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SOCIAL AGENDA

SKILLS A new agenda



SKILLS
FORMATION

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VISIB
AN
COMPAR

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Looking for EU identities:
communicating the EU job
market

di Paolo Donadio, Antonella Napolitano

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I focus on

6

HEALTH AT WORK

Cancer-causing
chemicals

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Abstract

The blow dealt in 2005 by the outcome of the French and Dutch referendums to European constitutional process triggered a dramatic review of European institutional communication. The idea that the gap between Brussels and European citizens was related to ineffective communication models was already clearly stated by the European Commission Vice – President Margot Wallström in 2004:

We need to explain what exactly it is we do.
We want to reach out ... We will use images and faces of real people who can explain in language that is not full of Eurojargon. There are so many problems that can't be solved by the nation-state. We have not been good at saying that (interview to Herald Tribune, December 22, 2004).

In June 2005, the European Council declared the start a 'period of reflection', during which a broad debate on Europe took place in each European country, involving citizens, civil society, social partners, national Parliaments and political parties. Since then, a properly conceived communication policy has become an essential element to the creation of a distinctive European identity.

The goal of this paper is to extend the scope of other scholarly investigations on European communication strategies (e.g. Valentini-Nesti 2010) to the way in which European institutions represent the job market. This paper will be focused on Social Agenda, a traditional quarterly paper magazine published by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (in French, German and English) since 2002 and virtually addressed to all European citizens in working age

[*]The authors discussed and conceived the article together. In particular, Paolo Donadio is responsible for sections 1 to 5, Antonella Napolitano for sections 6 and 7.

1. Introduction: a communication breakdown or a political defeat?

The idea that Brexit is, in 2016, the direct outcome of ineffective communication policies put forth by European institutions and national governments is not new among European supporters. A mismanagement of communication about what “Europe does for you” was thought to trigger scepticism and even concerns among European citizens already in 2005, when French and Dutch citizens surprisingly rejected the European Constitution through national referendums. I Opinion polls, more than ten years ago, explained that the ‘no’ voters were especially influenced by concerns about the countries’ economic and social conditions. In France, voters chose ‘no’ for socioeconomic issues: fear of the potential harmful effect on jobs and the impression that the European Constitution was too liberal and poorly social (*Flash Eurobarometer 171*). In the Netherlands, ‘no’ voters were motivated by an inadequate understanding of the real impact and meaning of the Constitution, followed by fears of a loss of sovereignty (*Flash Eurobarometer 172*). Notwithstanding this, 88% of the French and 82% of the Dutch had positive perceptions of the European Union.

The blow dealt by the outcome of the French and Dutch referendums brought about a strategic review of EU institutional communication. The gap between Brussels and European citizens was thought to be related to ineffective institutional communication. Eurosceptics, on the other hand, had an easy task to explain the political meaning of referendums in 2005, remarking that the results pointed out the impossibility to reach a federal convergence among sovereign states (see Fossum 2006). This would include the devolution to a supranational Brussels-based central state of a great part of national powers on crucial political matters, such as foreign affairs and military development and alliances.

However, while the advocates of the constitutional failure theory maintained that the French and Dutch polls were more representative of the democratic will of European citizens than the rest of parliamentary ratifications, the European institutions started a radical review of their communication policies. Indeed, in June 2005, the European Council declared a ‘period of reflection’ during which a broad debate on Europe took place in each European country, involving citizens, civil society, social partners, national Parliaments and political parties. A properly conceived and ade-

In 2001, the European Council adopted the Laeken Declaration, which officially set up a Convention (chaired by the former French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing) whose task was to write a constitutional charter for the European Union. After several drafts, the final text was signed by member states in Rome (October 2004).

quately resourced communication policy was thought to be an essential element for the construction of a distinctive European identity.

Since then, the search for a tighter European integration has been regarded as a matter of communication strategy. A simpler and multi-channelled communication, based on images rather than words, was a priority set by the European Commission, as the former European Commission Vice – President Margot Wallström explained in 2004:

We need to explain what exactly it is we do. We want to reach out ... We will use images and faces of real people who can explain in language that is not full of Eurojargon. There are so many problems that can't be solved by the nation-state. We have not been good at saying that (interview to *Herald Tribune*, December 22, 2004; our emphasis).²

Unfortunately, after what was called the 'period of reflection' and more than ten years, Brexit seems to demonstrate that the lack of a European "appeal" does not depend on poor communication strategies but is, at its heart, a political deficit.

