Holistic Strategy for Public Action through Visual Digitalization in the Convergent Environment

Mario Plenković, University of Maribor, Institute of Media Communications, Slovenia

Tina Tomažič, University of Maribor, Institute of Media Communications, Slovenia

Vlasta Kučiš, University of Maribor, Faculty of Philosophy, Slovenia

Abstract

Basic operative terms of visual phenomenology are analyzed to develop a holistic strategy for public action within the new culture of communicating in the global context. New arenas of visual communication are observed as a sociocultural process of adjusting visual technology. Creating a new strategy for public action will enhance daily life and understanding between all citizens, about questions concerning human development and society in general. A theoretical discussion is conducted through diachronic and synchronic analysis of visual communication content. The main goal is to establish a new communicative paradigm for a holistic strategy of public action. Observing visual digitalization, the authors develop a holistic strategy for public action, not only in the technical sense of the transmission and adjustment of analog signal into digital signal. The future of visual communication is a powerful source for creating images, the transmission of pictures via images, and the description or manipulation of reputation, dominance, subjection, and media exhaustion within the convergent environment. The authors identify technical and sociocultural questions regarding visual communication from the perspective of the usage of new information and communication technologies (ICT). The holistic public action strategy seeks to preserve cultural identity within the context of global communication.

Key words: holistic strategy, visual communication, digitalization, public action, media

1. Description of the Problem

We live in a time of sudden and significant new information and changes in communication. This is occurring in daily life and is affecting individuals, families, societies, and nations. The entire global sphere of public action is conducted through the medium of visual communication transmitted through information technology. We are on the threshold of a new era of visual communication. Under the powerful influence of information and communication technologies (ICT), private life and social action are evolving through visual communication. For all persons and groups who are searching for information, the new visual forms of communication are becoming a vision and a guideline.

Through unifying all channels for human communication, we can optimize the in functioning of the psycho-structure of human visual communication. The cortex of the wondrous human brain integrates and synthesizes visual information through a process of selection and communication, operating via a principle of the discursive cohesion of parts into a totality. By connecting all senses into one faculty, visual

communication enables the fusion of all human sense functions. Thus in this way the process of visual communication enables the synthesis of visual, verbal, and praxeological public communication, a process which encompasses the ancient dream of all humans on planet Earth.

The fusion of the separate communication channels suddenly enlarges the human cognitive capacity to process information. Neurological research stresses that human beings at this moment are using less than 10% of celebral capacity. And that is because of the difficulty in integrating information from many different sources which are entering the brain through special antenna receptors, with which man can grasp only a portion of the wavelengths of the cosmos. New breakthroughs in information and communication technologies will enable the intermediation of highly sensitive visual messages, which will in turn enable usage of the as yet largely unused human capacities for communication.

The new era of communication is more and more determined by information processes, visual communication, interactive communication, new information technologies, and the spread of Internet citizen networks. In the book *Revolution of Internet*, the author, Keniči Ohmane, claims that a new social network is being created, a network formed by "citizens of Internet." He uses the new word for them, "Netizens" (Plenković, 2002). This network should enable interactive communication in the global cybernetics of visual communication space.

Current communication science is intensively studying the process of visual communication: the dialectic of words, images and power; the process of visual communication; intercultural communication and cultural barriers; and the new holistic strategy of public action from the perspective of visual media development and visual communication. Using the process of visual communication, strategic public action is causing citizens to form attitudes and opinions about products, institutions, other persons, government, media and events.

Based on all of these developments, we believe that an era of "homo novus"—a more perfect and more totally visual human being has begun (Plenković, 1988). From an evolutionary point of view, information and communication technologies are developing and integrating in the sphere of public action. This process is occurring so rapidly that it is leading to the appearance of the new visual human being who is at the peak of evolutionary development. This phenomenon will open new paths for changing social relationships and society as a whole.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Concept

The basic goal of this paper is to explore new communication knowledge and accomplishments which can be used in the holistic analysis of visual communication and visual culture to formulate a public action

strategy of visual messages in Croatia and other regions of the world. The purpose of the paper is to identify and develop terminology for basic operative communication concepts, enabled by new modern ICT technologies. The starting point of the paper is the hypothesis, which is determined by synchronic and diachronic analysis of the phenomenology of visual communication. In so doing, it will be possible to create a foundation for establishing a research frame for complex and systematic holistic research of visual communication on all levels of public action (local, national, regional, and global). This theme is connected with the life of every individual, and the functioning of political and interest groups, of economic systems, and of states and nations.

