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SOCIALIST AND POST-SOCIALIST COMMUNICATION RESEARCH: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The present paper uncovers the intellectual history and present of the communication and media studies and its thematic and paradigmatic *foci* based on content analysis of articles dealing with communication topics in social scientific and communication/media journals published in Croatia between 1969 and 2011. The sample includes 481 articles, constructed from all full original articles published in odd years starting in 1969, dealing with communication and media topics in the most important social scientific journals: *Naše teme* and *Kulturni radnik* (both discontinued in 1990), *Politička misao*, *Revija za sociologiju*, *Društvena istraživanja*, and *Informatologia*, and all full original articles in the academic journals devoted exclusively to media and communication studies (all of them established after 1990) - *Medijska istraživanja*, *Medianali*, and *Medijske studije*. The article finds a growth in volume, and diversification of topics, theories, paradigmatic approaches and methodologies in communication and media studies in Croatia, with modest improvement in scientific quality in terms of the increased use of theory and empirical research. Similarities as well as differences are identified in relation to European and US disciplinary developments in the periods of socialism and democracy.

Key words: history of communication research, post-socialist communication and media studies, longitudinal analysis, content analysis, Croatia

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Löblich and Scheu (2011) identify three approaches to the historiography of communication discipline: the intellectual approach focusing on the main topics of interest, ideas, theories and paradigms, the biographical approach highlighting the role of the founding fathers, and the institutional approach focusing on the extra-scientific social, political, and wider academia related variables which influence life paths of different scientific disciplines in different countries. Slavko Splichal (1989a, 1989b) analyzed the development of communication science in former Yugoslavia as it was defined in articles published between 1965 and 1987. Apart from this account of its early decades, no systematic investigation has been conducted to date of the development of the academic discipline/field of communication and media studies in Croatia.¹

In this article, we trace the intellectual history of the communication field in Croatia based on content analysis of articles published in social scientific journals in the 1969 – 2011 period. In this we encompass two periods of Croatian history relevant to the development of the scientific field of communication and media studies: the socialist period when Croatia was a republic in the SFR Yugoslavia (1945-1990), and the contemporary period after 1991 and independence from SFRY, as a “new democracy” and member of EU from 1 July 2013.

The article shows trends in disciplinary attributes in terms of the main paradigmatic or intellectual approaches favored, theories used, topics of research focus, types of research questions and methods used in data gathering and data processing. The findings are then related to trends in the American and Western European disciplinary mainstreams to find points of connections or disconnections with the space of international scientific flows. Let us briefly first turn to the last, as they provide the theoretical grounding for the following empirical analysis.

Intellectual boundaries

There are different ways of defining the intellectual borders (understood as both dividing and connecting) of the discipline/field of communication studies, and not one of them is completely unproblematic either in concept or in its application to empirical research. Luckily, the discipline is aware of this, and has been dealing with its own changing disciplinary identity in bursts. After the “ferment” of the 1980s, periodic conferences and special journal issue have dealt with the changes in the understanding of the fields’ main topics of interest, paradigmatic approaches, theories, methodologies and epistemologies (Journal of Communication 1983 issue «Ferment in the Field» and 1993 issue «The Disciplinary Status of Communication Research», 2013 International Journal of Communication published two thematic blocks on Latin American and European communication and media studies, also see Darvin et al. 1989, Donsbach, 2006, Craig, 2008, Pooley and Park, 2008, Jensen, 2012). In this text we are primarily looking to establish its conceptual foundation in order to meaningfully define categories for empirical research and theoretical generalizations of Croatian findings.

An extremely low coherence of “common knowledge” in the communication field/discipline makes it impractical to anchor the comparisons at the level of middle range or micro theories:

“Anderson (1996) analyzed the contents of seven communication theory textbooks and identified 249 distinct “theories,” 195 of which appeared in only one of the seven books. That is, just 22% of the theories appeared in more than one of the seven books, and only 18 of the 249 theories (7%) were included in more than three books. If communication theory were really a field, it seems likely that more than half of the introductory textbooks would agree on something more than 7% of the field’s essential

contents. The conclusion that communication theory is not yet a coherent field of study seems inescapable.” (Craig, 1999: 120).

At a more general level of theory, Craig (1999) distinguishes seven theoretical perspectives or research traditions based on their different understanding of the purpose of communication - the rhetorical tradition, the semiotic tradition, the phenomenological tradition, the cybernetic tradition of information transmission, socio-psychological tradition, socio-cultural tradition and the critical tradition.

Pietila et al (1990:181-182) see three main intellectual currents in the development of mass communication as discipline/field (mainly looking at the western tradition, which also provides an appropriate cultural framework for the Croatian analysis): an Euro-American (main)stream of social scientific, behaviorist, mainly quantitative research focused on individual (or group) action; the French stream beginning with Barth's semiotics built on the basis of structuralism and post-structuralism in literature and linguistics; and the German stream including both humanistic and social scientific analyses.