2. Constructing workers' identities: the path to tabloidization

In a previous paper we focused our attention on *ES Mail*, the monthly electronic newsletter issued by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, virtually addressed to all European citizens in working age (Borrelli-Donadio-Guzzo 2008). Discourse analysis, carried out at a micro-structural level and on a diachronic perspective, showed how the representation of workers' identities gradually changed over a time span of four years (2001-2005): at the end of 2005, self-referential and jargon-like expressions were less frequent and gradually replaced by more emotive and 'down-to-earth' linguistic choices. The main concern of this new wave of communication policies was

2 Wim Wenders was very harsh on Mrs. Wallström's reform of European communication policy after the failed referendums in 2005. In a speech entitled "The image of Europe – Identification and Representation", delivered in Berlin during the conference *A Soul for Europe* (July 2007), Wenders said: "What a communication campaign that could have been if, after the failure of the referendums, Mrs. Wallström had made immediate and direct use of the language of literature or the pictures created by film-makers and photographers to convey the importance of the European project! If artists had been allowed to assume this task and had been given scope to show their own emotions concerning Europe! That would definitely have affected Europeans more, I venture to suggest, than what the bureaucrats in Brussels – aided by their marketing consultants – finally came up with: a top-down, run-of-the-mill publicity campaign!" (Wenders 2007).

the rejection of *eurojargon* and the research of a language understandable by common people:

People within the EU institutions and in the media dealing with EU affairs often use 'eurojargon' words and expressions that they alone understand. Eurojargon can be very confusing to the general public, which is why we have written this "plain language guide" to help you.³

In this paper, we intend to focus on the same time span (2002-2007) and start a multimodal analysis on a publication that was and is still addressed to the job market: *Social Agenda*. *Social Agenda* is a quarterly paper magazine published by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in French, German and English, virtually having as addressees all European citizens in working age.

The hypothesis to test is that the European approach to communication conformed to a *tabloidization* process with an increasing emphasis given to visual communication (Esser 1999; McLachlan - Golding 2000; Uribe – Gunter 2004). By examining the visual material contained in the issues of *Social Agenda* from 2002 to 2006 (nn.1-15) and focusing our attention on its covers, we will attempt to understand in a diachronic perspective how the function and the goals of this magazine changed over a period of five years that included the constitutional referendums in France and the Netherlands.

The analysis will be carried out from a critical discourse analysis viewpoint, namely through Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of visual images and social semiotics (Kress – Van Leeuwen 2006). We will also use the peircian distinction among symbol, icon and index (Peirce 1955), so as to highlight some specific features of a changing communication policy.

3. What is tabloidization?

The substantial simplification of the language practices in the European approach to institutional communication seems to be consistent with the growing phenomena of oversimplification in media production, which is taking place in Europe and the USA alike. Commercial imperatives, along with media control and ownership, enhanced by the competition with television, have driven the traditional news market to decrease the space devoted to traditional news and extend gossip and sport stories.

This process of *tabloidization* has been so far defined according to different perspectives, but always in contrast with an ideal highbrow pattern of quality press. If quality newspapers are "large format newspapers that report news in-depth, often with serious tone and higher level language" [...] and featuring news "dominated by national and international events, politics, business, with less emphasis on celebrities and gossip" (Sparks 2000), tabloid-

³ <http://europa.eu/abc/eurojargon>.

zation is a trend characterized by an emphasis on both private life and 'soft' news coverage. Some scholars have evaluated this process talking of a deep transformation in the behaviour of journalists (Esser, 1999) and even of a cultural decline pointed out by an increasing 'feminization' of news presentation (van Zoonen, 1998).

For the purposes of our analysis, we propose to adopt the framework set up by McLachlan and Golding (2000). Their definition of tabloidization and three-level operational characterization are arranged according to the parameters of *range*, *form* and *style*:

Range This was defined as a decreasing proportion of page space devoted to (1) the provision of information (news items) as compared to other items (i.e. entertainment and service) (Rooney, 2000); (2) foreign affairs news stories as compared to home news (Riffe et al., 1993); and (3) hard in respect of soft news (stories about sports, racing, entertainment, crime, show business, the royal family and human interest [Hartley, 1982]).

Form This was understood as less proportional space dedicated to text and more to visuals and headlines (Djupsund and Carlson, 1998).

Style This was defined as more space devoted to stories including a personalized angle of coverage, understood as the presentation of public figures as private persons (Latimer, 1984). (Uribe – Gunter 2004).

