's structure correlates to the questions.

Mediapolis as a space for media life

In the context of media research, one must transfer attention from institutes and professionals to the "ordinary" person, who has his or her own media behaviors. This includes when activities are not governed by person's desire and consent. From these positions a sufficient addition to an expressive metaphor of the Mediapolis arises, namely, the concept of **media life**. Corresponding to Silverstone's concept, media life is not opposed to "usual" life in its traditional syncretised understanding, but becomes one of its integral parts. François Heinderyckx writes in this context: "Innovation in the area of information and communication technologies is particularly prone to radical prophecies with these types of spectacular trajectories. Looking back at the vast majority of predictions in this area over the past thirty years or so is disconcerting and often amusing. The domain of e-business, e-commerce and e-government is particularly subject to drastic claims that fail to materialise in real life: the end of shops and stores (why bother if you can order online?), the end of offices (so much more efficient to telework from home), even the end of corruption and opaque governance... Prophecies are also remarkably cyclical: changes are announced, later found to be inaccurate, then a few years later reiterated, either with no reference to the earlier predictions" (Heinderyckx, 2013: 99-100).

At the same time, media life operates according to its own laws and rules similar to humans living in economic, familial environment, political arenas and other spheres that have their own regulations, customs and standards. Through this connection, a society may expect noticeable growth of interest in so-called audience's behaviour in the media sphere (though a canonical understanding of the audience as a set

of information consumers, most likely, will lose its meaning in coming years). The statistical analysis of subjects and objects of research grants the ability to see how zones of attention in scientific publications actually correspond with each other. German scholars made such an attempt.

For historical and theoretical introduction they have examined the evolution of journalistic research in Western countries. After World War II a great variety of research approaches appeared. The authors especially stressed a necessity of cultural studies in the field of journalism. They recalled some authoritative scientists, who urged the primarily sociology-driven community of journalistic academics to overcome their narrow focus on communicator research, and to stop the "exclusion of the audience" (Löffelholz, Rothenberger, 2011: 13).

The content analysis of scientific journals concerning journalism demonstrates a state of affairs similar to the contemporary situation. Seven academic journals that use the term "journalism" in their title have been selected for studying. These English language journals represent different regions of the world. The majority of research focused on the communicator (mostly editorial personnel): 64,5% of all published articles. They are followed with the analysis of the content of media (49,6%), and audience studies (14,6%). Research of the channel or, accordingly, media production is seldom: only 9,2% of all cases. The preferences have not changed a lot in comparison with a period when pragmatic interest in media functioning and journalist dominated science.

A qualitative leap in the development of fundamental theoretical research is necessary in order to define the needed level of reasoning for situations regarding the Mediapolis and media life. The situation demands fresh ideas, and if possible new paradigmatic suggestions, instead of the empirical observations that prevail today. It would be strange to deny the importance of data gathering, including experiences in a genre of case study. It is even less suitable to agree with the domination of simple descriptive projects when the reality requires the formulating and checking of hypotheses of the highest theoretical level.

Attempts to arrange such research were made by members of the *Theory of Journalism and Mass Communications Department* of the St. Petersburg State University. The project titled *The Modern Russian Mediapolis* is developed here, and some steps to its practical realization (mainly regarding St. Petersburg) are taken. The intellectual impulses were found in the context of those ideas, propositions and data that have been presented above. The general intention is to construct (better to say — to reproduce) a media copy of a megalopolis, or to reflect a megalopolis in its media hypostasis. There are no analogues of such research, as far as we know.

The author does not formulate a definition of city (megacity). Let's use a description that does not cause objections because of its commonly offered characteristics: "The city in general is a rather independent, legally formed complex dynamic territorial, economic and social system in which... relations of life-support are generated... Thus, the city... unites community into the system consisting of various elements (economy, culture, politics, ecology), penetrated by social relations whose functioning is directed on achievement of the global purpose — growth of the quality of a life of each person" (Shibakov, Kotlyar, Shibakova, 2004: 71).

Just as the real, "physical" city includes a rich variety of interconnected substructures and elements, the Mediapolis also "consists" of management and manufacturing, infrastructure and a private life, mass consciousness and speech dialogue. Additional arguments for this intellectual frame may be found in the modern understanding of the city. As philosophers insist: "In the city the universal image of the person as a set of representations about his intrinsic characteristics is formed. This image becomes a basis of self-consciousness of the modern person, his ideal design which gradually joins new elements of the same nature: representations, ideas, values. They arise in a special communicative situation of a city life in which the exchange is made, first of all, of symbolical values: a word, gesture, ritual" (Scherbakov, 2012: 173).