Differences between humanities and social scientific approaches have traditionally been epistemological and methodological. Humanities approaches are more interested in text than in people or the empirical world, and include philosophy, linguistics, semiotics and literary theory. On the other hand, “social scientific theory, as it was understood by the mid-twentieth century, requires something quite different: systematic models and causal explanations of phenomena that are empirically testable.” (Craig, 2006:10). The two are joined by critical theory to form a tripartite scheme of social sciences, interpretative studies, and critical analysis (Fink & Gantz), sometimes with slightly different labels – “empiricism, hermeneutics and critical theory” (Craig, 1989: 117), or “empiricism, constructionism, critical theory” (Hasmondhalgh & Toynbee, 2008: 7). The dominant social scientific approach - “dominant paradigm” (Gitlin, 1974), “theoretical ideology” of value neutrality (Hall, 1989), “orthodox consensus” (Giddens, 1989) is characterized by naturalism (or positivism or post-positivism, science studies what really exists), social causation and functionalism (Giddens, 1989). As to the definition of what is critical theory, “in the usual sense critical theory includes progressive political *praxis* rooted in a radical socio-historical analysis” in which the “research ranges across a political spectrum from relatively “hard” Marxism (e.g. Smythe & Dinh, 1983) all the way to a liberal pluralism” (Craig, 1989: 117; 120, ft. 11). The approaches that don’t tend to generalize outside of the specific texts, contexts or individual phenomena belong to the interpretative/humanistic/hermeneutic/constructionist approach. This also includes articles on the border of communication discipline and the humanities, like philosophy, literature, art, linguistics, etc.

Probably still the most transparent and empirically useful typology of meta-theoretical approaches is the Burrell & Morgan (1979) typology of sociological paradigms, applicable also to communication studies (Rosengren, 1983, 1989). Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) categorization was employed in coding the dominant paradigmatic approach of the analyzed articles. The typology, simplified, includes four paradigms based on two dimensions: assumptions about the character of society (regulative or conflictual), and assumptions about the character of social science (objective or subjective). Two resulting paradigms for the analysis of social theory that both espouse the view of society as conflictual, are the radical humanist and the radical structuralist paradigms. These paradigms include what we usually understand as critical theory, in which the radical structuralist (objective science) includes the classic Marxist, and the radical humanist (subjective or interpretative understanding) includes the Frankfurt school and the British cultural studies (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 28, Rosengren, 1983). Rosengren (1983) points to the difficulty of categorizing the critical approach according to the subjective-objective dimension; thus we simplify our categorization to one category of critical theory.

Regulative approach to society with the objective approach to science forms the dominant social scientific paradigm; the regulative approach to society with the subjective approach to science forms the interpretative paradigm.

Even if today we notice convergence of social scientific and humanistic approaches (Jensen, 2012: 18) as well as a bridging of the qualitative-quantitative divide in multi-method research designs, this tripartite division still prevails for broad identification of research traditions, and is thus the most useful heuristic device for categorizing of the history of Croatian research and for its subsequent comparison to the disciplinary flow.

In our research we choose to ignore the long-standing division between critical and administrative research (which is sometimes echoed by the division between theoretical and applied research), because we don't believe that the use of research results for the benefit (or to the detriment of) aims external to the research, inherently defines the scientific character of the research or a research text itself. Thus we use the term "administrative-normative" to denote articles that are atheoretical and non-empirical, which often only have a (paternalistic, and not defined in theoretical terms) normative dimension, and are thus non-scientific (c.f. Splichal, 1989a). The term "layman" in Donshbach's terms also applies here.

As the field has not previously been surveyed, the aim is a mapping of the growth, diversification and scientific grounding of the discipline in Croatia. To this end we pose several research questions:

RQ 1 What are the trends of growth of the communication discipline?

RQ 2 What are the most important research topics?

RQ 3 What is the scientific and methodological character of the discipline?

RQ 4 What main theories inform the research?

RQ 5 What paradigmatic approaches prevail in the communication discipline in Croatia?

In order to answer these questions, a content analysis research design has been devised, and articles published in relevant social scientific journals between 1969 and 2011 analyzed. In the following section we present our research approach and procedure.

The method and data set

Our study follows the approach of those (Splichal, 1989a, 1989b, Potter et al. 1993, Fink & Gantz, 1996, Bryant & Mirion, 2004, Feely, 2008) who analyze disciplinary developments based on the qualities of articles published in academic journals. The study uses Potter et al. (1993) as the basis for a number of variables, and expands or simplifies as required by our research aims and specific circumstances.

Content analysis was performed on a constructed sample of articles dealing with communication topics in social scientific and communication/media journals published in Croatia between 1969 and 2011. Data were analyzed with SPSS, using mostly descriptive statistics, as the categorical variables with large number of categories and low expected frequencies left us without assumptions to test some interesting relationships.

