

A Conceptual Mapping of the “Gender Pay Gap” within the Communicative Actions of the European Commission

Mădălina MANOLACHE

Interdisciplinary Doctoral School in Marketing, “Transilvania” University of Braşov,
Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration
E-mail: madalina.manolache@unitbv.ro

Abstract. *The European Commission has long been considered the main communicator (Cini, 1996) of the EU, within the European public space. When it comes to communication, each Commission had a different perspective regarding the who, how and to whom elements, a trinom considered to be a rather similar challenge for almost all policy portfolios. This paper is part of a broader research on EU gender policy and the offline and online means of communication used especially for it. Dealing with strategic documents, policy documents and proposals, reports and Eurobarometers, and placing our research within the field of international socio-political marketing, we have noticed that what was meant as a communication campaign at first on a specific policy chapter (in our case the gender pay gap), due to the embedding of the policy cycle stages within the communication processes, transformed into a communicative action (Habermas, 1984). In order to depict this transformation in the case of the gender pay gap (GPG) we set up as a starting point the conceptual mapping of GPG within the strategic documents of the European Commission, issued between 2006 and 2010. This mapping entailed the demarcation of conceptual nodes around which conceptual flows have emerged, having as data sources the strategic documents issued by the European Commission and the annual reports*

(2006-2010), and the depicting of the communication channels upon which the conceptual flows have emerged towards specific target groups. In order to achieve this we used qualitative software for our analysis, QDA Miner, and one type of operation: text retrieval for a specific code, using the Cosinus similarity coefficient, for four types of codes, as identified in the documents issued by the institutional communicator.

Keywords: *communicative action, conceptual mapping, conceptual nodes, Cosinus coefficient, gender pay gap.*

Introduction

The European Commission has long been considered the main communicator of the EU (Cini, 1996), within the European public space. In the literature state of art, there are five reasons for which this European institution is considered as such, the first four deriving from the institutional functions of the European Commission:

- it is the *inspirator* of the integration process, the *ideas-box*, the force of proposal which has to open prospects for the future. As a consequence, it is habilitated to elaborate global representations of the Union and to build a long-term strategy;
- the Commission is next in charge of the *management and the enforcement of the European policies*, which makes itself the *linchpin* of the system and the first interlocutor of all social actors. Its eighteen thousands civil servants are the daily interpreters of Europe;
- it is the *guardian* of the treaties and of legal order, thus presenting a two-fold role: passive conscience by controlling how the EU law is applied and an active conscience by promoting integration. Thus, the Commission is identified with Europe, any attack against itself calling in question the unification process as a whole;
- it is the *builder of consensus who has to reconcile positions of supranational, national, local, private and public actors to propose a “common interest”* able to create a technically viable *modus vivendi* – this is why the Commission is known as the honest broker within a process largely concerned with intergovernmental negotiation;
- it has the responsibility to *inform* and to *communicate* – starting with the Delors Commission, the European Commission has been considered the responsible institution for establishing contact with specific audiences (governmental elites) and to gain support for the idea of european integration. Information has been used as a strategic weapon as well as a strict legitimization resource.

Communication however, both as a strategic objective and as a tool for conveying a coherent institutional message, was considered a key asset for the European institutions only after the failure of the Santer Commission. Even if during that mandate the European officials were able to overcome the Maastricht crisis from 1992-1993, the group resignation of the EU commissioners brought to center-stage in the European public space issues such as EU governance and its legitimacy, the lack of coherence and cohesion in conveying institutional messages, the fragmentation of communication processes and the democratic deficit, otherwise known as the growing distance between civil society and the EU. All these had been acknowledged as real phenomena of which the EU officials had not been sufficiently aware of until the resignation of the Santer commissioners.

The following Commissions, namely the Prodi mandate and the first and second Barroso mandates, treated communication differently, each of them presenting a different perspective regarding the *who, how* and *to whom* elements, a trinomial considered to be a rather similar challenge for almost all policy portfolios. Why a challenge? – because the institutional system of the European Union has always been considered an ever-changing entity, especially due to the process of creating, communicating and delivering ideologies every four to five years by those communicative actors (re)elected within the EU institutions. This continuous transformation of the system ensured the constant fragmentation of the communication processes both inside and outside the system.