The term visual communication refers to a wide range of communication and graphical-technological interests, whose theory and praxis must be systematically explored and implemented. The paper will attempt to create new theoretical frames, which will enable exploration of visual communication in the social and technical sciences. The advanced development of ICT technologies opens new avenues of communication and new graphic possibilities for the improvement of the strategic development of all levels of communication in modern Croatian society.

3. Structure of the Visual Communication System

Visual communication is a complex and continual interactive process in which the author (creator), as a sender of the message, is forming visual communication, because he wants the recipient to believe that the message has the socially accepted meaning. Visual communication, from the scientific aspect, is the directed "individual or social consensual validity," which is received and accepted by individuals, social groups (whose focus might be culture, art, science, sports, education, or economy), church and religious groups, political parties, state and social institutions, and the public in general. The senders of the visual messages (which may be in the form of commercials, videos, web pages, logos, or brands) are suggesting a possible social or individual reward to the recipient of the visual message. This reward can be gained by receiving the intermediated message. Also possible is the negative individual or social consequences, which we can expect if we refuse to accept the intermediated message.

Visual communication and communication with visual signals is instantaneous and reaches the receiver with the speed of light. Intensity and color of the intermediated visual message, and the process of visual communication itself, is limited. By night or in the dark, visual communication is limited, and clear intermediation of visual signals is impossible (for example, commercial visual messages on posters or billboards at locations with very little light). Visual communication is a complex and complicated process of

intermediation and of presenting visual messages (such as on the World Wide Web), in a medium of limited expression of visual rhetoric on computers and via the new convergent media.

Written communication, which enables the coordination of human activities, encompasses the greatest epochal scope of the human mind,. In ancient cultures literacy was, in terms of communication, an expression of a prominent and significant social role, always in correlation with religion and the ruling class. The priests were the first to learn to use the new written visual art, and writing was also used by potentates to establish hierarchical relations between men.

When man first drew visual characters and signs on rocks, he thought that this marvelous visual message had a magical power. It was a new magic which connected humans. Writing was a new form of visual communication, which not only integrated tribes, but also, in the communication sense, has reached wider horizons. Mankind has achieved global communication and the world has been transformed into a "global village." The invention of writing systems has stimulated cultural development and the progress of civilization more than any other activity in the history of humankind (Vreg, 1988).

Socrates and Plato considered serious dialogue to be an ideal medium for philosophic intermediation and the creation of knowledge. Dialogic speech should be distinguished from written and visual uses of language. Before the invention of the visual written form of language, humans were communicating by speech and movement or gesture. Speech communication was a crucial ingredient in making the distinction between humankind and ape species. Plato emphasizes that when speech is materialized in the written form, the written word (written communication) by act of inscription becomes independent from the author (the creator of the visual message) and it becomes a part of the public domain.

