THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE NATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY IN ITALY

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Abstracts. The article notes the main characteristics for different schools of PR (such as schools of the USA, Great Britain, France and Germany), but it is devoted to a retrospective analysis of the institutionalization of the professional public relations industry in Italy in the 1950s-1980s. The formation and development of the professional PR-community is considered through the prism of socio-economic and political conditions in the country.

Key words: Public Relations, Communications, schools of PR, PR in Italy.

Introduction

S. Black in his book defined public relations as "one of the functions of management that contributes to the establishment and maintenance of communication, understanding, disposition and cooperation between an organization and its public"[1, c. 15]. Thus, the basis of public relations is a mechanism of coordination and settlement of interests. This mechanism itself is very ancient, therefore, some technologies and mechanisms of public relations date back to the times of Ancient Egypt (the literary monument "Glorification of the Scribes") or Babylon (in the "Tales of Gilgamesh" the hero quite professionally makes the ambassadors change their decisions). At the same time, it is precisely with the development of the mass press that the popularization and growing influence of public relations as a science is connected.

The process of formation and institutionalization of public relations as a professional field has its regional peculiarities and is largely determined by the sociopolitical and economic development context of a country. Numerous factors belonging to various spheres of activity take part in the professional development of any branch. We are talking about the business environment, state authorities, scientific and expert community, etc. At the moment when an industry reaches a sufficiently noticeable size for society, professional associations often begin to form, taking on many functions related to the development and recognition of their field both at the national and international level.

The relevance of the survey study presented in this article is related to the need to adjust the public relations methods used depending on national specifics. Thus, the traditional for the United States rigid PR tools, the abundance of press releases and a lot of purchased airtime are rejected by the majority of the European public [1, p. 112]. It is in the European context that it becomes evident that the establishment of feedback is a necessary element.

A specific feature of the Italian public relations system becomes also the fact that in this country, like in France, the fashion industry plays a significant role in the economy - which, in turn, requires new, more "subtle" and "creative" tools: unusual events, exclusive and mass shows, etc.

The review study presented in the article has practical relevance, as it is aimed at finding tools to solve the problem of establishing public feedback. In the future, the problem under consideration can create the prerequisites for the establishment of new forms of corporate social responsibility, which in the beginning...
was seen as something superfluous and unnecessary, but at the moment is one of the mechanisms necessary to retain the company in the market.

The research methodology is in line with the neo-institutional approach [2]. According to D. North and his followers, one of the key reasons for institutional changes are changes in ideology, as well as in the totality of factors that determine social life.

This article aims to describe retrospectively the process of birth and institutionalization of the public relations industry in Italy in order to identify the factors and national peculiarities that served as the basis for the formation of the PR school in the country. The period chosen for analysis is from the end of World War II to the late 1980s: it was during these decades that Italy went from the opening of the first PR department to the presence of a branched structure of institutions whose specialists are engaged in various communication practices. A retrospective analysis of the process of formation of the Italian school of PR, poorly studied against the background of many other national approaches, is particularly interesting: the history of the Italian state of the centuries repeatedly underwent various kinds of crises, requiring, among other things, the rapid response of the communications industry.

In this case, considering the presentation in the literature a retrospective analysis of the process of institutionalization of the PR industry in the second half of the XX century, it is impossible not to note that, for the most part, the sources agree on one thing: the concept of public relations in the closest to the modern understanding originated in the United States in 1807 [3] and it was there "first appeared and the concept of public relations as the most important system of social management. The first mass printing appeared in the United States in 1844. In 1900 the first publicity firm was founded in Boston. The clear success of practical activities of PR - specialists contributed to the emergence of a completely new direction in knowledge"[4, p.529]. In 1922, E. Bernays was one of the first to teach courses on the science, becoming its progenitor [3, p. 28]. The American experience has been transmitted to other continents with varying success, being transformed by national factors. The French, German, and British schools of public relations are invariably cited as the most different from the classical American school, and they are also the most studied[5].

The French school is first of all connected with such names as L. Matra, J. Seguela, F. Boiry, M. Crozier[1]. The main features of this school are the great influence of French philosophers (such as J.-P. Sartre for example): the basic concepts that underlie PR are "information" and "social function"; "trust strategy" where values of humanism are the basis of communications (as opposed to the American approach with centralization around corporate interests), personality (the individual) as a key target audience of PR.

The French school, in turn, influenced the formation of the British and German schools.

