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Transformational Public Relations as a Communication Paradigm According to the Poznan School of Information Economics

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Abstract

This article presents transformational public relations (TPR) as a communication paradigm developed in the context of systemic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and interpreted from the perspective of the Poznan School of Information Economics. TPR is presented not as a conventional tool of organizational reputation management, but as a social infrastructure of systemic change, serving to explain reforms, legitimize a new institutional order, integrate society and mediate between different groups of interests. The article discusses the origins of the concept, its functions, stages of development and two models: the foreign-imposed model and the home-grown, internalized model. Particular attention is paid to the three-level model of TPR, covering the macro, meso and micro levels, as well as to the relationship between TPR, the political economy of communication and econocentric public relations. The text argues that TPR makes it possible to analyze public relations as a mechanism for organizing the social understanding of economic processes, revealing structures of communicative power and building or eroding trust in institutions. The concept represents a Central and Eastern European contribution to global reflection on communication under conditions of systemic change.

Keywords: transformational public relations; Poznan School of Information Economics; econocentric public relations; systemic transformation; political economy of communication; Central and Eastern Europe; legitimization; public communication

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Introduction

The systemic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 was one of the most complex social and economic processes of the twentieth century. These changes involved not only the political and institutional sphere, but also a fundamental transformation of ownership structures, economic paradigms and social identities. In this context, public communication acquired key importance as a tool for legitimizing systemic change, explaining the social meaning of reforms and channeling tensions resulting from the disruption of the existing order (Tampere, 2003).

The existing theory of public relations, developed mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries, with particular emphasis on the United States, was dominated by a microeconomic managerial perspective (Culbertson, 1993). From this perspective, public relations was defined primarily as a tool for managing reputation, building relations with stakeholders and strengthening an organization's market position. In Grunig's model, two-way symmetrical communication was expected to enable the exchange of information and the building of consensus between an organization and its environment (Grunig, 2001; Grunig, Grunig, 2005). However, as representatives of the critical approach have pointed out (Culbertson, 1993; Botan, Hazelton, 2007; Vercic, Grunig, 2000), the dominant theoretical perspective neglected the macroeconomic and systemic context of PR activity, especially power relations, structural conditions, capital interests and global information inequalities.

It was precisely this macroeconomic approach to public relations, one that takes into account processes of systemic transformation, economic policy and the political economy of communication, that created the conditions for developing the concept of transformational public relations (TPR). In contrast to functionalist approaches, TPR treats PR not as a communication technique, but as a social infrastructure of systemic change. It encompasses activities aimed at legitimizing a new institutional order, explaining the mechanisms of the market economy, integrating citizens around new values and building trust in reforms and their authors.

Effective systemic change required not only the implementation of market institutions, but also a transformation of social mentality, a redefinition of the relationship between citizens, the state and the economy, and a new understanding of such concepts as property, competition, public interest and the market. In this process, communication carried out by the state, intermediary institutions and private organizations performed the function of translating systemic reality, responding not only to the need for information, but also to the need for meaning, justification and symbolic coherence (Ławniczak, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2015).

Over time, as reflection on TPR developed, increasing emphasis was placed on the economic aspects of communication (Deszczyński, 2017). In particular, it became necessary to consider information asymmetry, the hegemony of market narratives and the role of PR in legitimizing specific models of capitalism (Hall, Soskice, 2001; Lane, Myant, 2007; Nölke, Vliegenthart, 2009). From these observations emerged an econocentric approach to PR (EconPR), developed, among others, within the Poznan School of Information Economics, which calls for the analysis of PR in terms of political economy and the critical disclosure of economic interests hidden behind image-oriented narratives (Rydzak, 2020a, 2022; Babran, 2008; Lee, 2005).

In this article, TPR is treated as a concept grounded in macroeconomic and social analysis, one that also integrates the econocentric perspective as its natural analytical component. The following sections present the theoretical foundations of TPR, its functions and models, as well as specific cases of application, showing PR as a tool both

for explaining reforms and for balancing global communication and reputational asymmetries.

2. Transformational Public Relations: Origins and Conceptual Foundations

The concept of transformational public relations (TPR) emerged from the experiences of post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which after 1989 found themselves undergoing a profound reconstruction of their political, economic and social systems. Under these conditions, public relations, understood more broadly than merely as a tool of marketing or reputation management, began to play the role of a communication infrastructure supporting systemic transformation (Ławniczak, 2001, 2009). Its underlying assumption is that systemic change requires not only institutional reforms, but also changes in social consciousness, values, narratives and interpretive frames that allow citizens to understand and accept a new order.