Communication processes inside the European Union institutional system

Our paper is part of a broader research on European Union gender policy communication process and the offline and online means of communication used especially for it and for depicting contexts of cognitive dissonance and/or consonance within the communication processes of the Gender Policy. Dealing with strategic documents, policy documents and proposals, reports and Eurobarometers, and placing our research within the field of international socio-political marketing, the marketing of ideas approach (Fine, 1981), we have noticed that what was meant as a *communication campaign* at first on a specific policy chapter (in our case the gender pay gap), due to the embedding of the policy cycle stages (Jones *apud* Boussaguet, Jacquot, & Ravinet, 2009) within the communication processes, transformed into a *communicative action* (Habermas, 1984). The difference between the two becomes clear when one tries to go beyond the European public space debate and tries to understand the relationship between communication, citizenship and rights, especially in the case of gender policy.

In order for us to identify these communicative actions, we first analysed four mandates of the European Commission (Santer, Prodi, Barroso I, Barroso II), using as tools *information flows* and *relational flows*, where by *information flows* we

understood the activity of informing inside the institutional system, both inter and intra-institutions, the activity of informing the institutional partners (member-states, national parliaments) and other specialized audiences (we named them *communities*) and by *relational flows* we referred to the EU's intentionality to initiate, fundament and build a *genuine* communication with civil society and specialized audiences.

This analysis was presented in detail in the corresponding thesis – here we shall present only the conclusions for each mandate. For the Santer commission, the informing activity inter-institutions (Commission, Parliament) and intra-institutions (between General Directorates and the SpokesPerson Service) was null, hence the group resignation of all the commissioners. Regarding the informing activity towards institutional partners, namely EU-12, later EU-15, the created relations were not of an informing nature, but of an influential typology, mostly fundamented in national interests. Considering the relational flows, due to information services such as SpokesPerson Service, DG 10 and the Commissioner's Cabinet, there was established a first layer of intentionality, but not towards communication, nor towards information, but of a technocrat nature.

In the case of Prodi commission, there were activities of informing inter and intra-institutions. Therefore the final outcomes identified were: a higher level of coherence inside the administrative aparatus and a clearer approach of the internal procedures when handling information in terms of responsibility, adresability and direction. Despite all these aspects, the functional fragmentation of the informing activity was maintained through the triadic character of competences and the focus on quantity rather than on quality of information. In the case of the relational flows, the predilection for the term *information/informing*, even if in close proximity to the term *communication*, emphasized the Commission's activity outside the umbrella concept of intentionality by molding it into a uni-directional and technocratic *engaging* with the citizens.

Regarding the first Barroso mandate, the informing activity inter-institutions and intra-institutions was performed at a higher level, from a qualitative point of view. The act of separating the forms of communication into public and institutional, as well as perceiving it as both internal and external flows of communication, indicated a transformation of the informational flows into a strategic asset for the administrative aparatus. Also, there was evidence of inter-related use of information and communication tools, but with a relatively low feedback component. The efforts to initiate, fundament and build a genuine dialogue, through the open statement of the EU institutions on creating a public European space, were identified in the "go local" paradigm, at the level of civil society, and in the inter/intra institutional partnership with other EU and national institutions. From these actions, several relational flows were pinpointed on several levels as a

multi-level democracy correspondent to a *multi-level legitimacy*. The relationship with the press presented a binary evolution, in terms of professionalism in handling information for the press and of EU officials' press skills. The later presented two aspects: developing press-communication competences at all the levels of all European Commission departments and initiating, fundamenting and building a systematic dialogue with journalists, especially with those who presented editorial tasks in written and audio-visual media.

