

Clientelism, Economic Structure, and Public Relations in Southern Europe:

An Example of Diversity in the Western World

Public Relations Journal Vol. 7, No. 2, 214-241
Special Issue: Diversity in Public Relations
ISSN 1942-4604
© 2013 Public Relations Society of America

By César García¹

Central Washington University

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between state power, clientelist relationships, and economic structure in the public relations practice of European Mediterranean countries. It considers the cases of Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, part of a management subdivision – “the Southern European region” – that multinationals have been using for decades. Some common characteristics of the public relations field in these countries can be highlighted, including the prominent role of media relations, the importance of personal relationships, and the gap between state-supported multinationals and remaining companies. The author argues that the field’s normative ideal of the two-way symmetrical model fails in these Western free-market democracies due, in the case of numerous organizations, to an emphasis (and dependence) on building relationships with the government at the expense of other publics, as well as the lack of scale economies. This disparate social and economic structure makes the use of persuasive models more appropriate for their contexts.

Keywords: Diversity, clientelism, economics, Europe, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece

¹ Address correspondence to César García, Assistant Professor, Central Washington University, Department of Communication, Bouillon Hall, Room 232B, 400 East University Way, Ellensburg, WA 98926-7438; Phone: 509-963-1097; Fax: 509-963-1060; E-mail: garciace@cwu.edu.

**Clientelism, Economic Structure, and Public Relations in Southern Europe:
An Example of Diversity in the Western World**

J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) mentioned diversity as one of the characteristics that define excellent public relations. In their generic principles, they suggested that, in order to communicate most effectively with varied publics, organizations should embody diversity in all roles. Public relations professionals and scholars have upheld this perspective, focused mainly on the description of experiences by minority practitioners, communicating with ethnic and racial subcultures, and the role of public relations in the management of diversity in organizations (Sha & Ford, 2007). This approach is, as well, currently reflected in the mission of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and its three areas of focus:

“(1) Increasing recruitment of diverse individuals to PRSA as members, (b) providing training for PRSA members and leaders with respect to diversity and multicultural communications, and (c) encouraging diverse professionals to consider leadership roles within PRSA” (PRSA, 2010, p. 3).

Likewise, American public relations textbooks refer to the concept of diversity with regard to the distinct behavior of the ethnic groups that shape the United States, reserving other terms such as global or international public relations when dealing with other countries (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, & Toth, 2009; Wilcox & Cameron, 2011).

It is not found, however, as often as desirable, the application of the term diversity to international contexts. Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) articulated one of the few definitions that includes the term diversity within a global context:

Public relations is the strategic communication that different types of organisations use for establishing and maintaining symbiotic relationships with relevant publics many of whom are increasingly becoming culturally diverse. (p. xxxiv)

This definition is particularly relevant for this article because it recognizes “relevant publics are culturally diverse (multicultural) and/or global (located in multiple regions of the world) largely due to globalization” (Sriramesh, 2010, p. 2). It must be acknowledged, however, that although multicultural publics can differ from the average U.S. practitioner culturally, linguistically, and even economically, they are not exactly like international publics (Wakefield, 2008). It is still significantly different for public relations practitioners to build relationships with publics across different time zones, who live under different political, economic, social, and media systems (Verčič, 2009). Despite that, it is undeniable that in a globalized world we increasingly find in a number of countries important segments of their population that hold different beliefs and values (e.g., in the European Union the foreign-born population is 6.5 percent and much higher in countries like Spain, with 12 percent [Eurostat, 2011]).

Overall, to make the public relations profession truly excellent, the term “diversity” should expand its scope. That means understanding diversity not only from the viewpoint of living in a multicultural society such as the United States, but also from that of a multicultural global world where organizations relate frequently to international publics. A global conception of diversity should be incorporated into the research and practice of the public relations field where terms such as “diverse” and “global” should go hand to hand. Probably, the day that practitioners and scholars stop making the distinction between “international public relations,” “global public relations,” and “diversity,” the field will have reached a higher degree of maturity in an era where “even ‘domestic’ publics are becoming multinational and multicultural due to globalization” (Sriramesh, 2009, p. xxxv).

Diversity and Globalization

The distinction between the concepts of diversity and globalization should imply that good public relations practices are those appropriate for their respective cultural contexts. But the reality has been otherwise for a long time. Indeed, the normative view of public relations has been largely

ethnocentric, meaning rooted in American theory and based on the ideal of public relations practiced as two-way symmetrical communication (Sriramesh, 2007). This ethnocentrism has strong foundations. A primary factor is the near absence of alternative public relations models widely accepted as a normative ideal by scholars (J. Grunig, 2001). To wit, the symmetrical model is the only model supported by the empirical evidence of an international, multi-year research project like the Excellence Study (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995).

It is worth noting, though, that the three countries included in the comparative Excellence Study – Canada, the United States, and Great Britain – are all advanced Anglo-Saxon democracies, limiting the applicability of these principles to other societies. It is also worth noting that one of the Excellence Study co-creators himself has found that public relations practitioners outside the United States most often employ *craft* models even if they say they prefer symmetrical models (see J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995). Interestingly, and paradoxically, scholars inside of the United States have noted that American practitioners use craft models as well (Vasquez & Taylor, 1999), and that includes the use of the new media in the same way they use the old (Grunig, 2010). Overall, and to make things more complicated, in *strictu sensu* the one truly universal model practiced around the world is still the press agency/publicity model (J. Grunig et al., 1995).