Typical representatives of the British school are J. Grierson and S. Black. PR is based on mutual understanding, trust and full awareness[6], which fundamentally distinguishes this school from the American, based on the principles of propaganda [7]. However, an interesting feature is that if we proceed from the understanding of political communications as part of PR, then the British post-war school of political PR completely copies and at times even exceeds the American one [8] in terms of the use of "black" and propaganda tools, which is noted by many researchers, for example, S. Bodrunova [9].

Among the typical representatives of the German school, A. Oekl [10] stands out especially. The principles of work are similar to those of the French, that is, public relations is based on social interaction[10]. A distinctive feature of the German school, as well as of the Italian one, is the significant influence of economic factors, especially the phenomenon of the "economic miracle."

The analysis of the literature shows that the transformation of the public relations industry is influenced by the following groups of factors:

- Economic. Initially, PR was a purely applied technology, because public relations is primarily a set of tools and techniques to solve specific practical problems. PR departments of commercial structures accumulate the best practices, the most effective technologies, which subsequently will be analyzed in the academic environment. That is why in the study of national characteristics of the industry in the first place it is necessary to take into account the economic situation in a particular country at a particular time. Different spheres of production require different communication tools, so each country will most actively develop those approaches to communications, which need the most developed there commercial segments.

- The degree of integration into international processes. In every certain period the level of borrowing of foreign PR-technologies is determined depending on what kind of attitude prevails at the moment - on the isolated national development or on the maximum involvement into international experience. This can be seen most clearly in a comparative analysis of PR-campaigns of transnational corporations (in which countries a "tracing" of communication activities is enough, and where a full processing of key messages is necessary).

- Values: while there are common global communication trends due to changing values, the degree of penetration of new patterns of behavior significantly differs from country to country.

- Level of technology development. At the moment, this group of factors seems to be the least significant, because the rate of diffusion of new technological solutions significantly exceeds the rate of borrowing of other attitudes.

The study of the listed groups of factors formed the basis for a retrospective analysis using the neoinstitutional approach. Theoretical research was based on the analysis of Italian Public relations school
conceiving. The qualitative analysis was used in order to underline basic imperatives that influenced Italian PR schools in the period of its germination including traditional (cultural) and historical ones.

The sources of data for the analysis were scientific articles devoted to the problems of the development of the public relations industry, as well as official statistical data sources. The search for data sources for analysis was carried out in the databases of scientific publications according to the compiled list of keywords and phrases. Relevant articles and materials were manually selected from the selected data set.

The hypothesis of the study is the assumption that the formation of a distinct national school of public relations occurs when several multidirectional factors coincide in a certain historical period.

**Results**

Formally, the moment of the beginning of the public relations industry in Italy is defined as 1934, when a PR department was opened in one of the Pirelli group units [11, p.76]. In fact, however, until 1943 all activities in one way or another related to communications were concentrated in the hands of The Ministry of Propaganda and the Press, created by B. Mussolini.

After the end of World War II, the USIA (United States Information Agency), an American information agency becomes very active in Italy, with the main goal of confronting the Soviet propaganda at home and abroad. This period is characterized by the intense introduction of American PR practices in Italy through the massive involvement of public relations specialists from major Italian companies in the activities of the USIA. The American approach to both internal and external communications was broadcast both through the media and directly through the employees of the companies involved with the Agency. In this way, during the Cold War, the values, internal corporate culture and communication tools characteristic of the American approach to the public relations process were deeply rooted in Italy[12].

The 1950s-1960s can be considered a transitional period in the Italian national school of public relations formation: On the one hand, during this period, the process of sector institutionalization in various directions was actively going on in the country; on the other hand, the “founding fathers” of Italian PR, whose efforts created new institutions and organizations for the country, had in one way or another received their specialized education and skills in the USA, which largely determined the continuation of the dominant American approach to public relations era, namely, the dominant principle of promoting the corporate interest, when the expertise sold the public opinion that the citizens ultimately sold to citizens [12, p.38].

The experience accumulated by this time in the field of communications began to be applied primarily to the commercial sector. Pirelli, Olivetti, ENI and a number of others were the first companies to create full-fledged public relations departments and to apply the relevant technologies to their own interests.