The sample. The sample was shaped by assumptions/knowledge about the initial development of the discipline. Since the communication field developed from within existing social sciences, especially sociology, political science, and psychology (Splichal, 1989), the journals chosen as the universe for the construction of the sample were the most influential social scientific journals in Croatia. Among them are *Naše teme* and *Kulturni radnik* (discontinued after 1990

but very influential during socialist era), *Politička misao* (Croatian Political Science Review), *Revija za sociologiju* (Sociological Review), *Društvena istraživanja* (Journal for General Social Issues). The study also included all media/communication journals: *Medijska istraživanja* (Media research) *Mediaanali*, (Media Annals), *Medijske studije* (Media studies) and *Informatologia* (until 1990 titled *Informatologia Jugoslavica*).²

The first year of our sample is 1969, the year when the journal *Informatologia* was first published as a journal devoted to information science, which is in Croatia the wider disciplinary “hat” for the communication and media studies field.³

Table 1. Journals and articles included in the sample

Name	No. of articles in the sample	% of the total sample	First year of publication, first and last year included in the sample	Periodicity (yearly)
<i>Informatologia</i>	173	36	1969-2011	4
<i>Medijska istraživanja</i>	96	20	1995-2011	2
<i>Medianali</i>	69	14,3	2007-2011	2
<i>Medijske studije</i>	6	1,2	2010-2011	2
<i>Politička misao</i>	54	11,2	1964/1969-2011	4
<i>Revija za sociologiju</i>	7	1,5	1971-2011	4
<i>Društvena istraživanja</i>	16	3,3	1992-2011	4
<i>Kulturni radnik</i>	24	5	1948/1969-1989	12
<i>Naše teme</i>	36	7,5	1957/1969-1989	12
Total	N=481	100%	9	--

The sample universe consists of all published full articles as units of analysis in this time frame, with the systematic skip of two years (22 years in a 42 years span) dealing with a communication, media, or journalism topics in the social scientific journals and *Informatologia* (as it was shown to publish many articles dealing with information sciences like library sciences, archives, etc. which were not considered relevant for the discipline of communication studies, cf. also Pehar, 2010, Aparac and Pehar, 2010) and all articles in the three media journals, (excluding book reviews, conference announcements, etc.), which included at least one bibliographic reference. The final sample includes 481 articles, which is 57,8% of total population of articles (832) in the time frame of 1969-2011 in selected journals. We consider this sufficient to treat the results as representative of the whole period.

Coding. Articles were content analyzed according to the prepared coding scheme. The coding protocol included the following variables: name of the journal, year and number of the journal issue, title of the article, name of the author, research topic, theories mentioned, scientific and methodological character (presence and type of empirical research), and some other topics not reported in this paper.

The unit of content analysis was a full journal article. The junior author of the article on the basis of the initial coding matrix performed the first round of coding, after coding procedures were discussed with the first author. Categories were recoded during the coding procedure as

authors “renegotiated” definitions and the coding sheet was modified in several versions during the procedure before the final coding. This is the first research in Croatia that attempts to survey the boundaries of the communication discipline in an empirical fashion, thus comparisons are only possible with the earlier research by Splichal (1989a, 1989b) for the pre 1990 period (although this data does not show data separately for Croatia, the variables are also different and comparisons are possible only at the level of findings, the earlier Yugoslav context does provide a historical reference point). The initial coding procedures were done to “probe” Potter’s coding matrix in this specific context and to create a suitable coding matrix. For this reason, instead of intercoder reliability test, an “inter-rater agreement” (Krippendorff, 2004:130) was used to ensure reliability of the coding procedure. In this case, having in mind the specific nature of the subject that requires some accumulated knowledge of the communication discipline in order to perform the coding procedure, the consensus by jury (of the two authors) was finally used as the method for ensuring reliability.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of articles in the sample by decade (N=481)

	No. of articles/year	Percent of total sample
1969-1979	44	9,15%
1980-1989	72	14,97%
1990-1999	105	21,83%
2000-...	260	54,05%
Total	481	100,00%

Number of articles dealing with communication and media grew in time, as did the number of specialized academic journals. In 1960s and 1970s the dominant journals were the ones from the cultural field, in 1980s one journal from communication/information discipline. In spite of the first media studies journal that appeared in the 1990s, this is the only decade in which the number of articles was not doubled. Two new media journals appeared in the 2000s, and in 2009 and 2011 have the highest number of published articles in the field of communication and media studies.

Findings and discussion

These numbers show a growth of the communication discipline in terms of the number of articles and journals (RQ 1). In the following section we will show the trends in the popularity of research topics (RQ 2), changes to the scientific and methodological character of the discipline (RQ 3), theories that inform the research (RQ 4) and the prevailing paradigmatic approaches (RQ 5).

Research focus: diversification

Research focus „refers to the part of the mass media phenomenon that the authors attempt to explain, interpret, or critique“ (Potter et al, 1993: 327).

Only the categories⁴ with highest frequencies are shown in the table and categories with frequencies in the total sample below 25 were collapsed into the category “other”⁵.