This discussion has made, however, a steady progress since in 1996 Verčič, J. Grunig and L. Grunig initiated a global theory of public relations later elaborated by Sriramesh and Verčič (2003, 2009) and Sriramesh (2010). During this period, the research of numerous scholars (e.g., Holtzhausen, 2002; Holtzhausen, Petersen & Tindall, 2003; Sriramesh, 2004; Molleda, 2008; Molleda, Athaydes & Hirsch, 2009; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003, 2009) has demonstrated that there are many idiosyncrasies and cultural differences around the world that shape the practice of public relations. These findings have led the authors of the global theory to introduce nuances to accommodate the respect for the idea of diversity. In other words, public relations throughout most of the world is more effective when is follow the generic principles, such as the two-way symmetrical

model, and adapt them to the specific cultural, political, social, economic and media conditions (Grunig, 2010). Sriramesh (2010) uses the term “glocalisation” to describe this approach where “some universally applicable principles of public relations are harmonized to develop communication strategies that suit local cultures” (p. 4).

This article argues that the European Mediterranean countries of Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain are an example of diversity within Western public relations. These countries share a number of characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of the West and particularly the English-speaking countries. This is a management subdivision (‘the Southern European region’) that numerous multinationals have been using for decades. The author will attempt here to develop a theoretical understanding of these differences, focusing especially on two aspects shaping public relations practice in this region: the existence of clientelistic relations between organizations and the state, and the particular economic structure of these societies.

Clientelism

Clientelism, a concept with profound political and economic implications, refers to “a particularistic form of social organization, in which formal rules are less important relative to personal connections or, in later forms of clientelism, connections mediated through political parties, the Church and other organizations” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 58). A crucial aspect in the clientelistic model is its asymmetrical character. It is based on the abdication by the client of any potential autonomous access to the use of resources and to the setting up of public goods and services. It requires “the mediation of some patron, whether a person or an organization (i.e. party or trade union), within which the clients do not obtain autonomous access to major loci of power” (p. 168). The reality of companies and other organizations in these societies is a larger dependence on the government or political parties that have assumed many of the functions of the individual patrons of an earlier era.

In comparison, patronage systems only existed in the United States until the middle of the nineteenth century, and clientelism only survived at a local level in the first part of the twentieth century (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Therefore, the business world and political institutions are much less separated in Southern European countries than in the U.S. where, by definition, the role of the market and the private sector was always much larger and, thus, the social role of the state much more limited. Therefore, in Southern Europe, the priority given in the construction of relationships with politicians, government officials, and media is sometimes disproportioned in comparison to other stakeholders. The use of gifts, exchange of favors, and the cultivation of personal relationships are considered part of the public relations strategic menu for many organizations.

State Intervention

Regarding the role of the state in these countries, a few considerations need introduction first. While the state plays a relevant role in all industrialized nations, the level of state intervention can vary according to the degree of development of the civil society and the economy. In the United States, the state plays a minor role in the life of organizations because more than two centuries of democracy and early industrialization made the construction of a strong civil society possible. In Southern Europe, by contrast, democracy and industrialization developed later, and civil society has never been as solid, a gap filled by other institutions such as the family and the state (Fukuyama, 1995).

Another important consideration is that such relationships and patronage systems exist to some degree in all modern societies (Kawata, 2006). Indeed, it could be argued that in many cases there is but a thin line between lobbying and clientelist practices in the contemporary United States.

Economic Structure

Likewise, every country in the world (even the United States) has a larger number of smaller companies than bigger companies, a key point this article will make about the public relations sector in European Mediterranean countries. Nonetheless, the size, level of management, and level of labor

qualification, as well as the type of product and/or service offered varies considerably, factors that affect the use of communication strategies to create added value. Low competition at home, promoted by governments, as well as low added-value industries in general, has inhibited the development of more sophisticated public relations campaigns (beyond traditional media relations) in these countries.

This article challenges the prevalent notion of the two-way symmetrical model as a typically Anglo-Saxon, though not necessarily Western, ideal that places more importance on what public relations should be than how and why it is different across countries.

Method

This article uses a critical-conceptual method, meaning “a re-conceptualization of themes from secondary qualitative analysis of existing qualitative data sets and reviews of published qualitative papers” (Protheroe, Rogers, Kennedy, Macdonald, & Lee, 2008, p. 3). Through the collection and review of existing data, this article analyzes the interaction between public relations practice, the concept of clientelism, and economic structure in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

The article follows five steps. First, it analyzes briefly some cultural, historical and economic similarities that make these four countries an identifiable group. Second, it describes their common characteristics of public relations practice. Third, it explains how there is a correlation between clientelism and heavy use of media relations. Fourth, the article describes how the economic structure in these countries creates two types of situations where (1) small and medium sized companies invest very little in publicity and corporate social responsibility, or (2) the larger corporations, often former monopolies that operate in absence of real competition, care mostly about their relationships with the government at the expense of consumers or even shareholders. Fifth, the last section of the article offers a discussion of how liberalized economies and a strong concept of rational-legal authority are conditions *sine qua non* for the existence of symmetrical

relationships. The article offers some closing tips for managers and practitioners working with these countries as well as some ideas for future theoretical development.