TPR is based on the conviction that communication conducted by the state, intermediary institutions and economic actors can help society become familiar with previously unknown mechanisms of the market economy, thereby supporting economic education, social integration and the building of trust in reforms (Ławniczak, 2001). From the outset, this approach assumed the need to operate under conditions of weak trust in institutions (Kochanowicz, 2004), low social capital and a deficit of economic knowledge, that is, in a context radically different from the one in which the American model of PR developed.

Institutional changes in the region were often implemented faster than social mentality changed, which generated tensions between structure and culture (Staniszki, 2003). TPR therefore had the function of explaining and legitimizing change, both through state activities, such as information campaigns concerning reforms, and through communication carried out by economic institutions, the media or opinion leaders. In this sense, TPR performed the role of a "cognitive infrastructure" enabling the social internalization of change (Trębecki, 2001).

Unlike the classical model, for example that of Grunig and Hunt (1984), which assumed that PR is primarily a communication process between an organization and its environment, TPR places PR in a macro-social perspective, as an element of the public communication system that may support processes of political and economic transformation, but may also work against them if it serves the interests of dominant groups rather than the common good.

This approach is also supported by the literature on institutionalization and organization theory. Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) showed that institutions function not only as formal structures, but also as carriers of meanings, rituals and practices that legitimize social action. In the TPR perspective, communication is precisely such a mechanism of institutionalization, consolidating and familiarizing new norms, rules and values. PR thus ceases to be a technique of persuasion or a media strategy and becomes a tool of social transformation, capable of supporting or blocking change depending on the interests behind it.

Transformational PR is not limited to the level of the state. Its structure encompasses activities at three complementary levels:

- the macro level: communication of systemic reforms by the state, government and international institutions, such as the EU and the IMF, as well as social campaigns promoting a new order;

- the meso level: communication carried out by intermediary institutions, such as stock exchanges, central banks, rating agencies and development foundations, which explain the principles of market functioning, legitimize capital and mediate between the center and society;
- the micro level: activities undertaken by organizations, opinion leaders, local elites and enterprises that build trust in specific products, consumption models and collective identities (Ławniczak, 2009; Rydzak, 2020a).

In practice, activities at these three levels often overlap, and their effectiveness depends on narrative coherence, social legitimization and adaptation to the cultural context. In this arrangement, PR may both support transformation and mask its costs, for example by euphemizing the consequences of privatization, unemployment or deregulation. From this perspective, TPR becomes not only an informational tool, but also a hegemonic one, capable of reproducing existing structures of domination or breaking them, depending on whether it serves the interests of narrow elites or is oriented toward the common good.

The following sections discuss the specific functions of TPR, its models and empirical examples illustrating both its transformational and econocentric potential. As the analysis will show, TPR may serve both emancipation and manipulation, and its effectiveness depends not on techniques, but on the institutional frames in which it is embedded.

3. Functions of TPR in Processes of Systemic Change

Transformational public relations (TPR) assumes that effective support for processes of systemic transformation requires not only the transmission of information, but above all the performance of multidimensional social functions. In contrast to the traditional microeconomic understanding of PR, which reduces its tasks to reputation management or stakeholder relations, TPR assigns PR a key role in constructing interpretive frames for political, economic and cultural change.

On the basis of previous analyses, four main functions of TPR can be distinguished: explanatory, legitimizing, integrative and mediating. These functions are systemic in nature, and their implementation may take place simultaneously at the macro, meso and micro levels.

3.1. The Explanatory Function

Under conditions of rapid social change, individuals experience a cognitive deficit, understood as a lack of understanding of new rules of the game, principles of institutional functioning or the logic of the market economy. In this context, TPR performs the role of a "translator of the system," enabling citizens to interpret complex socio-economic processes through familiar cultural and linguistic codes.

This function is implemented, among other means, through information campaigns explaining the purpose of reforms, government statements clarifying legal changes, as well as educational activities conducted by the media, intermediary institutions and opinion leaders. TPR not only translates the technocratic language of public policy into social language, but also simplifies and familiarizes the new reality, reducing uncertainty and cognitive resistance.

According to Staniszkis (2003), transformation in Central and Eastern Europe took place under conditions of tension between structure and mentality, which made the explanatory function particularly important. Through its capacity to encode meanings and build narratives, PR filled the gap between reformist elites and society.