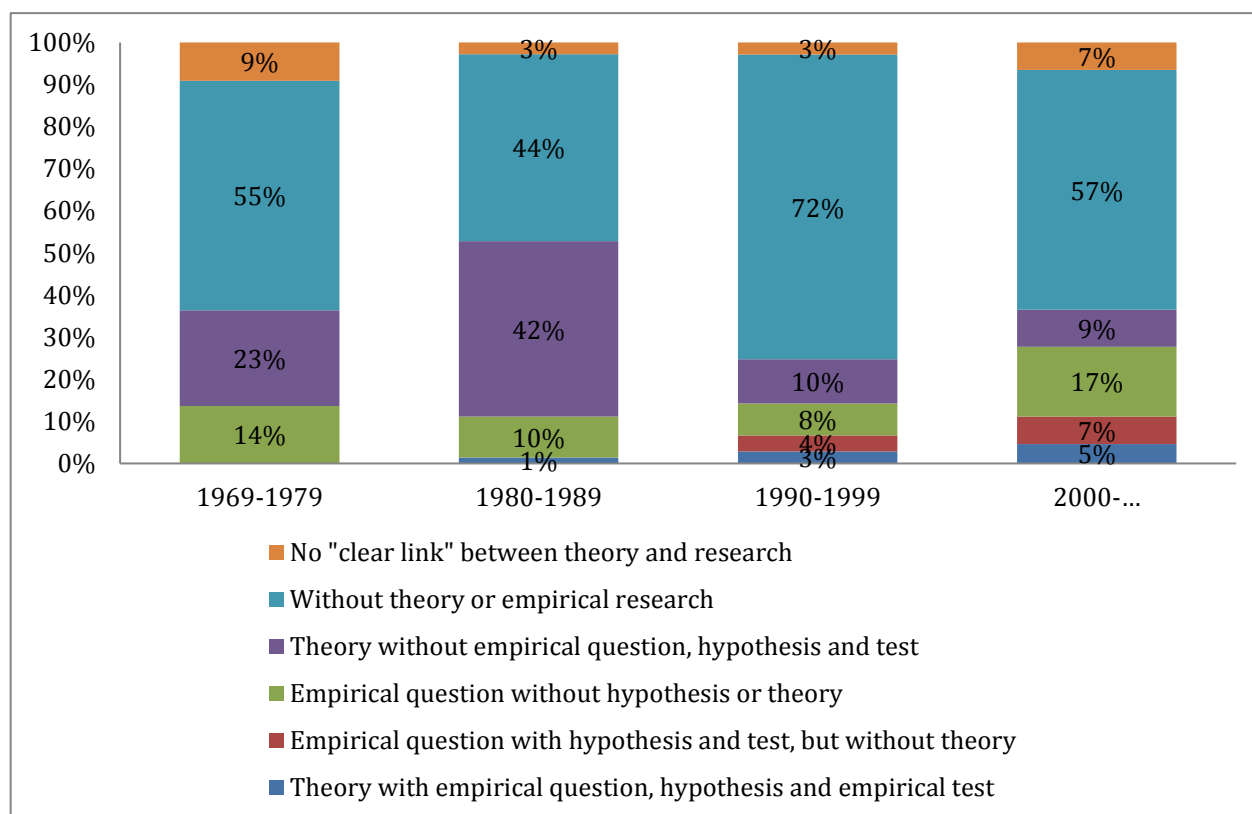
The most frequent topic in the surveyed period 1969-2011 was political communication (12,5%). With the gradual growth in the number of the articles, the number of the topic areas of the articles is diversifying. In the last decade, all topic areas are included, except mass culture, which became extinct in the sampled journals after 1960s. The most frequent research area, political communication, became the predominant topic in 1980s, while this position was replaced by production of messages and public relations and marketing communication in 2000s. This could be explained with the emergence of media journals; whose research preoccupation is mostly in journalism and the professional development of public relations in Croatia after 2000 (the number of articles in public relations and marketing significantly increased from only 2 in 1990s to 33 in 2000s). This might be seen as a sign that communication/media studies in Croatia are largely determined by the professional nature of journalism departments at Croatian universities.

Table 3. Research focus by decade (N=481)

	1969-1979	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2011	TOTAL
media industry	9 (20%)	8 (11%)	13 (12%)	21 (8%)	51 (11%)
production of messages		03 (4%)	12 (11%)	35 (13%)	50 (10%)
message content	3 (7%)	6 (8%)	5 (5%)	27 (10%)	41 (9%)
audience analysis	3 (7%)	3 (4%)	4 (4%)	15 (6%)	25 (5%)
effects of media	1 (2%)	6 (8%)	5 (5%)	19 (7%)	31 (6%)
regulation of the media		02 (3%)	11 (10%)	17 (7%)	30 (6%)
interpersonal communication		09 813%)	5 (5%)	25 (10%)	39 (8%)
organizational communication	7 (16%)	5 87%)	5 (5%)	13 (5%)	30 (6%)
political communication	2 (5%)	12 (17%)	20 (19%)	26 (10%)	60 (12%)
public relations and marketing communication	1 (2%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	33 (13%)	37 (8%)
information systems	2 (5%)	6 (8%)	12 (11%)	12 (5%)	32 (7%)
other	16 (36%)	11 (15%)	11 (10%)	17 (7%)	55 (11%)
	44	72	105	260	481