Pirelli’s PR activity is remarkable for two reasons: firstly, because the company was able to gather a group of intellectuals with different cultural backgrounds in order to give Pirelli added value beyond the core production idea; and secondly, because the company launched a first-of-its-kind corporate magazine that covered social issues and explored interesting cultural phenomena. In addition to the Pirelli story, Olivetti’s experience has become emblematic of the PR early history in Italy. It was the application of communication tools that allowed a peripheral regional company to take center stage in the market, first in Italy itself and then worldwide [12, p.345]. ENI has also achieved outstanding success through PR activities. The largest Italian oil and gas company decided to challenge the “seven sisters” (big oil companies) in the Mediterranean and North Africa. By recruiting some of the most respected journalists and intellectuals as public relations specialists, it implemented a very unconventional program of public diplomacy at the time, which opened up economic cooperation and trade with many Arab and Soviet bloc countries [11, p.79].

Many of the above practices later spread to other countries and laid the foundations of the public relations industry in Western Europe.

The year 1952 marked one of the most important stages in the process of independent development of the PR industry in Italy: Professor Roberto Tremellone, at that time the future Minister of Finance of the country, founded the Institute of Public Relations (IPR). The Institute was the first professional association of the Italian PR specialists, and its mission was to raise the awareness of PR and its methodology in relation to both public and private organizations. The association was involved in organizing the training of public officials in order to promote PR practices throughout the country. [12, p. 346].

In 1954, the Italian Public Relations Association (Associazione Italiana di Relazioni Pubbliche /A.I.R.P.) was established. The joint efforts of IPR and A.I.R.P. led, among others, to Italy becoming a member of the European Confederation of Public Relations (CERP) and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), the largest associations of PR professionals, which marked the recognition of the industry outside the country. At the same time, despite the formal institutionalization that took place, during this period it is still too early to talk about the national character of PR in Italy, because the newly created professional associations were led by leaders who worked closely with the American representatives of the public relations industry.

The 1960s were the beginning of a period of social instability in the country, caused by the effects of the so-called “Italian Miracle” - a rapid spurt of industrialization in the post-war decade. The economic boom affected mainly the northern regions of the country, which led to an uncontrolled flow of internal migration, social stratification, the emergence and growth of student and labor protest movements.

The public relations sector at this time is forced to focus on communications between civil society,
government, the Catholic Church and corporate elites. In 1961, in Rome, Father Felix Morlion, a Jesuit known for his connections with Opus Dei and the CIA, founded the first master's program in PR at the International University of Social Sciences ProDeo [11, p. 80]. With the emergence of the first center-left government in 1963, commercial enterprises had to intensify their dialogue with the political system: previously their relations had been mainly focused on trade union activities, and the political dialogue with the Catholic Party and other smaller coalition parties was conducted directly by entrepreneurs or their public relations advisors. In particular, one of the special PR programs of Antonio Giolitti, Minister of Finance of the Socialist government, was aimed at attracting economic investment to southern Italy [12, p. 80].

Protest activity in many aspects provoked a departure from the American model of promoting corporate interests in PR activities. If previously large corporations had been communicating in a one-sided manner, using a limited set of tools (mainly the distribution of press releases in the print media), now they faced the need to use feedback mechanisms with target audiences in order to reduce tensions and establish a dialogue. Italian researchers C. Bandiera and L. Marozzi describe this period in the history of Italian PR as follows: "In addition to the "elegant writing style" which continued to retain its undeniable importance, the attitude to two previously undervalued skills was revised: "the ability to speak" and, more importantly, "the ability to listen" in order to be able to consciously build information flows from the enterprise to the target audiences and back" [13, p.13].

The 1970s and 1980s for the Italian PR was the time of the emergence of professional associations, which are still active today and in many ways determine the contours of the development of the industry in the country. Economic crisis, increasing social tensions, far-right and far-left terrorism - it was in these difficult social and political conditions that FEPRI, the Italian Federation of Public Relations, was founded. The association, founded in 1970, works on professional development in a constant dialogue with public and private institutions, foundations, universities, federations and national and international industry associations. FEPRI's areas of expertise include the ethical issues of the industry, the professional qualifications of public relations professionals, and identifying and predicting trends in the PR industry (Statuto FEPRI).

In 1982, six of the largest PR-companies in the country created an association of agencies Assorel. Unlike FEPRI, the individual membership organization for consultants, Assorel focused on uniting professional agencies. According to the charter of the organization itself, it was created to spread the culture of public relations in communications, strengthen and develop the industry, affirm the values of the member agencies and provide its partners with constantly updated data on trends and forecasts in the communications market [14].

