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Transnational Tools and Activities to Promote the Local Culture: case of the promotion of Latvian author's literary contribution as a part of Siberian culture

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Abstract:

In the article, I focus to one of the phenomena of the globalization - transnational network, which turned out a successful activity to promote the local cultural history. The study is based in the case of creating a process of the article in Siberian cultural media about Latvian author M, Vanaga (Melānija Vanaga) and her novel „Veļupes krastā”, an autobiographical work about exiled peoples life in Siberia in the middle of the 20th century.

The study has interdisciplinary approach; it involves social, medial and cultural processes. The visualization of the network based on the certain activity (threshold) helps to reveal social mechanisms and to outline the boundaries and distinctions between different cultures in both local and transnational level. Description of the communication in the network partly answers to questions: what are the common values and the goal of the network? What bonds together local and foreign people and how museums and other cultural institutions become meaningful tools in the process of maintenance and construction the cultural memory? The study case can be accepted as evidence of the transnational communication in the purpose to maintain above-national heritage in modern times.

Keywords: cultural memory, media content, social network, transnational interaction, heritage.

Acknowledgments

*People become great with his passion, love for the nature,
work and others, not with his 18 or 20 years.
Immortal people become when he learn to rise
his work and love above his personal life. /M. Vanaga/*

I express gratitude to the representative of M. Vanaga's museum in Latvia, in Amata, journalist and other close supporters in Latvia, who helped with material, advice or simply moral support in correspondence in the process of creating the article in 2012.

It wouldn't be possible to gain a deep understanding about M. Vanaga's life in Siberia, in Tjuhtet if Josef, local Latgalian wouldn't take me to the village, respected my every wish to take photos and meet with a representative of the local museum.

Although I had spent some time in Russia already, my Russian language skills weren't strong enough to make the article in Russian already at the beginning. I thank Irina, local Latgalian, who dedicated her time to help me to translate the text into Russian.

The last, but not the least thank is to Iveta Kestere, who found time to meet and give a great list of literature to help me to find the theoretical frame for the research.

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Abbreviations

RL – Rīgas Laiks, journal

EU – European Union

UNESCO – The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Figure 1. [The article based communication network.](#)

Introduction

More than ever today European has to confront their belonging to a certain national and cultural identity, estimating the values it is based on. Among huge immigration waves in Europe recently, society has to be aware of common values in order to live next to each other in one place. It underlines the fact that the European Union (EU) is an above-national arena, where many tragic and destructive issues have taken place (Assman, RL, 2017:27); but respecting the historical paradigm as well, it extends in a broader frame. Scholars draw attention to raising awareness for the European common values and history memory frames both at a national-state and a global level.

The purpose of this study is to show transnational interactions producing written media content about above-national heritage. This study answers these questions:

How do the local events reflect the greater tendencies there are in the world?

What are the common values of actors who make up the network?

None of the states can avoid the political and social process changes that we are experiencing today, although every region might have a different reflection on them. Questions about history memory and empathetic attitudes are actually a knowledge and competence to build the bridge between individuals' and others' memory. A. Assman claims it is crucial for the common European identity frame, which will learn to admit every representative's memories and empathically listen to others' memories (Assman, RL, 2017:29). Simultaneously, knowledge can be acquired only when it is reachable and society has the moral and cognitive skills to accommodate information. Modern times and the way of thinking has a very creative approach, raising the importance of different narratives and research as a source for the educational process. Knowledge is closely linked with memory. Memory has two possibilities: to remember or forget; as it has an individual and collective side (ErlI, 2011:1). In this study, I use the view of Astrid ErlI about memory from the social constructivism side and engagement within the media. Currently, there are calls in the public media to be brave and remember and deal with memories to forgive and free society of the negative emotions of memory (Hanovs, 2017). Periodically there is a message about M. Vanaga and her novel "Veļupes krastā" (In the Coast of Souls of the Dead); the last discourse is about a movie made by V. Kairišs based on the novel with the goal of reminding the next generations about the XXI century's vital history issues.

The study is based on the autobiographical individual memories, correspondence, and available documents. The described interaction between Russian journalist (further-journalist), Latvian Language teacher (further-teacher), representative of the Amata museum in Latvia, museum in Tjuhtet and representatives of Latvian society in Krasnoyarsk region shows, how it reflects more general socio-economic and cultural patterns – such as the complex relationship between elite and popular culture (Port, 2015:110). The interaction lasted around two months and included activities starting from the journalist's idea for the article and settling connections with the teacher and finishing with the last teacher's draft sent to the journalist. The networking process identifies the globalization phenomenon, which can be seen in the visualization of communication between actors. The goal of the article is to remind readers about local cultural heritage and moral values that can be learned from the story of M. Vanaga and her novel.