3.2. The Legitimizing Function

TPR also operates as a mechanism for legitimizing the new institutional and economic order. This legitimization may be normative, through references to values; functional, through the indication of benefits; or procedural, through the emphasis on compliance with democratic and market-oriented rules.

This function is implemented through communication activities that present reforms as necessary, rational and irreversible. Examples include campaigns persuading citizens of the need for privatization, liberalization or European integration, often based on the language of modernization, normalization and hope (Kunczik, 1997, 2005; Ławniczak, 2009).

Legitimization also includes persons and institutions. Reformers, foreign investors and financial institutions are presented as carriers of professionalism and progress. In this sense, PR co-creates narratives that enable social acceptance of changes which, under different circumstances, could provoke resistance or destabilization.

3.3. The Integrative Function

Systemic transformation entails the risk of social disorganization, atomization and weakening of collective bonds. TPR responds to these challenges by performing an integrative function, creating a sense of common purpose, redefining collective identities and supporting social trust.

This function may be implemented both through institutional messages, such as campaigns referring to national identity, shared fate or intergenerational solidarity, and through local activities, in which NGOs, opinion leaders and regional media can strengthen a sense of community and engagement.

Integration around a new economic model requires not only persuasion concerning its rationality, but also the inclusion of citizens in the process of change, at least symbolically. TPR may therefore perform a cultural role by producing new rituals, symbols and communication codes corresponding to the values of the market system.

3.4. The Mediating Function

The fourth key function of TPR is the mediating function, which consists in mediating between different interest groups, values and logics of action. In post-transformational societies, tensions between capital and labor, the state and the market, the center and the periphery are particularly visible. TPR may function as a space for negotiating meanings and communication compromises.

This function is manifested, among other things, in advocacy activities, participatory social consultations, public debates and discussions on the shape of public policies. In this context, PR ceases to be merely one-way organizational communication and becomes a tool of social dialogue, although often imperfect and unevenly distributed.

At the same time, the mediating function in TPR may be abused or simulated, for example through apparent participation, greenwashing campaigns or top-down narratives about the alleged "necessity of reforms." For this reason, the evaluation of this function requires, in each case, an analysis of the context and of the interests behind a given communication practice.

4. The Evolution of the TPR Approach in Central and Eastern Europe

The development of transformational public relations (TPR) in Central and Eastern European countries was uneven and diverse, yet three main stages can be distinguished: fascination with Western models, a critical phase and an emancipatory phase. Each of them reflected the gradual maturation of local communication elites toward a more conscious and contextual use of PR practices under conditions of political, economic and cultural transformation.

4.1. The Phase of Fascination with the Western Model

In the first phase, which took place in the 1990s, Central and Eastern European countries were dominated by an uncritical adoption of PR models from developed countries, especially the United States and the United Kingdom. The dominant narrative at that time was the so-called Washington Consensus, a set of neoliberal economic recommendations promoted by international financial institutions and governments of developed countries (Williamson, 1993; Stiglitz, 2002; Kołodko, 2008, Szondi, 2014). The theories of Grunig, Dozier and Cutlip became the main points of reference in communication activities, while PR was understood primarily as a tool of corporate communication oriented toward organizational and managerial effectiveness (Grunig & Grunig, 2005).

Under conditions of systemic transformation, however, this type of approach did not take into account the specificity of the local context: damaged social trust, the lack of rooted democratic institutions, axiological instability and the absence of social capital. The adaptation of PR models often consisted of superficial copying of tools and techniques, without reflection on their cultural, systemic and political adequacy.

During this period, PR served primarily as an instrument supporting market transformation, performing the function of promoting privatization, liberalization and integration with the global market. Actors using PR, both state institutions and corporations, employed it as a means of legitimizing reforms, presenting them as inevitable and desirable, and masking the social costs of transformation (Bogdał, Gołata 2013, Gołata, 2014, 2017).

4.2. The Critical Phase

In the second phase, which began at the start of the twenty-first century, as reforms produced increasingly diverse social effects, including growing inequalities, the disintegration of local communities and a decline in social trust, there was a gradual recognition of the limitations of the Western model. It began to be understood that PR could not be merely a tool of one-way transmission, but had to involve society in processes of communication and co-decision-making (Ławniczak, 2003, 2007; Jakubowicz, 2001; Sussman, 2005). It was during this period that the first critical voices emerged against the dominance of Anglo-Saxon models, calling for the construction of a theory of communication based on local experiences and cultural contexts (Sriramesh, Vercic, 2003; Curtin, Gaither, 2007). PR began to be understood as a social process rather than merely an image technology (Hallahan et al., 2007; Vercic, Grunig, 2000; Ławniczak, 2001, 2007).