Conceptual mapping of the Gender Pay Gap

The mapping of these flows was established within the processual paradigm of communication as the general frame for this analysis. It was from this mapping together with a preliminary framing (Entman, 1993) of source documents (i.e. Annual Strategies on Gender Mainstreaming, Annual Reports, Working Papers – all issued by the European Commission) that we were able to extract the necessary patterns for a conceptual mapping of the *gender pay gap* within the communicative actions of the European Commission.

Methodology

The extraction of the patterns was done using the text mining technology and qualitative software (QDA Miner) for the indexing of the source documents. The codebook created from the informational and relational flows and from the preliminary framing of the source documents allowed for several text-retrieval operations to be performed. For each text-retrieval operation we conformed to the following aspects:

- maintaining a tolerance factor of 0,000001 (Tolerance = This option specifies the tolerance factor that is used to determine when the algorithm has converged to a solution.);
- keeping a window of n paragraphs to a maximum of 5 (the operation is restricted to codes separated by no more than n paragraphs);
- keeping a maximum of iterations to 500, based on the Tf*Idf factor (This option allows one to specify the maximum number of iterations that are to be performed during the fitting procedure. If the solution does not converge to the limit specified by the TOLERANCE option before the maximum number of iterations is reached, the process is stopped and the results are displayed.);
- using visual displays of results under the forms of proximity plots, 2D/3D conceptual maps and dendograms (for each of the visual representation item, the same aspects must be set again).

The index we used for these operations was the Cosinus proximity coefficient and the codes that presented the most relevant values, in terms of indexed text

fields, were selected based on queries performed on the source-documents, following specific frequency criteria. The Cosinus coefficient ranges between [0, 1]. Each term is notionally assigned to a different dimension and the source document is characterized by a vector where the value of each dimension corresponds to the number of times that term appears in the document. Thus Cosine similarity then gives a useful measure of how similar two documents are likely to be in terms of their subject matter, or in our case, in terms of conceptual proximity.

Conceptual approach

Having as starting point the preliminary framing of the source documents, we identified several conceptual flows within the documents, flows which were (re/de)activated by certain conceptual nodes. In order to validate these conceptual nodes and their role in the re/de-activation of flows, we defined them as *conceptual associations*. Under this associative form, we could analyse both the institutional communicators' messages and the specialized audiences' responses. We considered that depending on the communication competences (Zagan-Zelter, 2011) of the communicator and the social practices within the originating social group (Van Dijk, 1998), these preliminary framings are (re)activated through conceptual nodes structured by ideas, values or cognitive assets from economic, social, political and cultural domains. Also, in the case of the receiver, depending on the cognitive standards and on the social practices within the originating social group, the representations of the framings were (re)activated through conceptual nodes structured by knowledge, opinions, beliefs and attitudes from economic, social, political and cultural domains.

Mirroring them, we proposed a network perspective of the European public space, formed of communities, which develop processes of communication activated by a specific conceptual node.

Conceptual mapping for the institutional communicator

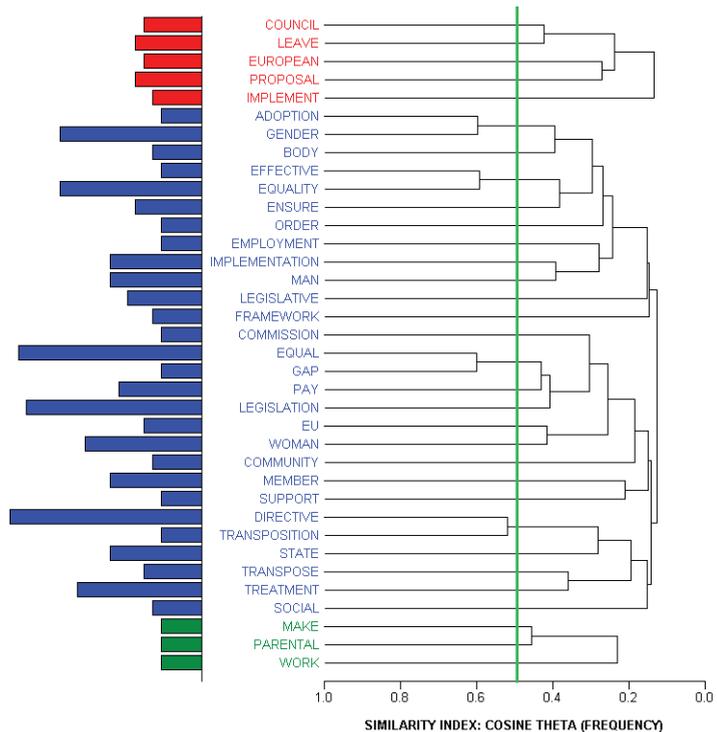
Having as basis for our mapping the codebook (see Figure 1), we chose four codes for which we performed text-retrieval operations. The whole research project entailed a number of 7 codes and 20 text-retrieval operations, but for these paper we chose the following:

- Equality Objectives for PA1: Equal Economic Independence for men and women code category, Legislation framework code (2006-2010);
- Causes of Gender Pay Gap (2006-2010);
- Ideological Assets code category, Awareness raising code (2010-2013);
- Equality objectives for PA2: Equal pay for work of equal value (2010-2013).



Figure 1. Codebook for the source documents issued by the institutional communicator during the time period 2006-2013 (sample)

For the first code, Equality Objectives for PA1: Equal Economic Independence for men and women (2006-2010), we obtained the specific dendrogram (see Figure 2) and the corresponding distance matrix. According to the values of the Cosinus coefficient for the clusters in the dendrogram in the range [0.5;1] the following conceptual associations were validated: equality – effective – implementation; gap



– pay – equal – legislation; directive – adoption – transposition; social partner – equality body – legislative framework and European Council.

For the second code, *Causes of Gender Pay Gap*, the dendrogram (see Figure 3) and the distance matrix (out of space requirements, we did not introduce it in this paper) revealed high values for the key-word *woman*. As such, we created a proximity plot based on the Cosinus values for this word's associative patterns. (see Figure 4)

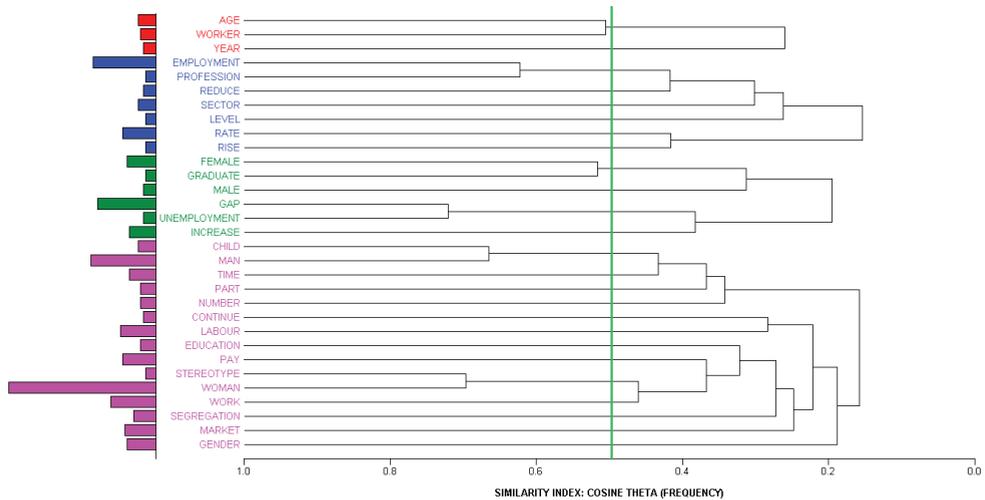


Figure 3. Dendrogram for *Causes of Gender Pay Gap* code / 2006-2010

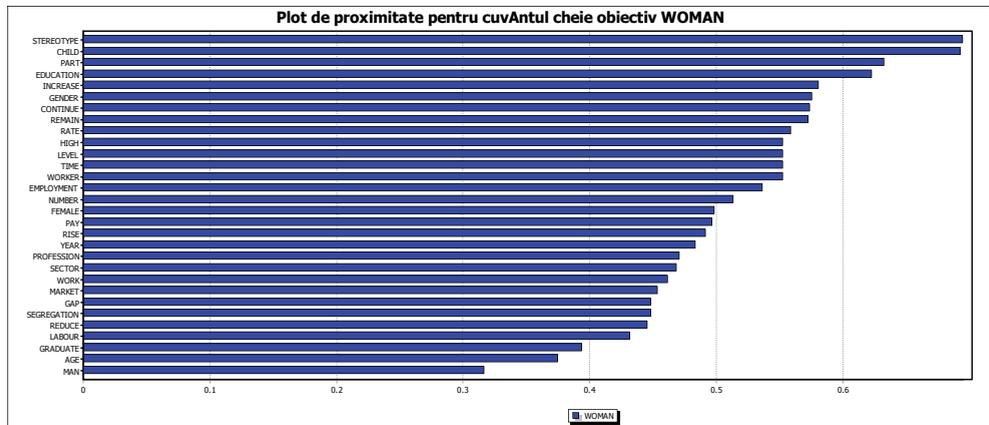


Figure 4. Proximity plot for the word *Woman*, in the case of *Cause of Gender Pay Gap* code / 2006-2010

Thus, the validated associative patterns for the code were: stereotype – woman – work – pay – education – segregation – (labour) market – gender; profession – employment / unemployment – rate and child – man – part – time – work.

The third code, according to the dendrogram, denoted that the conceptual associations validated the relevance of the communication campaigns *Gender Pay Gap* and *Science, it's a girl thing!* (see Figure 5) within the policy bigger picture.