The given description of the collaborative network between the organizations and representatives of Latvia and Russia gives additional information and helps readers to understand the range of differences of the International Relations (Cudworth, E. and Hobden, S, 2013) among countries which do not have friendly diplomatic relation due to historical political issues.

The study can be seen from the microhistory perspective, where large questions are asked in small events or places; where memory is considered as a raw material of history (Creet, 2014:84). A microhistory approach is used as a tool to decrease the negative energy of memories - the ability to put

memories in the context of broader interrelationships. It is a task of cognitive education since the mentioned ability is possible only after some period of time (Assman, RL, 2017:28).

Background

After two-year work experience in Latvian diaspora, in Russia (Omsk region, village Курляно-Дубовка and Krasnoyarsk city and region (г. Красноярск, д. Тюхтет, г. Ачинск, д. Богатое) I describe it in the frame of social theories in my master thesis about the interaction between Latvia and Siberian Latvians after regaining the independence of the Republic of Latvia (Salmina 2014).

This study broadens my master thesis (Salmina, 2014). The experience of the interaction increased my, as teacher's, empathy to notice and accept moral and ethical values above the national ones, understanding of the strong dependence between the climate and political frame and local culture. Mentioned experience decreased stereotypes about other nation representatives as well.

The globalization breaks the principle of territoriality, the existing interaction between the power and the place (Castles, Davidson, 2000:6), and brings new challenges to nation-states and global organizations (policy agenda and implementation process) to interact in a transnational frame. The first definition of transnationalism was given in 1992 (Schiller, 1992:1), but soon it developed to "process, in which migrants make up social ties and platforms out of the geographical, cultural and political borders" (Baschi, 1994:7).

Specific fields try to adopt the new phenomena – cultural institutions have made a legal formal frame to transnationalise heritages. One of the most obviously 'transnational' heritage projects is UNESCO's World Heritage List, yet numerous case studies detail how designating something as 'World Heritage' has too often just been used for place-marketing since World Heritage has become an integral part of the global 'economy of prestige' (Hoelscher 2011, 302; see also Herrera 2014, quoted by Chalcraft, J., and Delanty, G., 2015:4).

The Siberian phenomenon

Globalization per-se doesn't assimilate but motivates and requires to save national and local identities and their unique values. Siberian Latvian (and Latgalian) phenomenon is discussed through ethnographic or linguistic theories (Kursīte 2008, Lielbārdis 2007, 2008, Leikuma 2004, 2008). Estonian researchers discussed the Latvian and Estonian cultural preservation in the northern Siberian region, indicating that cultural and ritual rooting and existence continues after the extinction of certain representatives of the nation (Truškova, 2013).

The Siberian identities characteristics are based on the environment (mostly climate). The essential influence of the identity of the climate was pointed out from the interviews of Siberian Latvian (Salmina, 2014) and is mentioned in last studies by Siberian ethnographers

(Ермолович, 2015:42) as well. M. Vanaga in her novel reflects untraditional by Latvian culture attitude to Russian nation:

“There lived many good Russian in the Thjuhtet, but it took a long time to find an understanding between them and us. [...] Nura was my closest neighbor and helped me the most in my hard days. Took care about a goat, brought the water, stood the line for bread. The real good Russian heart. I knitted for her something in the end.”

In the same time M. Vanaga draft the picture of the multicultural platform in Siberia, pointing out that Latvians weren't the only ones in this hard situation:

“Flora, exiled Hebrew, who was behind Kirov, told to the doctor as I wouldn't be there: I believe less to your hands, even less – to the power of hostess. I definitely, don't believe in Latvian God, which they all are praying to, but I believe to the divine love I see among Latvians when they take the pilgrimage to the hospital every day already for months.”

Common values and network

The unique Siberian identity shares common heritage with Latvian national identity which become the threshold to create the network (see Figure 1).

The theoretical acknowledgement that the potential of the network is measured in proportion to the amount of the weak ties (usually only activated for a specific purpose) (Granovetter 1982, quoted by Kadushin, 2012:30, quoted by Salmina, 2014:43) is one of reasons to look for this certain network. In this case common value for actors is M. Vanaga and her novel: for Latvian – writer and local historian, for Siberian (Russian) – writer, who spend sixteen years in Siberia and reflects her life of this period in her most famous novel “Veļupes krastā” (On the coast of souls of the dead).