PR also began to be perceived as a potential space for reflection, participation and correction of the socio-economic policy course. Interest grew in dialogical and relational models embedded in the idea of social responsibility (Grunig, Grunig, 2005; Ihlen et al., 2009; Holtzhausen, 2000). It was precisely during this period that the concept of TPR began to crystallize as a reflective response to the ineffectiveness of adaptive

transplantation of PR models detached from social reality. PR came to be understood not as an imported communication technology, but as a culturally embedded practice supporting systemic change, capable of building trust, explaining reforms and integrating society around a new reality.

In this phase, awareness of information asymmetry and the need to develop local models of communication also increased. These models were expected not only to translate the logic of the market into local language, but also to give society a voice and create conditions for a more equitable distribution of knowledge, power and benefits (Rydzak, 2020a). Concepts of PR as an infrastructure of legitimization and as a tool for creating community around the values of the market system were also developed.

4.3. The Emancipatory Phase

After the enlargement of the European Union to include Central and Eastern European countries in 2004, a new phase in reflection on PR began: a critical and emancipatory phase. During this period, the need emerged to build indigenous PR models, consistent with the experiences of the region and at the same time embedded in the global debate on the decolonization of knowledge (L'Etang & Pieczka, 2006; Connell, 2007; Sriramesh, 2014). Within this trend, there appeared a clear need for the contextualization of knowledge, understood as a departure from "universal" theories in favor of approaches that take into account the cultural, historical and political specificity of post-authoritarian societies (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Jakubowicz, 2001). Transformational PR ceased to be a function of adaptation to global norms and became a tool of self-definition, identity reflection and conscious management of communication knowledge (McKie, Munshi, 2007; Hallahan et al., 2007).

In this phase, TPR not only supports reforms, but also allows societies to ask questions about their meaning, direction and consequences. This becomes easier under the influence of media convergence and the spread of the Internet (Rydzak 2016a, 2023). Public relations ceased to be the domain of experts and began to belong to citizens, social movements, non-governmental organizations and local governments. Under such conditions, the econocentric approach to PR begins to play a particularly important role. It treats communication as an element of the order of political economy, analyzing PR as a mechanism for legitimizing models of capitalism, global reputational divisions and the symbolic hegemony of financial elites (Babran, 2008; Lee, 2005).

The emancipatory phase also means shifting the emphasis from the import of theory to the export of local knowledge and the building of analytical and empirical models embedded in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. TPR thus becomes not only a response to local needs, but also a proposal for an alternative approach to PR on a global scale, capable of critical reflection on the role of communication in the market economy and liberal democracy.

In this context, the communication challenges associated with the phenomenon of "reverse globalization" are particularly interesting. The acquisition of Western companies by capital from developing countries involves overcoming distrust, combating negative stereotypes and legitimizing the presence of an investor from a transforming country.

Companies from countries such as Poland or China must not only demonstrate their market effectiveness, but also, crucially, justify their right to be economic actors on an equal footing with Western entities (Ławniczak, 2011). PR thus becomes a tool for translating values: explaining systemic, normative and organizational origins in a manner that is understandable and acceptable to stakeholders from other economic cultures.

5. The Foreign-Imposed Model of TPR

In the first stage of systemic transformation, Central and Eastern European countries found themselves facing a structural deficit of their own communication competencies, both at the institutional and expert levels. There was a lack not only of qualified PR professionals, but also of indigenous theoretical models and traditions of open, strategic communication in state-society relations. This gap was quickly filled by international institutions and Western foundations, which, often in good faith, supplied ready-made communication patterns rooted in the Anglo-Saxon model of PR, but insufficiently adapted to local social and cultural realities (Ławniczak, 2015). During this period, one of the two approaches to transformational public relations dominated: the foreign-imposed TPR model. The second approach, the home-grown and local model, developed later (Ławniczak, 2015).

