

Review

Public Relations : A Revolutionary Discipline

by Adela Rogojinaru

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The volume *Public Relations : A Revolutionary Discipline* includes the majority of conference papers held by professor Adela Rogojinaru (1963-2014) to specialized scientific events. Some of these texts have already been published in various conference proceedings (five of the 13 papers that comprise the present volume), but most of them are unpublished. One notable and interesting fact that can be easily observed is the substantial dimension of almost each lecture; most of the lectures are valid studies in Public Relations. The editors (R. Moise and A. Săvoiu) also chose to publish two lectures in power-point format, because the content is highly relevant regarding ideas and realities presented.

The book encompasses, in a suggestive manner, Adela Rogojinaru's trajectory of becoming a theoretician and a well-known scholar in the field. Two terms can define best Adela Rogojinaru's vision and interpretation on Public Relations: critical and revolutionary. Thomas Kuhn's influence is assumed by Adela Rogojinaru since one of her first books, *Fundamente interdisciplinare ale Relațiilor Publice* [Public Relations: Interdisciplinary Foundation] (Tritonic, 2005) and it is present throughout the author's full analytical and theoretical approach. Readers will be therefore able to identify the author's major research interests: from studies that ground the Public Relations discipline in a theoretical and metacritical way, to a national historiography of Public Relations and analysis of Public Relations process and practices (risk communication, crisis communication, internal communication, corporate branding and storytelling).

The volume is structured in three parts. First chapter, intitled "Paradigm Shifts in Public Relations. Towards a Critical Theoretical Model of Public Relations", includes

studies that analyze and interpret the process of paradigmatic change of Public Relations: from the relevance of introducing new scientific fields in the effort of defining the discipline and the analysis of current social practices (*popular culture*, cultural studies and cultural history), to the influence of new media onto theoretical models and dominant practices of Public Relations. This first chapter comprises studies which reflect dominantly the in-depth metacritical and theoretical attitude, with historiographical roots. The volume begins with what we consider to be a programmatic study, written and presented in 2013 at the *International Public Relations History Conference*, Bournemouth University: “Epistemic tensions of the public relations disciplines: transgressing the paradigm”. Our main argument for considering and diagnosing this study as programmatic is the author’s explicit and declared intention of “reconsidering the «public» roots of the relations, namely the power of the public man and his public history (...)” (Rogojinaru, 2013), an intention which “enriches the theoretical interpretations of the public sphere as well as the fields of applications of public relations.” (Ibidem)

The study develops both diachronic and synchronic perspectives of and on Public Relations as a changing and revolutionary discipline. Analyzing the theoretical and paradigmatic becoming of Public Relations as a social discipline, Adela Rogojinaru identifies and structures its trajectory into three stages: the *pre-paradigmatic stage* (between the decade of 1920s and the 1980s of the last century), the *paradigmatic stage or the creation of the dominant paradigm* (the period of the 1984 and the 2002) and the *post-paradigmatic* (de)construction of the discipline (started probably with 2004, the Facebook year, with effects up to the present date and beyond). Each stage is thoroughly described and interpreted in a forensic way: Adela Rogojinaru highlights the main process that led to identifying the poles, being either the influence of a theory or a social phenomenon, she reconstructs, by explaining the most relevant factors of evolution, each stage, and finalizes her analysis with a national cultural landscape (the Romanian case).

This trajectory of Public Relations discipline is constantly marked by the epistemic tensions between the instrumental role and a broader societal value, or, as Adela Rogojinaru states, between the emphasis put on *Relations* and the relevance given to the *Public* concept. She therefore analyzes and interprets two diachronic axes of Public Relations discipline which are reconstructed in a theoretical and metacritical way. The first dominant perspective, whose impact is also reconstructed, links Public Relations to the business sector, more specifically in the corporate practice of the private industrial trusts or companies. At the level of its applied legitimacy, “PR always served as an instrument of the liberal economy and private business, being meant to assess the business performance in society or in particular public spheres (by means of different types of profitability: financial, social, relational etc.)” (Rogojinaru, 2013) A second perspective is brought to light, and that is the perspective of Public Relations as discipline that investigates publics, public sphere and public opinion. Rogojinaru states

that the process of appropriating Public Relations as a tool for business as singular and dominant paradigm in understanding its role impoverishes the interpretation of any public event of interest for our discipline.

The synchronic analysis that the first study develops is programmatically entitled “Transgressing the organizational boundaries: from organizations back to publics” and states author’s theoretical position regarding the role of Public Relations as a discipline. Adela Rogojinaru explains this paradigmatic shift first of all from an intrinsic disciplinary perspective, retracing the relevant changes as the influence of learning theories in organizations and the innovation theories, the impact of sociologists as Bauman, van Dijk, Castells or Ritzer who theorized the concept of *cognitive capitalism*.

These interdisciplinary influences prepared the ground for the societal impact of another phenomenon which Adela Rogojinaru considers to have shifted the theoretical emphasis from organizations to public(s): social media, especially Facebook. She argues this position by highlighting what she considers to be the dominant characteristics of the (New) Public Man: multiple rationalities, the incapacity of the publics to focus on specific issues, an incapacity defined by fluidity or fragmentation, or lack of cohesion. The immediate impact on reconfiguration of relations is, accordingly to the author: “The assessment of these relations is no longer related to the degree of publicness or publicity but to the level of recognition of *otherness*.” (Rogojinaru, 2013)

The archeology of the new network society leaves the place for paradigmatic questioning; Adela Rogojinaru also proposes, in the last part of the study, interdisciplinary paradigms between Public Relations and cultural disciplines (Popular Culture, Cultural Studies and Cultural History), finding legitimate theoretical linkages and new research objects. At this point also, she advances provocative ideas and theoretical positions. She opts for redefining the public sphere, long time viewed from Habermas rational perspective, under the profound influence of social media and proposes a more constant and in-depth attention given to emotions and public positions for whose analysis the dominating theories do not apply anymore. She considers necessary the shift of the research interest and theoretical emphasis from class perspective and Public Relations as a soft power or vertical instrument to cultural production, cultural practices and local histories of places and spaces.