Range has been the most frequent variable used in the studies in this field (Grabe et al., 2001), mainly quantitative, whereas studies on form and style do not seem to be very extensive. Style is the variable less frequently taken into account (Franklin 1997).

Basically, we will adopt McLachlan and Golding's categories and attempt both a quantitative assessment and a qualitative evaluation of *Social Agenda* from 2002 to 2007. For our purposes, we will restrict our attention to the second category, *form*. We will deal with the proportion between verbal and visual elements and try to perform an in-depth analysis of the relations between images and headlines published on the covers of the magazine.

In a multilingual and enlarged Europe, culture standardization is actually taking place thanks to the dominant modes and distribution of audio-visual communication, controlled by the global English-speaking media empires which exert a normative influence on cultural models. Regionality and cultural entrenchment, eminently represented by language fragmentation, are a barrier to the European drive towards a more homogeneous and shared sense of identity and belonging. Therefore, one of our main objectives is to investigate how visual grammar and design were manipulated with the aim to "bridge" the cultural gap that divided (and still divides) European institutions from European citizens.

4. The figures of *Social Agenda* (2002-2007)

If we examine our corpus quantitatively in its components (cover headlines, number of articles, number of pictures, number of tables, number of pages, number of words), we immediately notice (see Table n. 1.) that the number of pictures increases from December 2004 onwards, when *Social Agenda* was issued in a completely renovated design. As we can see, until August 2004, the number of pages invariably exceeded the number of published pictures, so that, on average, there was less than 1 picture per page. In December 2004 (issue n. 10), Odile Quintin (former director of the DG Employment), announces a "face-lift", whose features radically change the informative function of this type of press:

In this time for change, *Social Agenda* magazine is getting a face-lift. This is not only about look and style. We intend to better reach out to our readers' needs. A more active communication with our stakeholders, contributing to a partnership for change at all levels. We will continue to inform you broadly about news in EU employment and social policy. But, responding to a readership survey, we are expanding background features and putting more emphasis on concrete figures and cases. And more space will be given to our stakeholders' views. Emphasis on diversity, we hope, may help to better convey the unifying message: "Social Europe in a global economy – jobs and opportunities for all. (*Social Agenda* n. 10, Dec. 2004)

From December 2004 to September 2007, the number of pages and the number of words increased, but, differently from the past, the number of pictures always exceeds the number of pages. From the face-lift in 2004 onwards, we have more than one picture per page.

Issue	Headline(s) on the cover	art.	pics	tabs	Page n.	n. of wds
1) April 2002	Pushing up the retirement age (+ 3 minor headlines)	8	12	5	16	9677
2) July 2002	Sexual harassment outlawed (+ 3 minor headlines)	8	15	6	20	11357
3) Oct. 2002	Companies face their social responsibility in Europe and abroad (+ 3 minor headlines)	9	18	3	19	10834
4) Dec. 2002	Safeguards for data privacy at work (+ 3 minor headlines)	9	18	2	20	10724
5) April 2003	Should he be worried about his pension ? (+ 3 minor headlines)	9	14	2	20	12608

Issue	Headline(s) on the cover	art.	pics	tabs	Page n.	n. of wds
6) July 2003	Immigration: creating a win-win situation (+ 3 minor headlines)	8	11	2	20	13261
7) Dec. 2003	Promoting diversity (+ 3 minor headlines)	9	16	0	19	10639
8) April 2004	The European Social Fund invests in knowledge and people	9	16	1	20	12880
9) Aug. 2004	EU health and safety rules at work (+ 1 minor headline)	9	23	1	24	13260
10) Dec. 2004	Drive for fair working time	10	31	8	28	16079
11) May 2005	A Europe for all ages	10	35	2	28	14371
12) Oct. 2005	2006 – European year to promote workers' mobility	12	32	0	28	14708
13) March 2006	Flexicurity: greater flexibility and employment security	13	31	0	28	15904
14) July 2006	Improving young people's opportunity in the labour market	10	30	3	28	16395
15) Sept. 2007	European Social Fund: 50 years investing people	6	34	1	28	16350

Table n. 1 – Figures from *Social Agenda* 2002-2006⁴.

Another interesting quantitative information is the relation between the number of articles and the number of pictures. Before the “face-lift” in 2004, there were, on average, two pictures per article. The issue n. 9/2004 already displays an increased number of pictures, but since the issue n.10/2004 their number has invariably been more than 30 or equal to 30 (just one case in July 2006). On average, from the issue n.1/2002 to n.9/2004, every article was matched by less than 2 pictures (1.8), whereas we have more than 3 pictures per article (3.1) from n.10/2004 to n.15/2007.