The foreign-imposed model dominated the first two decades of systemic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, when the direction of socio-economic and communication changes was strongly determined by international financial institutions, advisory organizations and experts representing Western theoretical and practical models (Sussman, 2005; Williamson, 1993; Stiglitz, 2002). This model assumed that the public communication system should be rapidly modernized according to patterns developed in the United States. The dominant theoretical scheme was the four-model paradigm of Grunig and Hunt (1984), based on instrumental rationality, symmetry and a technocratic approach to PR (Grunig, Grunig, 2005; Curtin, Gaither, 2007). This approach was implemented through:

- organizing scholarships and training for young opinion leaders, journalists and politicians, for example by the Soros Foundation, NED, IRI and CASE;
- creating local branches of think tanks promoting the neoliberal paradigm of reform, such as the Batory Foundation and the Adam Smith Center;
- purchasing media by Western capital and taking control over the information space, for example by Bertelsmann or Ringier Axel Springer;
- information and social campaigns supporting specific reforms, such as the privatization of the banking sector, the abolition of benefits and labor market deregulation (Sriramesh, Vercic, 2003; Sussman, 2005; Jakubowicz, 2001).

In this model, public relations performed primarily a technological and persuasive function. Its main task was to obtain social acceptance for economic reforms such as privatization, market liberalization, deregulation and the reduction of the role of the state. These reforms were often presented as a "historical necessity," while alternative approaches were delegitimized (Żakowski, 2005; Kołodko, 2008; Pomykało, 2014). In this perspective, PR became a tool of hegemonic communication: one-way, transmission-oriented and excluding genuine social dialogue. Alongside traditional media campaigns, considerable importance was attached to so-called "civic education," which was supposed to help citizens accept the new economic system. In reality, however, this was often a form of transformational propaganda (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; McQuail, 1994).

The problem with this model was communication asymmetry: the authorities spoke, while citizens listened. The role of citizens was reduced to the passive reception of messages, without any real possibility of influencing the shape of reforms. This model ignored key local conditions: low levels of social trust, the absence of traditions of deliberation, the weakness of civil society and the burdens of an authoritarian past (Castells, 1997; Holtzhausen, 2000). A repeatedly invoked narrative was the TINA formula, There Is No Alternative, which limited public debate and strengthened the

sense of social powerlessness (Żakowski, 2005; Harvey, 2005). Public relations in this form became an instrument for reproducing the dominant neoliberal discourse, marginalizing other voices and social experiences (Curtin, Gaither, 2007).

The foreign-imposed model was also weakly reflective. It was rarely evaluated in terms of the social consequences of reforms. There were no mechanisms of communication evaluation involving citizens, and external narratives dominated over local perspectives (Ihlen, van Ruler, 2009; L'Etang, Pieczka, 2006). For this reason, a call emerged to move away from the foreign-imposed TPR model toward a local, participatory and culturally rooted approach (Ławniczak, 2015). The imposed model not only failed to build lasting trust in institutions, but also produced a deficit of legitimacy of the economic system, the consequences of which are still felt today (Rydzak & Trębecki, 2005).

6. The Home-Grown and Internalized Model of TPR

The promotion of different models of capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe was, from the beginning of the transformation, part of a broader geopolitical and communication game. Western countries, and especially the United States, had long been involved in activities aimed at disseminating their own political and economic models in developing countries or countries undergoing systemic transformation. In this context, particular importance was attached to the American "Democracy Promotion" campaign, whose effectiveness in the field of public diplomacy and strategic communication led to the dominance of the neoliberal model in most countries of the region (Connell, 2007). A key element of this information hegemony was the rhetoric of TINA, "There Is No Alternative," which eliminated alternative development paths from public debate and imposed the only acceptable version of modernization.

In Poland, the first serious contestations of this model appeared only about fifteen years after the beginning of transformation. In 2005, three political parties, Law and Justice (PiS), Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families, came to power while openly criticizing the neoliberal assumptions of earlier reforms. In the election campaign, "liberal Poland" was opposed to "solidary Poland," thereby questioning the ideology of TINA (Żakowski, 2005). The leader of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, argued at the time that liberal governments "oppose a certain way of thinking... too much state, too little market, taxes too high, labor costs too high" (Puls Biznesu, 2 września 2005). Further turning points were the victory of Fidesz in Hungary in 2010 and the return of PiS to power in Poland in 2015, both cases symbolizing a departure from previously imposed development models.

In this context, the communication of transformation, both in its informational and normative dimensions, became the subject of rivalry between actors representing different logics of capitalism. The main tools used in the process of legitimizing specific economic models included media ownership, public diplomacy, think tanks, quasi-non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) and institutions with QUANGO status. In societies with a strong sense of identity and collective memory, the rhetoric of the lack of alternatives often met with resistance, which opened up space for the development of the home-grown TPR model: more flexible, dialogical and rooted in local socio-political conditions.