Use of theory and type of data: an increase of empirical research

Whereas in Potter et al (1993) 87% of studied articles had some form of empirical research, the situation with the Croatian journals is quite different. Only 26,4% of articles in our sample have some form of empirical research, while only 3,3 % articles with empirical research are genuinely theory driven. Articles that mentioned theory, but did not derive hypotheses from the mentioned theory amount to 5,6 %. The most frequent category of articles is the one without either theory or empirical research (58,2%), which supports the previous interpretation that the discipline is determined by the professional nature of journalism studies (or is still open to “laypeople”, cf. Splichal 1989a, Donshbach, 2006). This is the most frequent category in all the decades, but a greater balance develops after 2000 (Table 4). The decade of the 1990s is again an outlier, showing a retrograde tendency in relation to the decade of the 1980s during which the trend of reduction of the “administrative-normative” articles was clearly present. In the last decade, although still in very modest numbers, there is a clear growth in the share of articles that empirically tested hypotheses driven from theory (5%).

Graph 1 Use of theory by decade (N=481)

By collapsing these categories into only two (articles with empirical research, 26,4 % and articles without empirical research 73,6%) the number of empirical articles is seen to grow with the growth in the number of overall articles. The number of non-empirical articles is also rising (however in a much less linear way, with “jumps” and “declines” during the 1969-2011 period), but the last decade marks certain “stabilization” and a slow rise of the share of empirical articles (the lowest share in 2000s is 25% and in 2011 there was 46% of empirical articles). Although the predominantly non-empirical and non-theoretical nature of most of the output was previously interpreted as a consequence of “professional” character of journalism studies in Croatia, it does not follow that the topic areas most connected to journalism as a profession are non-empirical. Among articles with empirical research, the most common topic areas are message content (17,3%), audience analysis (16,5%) and production of messages (15%). It seems that message content and audience analysis are “most empirical” research focus topics, since these are the only categories where empirical articles are in the majority.

Table 4. Empirical research with research focus, 1969-2011 (N=481)

	Articles with empirical research	Articles without empirical research	Total
media industry	5 (3,9%)	46 (13,0%)	51 (10,6%)
production of messages	19 (15,0%)	31 (8,8%)	50 (10,4%)
message content	22 (17,3%)	19 (5,4%)	41 (8,5%)
audience analysis	21 (16,5%)	4 (1,1%)	25 (5,2%)
effects of media	7 (5,5%)	24 (6,8%)	31 (6,4%)

regulation of the media	2 (1,6%)	28 (7,9%)	30 (6,2%)
interpersonal communication	13 (10,2%)	26 (7,3%)	39 (8,1%)
organizational communication	9 (7,1%)	21 (5,9%)	30 (6,2%)
political communication	13 (10,2%)	47 (13,3%)	60 (12,5%)
public relations and marketing communication	9 (7,1%)	28 (7,9%)	37 (7,7%)
information systems	3 (2,4%)	29 (8,2%)	32 (6,7%)
other	4 (3,1%)	51 (14,4%)	55 (11,4%)
Total	127 (26,4%)	354 (73,6%)	481

Most of the articles with empirical research (127, or 26,4%), use quantitative data (69%) and the most common method used are by far survey research (45,7%) and content analysis (21,3%). Surveys and content analysis are also the methods that have been used for the longest time. Most other methods appear in the last decade. In 11,8% of empirical articles mixed methods are used, in most cases a combination of quantitative and qualitative, or two qualitative methods are used. The emergence of mixed methods use in 1990s and especially 2000s (Table 6) might be a sign of progress in methodological rigor in empirical research, but also perhaps a change of focus from quantitative to qualitative research. Qualitative data is in use from 1980s, but most of the articles appear in the last decade (92,3%). The last decade has been marked with a higher number of articles that used combined data as well (N=9, or 69,2%).

Table 5. Type of data by decade (only in empirical articles, N=127)

	Quantitative data	Qualitative data	Mixed data	Total
1969-1979	9 (10%)	0	1 (8%)	10
1980-1989	9 (10%)	1 (4%)	0	10
1990-1999	14 (16%)	1 (4%)	3 (23%)	18
2000-...	56 (64%)	24 (92%)	9 (69%)	89
Total	88 (69%)	26 (20%)	13 (10%)	127 (100%)

Table 6. Frequency of articles in regard to method by decade (only in empirical articles, N=127)

	1969-1979	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-...	Frequency	% of total empirical sample
Survey	6	5	9	38	58	45,70%
Interview	0	0	0	8	8	6,30%
Content analysis	3	2	3	19	27	21,30%
Focus group	0	0	0	1	1	0,80%
Case study	0	0	0	1	1	0,80%
Discourse analysis	0	0	0	3	3	2,40%

Experiment	0	1	1	0	2	1,60%
Bibliometry	1	1	0	1	3	2,40%
Frame analysis	0	0	0	1	1	0,80%
Policy analysis	0	1	1	0	2	1,60%
Narrative analysis	0	0	0	2	2	1,60%
Visual analysis	0	0	0	1	1	0,80%
Analysis of secondary data	0	0	1	0	1	0,80%
Mixed methods	0	0	3	12	15	11,80%
No information on methods use	0	0	0	2	2	1,60%
Total	10	10	18	89	127	100%

In 21 articles that have an empirical research approach the sample is not defined at all. In only 10 articles the sample was clearly defined as probabilistic.