According to the social theory based on the type of ties and flows described network, it is open network (Kadushin, 2012:17). Ch. Kadushin indicates that the shared norms and values form a tie between nodes, or vice versa - links and shared attributes can lead to shared norms and values in both individual and community level (Kadushin, 2012:19). The network shows several direct ties between Latvian actors (Amata museum, the teacher and others). Direct ties between the teacher and Latgalian (According to the Krasnoyarsk region ethnic [map](#) Latgalian are defined as the separate ethnic group, although counted in one group (Этноатлас, 2017). There are only one direct journalist tie with the teacher. Most direct ties bonds teacher, her nodes is the main in the network. The communication with actors in Latvia happened via e-mail proving the efficiency of digital resources to able cross-border networks, in addition to the development of transnational and field location (Faist, 2010:17-18). Described network includes professional and occupational field ties (Quasysan, Daswani, 2013:13).

Network theory confirms A. Assman's statement that common frame of both identity and values allows different memories to exist next to each other without provoking new conflicts (Assman, 2017:29). The interaction in described networked finished with positive emotions and mutual gratitude, opened to interact in the future as well.

Communication network based on threshold.
(The creation of the article about M. Vanaga in the Krasnoyarsk regional journal)

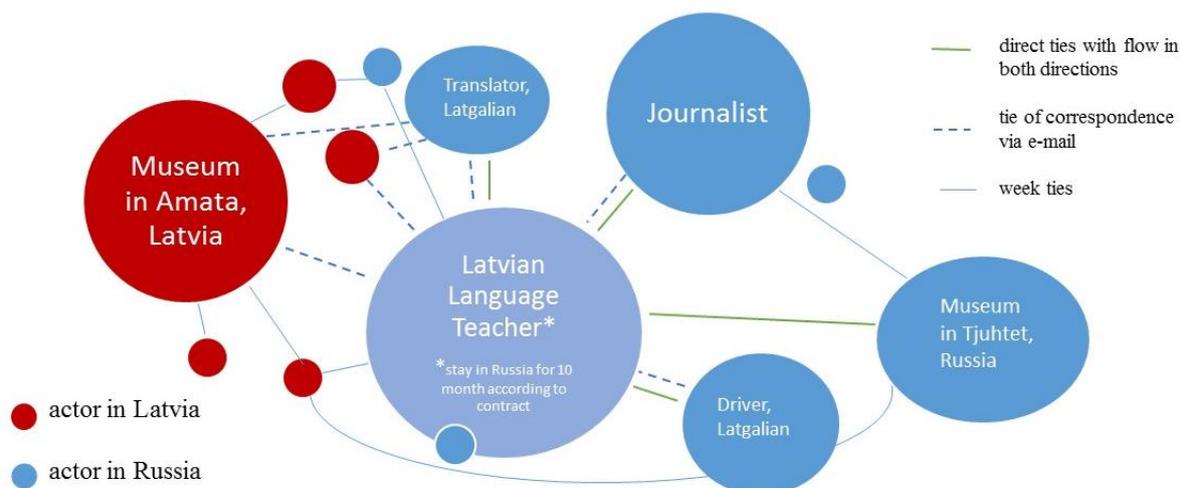


Figure 2. The article based communication network.

Cultural memory and policy

The socio-cultural context of memory mostly is maintained by institutions and governmental systems. Individual action echoes it and embodies the cultural memory in the media and institutions (Erll 2008:5). The process of embodying certain context or cultural values, evidence, narratives in the media is essential to keep it alive in the society and collective memory. In the same time context of media allows offering to society extra information.

Culture is not only written or always defined, it exists and is expressed by daily life rituals and self-spun webs of meaning (cf. Geertz)" (Erll, 2008:4). When experienced memories are bright enough they affect actor. The teacher's experience of the interaction in the network raised-up several issues she wasn't 't aware in Latvia: 1) not only Latvians were exiled and suffered because of the USSR; 2) the time in Siberia left not only negative, but positive lessons as well; 3) harsh nature makes people be friendly and helpful; 4) there are legal tools how to maintain the cultural dialogue, despite the existing unfriendly relationship between nation-states; 5) how deep in the culture can be fear learned in the history and how it affects the behaviour of society today.

Although memory is always purely individual and biological, the process of memorialization is bound with and shaped by socio-cultural context for every individuality. There are several theories and researchers (Erll, 2008:5) about different and more successful types (kinds) of strategies, how the socio-cultural context impacts the individual memory. According to the teacher's experience, the interaction between different actors (history, age, socio-cultural environment) is one of the successful ones. The interaction, where the goal is linked with the cultural memory, leads to the reconstruction of identity (John Locke, quoted by Erll, 2008:6); it proves that media functions as a policy implementation tool.