Growing disappointment with the consequences of transformation, especially after 2000, prompted some political and intellectual elites in post-communist countries to reflect critically on the direction and logic of public communication. There emerged a need to move away from the externally imposed PR model, which ignored local social contexts, cultural values and political traditions. In its place, an alternative variant began to develop: home-grown transitional public relations, whose assumption was to

communicate reforms in a way consistent with local patterns of communication culture and attentive to the real needs of citizens (Ławniczak i inni, 2003; Ławniczak, 2015). In this view, PR becomes a tool for negotiating meanings and values under conditions of systemic instability, rather than merely a channel for transmitting public policy (Sriramesh, Vercic, 2003; Curtin, Gaither, 2007).

Unlike the imposed TPR model, which was based on information asymmetry and the legitimization of actions undertaken by external elites, the home-grown model:

- recognizes society as the subject of communication, not as its passive recipient;
- operates with the language of common values and collective identity, rather than only technocratic language;
- includes mechanisms of social consultation and refers to collective emotions and cultural narratives;
- enables the adaptation of reform content to the local system of meanings, which increases acceptance and effectiveness of implementation (Ławniczak, 2015).

Home-grown TPR thus becomes an element of redefining communication policy. It serves not only to inform, but also to consolidate society around new political and economic goals. The home-grown TPR model assumes that public communication must be dialogical, inclusive and contextual, embedded in the language, symbolism and experiences of its audiences. In this approach, PR does not legitimize decisions made by political elites, but creates a communication space that enables citizens to participate in defining the directions of change (Grunig, Grunig, 2005; Holtzhausen, 2000; Hallahan et al., 2007). Home-grown TPR assumes that local models of communication should be based on collective historical memory, normative systems and the dominant styles of communication present in a given society (Ławniczak, 2015). An example, though certainly not an ideal one, may be the experience of Hungary after 2010, where, regardless of political controversies, a strongly identity-based model of communication was developed, grounded in local codes and references to national history (Jakubowicz, 2001; McKie, Munshi, 2007).

The home-grown model also assumes greater involvement of local actors, including local governments, non-governmental organizations, religious communities and educational institutions, in the process of communicating transformation. PR is no longer the domain of experts, but becomes a social function supported by diverse actors of civil society. In this approach, communication has a deliberative character: it is not only about transmitting information, but about jointly creating and interpreting it. Trust becomes a key category here, not so much as an effect of PR, but as both its condition and its goal (Ihlen, van Ruler, 2009; Craig, 1999; Habermas, 1984).

Unlike the imposed model, home-grown TPR allows for the revision and correction of policies on the basis of feedback from citizens. It is a reflective and responsive approach, open to criticism and ready to negotiate meanings and values (L'Etang, Pieczka, 2006; Holtzhausen, 2000). Importantly, home-grown TPR also constitutes a contribution to global public relations theory, because it shows that useful models can also emerge outside the centers of communication dominance. The epistemological decentralization of knowledge about PR means that the experiences of the "peripheries," such as Central and Eastern Europe, can provide solutions that are adequate not only locally, but also universally (Sriramesh, 2014; Connell, 2007). Only a model of communication based on real social experience, institutional openness and dialogue with citizens can ensure lasting legitimacy for systemic change. Home-grown TPR is therefore not only an operational concept, but also a normative one, indicating what responsible and fair communication under conditions of systemic transformation should look like (Kołodko, 2008; Ławniczak, 2015; Piketty, 2014).

7. The Three-Level Model of TPR: Macro, Meso and Micro

Transformational public relations (TPR), as a systemic concept, requires an analysis of communication not only from the perspective of the organization-environment relationship, but above all as a networked process spread across many socio-institutional levels. In the approach developed within the Poznan School of Information Economics, TPR functions within a three-level model, encompassing activities at the macro level, that is, the state and supranational structures; the meso level, that is, intermediary institutions and sectoral organizations; and the micro level, that is, individual and local actors.

This three-level model corresponds to the diversity of actors, channels, goals and communication functions in the transformation process. It also makes it possible to identify different forms of legitimization, integration and mediation that occur depending on the level at which communication is carried out.

7.1. The Macro Level: The State and Supranational Structures

At the macro level, TPR encompasses communication carried out by the state, government, parliament, government agencies and international institutions such as the European Union, the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. Communication at this level primarily serves the legitimization of systemic reforms, the explanation of their social logic and the building of support for the direction of change.

In practice, this includes social campaigns for European integration, narratives concerning modernization, pension, tax and deregulation reforms, as well as the language of expertise and the "lack of alternatives" (TINA). In this dimension, PR performs the function of an institutional translator of complex reforms and a guardian of their normative justification.