The increased visual element does not seem a coincidence, since Odile Quintin explained to the readers of *Social Agenda* that the greater number of illustrations and the focus on the so – called “success stories” were changes resulting from a survey carried out on the first six issues of the magazine. Furthermore, the European enlargement and the need to address the new member – states in East Europe prompted the editors to adopt radical and structural changes. *Social Agenda* was scarcely distributed in the countries that entered

4 The number of main articles is so low because of a special report on European Social Fund.

European Union in 2004: out of 47,000 regular subscribers (*Social Agenda* had a circulation of 80,000 copies), only 1% resided in the new member-states.⁵

5. *Social Agenda*: re-shaping the cover

In 2004, the new graphic design was probably also an answer to the need of a stronger cooperation between European institutions and communication bodies, called for in official documents issued by the European Commission in 2001 (COM 2001-354 final), 2002 (COM 2002-350 final), and above all, 2004 (COM 2004-196 final).

These documents, based on different surveys, pointed out European citizens' disappointment for the type and quantity of relevant information on European issues and initiatives provided by European institutions. Namely, surveys highlighted the fact that European media were not able to provide European citizens with useful and clear information on the projects and opportunities offered by the European Union.

The communication policy reform, started by the European Commission chaired by Romano Prodi, ended up with a whole restructuring of the officially responsible bodies under Barroso's presidency. Margot Wallström, appointed both as Commissioner for the DG Communication and Vice-President, carried out her reform of European communication policies in the aftermath of the referendum double failure and during the so-called period of reflection, issuing key documents on European communication such as the *Action Plan* (2005), *Plan D* (2005), the *White Paper* (2006), and the documents *Communicating Europe in Partnership* (2007) and *Communicating About Europe via the Internet: Engaging the Citizens* (2007).

Undoubtedly, the new design of the cover of *Social Agenda* stems from this new strategy of institutional communication in 2004 based on the need to legitimate the existence of European Union by promoting its images, faces, and projects: Europe had to be simple to understand, easy to be used and, above all, involve all its citizens through a “going local” approach. This approach was explicitly called for in *Communicating Europe in Partnership* (2007):

This Commission has already adopted three initiatives centred on listening, communicating and ‘going local’. The *Action Plan* kicked off a major internal reform of the Commission's use of communication resources. *Plan D* created a long-term framework for citizens' dialogue to go beyond the current “future of Europe” debate. Most recently, the *White Paper on a European Communication Policy* advocated two-way communication, involving active public participa-

5 The European enlargement saw the official admission of ten new states to European Union on the 1st of May 2004: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. On the 1st of January 2007, the second key date of European enlargement policy, Romania and Bulgaria joined European Union.

tion of citizens with a shift in emphasis from a Brussels-based to a 'going local' approach.

The emphasis on a "going local" approach, in opposition to a "Brussels –based" approach, accounts for the attempt to lose the most outstanding marks of a distinctive institutional and political identity and find a way to uniform discourse practices to standard and patterns easily recognized by European citizens. The differences emerging from the comparison between the covers of the issues n. 9/2004 (July) and n.10/2004 (December) show the effort to adopt standardized semiotic practices in quarterly press so as to simplify the

Social Agenda n. 9/2004



of page, distant from the magazine name and placed on the coloured frame *outside* the picture;

j. the publisher's name: the name of the official Directorate General, all in capital letters, is replaced by the unique reference to the European Commission (n. 9/2004 features *European Commission Employment and Social Affairs*, whereas n. 10/ 2004 features *The European Commission's magazine on employment and social affairs*).

The process of format standardization may be simply verified by looking at a copy of *Time* (the one below was issued in March 2004), which is probably one of the most popular weekly magazines in the world.

Social Agenda n. 10/2005



Figure n. 1 – Comparison between two cover formats of *Social Agenda*.

“transmission” of messages about Europe.

Some graphic changes are consistent with international magazine conventions which tend, broadly speaking, to standardize the format. These changes concern the frames, the name of the magazine, the picture, the cover heading and other relevant details, all aiming to hide the visible signs of a stereotyped and bureaucratic political identity of the European Union.