Certainly, it would be naive to proceed from the assumption of full identity in a structure of elements, but parallels can be relevant and fruitful

in intellectual analysis. Below is the description of main directions and problems of the project.

First of all, we need to define how we understand **the Mediapolis as a whole**. This word is in use in the public sphere (besides the context that has been offered by Silverstone) - publicity agencies, consulting agencies, publishing houses, and even a French radio program have used the term. It is not necessary to argue that such names, as a rule, are the result of a casual choice, instead of aimed theoretical-conceptual search. In the described project, the Mediapolis is understood simultaneously in several ways:

1. *The Qualitative conditions* of human life and of a society that is formed by intensive development of media technologies and increase in the production of media.

2. *The Non-material environment* of inhabitancy of the person and a society created by media communications and deprived of spatial definiteness.

3. *The Methodological toolkit* explaining events and processes in the modern world in a view of the production and consumption of media.

The substantive, qualitative characteristics and estimations of the Mediapolis lay outside these formulations. The main task of the research consists in searching for, and interpreting these subjects in various thematic directions. In other words, the researchers shall use and prove the selected methodological paradigm that has the generalized name of "Mediapolis".

For example, in regard to *quality of life* (media life) it is necessary to explain a correlation of infrastructural and technological factors, on the one hand, and social, economic, social-psychological ones, on the other hand, plus maybe ecological and anthropological factors. Otherwise, we arrive at primitive technological determinism, which is no longer a popular scientific model. These tendencies determine the development of modern science and will help us to investigate various aspects of the modern world (everyday lives, individuals' practices), which excite a heightened interest in sociology, social psychology and others humanities.

In particular, experts in political sociology write: "A revival of interest to the world of everyday life within the frame of sociology of daily practices has been connected with 'a practical turn'... means the separation of the world of routine actions into the autonomous area of research... Practical action forming dynamic unity with a structural context becomes the basic for existence in everyday life (according to A. Giddens)" (Plotichkina, 2010: 234-235, 237).

Recent research has focused on daily media behavior. Authors of one recent research project write: "A focus on the place of media in practices... directs attention to the place of mediated communicative practices in the variable formation of the field of 'politics'; and it also draws attention to how this relationship might in turn be shaped by the embeddedness of media practices in a variety of integrated practices that help up make urban life — work practices, transportation processes, socio-cultural practices of social reproduction in the home and neighborhood, and so on. In other words, it is a perspective through which it becomes possible to distinguish how certain media practices might be understood to be more explicitly political than others" (Rodgers, Barnett, Cochrane, 2008: 6-7).

Sociologists of culture use a wider approach to this matter, they analyze not only the political meaning of media behavior, but human practices with obvious accent on the socio-cultural understanding of media behavior: "Information revolutions are not a rectilinear process in the frame of which new kinds of media simply become current, taking a predicted place in a home and everyday life of the person. It would be more correct to speak about versatile process — acculturations of media, or... about a domestication process relating to media technologies. Within this process the means of communication are being examined and adopted to conditions of the developed life; simultaneously former habits collapse, and the social interactions mediated by technical novelties change" (Sergeeva, 2011: 3).

The Mediapolis in a structural dimension

One can see that such a view of a social reality is wholly organic in our understanding of the Mediapolis as the routine, regular practice of its inhabitants, who are deeply engaged in interaction with the media. This aspect of research deserves a detailed reflection in the analysis of **the Mediapolis citizens' life**, which constitutes one of the main components of the Mediapolis structure (and, in turn, is one of the main sections of the analysis). The citizen, in this case, is considered in a direct connection with the etymological roots of this word, as a city dweller, the ordinary inhabitant of the Mediapolis, despite obvious conditionality of borders of this quasi-territorial phenomenon.