Macro-level TPR operates in a highly politicized space, where the social stakes are high and messages have ideological, mobilizing and system-stabilizing significance. In crisis situations, such as pandemics or currency crises, it is macro-communication that is responsible for systemic response and the management of social moods (Rydzak, 1999, 2001, 2011, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

7.2. The Meso Level: Intermediary Institutions

The meso level includes intermediary institutions: chambers of commerce, stock exchanges, central banks, regulatory offices, investment promotion agencies, think tanks and development foundations. Their task is to translate macro-structural goals and decisions into sectoral, operational and expert language. Communication in this dimension connects the state level with the organizational level, providing knowledge, interpretations and indicators of trust, such as ratings, indices and forecasts.

In the meso perspective, TPR is responsible for building institutional trust, promoting the "investment climate" and supporting the image of the state as a reliable economic partner. It performs a stabilizing and bridging function, connecting the public and private sectors as well as local and global institutions.

It is precisely in this dimension that economic diplomacy, nation branding, rating communication and public affairs conducted by industry organizations play a key role. Meso-level TPR enables the translation of abstract transformational goals into actions that can be implemented by specific sectors. An example of this type of activity is educational work in the field of credit, saving and financial system stability carried out for society by the Polish Bank Association (Pietraszkiewicz 2005). From the TPR perspective, these activities contributed to the development of trust in the new economic system and created space for building a financial culture.

7.3. The Micro Level: Organizations, Leaders and Local Communities

At the micro level, TPR is carried out by specific organizations: companies, foundations, NGOs, local governments, local institutions and opinion leaders. It is here that reforms are translated into citizens' everyday experience, their perception of the market, consumption, trust in institutions and the future.

At the micro level, TPR includes, among other things, educational activities, CSR communication, reputation campaigns, employer branding strategies and local activities around corporate social responsibility. It is also the sphere in which the internalization of market economy norms takes place, for example through narratives of success, entrepreneurship, flexibility and innovation.

In this dimension, individual figures, such as investors, managers and media authorities, become increasingly important. They embody reforms in the language of biography, success, responsibility and ethics. Figures such as Jan Kulczyk function as symbols legitimizing the new system and at the same time producing a local point of reference for transformation.

The integrated three-level model makes it possible to understand that the effectiveness of TPR does not depend solely on the quality of the message, but on narrative coherence, systemicity and the mutual coordination of messages at different levels of the social structure. Only then can PR genuinely perform the function of an infrastructure of transformation: explanatory, legitimizing and integrative, without falling into propaganda or information chaos.

7.4. Characteristics of the Three-Level Model of TPR from the Home-Grown Perspective

In the home-grown and internalized model, the three-level structure does not disappear, but assumes a different logic of operation, one more oriented toward dialogue, co-creation and local embeddedness.

At the macro level, the state and its institutions enter into dialogue with society, accepting a plurality of narratives and seeking consensus in the process of communicating change. The role of PR here is not to impose the direction of reforms, but to negotiate their meanings and goals in the public sphere.

At the meso level, intermediary institutions, such as universities, local think tanks, chambers of commerce and foundations for social development, cooperate with social organizations and local governments, adapting reforms to local realities and facilitating dialogue between the center and the periphery.

At the micro level, communication initiative comes directly from communities, NGOs, local leaders and local governments, which formulate their own needs, goals and transformational narratives. PR performs here not only an informational function, but also an emancipatory and culture-forming one, enabling communities to exert real influence on processes of change and to express their identities and local experiences.

As a result, the home-grown model decentralizes the communication structure, transforming it from a vertical arrangement of sender and receiver into a networked arrangement in which meaning, legitimization and knowledge are co-produced at many levels, not only at the center, but also on the periphery.

8. Theoretical Conclusions and Implications for PR Research in the Context of Political Economy

Transformational public relations (TPR) goes beyond the classical understanding of PR as an instrument of organizational and marketing communication. In the approach developed, among others, within the Poznan School of Information Economics, TPR is a systemic approach to communication embedded in the broader context of political, economic and cultural change. Its functions, legitimizing, explanatory and integrative, refer not only to relations between an organization and its environment, but above all to relations between institutions of power and society.

From a theoretical point of view, TPR constitutes a counterweight to normative models of PR derived from the Anglo-Saxon liberal tradition, which emphasize neutrality, efficiency and communication symmetry (Grunig, Grunig, 2005). In place of a rational-technical model, TPR proposes a reflective, contextual and institutionally embedded approach that takes into account the realities of transformation, communication asymmetries and political-economic conditions.