In contrast with the issue n.9, the issue n. 10 features:

- a unique coloured frame (usually red) encompassing the whole cover;
- a magazine name written in bigger font type (Loporcaro 2005: 76) and not against the orange upper background;
- a full-page cover picture not concealed by the magazine title;
- a cover picture reprinted in small size on page 2 under the heading *Cover story*;
- a one-line heading without sub-headings added;
- a heading placed at the bottom of the page and not near the magazine name;
- the displacement of the European flag from the top to the bottom of the cover;
- the adoption of the *manchette* (top right of the cover page) to indicate a special coverage;
- the position of the publisher's name: on the top of the page, just beneath the magazine name, and at the bottom

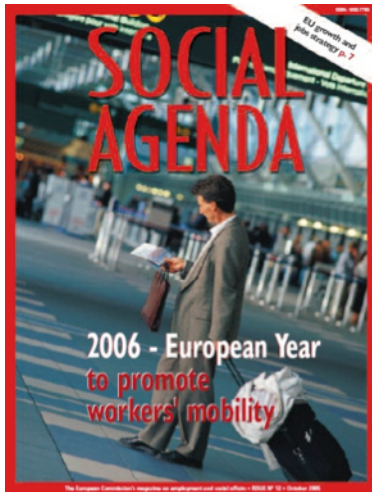
Thus, as far as visual design is concerned, *Time* appears to be the model followed by *Social Agenda* graphic designers in 2004. The attempt to communicate Europe by adopting a very popular visual template reveal the tendency to standardize the form and alter, as we will see, the construction of readers' identity.

6. From symbolic representation to icons

The piercean distinction among indexes, symbols and icons is revealing if we observe *Social Agenda* covers in a diachronic perspective. Just to quote one among the many explanations of the trichotomy index-icon-symbol given by Peirce:

“One very important triad is this: it has been found that there are three kinds of signs which are all indispensable in all reasoning; the first is the diagrammatic sign or icon, which exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject of discourse; the second is the index, which like a pronoun demonstrative or relative, forces the attention to the particular

Social Agenda n.12/2006



Time, March 2004



Figure n. 2 – Comparison between *Social Agenda* and *Time* cover formats.

object intended without describing it; the third [the symbol] is the general name or description which signifies its object by means of an association of ideas or habitual connection between the name and the character signified” (Peirce 1885).

As we can see, the changing *form* of the magazine was not equivalent to a banal make-up. Step by step, especially from 2004 onwards, the identity of the magazine turned into a voice fully functional to institutional and superordinate purposes - the European Commission - so losing its independent role of magazine committed to informing European citizens through original enquiries and analyses.

6.1. Indexes and symbols: the first group of covers (2002-2003)

Looking at *Social Agenda* covers in 2002, the indexical nature of the cover picture stands out, even if we have a drawing against a monochromatic background in the first issue. In the first issue, Kress and Van Leuween’s *represent-*
Social Agenda n.1/2002



Social Agenda n.2/2002



Social Agenda n.3/2002



Figure n. 3 –*Social Agenda* covers in 2002

ed participants (Kress –Van Leuween 1996) are two indefinite figures trying to raise a red arrow which represents the retirement age of European workers. The indexical relationship between the sign and the represented thing is to be seen in that arrow turning upwards. Its meaning is understandable only if we read the heading.

In the issues n. 2 and n. 3, we have an indexical representation of “bad” behaviours through real photographs: in the first case, the index is realized by displaying men’s hands under a table in a detail picture, whereas the little (probably Indian) girl at work stands for the exploitation of child labour in Asian countries. We have the real face of a participant only in the issue n.3, but, notwithstanding this, the portrayed subjects never correspond to an ideal European worker, that is to say the participant that actually receives and reads the magazine.

The main headings explain the pictures in a complementary function and point out what is the stance taken by European institutions in relation to these thorny questions: retirement age, sexual harassment and corporate social responsibility. Through *Social Agenda*, readers learn that Eu-

rope wants to *push up* the retirement age, *outlaw* sexual harassment and oblige companies to *face* their social responsibility. The team of anonymous journalists (we never know their names) working for *Social Agenda* emerges as a team aiming to investigate hot topics, such as the pension system, and denounce actual crimes such as sexual abuse and violence on children.

In 2003, the first two covers strengthen the identity of the team working for *Social Agenda* as a team of reporters

Social Agenda n. 4/2003



Figure n. 4 –Social Agenda covers in 2003

committed to social investigations.