Existence in the world of the media represents a daily practice to which our contemporary society has become accustomed, and in which the modern person is easily guided — not only in a technological dimension, but also in a behavioral dimension. Sociological statistics support this conclusion. So, according to the data of the *Zircon* research group in September 2011, 39% of Russians demonstrated a high degree of media literacy (knowledge, understanding and media skills), in comparison with 31%, who demonstrated a low-level (two years ago the situation looked worse: 31% and 23% respectively). Thus, in 2011, 62% of interviewed respondents were sure that all could understand a stream of information without assistance, and separate the reliable information from information "dust" (Mediapotreblenie naseleniya Rossii, 2012). Even if this opinion contains a deal of overestimated self-representation, it still demonstrates that people are adapting to new media.

In order to prevent the widespread mistake of narrowing a theme, let us emphasize that the everyday life of the townsperson is not restricted to the sphere of household and consumption. Researchers of human communities offer much more complex conclusions, which were the discussion of the *60 parallel* journal. It is remarkable that the magazine describes itself as a journal "for the people, inclined to think of sense and matter of their own everyday activity." They use a basic scheme of society

offered by the Russian philosopher, Georgy Schedrovitsky. It includes four zones:

1. The zone of formalized systems of activity: different organizations, institutions, and industrial structures, in which people exist as social individuals.

2. The zone of consumption and household.

3. The zone of the club, where people arrange different relations concerning events in the first two zones, and the content of the fourth.

4. The zone of culture, where matrixes (norms, standards and samples) providing the reproduction of the developed forms of activity and life are found. Man is thought of as a unity of the organism, the individual and the person (Rac, 2011: 44).

Accordingly, the citizen of the Mediapolis interests us in all zones of the social world because all of them include media components, and in each of them the citizen is the main character. However, in the formalized systems of consumption, and in the club, he is a dependent figure, with the lowest degree of independence from external influences. As the individual subject of thinking and behavior he appears in a field of everyday culture, where he has an opportunity to accept (or reject) the norms and patterns of media life. It's necessary to evaluate the Mediapolis citizen according to his civil activity and the role that he plays in media environments. Mediapolis citizens choose their roles. The roles are those of the communicator, an initiator and producer of information, the author with a high level of behavior variability, and the navigator who regulates information streams in the functioning of Mediapolis. Such navigation exists also as a kind of civil activity.

Certainly, freedom of choice requires a high level of media literacy, and mature self-identification. In methodological relation, the most difficult task is revealing the real level of the citizen's civil self-identification in the conditions of the Mediapolis. It seems to us that this task demands a complex program of applied investigations, first of all of political psychology profile.

The aspect of everyday human activity also plays an important role in the analysis of **labor resources** as a structural component of the

Media-polis. Certainly, daily practices of media producers interest us in traditional dimensions - from the viewpoint of the organization of the working process in media organizations, and personnel structure. It will be useful to track tendencies of change in media employee's corporation (their professional priorities, new official and qualifying positions, age, and educational background). There is only one reliable ground for doing so, namely gathering databases (statistics) on media professionals, within the limits of a region (territorial Mediapolis), country, continent, and so forth. Such bases existed in the Soviet era; however, this practice existed under a radically different political and administrative regime, and cannot be used to research modern Russian society.

Nevertheless, some statistical data give serious stimulus for reflection. So, according to *UNESCO*, in the first decade of the 2000s, in Russia there were 102,000 newspaper journalists, leading the entire world. In comparison, China had 84,000, and the US had 54,000. The population of China is 10 times greater than that of Russia, and the income of the American print media from advertising exceeds Russia's by approximately 20 times. Russia does not have an economic or demographic advantage (Ivanov, 2011). It is possible to assume that there will be a situation of personnel chaos and its inevitable consequence — a decline in the skill-level of employees.

Research of labor resources may use additional channels of information. Essential tendencies in the dynamics of the professional characteristics of employees come to light due to the observations of recruiting agencies. They use the Headhunter index (hh.index), which presents resumes for professional vacancies. For a normal market situation, the index used to supply two or three candidates. However, at the end of 2011, in St. Petersburg, per vacancy of a social network employee or blogger, there were only 0,5 resumes; actually, employers had nobody to choose. At the same time, labor market of traditional media was controversial; an overabundance of employees and the irrelevance of offers to employers' requirements generated a sharp misbalance. The sharpest supply and demand imbalance relates to reporters, observers and correspondents

(hh.index 37,7), TV and radio directors (32,6), photographers (28,1) (Shmatko, 2012: 94-95).