We chose to present this study in detail in order to explain the structuring logic of the present volume. We therefore think that this study and the theoretical positions grounded and presented here irradiate in the volume as a whole. This is the reason for which we continued the first part with a paper (“Digital Publics and Stakeholders. Theoretical Perspectives on the Notion of Publics”) that questions the role of digital publics and explains the systemic and structural transformations which impact the Public Relations theories and practices in an essential way. The study also emphasizes

the need to reconsider the way that Public Relations researchers and practitioners define and address digital publics and she advances an optimal anthropological perspective, one which is „oriented towards capturing the discussion themes around various forms of public engagement (as expressed by the public themselves) and applying the communities’ specific protocols in communication (contrary to the centrality of the persuasive models which remain limited in their multi-relational scope of action)” (Rogojinaru, 2015, p. 64). This particular study is completed by the ones entitled “Using Benchmarking to Evaluate Public Relations Effectiveness through Social Media”, “From Writing the Memoirs to Electronic Biography: Exposure through Personalised Media”, and “Risks and Crises: How to Manage Them in Different Culture, Communities and Democracies?”, each of them providing Adela Rogojinaru’s theoretical position and choices: from innovative evaluation methods of social media campaign (from publics perspective), the analysis of cultural biographical writing practices to a rhetorical analysis model of crisis management. The second study which emphasizes the critical approach on social media is „Using Benchmarking to Evaluate Public Relations Effectiveness through Social Media” (in co-authorship with A. M. Zaharia & R. Moise); this study is relevant for proposing a tool for analyzing the online Public Relations campaigns, the functional benchmarking, and a complex analysis grid.

The second part of the volume („Public Relations in Transition and Post-Transition Romanian Society”) represents a socio-cultural analysis of the development of Public Relations in Romania: from the critical aspects that define Romanian public sphere as being into a continuous stage of transition and the transitional Public Relations, to the role of Public Relations in the Romanian post-recession society as managing narcissist markets. The current chapter offers an integrative and broad perspective on the development of Public Relations in Romania, highlighting the critical moments and phenomena which changed the discipline and its practices. This part therefore highlights the main societal changes in Romania after the 1989, the author analyzing the nature of practice and the theory of practice in transitional public relations (Ławniczak, 2005). Adela Rogojinaru has always tackled upon the historiographical dimension in her studies, beginning with 2005 when she presented her first study in this field. She therefore integrated herself in a broader movement in Public Relations research, supporting a European Model of Public Relations based on cross-national comparisons and international studies. This socio-cultural turn movement, developed by Krishnamurthy and Verčič, who edited the first Global Public Relations Handbook, and Günter Bentele and Tom Watson by founding the European Public Relations History Network (EPRHN), develops analyses of public relations in different regions by identifying the contextual variables external to organizations (such as culture, political system, economic system, and media system) and the complex ways they influence public relations activities in various parts of the world.

Adela Rogojinaru adds in an original way to the current literature not only a relevant analysis of national evolution of Public Relations, but she also creates a history of Public Relations institutionalization and professionalization. She therefore explores and interprets the role of media in Romania after the 1989, the main changes in the Public Relations practice and theoretical evolvement, providing an in-depth analysis of the way Public Relations have been perceived and constructed by different actors. This historical and contextual analysis represents, at this moment, the fundament for a new direction in Public Relations historiography research, as a group of researchers (coordinated by Professor Tom Watson from University of Bournemouth) conduct currently an intensive and cross-cultural study on Public Relations in dictatorships. “

The last part of the current volume, “Strategic Communication: from Critical Practices to Legitimacy Discourses”, is dedicated to the strategic communication and integrates analyses and interpretations of the dominant methodologies in Public Relations: the history of Corporate Social Responsibility (as key-concept and practice), the informal dimension of internal communication influenced by the new technologies, the storytelling as key instrument for the corporate branding. This last part of the volume highlights the research interests in the methodology of Public Relations, the author proposing an analysis of structural changes of Public Relations. The “Corporate Responsibility and Sustainable Development. Policy Concepts” lecture develops the corporate altruism concept and emphasizes the relevant key-issues of the problematics. The study entitled “Communication organisationnelle et réseaux informels internes: les effets des TIC sur la culture interne de l’entreprise” describes in an almost ethnographical way an internal communication practice, the grapevine, the author analyzing its structural and systemic changes in the electronic era of using Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the organizational environment. The last study, entitled “Corporate Narrations and Brand Palimpsest” is also a unique and original approach: the poetics model used to analyze the brand discourse through common corporate books; a seductive interpretation gives the possibility to the reader to understand the complex layers of branding, such as it is explained and understood by Adela Rogojinaru.

Using a straightforward perspective, Adela Rogojinaru presents a high-level theoretical speech, cutting through the details and highlighting the essential. Her critical thinking also relies on methods of analysis which are not specific for Public Relations, her studies being strongly influenced by literary and anthropological methods of analysis. Adela Rogojinaru’s studies are full of substantial ideas and positions towards subjects and topics she tackles on; her thinking is highly architectural and we can see all levels of interpretation being presented in her own perspective. We strongly think that every reader will find “a key of comprehension” which could suit his/ her expectations.