ABSTRACT: The main thrust of the paper is the ongoing process of glocalization worldwide. The social networks created by Internet allow for the extremely quick spread of information and make possible interactions among people from diverse communities and cultures. The capacity of Internet has expanded its users’ social worlds and has enabled them to connect with faraway nations and places. Global events, issues and causes become the concern of millions of people almost instantly while at the same time connecting them more deeply to the place where they live through the interrelatedness of the global and the local.

In an age of a rapid shift from traditional human-to-human communication to computer-mediated and Internet-facilitated communication, people are empowered to collaborate as individuals or as groups in raising or responding to matters that are of importance to them. Weblogs, forums, chat rooms and other online social forms are the real-time sources that make sense to their users and are the de facto means through which global issues become tangible in particular localities and local issues gain wider recognition.

Addressed is the fact that a new type of participatory journalism, not restricted to the privileged, has emerged. In a digital medium, opinion and commentary coming from diverse contributors are offering fresh perspectives on what is going on locally and globally.

Key words: glocalization, globalization, Internet, social networks, participatory journalism

The meaning behind

Glocalization is a term widely used these days. To some, it sounds trite, to others – controversial, and to still others – all-embracing and hard to pinpoint. From a word formation point of view, it is a combination of the words "globalization" and "localization". According to Wikipedia this term is modeled on the Japanese word “dochakuka”, literally meaning “global localization”, i.e. a global outlook adapted to local conditions. It can denote a product or service that is developed and/or distributed globally, but is also molded to accommodate the consumers in a local market.

The term glocalization was popularized in the English speaking world by the sociologists Roland Robertson in the early 1990s, and Keith Hampton and Barry Wellman in the late 1990s. The term is used to refer to a variety of processes – economic, political, social, and cultural, as well as human interactions. Most often it denotes the integration of localities into the global, with localities in turn influencing the global. Mary Leigh Morbey writes about cyberglocalization (Morbey, 2006) to refer to the interconnection of digital spaces with cultural and geographical spaces adapting global cyber culture to local processes. To Hampton (2001) glocalization is the combination of global and local connectivity facilitated by computer-mediated communication.

In The World is Flat Thomas L. Friedman talks about how the Internet has accelerated globalization and changed communication among people around the world to equalize in many respects their opportunities to hear and be heard, to participate in global matters while supporting and sustaining local best practices. According to him, one manifestation of glocalization is the fact that internet is encouraging people to make websites in their native languages. People can benefit from the global achievements without leaving their locality (big or small).

Glocalization is a term describing the concrete daily contexts we live in influenced by the convergence of literally everything – knowledge, skills, practices, products and services. It is a process of significance to the preservation of the local which has been highly neglected after the advent of the omnipresent globalization. It is also a process which makes globalization less ab-
abstract, more tangible and beneficial to large numbers of people.

From traditional communities to social networks

People have always been bound up in relatively homogeneous groups and communities. From a historical perspective, there has been a constant shift from densely knit, bounded groups to less strictly structured communities. While this process was slow at the beginning, with the advancement of civilizations people started forming and participating in various diffuse communities, less and less dependent on immediate locality.

The advent and rapid proliferation of the Internet is greatly contributing to and facilitating this process. The society made up of “little boxes”, connoting “people socially and cognitively encapsulated by homogeneous, broadly-embracing groups” (Wellman, 2006) has become a society of social networks. The boundaries of these networks are not strictly “guarded”, access to them is liberal, and they facilitate interactions with miscellaneous others. “Membership” in one network does not hinder “membership” in many others. As Wellman (2006) claims, mankind has known many complex social networks, but with the advancement of technology, especially Internet and broadband, social networks have become a predominant type of social organization.