In other words, the manpower of the Mediapolis undergoes deep structural changes that occur spontaneously and remain, mainly, outside the research. In these circumstances, it is especially important to focus attention on the self-understanding and self-determination of employees in the Mediapolis, as well as on their reflection on the change in working conditions, attitudes in editorial staffs and other collectives, and on portrait characteristics of typical "new" professionals.

The separation of life from inhabitancy can be fulfilled only in an abstract-schematic context. Nevertheless, the accents in these two cases will vary. The research approach through inhabitancy grants primary attention to *the need for media* — both from the individual side (who is the main personage), and also from the side of structured and non-structured communities. Most likely, they are not limited by fundamental "deficiency needs" (by A. Maslow) — physiological and safety ones, but have so-called secondary needs, which prevail in even ordinary contexts. It means the highest level of the Maslow "pyramid" — self-actualization. It is necessary to consider that in the 21st century, self-actualization is tightly linked with the opportunity of self-expression, which, in turn, became a subject of the greatest anxiety. The authors of the world survey devoted to access to the Internet stressed in their report for UNESCO: "Representatives of global institutions and national governments around the world have endorsed freedom of expression as a basic human right" (Dutton et al., 2010: 7).

Correspondingly, it is impossible to imagine administrative **governance** in the Mediapolis (the next structural component) as a set of algorithms of outside actions. In this case, elements of spontaneity, self-regulation, horizontal coordination, and informal communications will be strong. In the media sphere, as well as in a public life as a whole, the role of the state and other official bodies is highly important and necessary, but they play only the role of the provider, regarding the rights and freedoms of the person, and furthermore about mass communication. In a certain

sense, institutional resources are now generally close to the end, and to no small degree it occurs due to the availability of media technologies to the ordinary inhabitant of the Mediapolis.

Recent history provides more and more examples of how the administration and its aspirations and press monopolies control of media life leads to sharp collisions and scandals. Among one of the most cases was the British *News of the World*, which violated a myriad of legal and ethical standards. In this situation, we frankly recognize that elite authorities have primary interests in such cases. According to the press, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, David Cameron, has declared a radical revision of relations between the government and the mass media. The government and representatives of the opposition for many years did not pay attention to the behavior of the press because they were more interested in gaining support from larger media groups, such as Rupert Murdoch's *News Corp* (Overchenko, 2011).

Nevertheless, it would be an unrealistic oversimplification to build a model of governance in the Mediapolis in a rectilinear, neoliberal way, supporting unlimited personal freedom. The parity of freedom of self-expression and information security remains an intellectual and practical problem because growing media resources add nuances that complicate the issue. More actors become involved in the relationship, from security personell to millions of ordinary network users. For example, the decision of the Russian *Foreign Intelligence Service* to develop special technique to monitor blogs was seen as controversial. The technique is planned to solve problems at several levels. It will examine the processes of community building in social networks, define the factors that influencing popularity of data, develop methods of organization and governance for the virtual communities, and so on (Barabanov, Safronov, Chernenko, 2012). The Russian officials are not pioneers. According to news agencies, the CIA has a division that supervises worldwide social networks (SMI: sluzhba vneshnei razvedki zaimetsya social'nymi setyami, 2012). Hardly was it possible to expect, that so-called competent services will bypass an enormous stream of the open information given by the Internet. But the problem of freedom and regulation expressed in the "priority —

parity" dichotomy becomes much more intricate. The case of Edward Snowden exemplified this contradiction in the extraordinary visible form.

Most likely, to develop true criteria for governance in the Mediapolis, it is necessary to define basic representations on regulation in social system. Let us try to offer a generalization: the purpose of social regulation consists, first of all, in the consolidation of the system, and this purpose causes importance of integrative function performed by journalism and media. If so, there are bases for the trepidations of Ukrainian communications scholar, who remarks: "While the totalitarian countries... create consolidation of social system, the post-Soviet space, due to total commercialization of the virtual field, bases the film-plots on breaks, instead of consolidation... We understand breaks as points where the system does not work how it should... In virtual space (movies) or information space (news) we see and we hear about a situation of breaks. For this reason today there are not and there cannot be movies, for example, about engineers, researchers, cosmonauts, artists because they do not coincide with a mainstream. They are founders of social systems, instead of founders of breaks" (Pocheptsov, 2012).