Theories and paradigms: from critical theory to social science approaches

The variable for theories was coded as open string variable, with categorization made after all the theories are listed as appearing in the articles. The results include theories of different levels, “grand” or “middle range” theories.

Most commonly mentioned theory⁶ is critical theory, which with Marxism, public sphere theory, cultural studies, feminist theory, Frankfurt school and hegemony theory constructs the critical approach in Croatia. The most common social science approach theories mentioned are agenda-setting, mathematical theory of communication, media system models by Hallin and Mancini, and media effects theories. Theories of active audiences, hermeneutics and semiotics are the ones that are most common in the interpretative approach. The total of 144 different theories are mentioned in the entire sample of articles. The fact that only 22 different theories are mentioned more than 3 times points to a “scatterdness” and low coherence of communication discipline in Croatia, similar to international examples (Craig, 1999).

Table 7. Most frequently mentioned theories (3 times and more)

Theory	Frequency of use
Critical theory	18
Agenda-setting	8
Public sphere	8
Cultural studies	8
Mathematical theory of communication	6
Media systems model by Hallin and Mancini	5
Theories of media effects	5
Four theories of the press	4
Functionalist theories	4
Cybernetic theory of communication	4
Systems theory	4

Limited effects theory	4
Active audiences	3
Feminist theory	3
Framing	3
Frankfurt school	3
Hegemony	3
Hermeneutics	3
McLuhan's theory of media	3
Semiotics	3
Symbolic interactionism	3
Cultivation theory	3

Articles that mention theory (116 articles, or 24,12% of the total sample) were further categorized into three approaches (critical, interpretative/humanistic and social science). Social science approach predominates in 61% of the total sample. With the rise in the number of articles, the number of the articles that mention theory also rises, however, even in the last decade, the articles that don't mention any theory are in the majority with 79,6%. Among the articles that mention theory, social science approach occupies a steadily larger share with time (0% in 1960s, 45% in 1970s and 72% in 2000s). Interpretative/humanistic approach appeared first in 1980s, and 1960s and 1970s articles were based mostly in the critical approach. The 1990s also show an interesting gap in the use of critical theory, which reappears after 2000.

Table 8. Use of theory by decade (in total sample, N=481)

	Articles that don't mention theory		Articles that mention theory		
1969-1979	30	68,18%	14	31,82%	44
1980-1989	39	54,20%	33	45,80%	72
1990-1999	89	84,80%	16	15,20%	105
2000-...	207	79,60%	53	20,40%	260
Total	365	75,88%	116	24,12%	481

Table 9. Paradigmatic approach by decade (only in articles that use theory, N=116)

	critical		interpretative/humanistic		social science		Total
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1969-1979	9	64%	0	0%	5	36%	14
1980-1989	11	33%	6	18%	16	48%	33
1990-1999	0	0%	4	25%	12	75%	16
2000-...	13	25%	2	4%	38	72%	53
Total	33		12		71		116

In the interpretation of results, some caveats are necessary. First, the coding of articles for the paradigmatic approach or school was done on the basis of the theories mentioned in the articles, and not on the basis of coder judgment about the presence or absence of certain qualities in terms of epistemologies, methodologies, topics, etc. The theories mentioned in the articles were grouped into three main “paradigms” or broad general scientific approaches in social sciences⁷, and the variable “paradigm” was only then coded for individual articles. The linking of theories and authors to paradigmatic approaches necessarily simplifies to an unsatisfying degree some theoretical approaches and authors’ contributions that bridge several approaches.

Table 10. Empirical and non-empirical articles in paradigmatic approaches, 1969-2011 (only in articles that use theory, N=116)

	critical	interpretative/humanistic	social science
Empirical articles	7 (21%)	0	35 (49%)
Non-empirical articles	26 (79%)	12 (100%)	36 (51%)
Total	33	12	71

Fisher Exact test showed a statistically significant (16,274, $p < .001$) difference between empirical and non-empirical articles in belonging to different paradigmatic approaches.

While most articles that mention theory don’t have empirical research, the ratio differs among different paradigmatic approaches. Articles that have the most comprehensive use of theory, that is, perform a full “theory driven” empirical research with at least one hypothesis (cf. Potter, 1993) are in minority in all the approaches. However, since social science articles have the highest share of empirical articles, these articles are also the ones that have the highest share of full “theory driven” empirical research (16,9%).