Cultural, Historical and Economic Similarities

The practice of public relations in Southern European countries has been shaped by political and economic shifts since World War II. Democracy and industrialization arrived late to Southern Europe. The region's imperfect transition from an economically and politically peripheral position in the world capitalist division of labor into a far more central one in the second part of the twentieth century puts this group of countries in a relatively difficult analytical situation (Giner, 1982). Italy benefited from newfound democracy and European integration while Portuguese, Greek, and Spanish dictatorships fell almost simultaneously in 1974-1975 (Malefakis, 1992). The dubbed "economic miracles" of these countries took place during the 1960s and 1970s, enhanced by their integration into the European common market.

The late development of liberal institutions in Southern Europe led to the consolidation of clientelism and the relatively low development of rational-legal authority (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002). Despite the efforts of modernization, these historical circumstances have allowed for the survival of political clientelism as well as an economic structure that differs considerably from Anglo-Saxon and Northern European countries.

Clientelism – called *rousfeti* in Greece and *clientelismo* in Italy, Portugal, and Spain (also *caciquismo* in Spain) – is a concept inherited from feudalism, the personal dependence of the rural population on landholders (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984). It has survived in these countries despite being undermined by European integration that imposes common standards of rational-legal authority.

Common Characteristics of Public Relations Practice

This section describes the current state of the profession by focusing on some major, common characteristics.

Low Social Legitimacy

Public relations is a relatively new discipline in Southern Europe. Highly regulated markets and an incipient capitalism made the practice of public relations as such impossible until recently and delayed the existence of formal public relations education. Spain was the first country in the region to create a university degree in advertising and public relations in 1974 (Moreno, 2004). The first graduate degrees in social communication in Portugal were created in 1979 and 1980 (Viegas & Marques, 2004). The only academic program available at an undergraduate level that focuses exclusively on public relations in Greece was created in 1999 (Yannas, 2004). In Italy, the first course on public relations was offered at the University of Milan in 1992 (Valentini, 2010).

A symptom of the immaturity of public relations education in these countries is an absence of research in a field that is still mostly understood as a craft – not an uncommon characteristic across all of Europe (Van Ruler, Verčič, Flodin, & Buetschi, 2001). In Greece there appear to be no Ph.D. programs in public relations although there are master's degrees (Yannas, 2004). In Portugal only a single institution offers a doctorate in public relations (Viegas & Marques, 2004). The lack of scholarship explains the shortage of indigenous literature on public relations in these countries (Xifra, 2009).

One proof of the relatively minor status of public relations as a discipline is its secondary role in the communication departments of universities. For example, at Spanish universities, the degree is called “advertising and public relations” and it tends to be taught in communication departments dominated mostly by journalists and advertisers (Moreno, 2005). In Italy, many question the true essence of public relations and its basic disciplines (Muzi & Kodija, 2004). This fact is reflected in the substitution of the term public relations with derivatives such as communication, corporate communication, external relations, and business communication, among others.

Lack of Professionalization

The short life of public relations education to date helps explain the lack of professionalization in the upper-middle levels of many companies where a majority of public relations practitioners are journalists or come from other backgrounds (Arceo, 2004; Viegas & Marques, 2004; Yannas, 2004; Valentini, 2010).

This lack of professionalization is also enhanced by the fact that small and mid-size companies represent around 80 to 90 percent of the entrepreneurial structure, that an important number are still family businesses, and that most of them operate in low value-added sectors (Amable, 2003; Roubini & Das, 2010). This means that a high percentage of management, people who inherited the business and did not study a related discipline in college, do not understand the role of public relations. The competitiveness of these companies tends to be exclusively based on price rather than brand building. All of this impedes the use of public relations strategies, particularly the two-way-symmetrical model, that require investment in research and a long term mentality absent in this type of management.

Prominent Role of Media Relations

The weakness in these countries of the media industry, highly dependent on public relations bureaus to create content, particularly in trade media, contributes to the prominent role of media relations. Managers who do not fully understand the role of public relations feel more motivated to generate fast and tangible results. Indeed, voluminous clippings reports are for many public relations practitioners the only way to verify the results of their efforts. Van Ruler and Verčič's pan-European book (2004) pointed out that media relations is still the main public relations activity in the Mediterranean countries. Spain is at the top (90 percent), followed by Portugal (84 percent), and Italy, where the highest share of public relations revenues (27 percent) comes from this practice.

Importance of Personal Relationships

In contrast to the U.S., personal relationships are more important in Europe in general and Southern Europe in particular. In Italy it is very frequent that new CEOs change the public relations managers in organizations in order to place friends or people of their confidence in the positions (Valentini, 2010). Grunig et al. (1995) describe how practitioners in Greece try to establish friendships with key individuals in the media, government, or political and activist groups. This also happens in Spain where dircoms frequently invite journalists for lunches in order to build trust. Indeed, Spanish public relations firms and companies tend to allocate part of their annual budgets for gifts to key journalists (Regoyos, 2006).