There are two extreme attitudes to the exploitation of Internet – the utopian and the dystopian. While the former emphasizes only its positive aspects and views it as a technological marvel that will bring a new Enlightenment (Wellman, 2004), the latter sees it as bringing about the disruption of traditional, healthy and reliable personal relations. The dystopian view is based on the assumption that people involved in Internet-based communication will suspend all other interpersonal contacts. It has turned out to be too far-fetched. Online communication has become an obsession mostly for people who are asocial anyway. It cannot be lightly claimed that Internet cuts people off from traditional communities and the relations that they foster. But it is evident that it has increased the options for membership and active involvement in a variety of Internet communities.

People’s social worlds have expanded tremendously through networking. Although there is still some debate about its definition, it can be claimed that a social network refers to a community where a person connects and communicates with others on the Internet. The format of this communication may vary from website to website but contacts are generally accomplished through a variety of methods – “blogs, instant messaging, email, chat rooms, video or forums.

There are two types of Internet social networks: Generic and Specialized. The generic ones (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn) can be defined as existing first and foremost to enable people to stay in touch while the specialized ones (e.g. YouTube, LibraryThingbeta, ALADIN, GUINI, SEE-ECN, etc.) bring together people with specific common interest. The specialized social networks outnumber the generic ones for the simple reason that there is no limit to people’s interests.

Both types of networks are important for the growth of local/global interactions. The specialized ones have the advantage of offering a better user experience because of a more focused, rich and sophisticated interface. Their limitation is their specialty which restricts the number of people who find them useful. The generic social networks are much more flexible in that they allow for specialty expansions without being very ambitious in their aims.

Peer influences typical of traditional communities have yielded precedence to anonymous ones where users influence users who influence other users. The socially inactive, shy or awkward become actively involved in these communities without the much dreaded face-to-face contact. The popularity of social networks has skyrocketed in recent years and the likelihood is that it will continue to grow with the advent of more sophisticated technology and user-friendly software.

Glocal online communities

Internet has created a new type of community – the glocal community which is comprised of people from near and far. Wellman (2004: 29) says that “Internet users are becoming “glocalized” – that is, heavily involved in both local and long-distance relationships.” Indeed, nowadays, we are empowered to communicate with others in cyberspace, unconstrained by space and time.

In a fairly short span of time people’s regular patterns of social life changed considerably. There has been a shift from traditionally strong bonds in the neighborhood and workplace to evolving strong network bonds between communities with unidentifiable boundaries. The transition started before the internet age and was en-
hanced by the increase in communication and transportation opportunities which led to greater mobility. However, most of the time social interactions still took place in densely-woven surroundings. Communities could be defined as predominantly local.

Internet caused a transposition of whole layers of social ties and attitudes. Following on the heels of the unprecedented mobility, it not only served as the most reliable and inexpensive means of maintaining contact with others, but also as a platform for speaking one’s mind, sharing ideas and opinions, and benefiting from other people’s postings. The severed traditional links with one’s neighbours, coworkers, or even family members who either do not stay the same for a very long period of time, or move to distant locations, needed an alternative. Given the increased individualism of man in the 21st century, belonging to a traditional community or group, was no longer a preferred option. Technology provided a solution and people started forming new communities.

We are now living through a period of transition from place-to-place to person-to-person connectivity, which means that it is the individual, moving around with a pager, mobile phone or wireless Internet that is accessible and important. People are much less dependent on place than they were even a few years ago. They participate in virtual organizations and have multiple allegiances, and fractional commitments. These afford a variety of flexible interpersonal relations which can be sustained through various lengths of time, broken, and reestablished when a need occurs again.

The unlimited opportunities for interactions with others from all latitudes and longitudes are just one of the two aspects of the glocal nature of contemporary computer-mediated communities. People actively involved in social platforms not only link up with other participants in the process, but also bring together the local and the global giving all the more reason to call these new communities glocal. Bridging scales from local to global is an important characteristic of these communities. And if glocalization is a portmanteau of globalization and localization, then glocal communities are those whose existence and activities relate to both local and global interests and concerns. They are communities which are both willing and able to “think globally act locally”.