Further analysis of the governance component of the Mediapolis requires one to examine a huge set of regulative acts in the media sphere in comparison with mechanisms of self-regulation. Key ideas for such a project may be found in Manuel Castells's conclusions, according to which the vertical administrative system has lost its monopoly on governance, and a new horizontal network determines social dynamics in modern society. In any case, the Mediapolis needs a new model of power relationship in information sphere.

Analysis of the environment also includes studying such structural components as **the infrastructure** of the Mediapolis. Valuable information may be found by collecting the maximum volume of data on media channels, which in an aggregate form the uniform space for the completely organized being of a society and the individual. To some extent, the databases of research (rating) firms may be used as sources of information, though they do not offer a complete description of the Mediapolis

infrastructure. However, this part of the article still addresses some points of contention; this is the place for debate. For example, whether the infrastructural environment is comfortable for its inhabitants? Whether it has a rational substantiation, or arises out of anarchy? To what extent does it increase accelerated self-reproduction? Whether it has prospects in the future, or it should remain a current (if not past) phenomenon? Whether division of transnational and local channels is relevant today? Finally, whether St. Petersburg "coincides" with tendencies, developed in other media cities, and whether it is necessary for it "to coincide?"

There are some precedents similar to the *Mediapolis project*, carried out in Singapore (another name is *Media City*). This Mediapolis physically exists, as a governmental company, a special area within the "big" city, and a complex of industrial enterprises. The administration of the project describes it as: "Mediapolis is the realisation of a vision: a media-centric city built to inspire creativity, collaboration and connectivity — where state-of-the art infrastructure, an active community of innovators and creators, and a collective spirit of enterprise make Mediapolis a place where ideas flow, flourish and thrive... Mediapolis is where digital media connects with the community in fun and tangible ways" (Our Media City, 2012).

For every nation, the question of the rationality of such media centric cities (or lack thereof) should arise in a context of infrastructure analysis.

There is one more special environment for us, namely **language and speech,** which are maybe the most visible aspects of routine life in the Mediapolis. Certainly, it is impossible to reduce observation to criticism of the damage to language in network communications and mass media. It is important in due time to question if a new, universal speech of the individual and society is arising. Or maybe there are a number of voices, which generates some kind of new Babylon, at least an intergenerational break in inhabitants' understanding of each other. Who is the source of a fashion and standards, and what today is referred to as speech culture, which institutes are responsible for "governing" speech processes, and

whether it is necessary to govern them? Besides, which national and international characteristics coexist in these processes? Perhaps, in general, the future will lead to a new Esperanto?

However, speech communication also has much more "prosaic" aspects that one should remember in addition to Internet-communications. Daily speech develops on the basis of direct interaction, and for a significant part of the population, problems arise at this level. Conflicts occur when there are migrations of other ethnic, language and cultural communities. Every modern Mediapolis, as well as a megalopolis as a whole, opens its borders. For Russian cities it is an extremely disturbing question. According to official statistics for the first half of 2013, migratory authorities in St. Petersburg have registered 792,000 new migrants. This is 22,000 more than in the first half of 2012 (V Smolnom uvideli migrantov, 2013).

The demographic reality is that the speech environment is distinct from traditional models. A new Babylon already exists in a megacity, and nowadays it has less in common with the literary-mythological allegory. Maybe academic linguists have the privilege to not pay special attention to the regeneration of the social environment, but the practices of a municipal government and self-regulation are compelled to adapt to actual circumstances of intercultural dialogue.

Anyway, it is obvious that the traditional uniformity of dialogue is replaced by the collision of different styles. The diverse speech of the Mediapolis is substantially focused on the personification of dialogue, unlike the unified dialogue in a mass audience. Thus, in a research it is necessity to combine the approaches of traditional linguistic and stylistic science with a freer attitude regarding language norms, which is characteristic for the postmodernist tendency in humanitarian knowledge.

In close connection to popular speech, but in a different mode, **the cultural consciousness and self-consciousness** of the Mediapolis develops. Undoubtedly, essential shifts occur in this structural component, and hardly all changes are homogenous. Positively, at least the individual has access to cultural property that transcends not only the borders of a real

megacity, but also planetary ones. Negatively, there are low standards and cultural simplification. These obvious changes are cultural phenomena that were generated by media life, by net communication.