Against a monochromatic background, the themes are, again, quite thorny: data privacy and pension system again. Pictures are not real-life photos and they are entirely symbolic: their meanings are based on the values our Western culture assigns to objects such as the *book* – data, knowledge about, information – and figures such as a naked man covering his genitalia with his hands; a little baby playing with a world-shaped ball. For sake of brevity, we do not analyse here the compositional level, that is the way these images are located on the page and edited, but in the

Social Agenda n. 6/2003



Figure n. 5 –Social Agenda covers in 2003 (2)

first picture the editing shows that the man is seen in the background as unprotected, because all information about him are contained in a book in someone else's and unknown hands, placed in the foreground. The second picture is a studio photograph but it is not the result of image juxtaposition. Its meaning cannot be recovered without reading the main heading: an innocent little boy is playing *now* with the world and does not know how difficult his future will be.

Social Agenda n. 5/2003



If we compare these 2003 cover pictures with the previous ones, we can see that their symbolic nature makes more difficult understanding and interpretation, which depends on the reading and understanding of the main headings. In these cases, the approach is the opposite to a tabloid-like perspective: topics can be regarded as hard-news and the interaction between text and images is essential to understand the true meanings of the covers.

Narrativity, conceived in terms of vectors by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), is still more cryptic: it is absent in the cover picture of issue n. 4, where man's absent clothes re-

Social Agenda n. 7/2003



present his life and are contained in a book reporting the word *Data*. In the cover picture of issue n. 5, the innocent little boy is playing, but the narrativity implied in his action is emptied by the world-like big ball and the worried warning conveyed through the heading. As it happened with the indexes of the first three issues, these pictures are static conceptual constructions representing a given and problematic situation.

In 2003, we can see the beginning of thematic turning point with the images of the issues n. 6 (July) and, above all, n. 7 (December). In these cases, the pictures appear to be icons, but they are close-up photographs where narrativity is still absent, as the represented participants are not involved in any type of action. The pictures portray people who do not represent, especially in issue n. 6., a stereotyped image of a European worker.

These two issues address two related topics, immigration and cultural integration, and that is why the represented participants belong to other (non-European) ethnic groups. In the picture of issue n.6, the symbolism is still apparent in the clash between the girl's Oriental garments and the square cap, Western symbol of a successfully completed learning path – university knowledge. The picture is staged because the girl is looking at the camera, but it was not taken in a photo studio (we can see a car in the background) and it is not the result of an editing work. The picture represents symbolically the “win-win situation” mentioned in the heading.

The issue n. 7 is the mark of a more meaningful thematic turning point: it is the first time we have the representa-

tative plan (what the policewoman does), but what she stands for. This picture represents a sort of passage to a more apparent watershed, a visual one, which takes place in 2004.

Through these simple observations, we can see that the identity of the anonymous team of journalists working for *Social Agenda* is committed to broaden and discuss global issues which directly concern the European job market. *Social Agenda* readers are invited to reflect on “hard” themes and shape their own opinions by approaching different issues in a problematic way. The ideal reader emerging from these cover images is a white European, attentive, cultivated, interested in suggestions and viewpoints on the impact of global topics on the society where he/she lives. *Social Agenda* is about job market, but it is not specifically addressed to workers.

6.2. Iconic representation: the second group of covers (2004-2006)

In 2004, we witness a real visual turning point, the passage to an iconic and narrative representation of work. Now the pictures do not represent, but actually show the ideal addressee of the magazine, who is depicted during his job and wearing the clothes and uniforms only used while working. The represented participant is meant to be the same as one of the interacting participants, the recipient, who is invited to identify himself/herself with a woman highly skilled worker (n. 8), home-builders (n. 9), doctors washing their hands n.10).

These three pictures describe different targets and, since

Social Agenda n.8/2004



Social Agenda n.9/2004



Social Agenda n.10/2004



Figure n. 6 –*Social Agenda* covers in 2004

tion of a European worker on *Social Agenda*, a black but British policewoman. Even here, the picture symbolically features several traits of “diversity”: a black and woman citizen, doing a job traditionally carried out by men in a European country. As in n.6, the policewoman is simply looking aside, so that the reader is not attracted by a nar-

they are meant to be icons of the world ‘outside’, they should be seen and interpreted by European workers as a sort of self – projections. The comparison with the past issues immediately shows that these pictures are meant to reproduce the real world of work of European citizens and that is why we have only here full or medium shot pi-

ctures, where we can see workers' arms, hands, legs *doing* something.

These pictures have a mirroring function and interact with the headings as being connected to specific initiatives promoted by European Union: European Social Fund (n. 8), European rules on safety (n. 9) and the (Commission's) drive on working time (n. 10).