People and places are connected through internet to form new types of neighborhoods based not on proximity of space but on proximity of interests and preferences, political and environmental concerns, moral and ethical stands, to name but a few. This is a new type of social integration which has come to replace many of the traditional social networks. Some claim that while face-to-face communication is the real thing, computer-mediated and internet-based communication is not genuine and significant. Underestimated is the fact that glocal communities existing though participation in social platforms can often achieve more than face-to-face forums bringing together only a limited number of people.

**Participatory journalism**

In an age of a rapid shift from traditional human-to-human communication to computer-mediated and internet-facilitated communication, people are empowered to collaborate as individuals or as groups in raising or responding to matters that are of importance to them. Weblogs, forums, chat rooms and other online social forms are the real-time sources that make sense to their users and are the de facto means through which global issues become tangible in particular localities and local issues gain wider recognition. Internet-connected communities bring the world to the locality and the locality to the world.

A new type of participatory journalism, also called do-it-yourself journalism, not restricted to the privileged, has emerged. Interactions within and between online communities resemble communication prior to the appearance of printed press. The process is reminiscent of circulation of information by word of mouth despite the fact that it is utilizing high-tech hardware, software and networks. Unrestrained by geography, time, and excessive filtering and editing, technologically interconnected audiences generate, analyze, and disseminate news and information bridging the gap between local and global happenings. Not only does society get better informed through a plurality of perspectives, but also the online communities gain importance as social factors of betterment, and stimuli for proactive attitude to local and global issues.

Contemporary technology enables citizens all over the world to record and spread stories and events that they have witnessed, and make news that no reporter or journalist can manage to capture because of the unexpectedness of happenings or the immediacy of experiences. In times of disasters – natural or ‘man made’ – there is no
surfer way of authentic representation of the events than that coming from people directly involved in them. These are people with cameras or cell phones, with access to the Internet, with no formal training in journalism who have a proactive approach to what is going on around them. From mere consumers of news stories they turn into producers who make the news.

The high speed of exchanges among members of glocal online communities ensures that burning issues get circulated and discussions follow at the right time. The ease of sending messages and making postings available to an unlimited number of recipients allows people to actively participate in multiple social milieus. Despite the fact that some types of communication through Internet take more extreme forms, the positive outcomes by far exceed the negative ones.

The most active contributors to the do-it-yourself journalism are usually people who already belong to online communities. They behave as stakeholders in both local and global matters. Rather than passively accepting news coverage like traditional consumers, they send e-mails, post comments and criticism, reportages, pictures and videos, or ask and answer questions in blogs.

The journalism of the 20th century was the territory of the omniscient journalists and public relations specialists who, with all my due respect to their professions, had the freedom to manipulate readers and viewers. Nowadays, millions of people are much better informed than ever before and have the freedom and means to voice their views, find and share with others their version of the truth. In the digital medium, opinion and commentary coming from diverse contributors are offering fresh perspectives on what is going on locally and globally.

Conclusion

The societal implications of the omnipresence of Internet are very controversial. They are seen by some as a threat and by others as a blessing. But Internet is here to stay and expand and should be taken advantage of rather than shunned. Every day it changes the world we live in from how we shop to how we work, from how we look for a job to how we find friends. There is no denying the fact that traditional social human interactions have changed greatly. The emergence of glocal social networks and participatory journalism facilitated by Internet has accelerated the move away from globalization to glocalization. The citizen-led conversation that takes place within and among glocal communities boosts democracy.

We will keep asking ourselves the questions: Are there limits to Internet? What are they? Is it going to become even more pervasive in our lives? How much further will it go? However, at present, one thing is certain – we are enjoying the freedom of many forms of communication that have been expanded into a global form by the Internet: one-to-one (e-mail, Skype, etc.), one-to-many (Internet newsgroups, facebook and personal Web sites), and many many-to-many (Internet chat, Usenet exchanges, etc.). The beneficial circumstances for networking have helped millions of people around the world to get out of the “box”, go beyond the local, understand better the global, see where the two meet or clash, and contribute in their own ways to the dissemination of news, stories and attitudes. The potential for avoiding and resolving conflicts has increased through glocalization which is engaging a “flat world” (Friedman, 2005).

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