The description and popularization of teacher's experience to the broader audience forward independent memory on the transnational and transcultural level. Existing similar studies demonstrate the continuous and multifaceted mobility, mediation and multi-directionality of memory (quoted by Kobalek 13, Bond and Rapson, 2014; Levy and Sznajder,

2006; Rothberg, 2009). Amata museum can value their participation as transnational and additional to their usual activities. The teacher's interest was to provide as much objective information as possible about Latvian author, marketing Latvian culture in the region. Journalist gained the teacher as a human resource with different experience, easily available (language skills, Latvian acquaintances) information resources and creative approach.

Relation between media and memory

Without an actualization, the narratives, values or cultural memory can't survive. Media according to the curriculum of policy gives the possibility to externalize culture; later it can shape individual memory, cultural knowledge and attitude to the history.

The journal is one of the media in the region (local); theoretically, it has the power to implement local society's attitude and values by providing certain content.

Journal is fully financed by the Russia government and has declared a goal to inform about different nations and their culture which live in Krasnoyarsk region. There is a note on the first page of the journal that the opinion of the published material might not converge with the editor's opinion (Enisej, 2012:1) to fit in the national political frame.

Additional the text, there are photos in the article as well. Although the journal editor received both: photos from Amata museum and from the teacher made in Tjuhtet, they chose to publish from the museum. The published photos show the experience in Siberia and Latvia during the life of M. Vanaga and museum today. Thereby media offer cultural memory from the Latvian side: photos and text, both are made by Latvians.

The interaction is an example of tendency - growing global communication makes harder to maintain national legends which refer only to themselves (Assman, RL, 2017:26) which can be accepted as a risk of healthy national self-esteem. The teacher changes her attitude to Russian society after experienced interaction because of certain reasons: positive communication with the journalist; common reference of knowledge acquired in the field trip to Tjuhtet and correspondence.

Memory institutions as supportive partners in education

Education is an important tool for society forming in both: national and global level. The memorialization process of cultural memory has two types: active and passive. Among the active type of cultural memory, a process expresses activities as canon, museums, selection and collectivization activities (Assman, 2008:99). The described situation shows the importance of the role of Amata museum participation: 1) provided appropriate photos; 2) representative of the museum had a closer link with M. Vanaga why she was a great advisor to the teacher to help her create better content of the article.

The article was an additional possibility to popularize both: Latvian author in Krasnoyarsk region and promote an idea about different nation collaboration and positive attitude to each other, which is expressed in M. Vanaga's novel. The position of victim of nation gives it immunity against its guilt and responsibility (Assman, RL, 2017:26), while the lesson in the novel and lesson learned by job experience of the teacher in Russia, motivates to forgive after getting known with local society, their historical and modern culture and nature of Siberia.

There is a statement that archive is an important achievement of civil society (Assman, 2008:106); the same could be addressed to the library and museum as well, which increase the importance of responsible and educated employees as performers of the information services.

Conclusion

An autobiographical narrative can be valued as a source that can help to identify common values and create and enhance awareness of one's own identity. The study shows that actors from different nation-states can interact in one network if they have common values and goals. The second criteria to interact is the knowledge of the spoken language, but efficiency increases thanks to available digital resources and digital literacy.

The common value in the network is the content of the novel made by M. Vanaga. Actors are interested in collaboration if they recognize the communicative goal as valuable according to the prior value. The achievement determines how long the network will exist. The experienced interaction will determine whether it will repeat the interaction in a similar network in the future or not. M. Vanaga made a novel about her sixteen years' of experience in Siberia. This novel became her most famous work later in Latvia guaranteeing her role in Latvian cultural memory. At the same time, the content of the novel will always be related to the geographical location – Siberia, playing a role in the local heritage in Siberia as well.

The study shows a tendency to collaborate according to the above-transnational content, not to only the local and political framework. At the same time participants in transnational interaction require certain skills and attitudes:

1. language skills,
2. computer literacy,
3. critical literacy,
4. cultural literacy
5. an open-minded attitude,
6. the courage to make mistakes and defend your opinion,
7. time management skills.

For further studies certain issues can be looked into:

How does the novel written by M. Vanaga live in its afterlife (a term defined by A. Erlil (Erlil 2011:4)?

What is the evidence of the journal's impact on the local cultural memory?

How can (strategies) individual memory affect collective memory?

What is the role of memory institutions in the existence of cultural memory in practice?

How do foreign institutions impact local cultural memory (channels, forms)?

How do local, self-centred and specific to a certain place and culture issues influence the professional field and professional culture?

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