Two Speeds of Public Relations

In Southern Europe we have two speeds of public relations. On the one hand is a core of globally competitive companies that receive state support, and that benefit from capital accumulated prior to privatization and exceptionally favorable market conditions. For example, if we take a look at the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, which measures 50 indicators of social responsibility (and where, significantly, Portugal and Greece have no companies), we can see that 10 out of 19 Spanish companies (Abertis, Caixa, Enagas, Endesa, Gas Natural, Iberia, Indra, Red Eléctrica, Repsol-YPF, and Telefónica) went public in recent years and, because they operate in strategic sectors such as transportation, energy, and telecommunications, the state still plays a major role in their decisions. Italy presents a very similar case: 5 out of the 11 corporations on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (Enel, Eni, Snam Rete Gas, and Terna) are state monopolies or enjoy some sort of strong state support (Telecom Italia). These giants have been able to develop some best practices and excellence in public relations (although a paradoxical situation is that often they combine sophisticated CSR programs and a clear alienation of their consumers concerning the delivery of services).

On the other hand, an ample group of small and mid-size companies practice one-way models of public relations. In Italy, “some best practices and excellence in public relations co-exist with

arcane public relations activities focusing on press-agentry/publicity concepts” (Valentini, 2010, p. 5). In Greece, the asymmetrical personal influence model is common and includes payments to journalists for their services (J. Grunig et al., 1995). In Spain, asymmetrical models are also the norm. Although 81.18 percent of communication managers say they defend the symmetrical model (Moreno, 2004), organizations do not determine goals and objectives through formal research (Arceo, 2002).

Relationship Between Clientelism and Media Relations

In Southern Europe, the strong interconnection between political and business powers results in a public relations practice that leans strongly toward media relations, especially newspapers. Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe a different Mediterranean public sphere structure in which the central element of political communication is the bargaining process between governments, parties, factions, and other social actors allied with them. Much of this process of communication takes place outside of the open public sphere and generally is more successful if carried out informally.

The media – particularly newspapers – have historically served and participated in this process of incessant bargaining. They are used in a tactical way by political and business elites to follow the progress of negotiations, establish agendas, pressure one another, and arrive at agreements. Mediterranean newspapers have small and sophisticated readerships. In these countries, newspapers are mostly followed by a business and political elite, which makes sense in a patronage system where business and political life are not very separate. As a result, the economic powers try to use the press as instruments to gain political influence. Such is the case of the great industrial emporiums in Italy (FIAT, Olivetti, Montedison), industry tycoons in Greece, and bank giants in Spain that play an important role as investors in the main media conglomerates of their countries.

The interrelationship between media, corporations, and government – through ownership, subsidies (15 percent in Italy), and/or government advertising (such as the case of Spain, where government administrations are unofficially known to be the country’s main advertisers) – undermines the notion of public interest ‘watchdog’ traditionally attributed to the media in Anglo-

Saxon countries. In the European Mediterranean countries, the media tend to put more emphasis on the strategies of political parties and businesses at the expense of citizens' concerns. There are numerous examples of this. The former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has extensively used the state-owned media as well as the various tentacles of his own media empire to promote his business interests. In Spain, MediaPro and PRISA, two left-leaning media conglomerates, provided ample support to the former Socialist Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in exchange for lucrative TV rights to football matches (Carvajal, 2009).

This aspect of media and politics has direct repercussions on the communication strategies of many companies. It often makes it more relevant for companies to focus on media relations than building relationships with their publics. Many businesses, particularly the biggest companies that operate in favorable conditions in highly regulated markets, consider it more of a priority to be in the financial pages of the newspapers to generate perceptions among the local politicians for the obtaining of licenses or subsidies than it is to build relationships with, for example, their own consumers. A recent example was the strong support that Catalan entrepreneurs, who signed a manifesto published in all Catalan newspapers, gave to the regional government of Catalonia in 2007 for the approval of a new Statute of Autonomy. By doing so, they opted to jeopardize their positioning in the rest of Spain, where a subsequent boycott of Catalan products took place, rather than lose favor with the regional government. This case can be understood as an example of a clientelist relationship with a local government, because consumers across Spain should be Catalan companies' main audience.

In sum, Anglo public relations models assume that a democratic political structure, as well as explicit laws and legal codes, should create a transparent public sphere where competing groups vie for audience attention. But this does not happen when, as in the case of the Southern European countries, the high levels of government intervention favor the development of clientelist relationships between the political and the business powers.

Economic Structure

The economic structure also conditions the organizational communication strategy of Southern Europe. First, these countries have a greater preponderance of smaller firms, often family run, than their more affluent neighbors. Germany, Denmark, France, and Britain have an average enterprise size double that of Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece (Mulhern, 1995). This factor, as well as the abundance of traditional industrial sectors, produces an often-neglected feature of Mediterranean capitalism: its low level of corporate social responsibility (Rangone & Solari, 2009). While in Anglo economies firms constantly lobby for friendly regulations, the circumvention of existing rules to increase profit is relatively popular in Southern European corporate culture (often through clientelistic practices).

Another major consequence of the lack of scale economies is a much lower publicity expense than those associated with larger-scale business organizations such as in the United States (Pilati, 1990, p. 47, cited in Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Although the foreign-born population increased considerably in Italy, Portugal, and Spain during the 1990s and early 2000s (Muenz, 2006), there is still a greater perception of cultural homogeneity and therefore even weaker motivations than in Anglo-Saxon countries to standardize collective customs through communication. This situation differs considerably in countries such as the United States or Canada, where the notion of multiculturalism is an essential aspect of education and public relations programs.