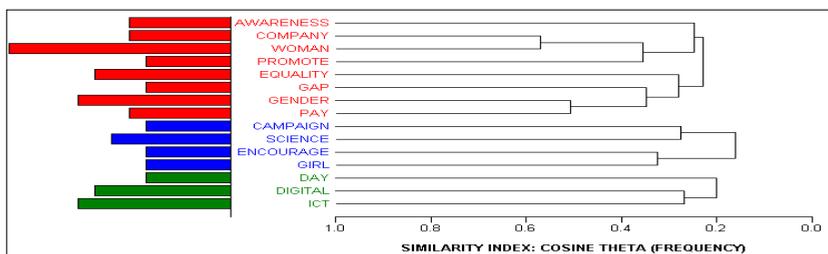


Figure 5. Dendrogram for **Awareness raising** code, **Ideological assets** code category/ 2010-2013

The fourth code presented several validated conceptual associations, according to the dendrogram (see Figure 6) and the distance matrix. This code was actually converted into a Priority Action in the strategic time-frame 2010-2013, as it became obvious that the gender gap did not project only in the financial aspect of payment, but became as pervasive as the gender mainstreaming issue itself in domains like pension, education, family earners model.

The validated conceptual associations for this code were: EU – employ – worker – activity; member – specific – recommendations – policy – female – aim; gender – effort – company – support – tool – analyse; equality – exchange – organise – tackle – practice; contract – equal – pay – fix – directive – implement – cooperation – effectiveness; work – encourage – life – employment – measure – promote; woman – care – long – education – labour – market – inequality – job – tend – segregation; social – exclusion – country – poverty – risk and GPG – wage – sector.

Conclusions

As we may observe from the validated conceptual associations, the Cosinus coefficient provided the appropriate frames for a mapping of conceptual flows starting from the official source documents issued by the European Commission. This technique of text mining is highly used in commercial marketing and in social media marketing in order to identify specific conceptual patterns inside the content generated by an online community. Because the communication processes the European Commission is involved in are polifonic and multi-leveled, we felt that this technique would allow us an insight into the intricacies of the democratic mechanism, positioned at the *heart* of the European Union. Due to these types of operations, several argumentative patterns emerged, together with new conceptual developments regarding institutional and democratic tools.