FERPI and Assorel have been working together since their inception in the priority area of continuous professional dialogue with Italian universities that have communication and public relations courses. The most striking example of this activity is the PR Consulta Education Assorel-Ferpi, a structure that serves as a fundamental connection between universities and the business world. Its main goal is to increase the number of qualified specialists in the field of PR. On the educational side this link is primarily maintained by IULM (Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione - Free University of Languages and Communications, Milan). It was founded in 1968 and specialized in professional communications [15, p.48].

The emergence of large professional associations, which have proven their effectiveness over several decades, is one of the most important stages of institutionalization, since these structures form a unified identity of the public relations industry for practitioners and specialized organizations. Associations promote and shape the common values and ethical norms inherent in the profession, and standardize the practical tools. [16, p.544].

Between 1984 and 1987 SCR, Italy's leading public relations agency, acquired by Shandwick in 1989, made a major effort to rationalize and spread a practice-based descriptive approach to public relations called "Gorel" (Relationship Management), which was a methodology for measuring PR effectiveness. [11, p. 82]. This approach, authored by current FERPI president T. Muzi Falconi, was refined over the next few decades and is another significant sign of the methodological distance of the Italian PR school from its American ancestor.

Another important achievement of the Italian PR of the late 1970s - early 1980s is the rise of Italy to the first place among European countries in the export of fashion. Earlier France was considered the leader of haute couture, and Italy had its own concept of Alta Moda Pronta (analog of the French pret a porter), which was most developed in Rome. However, both French and Roman fashion were focused mainly on show business stars and tailoring, which could not provide sales to the mass consumer. Entrepreneur Beppe Modenese played a paramount role in changing attitudes toward high fashion and became the first global "guru" of fashion PR [15, p.82]. By linking the development of designers and the industrial production facilities located in Milan, Beppe Modenézé opened high fashion to very different categories of consumers. It was during this period that the Armani brand burgeoned, starting to sew business suits especially for officials. Numerous other fashion houses also found their consumer niches, which even today are widely known all over the world. In 1979 B.Modenese held on the territory of Milan fair the first Italian fashion week with participation of 40 designers - this event became a turning point in the worldwide recognition of the Italian fashion industry.

Thus, by the end of the 1980s we can talk about the end of the first stage of the institutionalization of the public relations industry in Italy, because by that
time Italian PR had the following characteristics. Firstly, in all major companies not only public relations departments were created and are successfully functioning, but specialists for them are trained by national universities. Secondly, there are powerful industry associations that provide a continuous dialogue within the professional community, exchange of best practices, protection of the interests of the industry and its representation abroad. Finally, there has been a significant distancing from the original American model of communication. The post-war industrial boom led to the emergence of its own industrial structure, followed by years of social tension: under these conditions, the one-way communication model was no longer effective, replaced by an approach in which public relations professionals had to learn to listen and hear their audiences.

**Discussion**

The conducted retrospective analysis of the Italian school of public relations formation process confirms the hypothesis put forward. In a fairly short historical period in Italy a set of multidirectional factors was realized, which contributed, eventually, to the formation and institutionalization of its own academic and practical vector of development of the PR industry.

Firstly, it is a combination of economic factors: the rapid development of a number of industries allowed the creation of full-fledged public relations departments staffed by highly qualified professionals. Large corporations acted as customers for services in the PR sector, which allowed them to quickly accumulate their own unique experience of solving these or those communication tasks to interact with target audiences in the interests of business structures.

Secondly, the complex socio-political situation during the period in question led to a forced change of values: the need to establish a dialogue with different target audiences led to a transformation of public relations tools.

Finally, the national specificity in both economic and socio-political development did not allow to follow the paradigm of transferring the American model of public relations to Italian soil without losing efficiency: the need to solve its own internal problems temporally determined the course for an isolated development. We should also emphasize the importance of the emergence of national professional associations as the final stage of sectoral institutionalization.

The findings of the analysis highlight the relevance of communication ethics issues. The establishment of 2-way communication imposes new obligations on all participants in the communication process.

Some limitations of the study are associated with the specificity of the research method. The retrospective analysis made it possible to conduct an intelligence analysis, however, for a better study of the processes that took place, it is important to add a wider range of methods, including direct access to respondents (secondary data analysis, expert survey and questionnaires on a representative sample).

In addition, in the situation of studying the national context, cross-country comparison of public relations methods and their effectiveness becomes critical.

Further research perspectives are at the junction of the development of specific effective methods of establishing feedback, as well as the formation of the principles of social corporate ethics

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