A second factor caused by the late development of capitalism in Southern Europe has to do with the strong role played by the state in the economy. The Global 2000 Forbes list for 2010, the annual ranking of the world biggest companies, notes that almost 50 percent of the biggest corporations in these countries are still totally or partially state-owned and/or have been recently privatized. The Italian government directly or indirectly controls the few large corporations (ENI, ENEL, Finmeccanica, Telecom Italia), which compete internationally, with the exception of Fiat (Muzi, 2009). In Spain, five out of the ten biggest companies are former state monopolies privatized

in the last decade (Telefonica, Repsol-YPF, Gas Natural) or still partly owned by regional governments (Mapfre in Madrid and Criteria Caixa in Catalonia). In Portugal, the three main companies (EDP, Portugal Telecom, Galp) are still state-owned, as are the top four in Greece (National Bank of Greece, Hellenic Telecom, Hellenic Petroleum, Public Power). They all tend to operate in strategic sectors (banking, energy, utilities, telecommunications, and transportation) in quasi-monopolistic market conditions. Under these conditions, most of these companies don't see the return on investment of symmetrical relations with their publics.

An Example: The Telecommunications Sector

The telecommunications sector offers a good example of how unsuccessful liberalization processes can develop asymmetrical relationships between enterprises and their publics. Indeed, in Southern Europe, the incumbent operators still overwhelmingly dominate their respective markets, although theoretically they have been open to competition, in some cases for more than a decade. Spain's Telefonica still has a market share of 80.1 percent in land lines, 47.3 percent in mobile telephones, and 59.9 percent in broadband (López, 2009). Telecom Italia dominates the Italian market with 56.1 percent of the market in broadband and fixed lines and 33.2 percent in mobile communications, with the other six operators dividing the other 66 percent (Telecomitalia, 2010). Portugal Telecom has 90 percent of fixed-line services, 80 percent of broadband and 52 percent of the mobile telephone market (Cohen, 2010). Hellenic Telecommunications Organization has 90 percent of the retail market for public access to telephones in Greece, as well as 100 percent (as the single provider) in broadband (Papanikolau, 2009). These are percentages that would be considered monopolistic by any standard in liberal Anglo-Saxon countries. For example, in the UK, the main mobile operators are Vodafone and O2 (also a Telefonica subsidiary), and both have a 25 percent market share (The Worldwide Directory of Mobile Network Operators, 2008). In the United States, the leading mobile operators are Verizon and AT&T with 31.1 and 25.2 percent market shares respectively (Comscore, 2010). Under these circumstances, the need for symmetrical relations with

publics is almost utopic. A paradigmatic case is Spain's Telefonica, which has been denounced multiple times by the Spanish Association of Internet Users (Asociación de Internautas, 2006) and chosen by Spanish consumers' associations as the worst company of the year in Spain (Facua, 2010). The Spanish giant can afford to alienate these key publics without losing significant market share.

Furthermore, in the Southern Europe, the high level of government intervention in strategic business decisions complicates concepts such as reciprocity or cooperation with publics. One example is the state's capacity to approve mergers and/or takeovers. A major deal between the Italian and Spanish governments concerned the energy and telecom sectors. In 2007, in a Spanish-Italian summit, Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi approved several operations, such as the acquisition of Endesa, a leading Spanish utility company, by state-owned Italian power company Enel. In exchange, Telefónica was allowed to buy a 10 percent stake in Telecom Italia (Newsweek, 2007). A more recent example was Telefónica's acquisition of Vivo, a Portugal Telecom subsidiary in Brazil. Although Portugal Telecom's shareholders were in favor of Telefónica's offer, José Socrates, the Portuguese Prime Minister, blocked the deal because the Brazilian market was "strategic and fundamental for the development of Portugal Telecom" (Minder, 2010). In both cases, factors such as the interest of shareholders (to obtain a major profit), consumers (to enjoy a more competitive energy market), or employees (to work for a more solid and viable entrepreneurial project) were ignored for political reasons.

Discussion

This theory-based analysis brings to the table the ample diversity of social and economic structures in the Western world and how they affect the differing practice of public relations in individual countries.

With its emphasis on reciprocity and the search for mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics (see Broom & Sha, 2013), the symmetrical model of public relations assumes the existence of modern and rational modes of thought that exclude the irrationality of

tradition, religion, and myth attributed to clientelistic societies (Günes-Ayata, 1994). The symmetrical model also assumes that a philosophy of equality between organizations and publics is possible. In contrast, a clientelistic perspective sees the world as unequal, where clients develop strategies to fight against those inequalities. In other words, clientelism “privatizes public relations” (p. 24), makes the practice at times an exclusive business between politicians and organizations. At its best, clientelism creates equality between organizations with merits and organizations without them in their relationships with their publics.

Ethnocentric biases also affect a traditional overlook of the economic conditions needed for the development of symmetrical public relations. The Anglo public relations model “assumes an economic structure based on a decentralized free market economy” (Zaharna, 2001, p. 61). The main problem is that not all democracies and free market economies are the same. In the 2010 Index of Economic Freedom by The Heritage Foundation, a ranking that measures the degree of state intervention, four Anglo countries ranked in the top 11 positions: Australia (3), New Zealand (4), the United States (8), and the United Kingdom (11). In contrast, European Mediterranean countries fall way behind: Spain (36), Portugal (62), Greece (73), and Italy (74). With a high degree of political intervention, a lack of private capital, small domestic markets, and competition in low added value sectors, many Southern European organizations often find it more effective (and realistic) to receive support from the state (through government contracts and indirect subsidies) than to build symmetrical relationships with their publics.