When the creator (author) of the written visual message no longer can influence the communication process and the path of his visual written expression, he also loses the control of monitoring the influence of his written words. Such is the destiny of created visual messages. The philosophy of creating visual messages involves considering how cognitive and esthetic knowledge contributes to intellect and to thinking about science and art, in the creative process of the intermediation of visual communication.
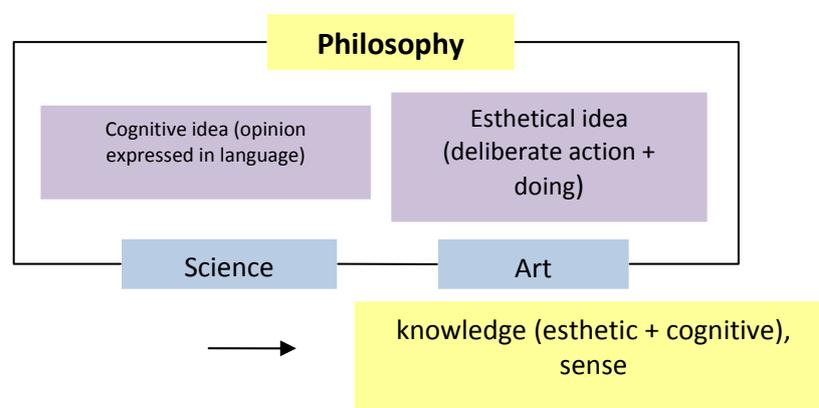
Visual communication consists of logical, gnostic, ethical, esthetical, and metaphysical thinking in the act of creating and intermediating messages. In this process man (creator) becomes "homo ludens" (playful man in science and art) on his way to becoming "homo faber," man who works with graphical tools and the new information www technology). Francis Bacon (Plenković, and Plenković, 1999) said that on the road of human cognitive holistic development, there are four constantly threatening errors, and those are: (1) "idol tribus" (all that man can see is only a view from the limited perspective of "homo sapiens," who is not capable of understanding the whole universe); (2) "idol specus" (besides general anthropomorphic limitations, man is also limited by his individual constitution in looking at the world and life); (3) "idol fori" (man is finally limited by uncritical fashion, which arises from common uncritical knowledge); and (4) "idol theatric" (man's knowledge is limited by the opportunities for communication, that is, there is the limitation from dogmatic learning which is imposed by force).

If we regard text as a primary means of communication, we can claim that Postmodernism is based on a dogmatic belief in what is seen and on constant affirmation of believing in what is seen. Visual communication corresponds with modernistic beliefs. Photography is a clear example of a permanent effort to making visual appropriation of modernity via a form of magic. Photography enables the multiplication of manifestations in the world which surrounds us (Jenks, 2002), and it introduces us into the world of sign communication. Visual communication signals have deep genetic roots. Every person visually signalizes with his or her appearance, color of clothes, fashion style, decorative objects, and other signs which indicate status and social position.

Most of the human visual signs are created according to a person's culture, and they indicate social status and social belonging. In every communication process, the basic elements of communication are comprised of: (1) the sender (creator) of the message; (2) the process of coding the message; (3) the communication channel; (4) possible interference in the communication channel; (5) the process of decoding; (6) the message recipient; and (7) the possibility of feedback information. On the same principles and according to semiotic theory, Ralf Lankau (2007) operates a visual system of graphic communication which includes, besides text, images and info graphics. He uses the two basic communication-graphic terms "grams" and "graphic," which, with their terminology roots, determine all basic visual and graphic communication terms:

Theory of signs (semiotics)

Visual system of graphic signs

Script   **Graphic**   **Picture**

| - gram | | - graphy |
|---| |---|

Sign script   Abstract signs   Real picture
Sign word   Concrete signs   Montage
Specific signs   Artificial picture   Collage
Glipts   Symbols   Persiflage
                                                                           Illustrations

Examples: Techniques:
Anagrams   Graphic
Diagrams   Computer graphic
Histograms   Typography
Ideograms   Photography
Monograms   Lithography
Pictogram   Lexicography

4. Formulation of Communication Terms in the Research of Visual Communication

Visual communication in a process of holistic strategy of public action increases the effects of visual communication in space and time, so it is intelligible that in order to understand visual communication it is necessary to know the scientific and phraseology structure of the visual communication process. For understanding the structure of the visual communication process in the context of a holistic strategy of public action, it is necessary to define thirty selectively chosen basic operative communication terms which are used in standard scientific and phraseology communication, the graphic media discourse. The basic terms in the analysis of visual communication systems are: *information, communication, media, communication science, visual communication* and *public*. Without defining these basic terms and 24

secondary communication terms, it is impossible to start any serious communication discussion and research analysis of visual communication within the process of strategic public action.