Paradoxically, the accessibility of gigantic information resources promotes cultural interaction with reality only to a minimal degree, and encourages a lazy understanding of reality. The original "mirror" of cognitive activity of the Mediapolis inhabitant serves as the structure of sources of knowledge and representation. The redistribution of channels of media consumption in favor of the Internet does not require further research. Let us use only one illustration. The surveys in St. Petersburg and Stockholm, carried out in the frame of comparative research *The Role of Media for Identity and Democracy* have shown the following data: most 17-year-olds, read (books, newspapers, magazines) only 1-2 days per month (near 75%), while nearly every day 70% use the Internet in Stockholm, and 38% do the same in St. Petersburg. The surveys were organized in 2007, when there was a rather big gap between Swedish and Russian Internet access. Today the disparity is much smaller (Use and Views, 2011: 58-59).

In a cultural dimension, the use of modern communication technologies causes neither objection, nor counteraction. Deep anxiety arises in connection with decline of reading. The popular Russian writer and Professor of Physics, Sergey Kapitsa (he also known as the son of the Nobel Prize winner, Peter Kapitsa), declared: "We at last came to what we aspired to come to during all 15 years; we have brought up the country of idiots... The speed of technical development today is very high. But our ability to comprehend all this and to live reasonably in a new technical and information environment lags behind from this speed. The world experiences now a very deep crisis in the sphere of culture. So the situation in our country is typical enough for all other world - in America and in England too people read a little... Now it is very difficult to find intellectual leaders in general. Probably, because minds are necessary to nobody — sensations are necessary" (Rabi Robsky, 2009).

It is easy to see that the subject of the discussion is not reading, but the culture of the Mediapolis. It is not crucially important which channels

carry knowledge and valuable representations to citizens. Someone can personally disagree with the elimination of paper books and "old" cinema. One should recognize that the decline of certain media is in itself a cultural practice, which requires analysis.

It is especially necessary to reflect on *the idols of the crowd*. It seems that writers as mentors, easily recognizable literature samples, outstanding thinkers, and film protagonists are things of the past. Bloggers are modern idols and prophets, frequently without personal originality. How does such a replacement affect mass consciousness and behavior? Is the construction of the Mediapolis equivalent to the destruction of the Culturepolis (or at least to qualitative pauperization)?

City folklore still exists. The idols, popular figures, who dominate the media, are a result of not only media institutions, but also the spontaneous actions of citizens. This way of communication rarely draws attention of researchers, possibly because of how difficult it is to study. Some precedents of studying demonstrate the necessity of such projects, and the value of their findings (Ries, 1997).

Certainly, mass media channels and oral dialogue have an inseparable relationship, and mutually influence each other. At the same time, they are historically independent systems. Contemporary science tries to include spontaneous dialogue in a number of aspects of mass communication researches. It is true that: "In the communicative environment alongside mass press, TV, radio and the Internet exists one more channel of mass communication... which in circumstances of modern dialogue... is filled by rumors (but not only them) and which is named the Oral Channel... It has its own effective organization; it is used for collective distribution of a social significant information product... and works via transfer of oral texts from the person to the person by a principle of a speech chain or a network" (Osetrova, 2010: 13).

Thus, city folklore and other forms of spontaneous dialogue are integral parts of media life and, accordingly, must be analyzed, including folklore processes in networks. What myths and legends arise in net communication? Correspondingly, which spiritual-cultural values do they demonstrate, and how do they relate to previous cultural values?

Separate and profound attention should be paid to the consciousness of the person, who has got unlimited opportunities for self-expression and self-realization in the media space. In principle, these wide possibilities correspond to the strategy of humanization, as to the ideological basis of civilization leap and motive power of social transformations. There are bases to suppose, that in the sphere of media in recent, the preconditions for increasing "the human factor" were established, and now the individual and the social community must face the consequences.

To the future understanding of Mediapolis

There is the question of the readiness of the townspeople to manage the potential freedom that the media infrastructure has given to them. It is a question of whether the individual perceives his personal freedom as an indispensable part of the Mediapolis, to which he or she is emotionally attached. Personal freedom is understood in the highest spiritual context, without any diminutions of its substance through "convenient" usage, or to a standard set of technological operations (like computer clicks) and so forth.

However, further analysis may lead us away from the complicated framework of the Mediapolis. Obviously, each element of its structure deserves research on fundamental and applied levels, with different methods. As an initial step, the research team from St Petersburg has published the first results of the project in a monograph, in Russian (Sovremennyi rossiiskii Mediapolis, 2012). There is no doubt that the project should proceed.

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