The analysis of TPR reveals that communication under conditions of systemic change performs the function of a symbolic infrastructure that enables not only the transmission of information, but also the construction of meanings, the negotiation of collective identities and the building, or erosion, of trust in institutions. In this sense, PR cannot be studied only in terms of the effectiveness of campaign activities, but requires the inclusion of categories of political economy: power, capital, hegemony and interest (Curtin, Gaither, 2007; Ihlen, van Ruler, 2009).

The key features of TPR theory include:

Contextuality: rootedness in local historical, cultural and institutional conditions, combined with the rejection of universalist models created under different socio-political conditions.

Dialogicality and reflexivity: treating communication as a process of mutual learning, negotiation of meanings and co-creation of reality, opposed to transmission-based and hierarchical models.

The legitimizing function: building trust in public institutions under conditions of political and economic legitimacy deficits.

Democratizing potential: recognizing PR as an instrument supporting participation, deliberation and the reconstruction of relations between the state and society.

Thanks to these features, TPR becomes a useful tool for analyzing power relations, conflicts over meanings and processes of legitimization and delegitimization of social orders. Its applicative and prognostic value goes beyond the context of post-communist transformation and also refers to contemporary crises of trust and the fragmentation of public debate in Western democracies.

The conclusions arising from research on TPR are as follows:

First, public relations should be analyzed as a mechanism organizing the social understanding of economic processes. It not only informs about reforms, but also gives them meaning, evaluates them and enables their internalization by individuals and groups. PR shapes dominant narratives, selects topics and establishes hierarchies of meaning.

Second, TPR reveals the existence of structures of communicative power that determine who may speak, with what legitimacy, and which versions of reality gain the status of being "official." Communication under conditions of transformation is not neutral. It

participates in resolving disputes over what development, the common good, economic rationality or modernization mean.

Third, the analysis of TPR in the three-level perspective of macro, meso and micro shows that communication under conditions of change does not take place in a vacuum, but within complex configurations of institutions, interests and values that require narrative coherence and agreed strategies of legitimization.

Among the important directions for further research on TPR, the following should be emphasized:

analysis of relations between PR and political and economic institutions, with particular emphasis on their legitimization through public relations (Deszczyński, 2016, 2020; Kaczmarek, 2020; Leszczyński i inni, 2024;);

comparisons of TPR models in different regions of the world undergoing transformation, such as Eastern Europe, Latin America, Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Leszczyński 2019, 2020; Świerczyńska, 2020);

research on local PR models as a response to Western universalism (Rabczun, 2020);

assessment of the application of TPR in crisis management, strategic communication and the shaping of collective identity (Rydzak 2011, 2014, 2016b, 2019, 2020b, 2020c);

assessment of the application of TPR to the analysis of changes taking place in the market (Adamus-Matuszyńska, 2023; Chlebowski i inni, 2023, Hybka i inni 2024).

From an educational perspective, TPR may provide the basis for a new paradigm of public relations professionalization, combining communication competencies with social responsibility, empathy and reflexivity. It is also a call to broaden the canon of academic literature by including "peripheral" voices, which demonstrate that valuable theories can emerge outside dominant centers of knowledge.

From a methodological perspective, first, research should take into account the institutional and political-economic perspective, treating PR as an element of the social order rather than merely as an organizational function. Second, it is necessary to develop critical and transdisciplinary approaches that combine communication analysis with theories of power, the sociology of knowledge and studies on capitalism. Third, researchers should take local and regional conditions into account, resisting the temptation to universalize Western models of PR. The cases of Poland, Hungary and Germany show that effective communication strategies must be embedded in cultural, historical and institutional contexts.

Conclusion

Transformational public relations is therefore not an alternative model to classical PR, but a research meta-perspective that makes it possible to capture the mechanisms through which communication constitutes socio-economic reality. In this sense, it offers a middle-range theory, useful not only in the analysis of post-communist countries, but also wherever communication becomes a factor of systemic change or resistance to it.

Transformational public relations is a concept that, although shaped under specific geopolitical conditions, has a universal dimension. It represents an important contribution of Central and Eastern Europe to global reflection on communication under conditions of systemic change, democratization and socio-economic transformation. At the same time, it is a proposal for a new, pluralistic paradigm of public relations research, open to the diversity of knowledge models, practices and cultural contexts.

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