As we can notice, the difference between these issues and the previous ones is clear: the focus switches from much –debated and general issues, such as pension systems, sexual harassment, privacy, immigration to job-re-

Social Agenda n. 11/2005



Figure n. 7 –*Social Agenda* covers in 2005

lated and specific issues involving European initiatives and their direct impact on the working conditions of European citizens. The broad and tough socioeconomic questions affecting European job market are limited, in 2004 and from that year onwards, to small –scale questions pertaining really carried out jobs in Europe. Training, safety, and working time are all issues dealt with insofar as European bodies promote specific actions and programs.

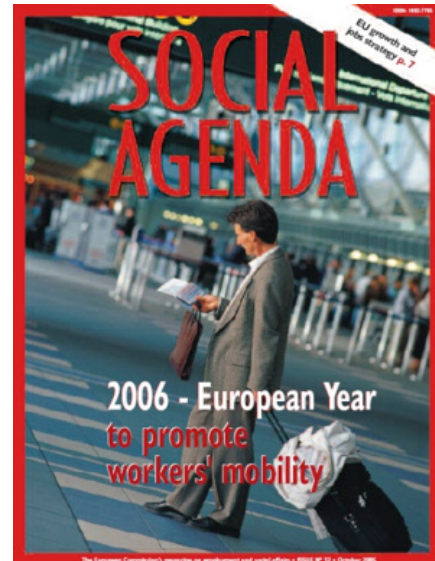
In *Social Agenda* n. 8 we find a description of European Social Fund activities in training programs for advanced skills, while in *Social Agenda* n. 9 we learn what EU Commission is doing to enhance healthcare systems and safety rules for workers employed in potentially risky sectors. In *Social Agenda* n. 10, the cover headline does not recall a European initiative, but the mentioned “drive” is about a set of reforms launched by the European Commission and presented as the *Cover Story* on the following page 2.

It is not casual that the Editorials, written by the DG Director Odile Quintin on each issue, become more and more repetitive and slogan-like from n. 9/2004 onwards, thus realizing in advance the recommendations stated in the *Action Plan* (2005) on communication, where we read that key messages should be shaped as “slogans and symbols” and “should be simple and repetitive” in order to “enhance recognition and avoid confusion” (*Action Plan*

2005, pp. 5-6). From the issue n. 9 to the issue n. 12/2005 (which was the last number of *Social Agenda* under Odile Quintin’s responsibility), we find the *Editorials* invariably containing the same concluding slogan: “social Europe in the global economy: jobs and opportunities for all”.

The covers in 2005 display two different pictures, one staged and promoting a Europe that can deliver welfare and prosperity to young and old people alike, the other a full-shot candid picture much more similar to the pictures published in 2004. The main headings adopt discourse practices which are typical of advertising discourse and

Social Agenda n. 12/2005



promotional campaigns. “Europe” is no longer the framework in which magazines like *Social Agenda* are thought and published but is turned into a product promoted through this magazine. In this way, *Social Agenda* performs an instrumental function that empties its past investigating role.

Clearly, both cover pictures are icons again, even if the juxtaposition of three generations in n. 11 represents symbolically the debate on demographic change launched by the European Commission through a Green Paper. The represented participants, in this case, do not correspond to the interactive participants and this is probably the last issue to address a global topic - demographic change - and provide an in-depth analysis going beyond the promotional emphasis of the cover slogan *A Europe for all ages*. Anyway, the smiling faces bring the same promotional and comforting message conveyed by the heading.

On the other hand, *Social Agenda* n. 12, that was published after the two failed referendums, mentions the promotional purpose of the magazine explicitly through a verbal phrase in its title, *promote workers' mobility*. The European year of workers' mobility, 2006, receives an iconic representation: the portrayed participant is a well-dressed passenger in a train station carrying his suitcase and, probably,

shot while checking his ticket or a timetable. He has not got a face, since he is supposed to depict *any* European worker leaving his country, ready to start another job in another European country.

The issues n. 13/2006 and 14/2006 are the conclusion of our visual review on *Social Agenda* covers, with the seemingly candid picture reporting a group of smiling people during a meeting or a briefing and the staged picture of a not very cheerful young boy working in a sport store.