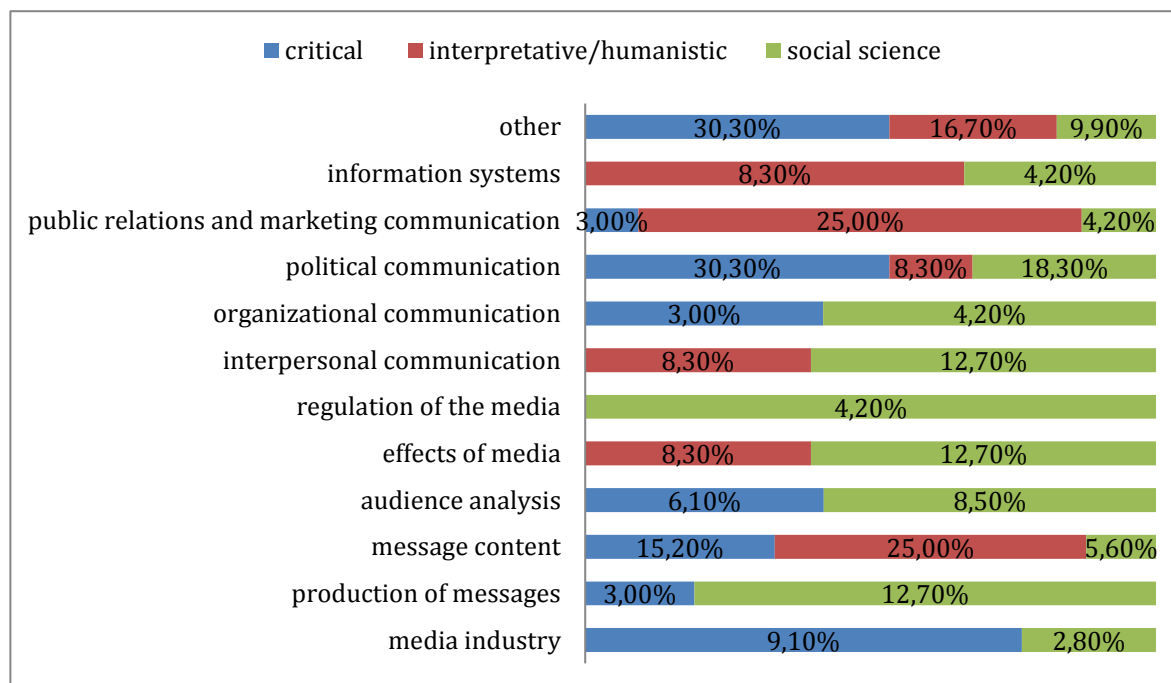
Table 11. Paradigmatic approach with the use of theory (only in articles that use theory, N=116)

	critical	interpretative/humanistic	social science
theory, hypothesis and empirical test	3 (9%)	0	12 (17%)
theory without empirical research	26 (79%)	12 (100%)	36 (51%)
no "clear link" between theory and research	4 (12%)	0	23 (32,4%)
	33	12	71

The most frequent research focus during the whole examined period, political communication, is also most frequent within articles with critical approach (30,3%) and social science approach (18,3%). The most frequent research focus within articles with interpretative/humanistic approach is message content (25%) and public relations and marketing communication (25%). Interestingly, audience analysis is more common within articles with social science, signaling that cultural studies has not reached Croatian media research when it comes to audiences (cf. Peruško, 2011).

Besides political communication, articles with social science approach include media effects, interpersonal communication and production of messages as most frequent research topics, echoing the developments in the international/US disciplinary trends.

Graph 2. Paradigmatic approach with research focus (only in articles that use theory, N=116)



Conclusion

The study shows some clear trends that resonate with disciplinary developments in European countries and the US. The growth of the discipline/field is evident – the number of articles in our sample doubled in every decade (except the 1990s) as is the diversification of topics. The still low share of empirical articles (34% in the decade of 2000) is not as worrying as a still very high share of articles that use neither theory nor empirical research (57% in the decade of 2000). In comparison to 18,7% empirical articles in the earlier Yugoslavian sample (Splichal, 1989a), some progress is visible and even more noticeable in the most recent years (46% of empirical articles in 2011). The results still show a significant lack of epistemological grounding in a significant percentage of articles. Optimistically, a modest opposite trend of theory driven research opposed to this “epistemological erosion” (Donsbach 2006:444) might indicate a slow epistemological strengthening of the field.

In Croatia, as in Europe, theoretical engagement of communication came first from the humanities, manifested in early critical theory approaches to investigations of mass culture. While in Europe the change of orientation to social science brought by the influence of American communication studies and general empirical trends in sociology and behavioral sciences were evident already in the 60s (Loblich, Scheu, 2011, Pietilä, Malberg, Nordestreng, 1990), in Croatia they became visible in published research in communication at least one decade later. Loblich (2007) in the analysis of the German disciplinary development post WWII, shows the rise of the positivistic current, inspired by the American social scientific mainstream, in the sixties, which pushed out and marginalized earlier humanistic and descriptive normative approaches of the «journalism and *publizistik* science». 64% of the International Communication Association (ICA) members (half of whom are from the USA) identified their research practices strongly with social sciences and 22% with the humanities;

(Donsbach, 2006:441). The Croatian communication and media articles in the decade of 2000 resemble this distribution. In terms of analytical approaches, 40% of ICA members identified strongly with the theoretical approaches, 46% with the quantitative-empirical, and 32% with the qualitative-empirical. For communication scholars in Croatia, there is still a long way to go in this.