Practical Implications

Some practical tips for foreign public relations executives, agency heads, and managers of public relations who are directly involved or managing international public relations campaigns in Southern European countries should include the following:

- Using a corporate or public relations manager who is a native or who has a deep understanding not only of the importance of personal relationships, but also about the link between the

political and business life in these countries. Hiring a local public relations firm or “in-house” public relations executive with experience in government relations is a plus.

- If, for example, an American corporation acquires a local company, opens new facilities, or introduces a notorious new product, arrange a meeting with the appropriate representative at the local, regional and/or national government level. Some documentation should be provided that includes an annual report as well as other available reports such as environmental or sustainability reports. If materials are only in English, a well-translated summary in the local language is a good idea. It is a plus to arrange an appointment when top executives visit a country.
- Local politicians like to capitalize on new investments and all that favors economic activity. It is important to prepare some key points about how your company, product, or service is going to benefit the local economy (national or regional) and increase its reputation (for example through exports of added-value products or investments in research and development). Managers and public relations executives should keep contact with their political contacts on a regular basis (once a year or every six months is usually sufficient). Organizations should share their successes with the administration.
- Companies should invite politicians to all their external events (e.g., inaugurations, anniversaries, etc.). Appropriate representatives of every administration should be invited (local, regional, and national).
- Managerial or public relations executives should never express their political opinions in public.
- It is convenient to arrange meetings and perhaps business lunches with local and national journalists to talk about a particular industry and to gain further knowledge about who-is-who.
- Gifts, and not necessarily expensive ones, are commonly accepted among politicians and journalists in these countries.

- CSR actions in these countries are still reserved, for the most part, to large corporations.

Anything your organization can do for the community will be very appreciated by the political class.

These tips can vary depending on the nature of the company and/or the campaign. They are certainly applicable in the case of companies with productive facilities and/or a chain with a public presence that wants to obtain public contracts or licenses and permits to develop a business.

Concluding Remarks: A Look into the Future

Beyond the traditional cultural approach, social and economic structures should be considered key factors of diversity in public relations practice. In Southern Europe these structural factors make the implementation of the Anglo symmetrical model very difficult. A key distinction is that communication strategies are being dictated by supposedly non-strategic factors such as the clientelist relationships and the size of the companies. Perhaps symmetrical public relations makes organizations more effective over the long term in all countries but certainly more so in some of them, like the Western English-speaking countries.

Thanks to European integration, however, Southern European countries should experience some changes in the short term, such as higher levels of market freedom. The current recession is particularly affecting them (pejoratively labeled, together with Ireland, PIIGS) in part because of their rigid economic structures. These countries have seen *de facto* intervention by the European Union that is imposing restrictions of government expense as well as measures to liberalize their economies. This may affect the importance of clientelism since national and regional governments will have less capacity to give political subsidies to companies. Another factor is that, if there is a higher level of European integration in the future through the creation of a supranational authority in Brussels with executive power, there will predictably be a reinforcement of a universalistic rational-legal framework that will make it more difficult for national governments to develop clientelist relationships with businesses.

To a greater or lesser extent, the circumstances that explain clientelism exist in most of the non-Western societies and its variability explains the diversity of public relations practices. Future studies on clientelism in public relations practice should explore its impact on other countries or world subregions in order to develop comparative studies of clientelistic practices that may help explain the variations of public relations practices around the world. Clientelistic practices tend to flourish more in less individualistic societies with high levels of power distance, where personal relationships are more relevant and the state plays a major role in economic life. What public relations scholarship has traditionally called the personal relationship models are due, for the most part, to the existence of clientelistic practices. For example, the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, a pattern of social organization in which connections and friendships seem necessary to get most anything (see Chen & Culbertson, 2009), can be considered a variation on the concept of clientelism. Something similar can be said about India where there is a *quid pro quo* relationship between public relations managers and key individuals in the government and the media (see Bardhan & Sriramesh, 2005).

Regarding the importance of economic structures, future research projects could focus on analyzing the level of competition and freedom of specific industries in a number of countries to offer a clearer view of why craft models are so widely used in a significant part of the world.

A more inclusive concept of diversity that incorporates structural factors will hopefully contribute to a more successfully confronting of the theoretical and professional challenges of matching the generic principles of public relations to the specific characteristics of every country or culture.

References

- Amable, B. (2003). *The diversity of modern capitalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Asociación de Internautas. (2006, November 11). Confirman la multa de 900.000 euros a Telefonica por una denuncia de la Asociación de Internautas. Retrieved May 6, 2011 from <http://www.internautas.org/html/3969.html>