Social Agenda n. 13/2006

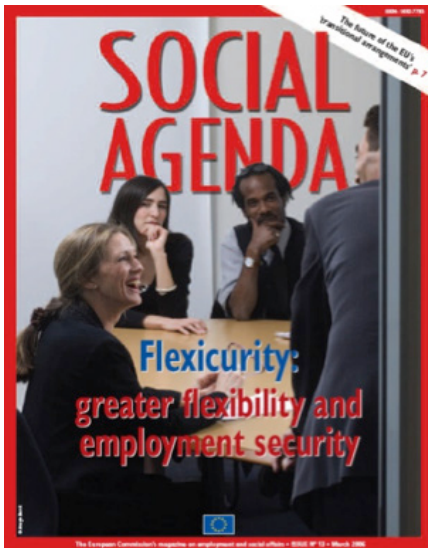


Figure n. 8 –*Social Agenda* covers in 2006

Here again, we can observe the attempt to create an identity between the represented participants and the recipients of the magazine. The pictures are different: they are medium shot pictures and one looks like a candid photo (n.13), while the other (n.14) is a staged picture. In any case, we can see they are pictures of European citizens taken during their job activities: a company meeting showing smiling people around a table and a young man working as shop assistant and placed behind a shop counter in a sport store (in the background, we can see some snowboards).

Again, we see icons dealing with small –scale problems involving working conditions in Europe and promoting institutional solutions through some common buzzwords in the neo-liberal economic jargon that seems to pervade the new approach taken up by *Social Agenda* – “flexicurity” and “opportunity”. Obviously, the European initiatives on job flexibility concern managerial and top jobs in companies, which is why those people’s physical position is around the table of decision-making. On the contrary, the young boy’s position is in a shop and his ‘table’ is a counter. In these icons, even if vectors are not apparent, narrativity and social status descend also from the strategic location of the represented subjects. The headings are still written according to the discourse practices used in advertising. For the first time on a cover heading, we find the collocation “labour market”,

which well explains the point of view which distinguishes the first seven issues of the magazine from the issues published in 2004, 2005 and 2006. To put it simply, labour in Europe seen by *Social Agenda* is a market to which people have to adapt themselves and be *mobile, flexible, skilled* so as to get the new *opportunities*. The conception of work espoused in the first seven issues of *Social Agenda* was an objective view, from outside, on the impact of global changes on European world of

Social Agenda n. 14/2006



work. From 2004 onwards, the equivalence between human beings and goods in the name of the market results in a visual strategy that takes for granted European citizens’ willingness to leave their own countries, accept temporary contracts and channel their educational and professional career towards knowledge, that is to say what is most wanted by the market.

7. Conclusion

Following Fairclough (1995a), the analysis of the construction of identities in media texts involves the key questions about contemporary changes in the media construction of relations between reporters and audiences and between politicians and audiences:

Do they (these changes) constitute a substantive democratisation or do they primarily have a legitimising role in respect of existing power relations? There are also questions about whether and to what extent media, in the ways in which they construct audience and reporter identities, operate as an agency for projecting cultural values – individualism, entrepreneurialism, consumerism – and whose values these might be (Fairclough 1995: 126).

The progressive convergence towards a tabloid-like model, which is in itself an example of the TV-led evolu-

tion towards a non-rational paradigm of media communication, highlighted by Loporcaro (2005) on Italian quality newspapers, develops by altering the combination of genres and discourse types and assigning different roles to the actual participants involved in the communication. The apparent distribution and the power relations between what Fairclough (1995a) calls “voices” are deeply affected by the visual changes taking place over the six years of *Social Agenda*. The graphic changes implemented in the issue n.10 (2004) and the gradual transformation of the cover picture, from its indexical / symbolic representations to the iconic reproductions of European workers, mark a general thematic shift and the progressive disappearance of the reporters’ voice. The initial journalistic investigations, critically focused on the most problematic issues of our time in the first seven magazine issues – pensions, sexual harassment, corporate social responsibility, privacy, immigration and integration – are replaced by themes uniquely related to the actions and initiatives prompted by European institutions to improve working conditions in Europe. From a purely visual perspective, the promotional, persuasive and conversation discourse types replace the more traditional traces of a discourse type based on the informative value of journalism.

From n.10 onwards, *Social Agenda* becomes a directly political communication channel, which only serves to amplify the institutional voices. The mediating intellectual role of the journalists working for *Social Agenda* is nullified and, on the other hand, the voice of the citizens seems to play a primary role in determining political decisions. Actually, the overall “democratisation”, here only examined in its visual deployment, seems to be only functional to a double purpose: a) ‘commodifying’ Europe, so as to communicate it as convenient and useful product and, above all, b) taking for granted workers’ endorsement of some specific ‘values’ – mobility, flexibility, life-long training - imposed by an agentless ‘market’ ruling over European citizens’ life.

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