In terms of the thematic focus, epistemological camps in the ICA clustered according to preferences for humanities or social scientific: at the far side of the humanities preferences are philosophy of communication, popular communication, visual communication, ethnicity and race, LGBT, and feminist communication studies, and on the opposite side of social scientific research preferences the information systems division, health communication, and interpersonal communication. A separate cluster at the cross-section of the humanities and social scientific approaches are the divisions of mass communication, political communication, communication technology, organizational communication, public relations, and intergroup communication (Donsbach, 2006:442). Although some research areas in the Croatian research show a predominantly social science approach (including the production of messages, audience analysis, effects of media or interpersonal communication), the most frequent research focus, political communication, is most frequent within articles with critical approach and the social science approach. The most frequent research focus within articles with interpretative/humanistic approach are message content and public relations and marketing communication, but these topics are analyzed within other approaches as well. Because of a relatively small sample of articles that could be assigned to a paradigmatic approach, we cannot claim statistically significant relationships between approaches and topics, but we can conclude that one topic can usefully be studied within different research traditions or paradigms (cf. Rosengren, 1983, 1989).

A large share of articles that don't mention any theory (75%) and the "scatterdness" of theories do not seem to provide a fertile ground for cumulative development of research or creation of a research tradition in communication science in Croatia. A bibliometric analysis might show if there are certain strands of research traditions being formed.

Our data show that the decade of the 1990s is an outlier in almost all the trends, a decade of regression in theoretical and methodological development of the field. The decade of the 1990s was in Croatia marked by a liberation war, the struggle to control and maintain the state territory after independence from SFR Yugoslavia, state building and democracy building processes that struggled against attempts of authoritarian regression. This context seems to have been adverse to scientific development in the communication and media studies field/discipline, which resumed positive trends of growth and improvement in scientific quality in the decade of the 2000.

Our research contributes also to a more general understanding of the development of communication and media studies from socialism to post-socialist democracy. The observed trends in meta-theoretical perspectives and research approaches and methods used show a broadening of approaches starting already in the 1970s as well as the early existence of empirical research. This contributes to a thin book of the history of east European communication research⁸ in breaching the stereotype that all socialist/communist countries subscribed to the same non-empirical and exclusively Marxist based Soviet media theory (cf. on the Soviet media theory Vartanova, 2009).

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¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the International Communication Association Preconference «New Histories of Communication Study», London, June 16-17, 2013. This article was the basis for the chapter Peruško, Z., Vozab, D. (2016). Communication Field in Croatia: Toward a Comparative History of Communication Studies in Central and Eastern Europe. In Peter Simonson and David W. Park, eds., *The International History of Communication Study*, NY and London: Routledge. pp. 213-234. 5. The section "Intellectual boundaries" appears in a similar way in the article by Peruško, Z., Vozab, D. (2014) Povijest komunikacijskih i medijskih studija u Hrvatskoj: Politička misao u komparativnoj perspektivi. *Politička misao*, Vol. 51 No. 1, 2014. pp. 133-170.

² All Croatian journals are available as open source on-line at http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=casopisi_podrucje&id_podrucje=5&lang=en.

³ This problematic subservience of communication to «information sciences» is one of the reasons for the slow disciplinary development of communication and media studies in Croatia, cf. Peruško & Vozab, 2014.

⁴ Content categories included media industry, personalities in the media, production of messages, message content, audience analysis, distribution of messages, effects of the media on individuals or groups, effects of the media on institutions/ society/culture, regulation of the media, media system, mass culture, interpersonal communication, organizational communication, political communication, public relations and marketing communication, information systems, information society, metatheory, methodology, other and cannot tell. Metatheory refers to articles that offered a review of media and communication theories or analysis of a discipline. Methodology refers to the articles that main focus were methodologies in media and communication research. Political communication category includes topics that concern media and communication aspects of political processes, democracy or public sphere. Media system category was seen as overlapping with political communication category and was originally coded separately.

⁵ The category «media system» was recoded into category political communication, effects of media on individuals/groups was merged with effects of media on institutions/society/culture. Remaining categories were merged into category other (personalities in media (1), distribution of messages (10), mass culture (12), information society (10), metatheory (12), methodology (4), cannot tell (5), other(1). Interesting category is «mass culture», as most of the articles appear in 1960s (9) and tend to take a critical approach towards the mass culture (Table 3).

⁶ Since authors often name more than one theory, the number of theories mentioned is larger (N=242) than the number of articles that use theory (N=116).

⁷ We would like to thank the colleagues in our "international jury" who commented on our paradigmatic groupings for their time and useful input in this endeavor. For any remaining problems related to the categorization the blame is on us alone, of course.

⁸ For a brief overview see the entry «Communication as an academic field: Eastern Europe and Russia», <http://www.communicationencyclopedia.com/public/search?query=eastern+europe>, and the recent chapter Peruško and Vozab, 2016.