- Arceo, A. (2002). Research and public relations in Spain. An overview. *European PR News*, 1 (1).
- Arceo, A. (2004). Public relations in Spain: An introduction. *Public Relations Review*, 30(3), 293-302.
- Bardhan, N., & Sriramesh, K. (2005). Public relations in India. Review of a programme of research. *Journal of Creative Communication*, 1(1), 39-60.
- Broom, G. M., & Sha, B-L. (2013). *Effective public relations (11th edition)*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Cameron, G. T., Wilcox, D. L., Reber, B. H., & Shin, J. (2008). *Public relations today: Managing competition and conflict*. New York, NY: Allyn & Bacon.
- Carvajal, D. (2009, September 13). El País in rare break with socialist leader. *The New York Times*. Retrieved February 26, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/14/business/media/14elpais.html>
- Chen, N., & Culbertson, H. (2009). Public relations in mainland China: An adolescent with growing pains. In K. Sriramesh and D. Verčič (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook. Theory, research and practice*, (pp. 175-197). New York: Routledge.
- Cohen, M. L. (2010). Company profile: Portugal Telecom, SGPS, S.A. *Hoovers*. Retrieved November 10, 2010 from <http://www.hoovers.com/>
- ComScore. (2010, May 6). comScore reports March 2010 US mobile subscriber market share. Retrieved January 25, 2011 from [http://www.comscore.com/Press Events/Press Releases/2010/5/cmScore Reports March 2010 U.S. Mobile Subscriber Market Share](http://www.comscore.com/Press%20Events/Press%20Releases/2010/5/cmScore%20Reports%20March%202010%20U.S.%20Mobile%20Subscriber%20Market%20Share)
- Dozier, D. M., Grunig, L. A., & Grunig, J. E. (1995). *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Eisenstadt, S. N., & Roniger. (1984). *Patrons, clients and friends. Interpersonal relations and the structure of trust in society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Eurostat. (2011a). Foreign citizens made up 6.5% of the EU 27 population in 2010. Retrieved on November 28, 2011 from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-14072011-BP/EN/3-14072011-BP-EN.PDF
- Facua (2010, March 16). La peor empresa del año es Telefónica Movistar. Retrieved December 23, 2010, from <https://www.facua.org/es/noticia.php?Id=4913>
- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust. The social virtues and the creation of prosperity*. New York: The Free Press.
- Giner, S. (1982). Political economy, legitimation and the State in Southern Europe. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 33(2), 172-199.
- Grunig, J., & Grunig, L. (1992). Models of public relations and communication. In Grunig, J. E. (ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management*, 285-327. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., Sriramesh, K., Huang, Y.-H., & Lyra, A. (1995). Models of public relations in an international setting. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(3), 163-186.
- Grunig, J. E. (2001). Two-way symmetrical public relations. Past, present and future. In R. L. Heath (ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations* (11-31), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Grunig, J. E. (2010). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalization. *Prism*, 6(2). Retrieved from <http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/globalPR/GRUNIG.pdf>
- Grunig, L., Grunig, J., & Dozier, D. (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organizations: A study of communication management in three countries*. New York: Routledge.
- Günes-Ayata, A. (1994). Premodern, modern, postmodern. In L. Roniger and A. Günes-Ayata (Eds.), *Democracy, clientelism, and civil society*, (pp. 19-29). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

- Hallin, D., & Papathanassopoulos, S. (2002). Political clientelism and the media: Southern Europe and Latin America in comparative perspective. *Media, Culture & Society*, 24(2), 175-195.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heritage Foundation. (2010). 2010 Index of Economic Freedom. Ranking the Countries. Retrieved January 10, 2011, from <http://www.heritage.org/>
- Holtzhausen, D. (2002). The effects of a divisionalised and decentralised organisational structure on a formal internal communication function in a South African organisation. *Journal of Communication Management*, 6(4), 323-339.
- Holtzhausen, D. R., Petersen, B. K., & Tindall, N.T.J. (2003). Exploding the myth of the symmetrical/asymmetrical dichotomy: Public relations models in the new South Africa. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15, 305-341.
- Kawata, J. (2006). *Comparing political corruption and clientelism*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Lattimore, D., Baskin, O., Heiman, S., & Toth, E. (2009). *Public relations: The profession and the practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- López, A. L. (2009). Telecom in Spain not in line with E.U. average. IESE, Madrid, Spain. Retrieved November 4, 2010 from <http://insight.iese.edu/docImpresion.aspx?id=1038>
- Malefakis, E. (1992). *Southern Europe in the 19th & 20th centuries: An historical overview*. Madrid: Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones.
- Minder, R. (2010, July 28). Telefónica wins full control of Brazil phone venture. *The New York Times*. Retrieved November 14, 2010 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/29/technology/29vivo.html>
- Molleda, J. C. (2008). Contextualized qualitative research in Venezuela: Coercive isomorphic pressures of the socioeconomic and political environments on public relations practices. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20(1), 49-70.

- Molleda, J.C., Athaydes, A., & Hirsch, V. (2009). Public Relations in Brazil: Practice and Education in a South American Context. In K. Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.), *Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice (2nd ed.)*(pp. 727-748). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Moreno, A. (2004). Spain. In Betteke Van Ruler, and Dejan Verčič, (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management in Europe*, (pp. 393-412). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Muenz, R. (2006). Europe: Population and migration in 2005. Migration Policy Institute, Washington, D. C. Retrieved January 27, 2010 from <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USFocus/display.cfm?ID=402>
- Mulhern, A. (1995). The SME sector in Europe: a broad perspective. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 33, 83-87.
- Muzi, T., & Kodilja, R. (2004). Italy. In B. Van Ruler, and D. Verčič, (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management in Europe*, (pp. 393-412). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Muzi, T. (2009). Public relations in Italy: Master of ceremonies in a relational society. In K. Sriramesh and D. Verčič, (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook. Theory, research and practice*, (pp. 484-502). New York: Routledge.
- Newsweek. (2007, June 23). The palm economy. Retrieved October 12, 2010, from <http://www.newsweek.com/2007/06/23/the-palm-economy.html>
- Papanikolaou, A. (2009). The Greek telecommunication's regulator prohibits the incumbent's "double-play" bundled offering of unlimited international calls taking into account a risk of margin squeeze of its competitors (OTE). *e-Competitions Bulletin*, May 2009. Retrieved from http://www.hunton.com/files/tbl_s47Details%5CFileUpload265%5C2550%5COTE_article_Papanikolaou_May2009.pdf