The conceptual mapping of the gender pay gap revealed associative patterns towards legislative framework, economic effectiveness, social care arrangements

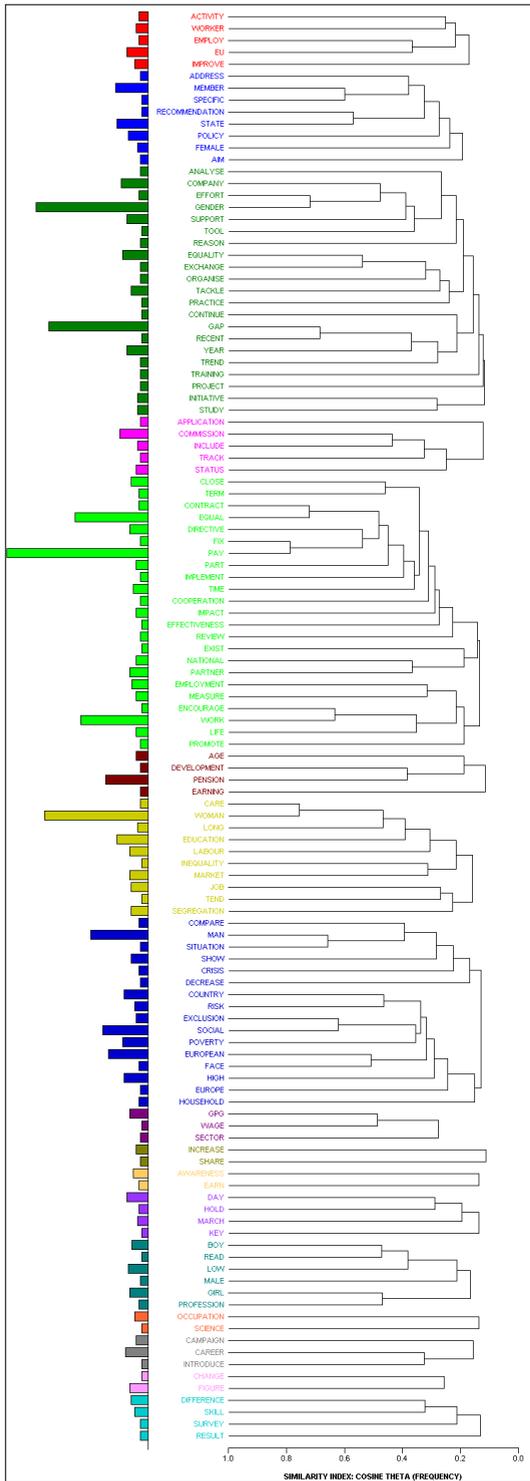


Figure 6. Dendrogram for the code Equality objectives for PA2: Equal pay for work of equal value (2010-2013)

and flexible working contracts (these patterns were detailed in the research project). Another aspect which emerged was the separation of the communication processes belonging to the policy and political frames and the civic society frame, the later being represented by the two communication campaigns. Even if there have been initiatives to bring these two closer (i.e. the European Citizens Initiative, the social media presence of EU institutions), there still is a conformity to stereotypes felt and seen inside the institutions when dealing with gender roles and gender pay gap.

References

1. Boussaguet, L., Jacquot, S., & Ravinet, p. (2009), *Dicționar de politici publice*, Editura Polirom, Iași.
2. Cini, M. (1996), *The European Commission: leadership, organisation, and culture in the EU administration*, St. Martin's Press.
3. Entman, R. M. (1993), *Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*, in: *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
4. Fine, S. H. (1981), *The marketing of ideas and social issues*, Praeger Publishers.
5. Habermas, J. (1984), *The theory of communicative action, volume one: Reason and the rationalization of society. Alkuteoksesta (1981): Theorie Des Kommunikativen Handelns*, 1.
6. Van Dijk, T. A. (1998), *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. SAGE.
7. Zagan-Zelter, C.-D. (2011), *Comunicarea Organizațională – Premisă a eficienței și eficacității organizaționale*, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai Cluj-Napoca, Facultatea de Studii Europene, CLUJ.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This paper is supported by the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), ID134378 financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government.