- Pilati, A. (1990). *L'Industria dei Media*. Milano: Il Sole 24 Ore. In D. Hallin and P. Mancini, 2004, *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics*, p. 48. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Protheroe, J., Rogers, A., Kennedy, A. P., MacDonald, W., & Lee, V. (2008). Promoting patient engagement with self-management support information: A qualitative meta-synthesis of processes influencing uptake. *Implementation Science*, 3(44).
- PRSA. (2010). PRSA & Diversity. Where are we today and where should be our heading? *PRSA Diversity Briefing Book*. Retrieved on December 4, 2011, from http://www.prsa.org/Diversity/documents/PRSA_Diversity_Briefing_Book.pdf
- Rangone, M., & Solari, S. (2009). Southern European capitalism and the social costs of business enterprise. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the *SASE Annual Conference, Sciences Po, Paris*.
- Regoyos, E. (2006, December 18). Periodistas españoles, de gratis por la vida. *El Periodista Digital*. Retrieved December 5, 2010, from http://blogs.periodistadigital.com/periodismo.php/2006/12/18/periodistas_espanoles_de_gratis_por_la_v
- Roubini, N., & Das, A. (2010, February 2). Medicine for Europe's sinking south. *Financial Times*. Retrieved October 6, 2010, from <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/59b19080-100c-11df-b278-00144feab49a.html#axzz1LbOymRs5>
- Sha, B-L., & Ford, R. (2007). Redefining "requisite variety": The challenge of multiple diversities for the future of public relations excellence. In E. L. Toth (Ed.). *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: challenges for the next generation* (pp. 381-398). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sriramesh, K. (2004). *Public Relations in Asia: An anthology*. Singapore: Thomson.

- Sriramesh, K. (2007). The relationship between culture and public relations. In E.L. Toth (Ed.), *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: Challenges for the next generation*, (pp. 507-526). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sriramesh, K. (2009). Introduction. In K. Sriramesh and D. Verčič (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook. Theory, research and practice*, (pp. XXXII-XXXVIII). New York: Routledge.
- Sriramesh, K. (2009). The missing link: multiculturalism and public relations education. In K. Sriramesh and D. Verčič (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook. Theory, research and practice*, (pp. 907-925). New York: Routledge.
- Sriramesh, K. (2010). Globalisation and public relations: An overview looking into the future. *Prism*, 6(2). Retrieved on January 4, 2012, from <http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/globalPR/SRIRAMESH.pdf>
- Sriramesh, K., & D. Verčič. (2003). *The global public relations handbook. Theory, research and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sriramesh, K., & D. Verčič. (2009). *The global public relations handbook. Theory, research and practice* (Expanded and revised edition). New York and London: Routledge.
- Telecomitalia.it. (2010). Domestic market. Retrieved November 4, 2010 from <http://www.telecomitalia.it/>
- The Worldwide Directory of Mobile Network Operators 2008. (2008). UK Mobile Operator Subscriber Data, Statistics and Market Share 4Q 2006-1Q 2008. Retrieved October 15, 2010 from http://www.telecomsmarketresearch.com/resources/UK_Mobile_Operator_Subscriber_Statistics.shtml

- Valentini, C. (2009). Italian public relations in a changing world: Historical overview, current questions and future challenges. *Prism* 6 (2). Retrieved September 12 from http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_on-line_journ.html
- Van Ruler, B., & Verčič, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Public relations and communication management in Europe. A nation-by-nation introduction to public relations theory and practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., Flodin, B., & G. Buetschi. (2001). Public Relations in Europe: A kaleidoscopic picture. *Journal of Communication Management*, 6(2), 166- 175.
- Vasquez, G., & Taylor, M. (1999). What cultural values influence American public relations practitioners? *Public Relations Review*, 25(4), 433-449.
- Verčič, D. (2009). Public relations of movers and shakers: Transnational corporations. In K. Sriramesh and D. Verčič (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook. Theory, research and practice*, (pp. 872-887). New York: Routledge.
- Verčič, D., Grunig, L. A., and Grunig, J. (1996). Global and specific principles of public relations: Evidence from Slovenia. In H. Culbertson and N. Chen (Eds.), *International Public Relations: A comparative analysis*, (pp. 31-66). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Vieigas, J., & Marques, A. (2004). Portugal. In B. Van Ruler, and D. Verčič, (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management in Europe*, 317-331. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wakefield, R. I. (2008). Theory of international public relations, the internet, and activism: A personal reflection. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20(1), 138-157.
- Wilcox, D. L., & Cameron, G. T. (2011). *Public relations: Strategies and tactics*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Xifra, J. (2009). Recent Mediterranean literature on public relations: France, Italy, and Spain. *Journal of Communication Management*, 13 (2), 191-196.

- Yannas, P. (2004). Greece. In B. Van Ruler, and D. Verčič (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management in Europe*, (pp. 169-184). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Zaharna, R. S. (2001). An “in-awareness” approach to international public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 27, 135-148.