4.1 Terminology

Etymologically, (in)formation means "to put in form" (in forman), "to be in an essence." Information is a human awareness of some form as a product of symbolic human action transformed into some other system (such as speech, letters, signs…). As cognition, of course, information is connected with a category of power, because the concept of the beginning knowledge is always some form of human power over what is known. Regarding this, hundreds of years ago, Francis Bacon had formulated this thought when he said, "tantum scimus, quantum possimus," and by that he equated information (knowledge) and human power (Plenković, 1980).

In the *Dictionary of Foreign Words* written by V. Anić and I. Goldstein, 'information' is defined (2002) as an observation about facts, a report on something, an element of knowledge, or an elementary observation which can be transmitted and formed, thanks to code and device. 'Information' as an adjective is a term which relates to informing. 'Communication' is information, which transforms from status per se to utilization value; it becomes valuable to other people too. Etymologically, 'to communicate' means to talk (communicatio-onis-conversation), to talk to each other, to exchange information.

'Communication' is giving and receiving information; dealing with the act of communicating; or a traffic connection between two places (by road, railway, ship or airplane). 'Communication' as an adjective means belonging to communication. 'To communicate' means to give and to receive information; to be in touch; to serve, to maintain, to establish; to make communication. A 'communicative' person is someone who easily talks to people, who is open, talkative, who is easily understandable, reachable. 'Communicativeness' is savyness, openness, a skill in dealing with and understanding other people. 'Communication science' is a science which deals with the structure of communication processes and systems (communication + logos).

'Visual' (adjective) belongs to the sense of sight, that which is seen or can be seen; or which can be realizable or controlled solely by the use of sight. A 'visual type is a person who easily remembers events or things which he can see. 'Visual identity' is a group of artistic visual (style or symbolic) characteristics, which reflects the communication specifics of a firm or a product. 'Visual media' is an instrument for transmitting messages intended for sight (paper, TV, film, www pages). 'Visualization' is the ability to present or imagine something in images (info graphics).

'Media' is a presumption of so-called materialization of information. Without transposing information in some communication media (such as speech, a sight channel, electromagnetic waves, letters, books, the

web, info graphics…), it stays invisible and inaudible to all people, except to the author (creator). Media should not be treated as a mechanism, only as a vehicle for transmission of human messages, yet dialectically, in unity with man and his information and communication development. 'Media' are instruments of communication, modern instruments for transmitting information (newspapers, books, film, radio, TV, the Internet).

'Mediation' is an intermediation of a third party in a conflict between two sides. 'Medius' is something around which everything gathers, a center, which is in the middle (lat. Medianus). A 'mediator' is someone who intermediates, someone who is between the sender and the receiver of the information. 'Media' (adjective) is that which belongs to the media (media man). 'Publicity' (German *Öffetlichkeit*, French publicite) is referring to what is public (lat. Publicus). The public (1) is a group of all individuals who are pointing their attention to questions of sociopolitical interest; (2) a sphere of communicating between audience members (gathering, associations, communication meanings); and (3) an organizational principle of the acting of institutions and institutional bodies, which are established with the aim of taking care of common and public interests (Prpić, Puhovski, Uzelac, 1990).

'Holism' (holistic) is a principle in which we consider man or appearances as a whole and parts of the same whole. Communication analysis is conducted theoretically and praxeologically from the aspect of a complex approach to affects of visual communication in the strategy of public action considering multidisciplinary social, anthropology, communication, psychology and technology-graphic multidisciplinary holistic paradigms. 'Visual culture' is a totality of material and spiritual goods, ethical and social values, created by mankind. The word 'culture' is derived from the Latin word *cultivare*, which means to take care, to honor. Culture is a universal good which should be explained to every individual and society (Wehmeier, 2000).

'Digitalization' is the transmission of visual messages in digital graphic form. Digitalization transfers all forms in electronic form and virtual sphere, so it is said that it creates new media. Digitalization refers to visual entry and transmission of information to the public. Internet and digital media are observed in a context of the development of culture of visual communication in all segments of cultural doings (graphic communication, music, visual culture, design, media culture, film and civil living). 'Strategy' is observed as a long- term way of reaching communication goals in visual communication in public and in general public movements.
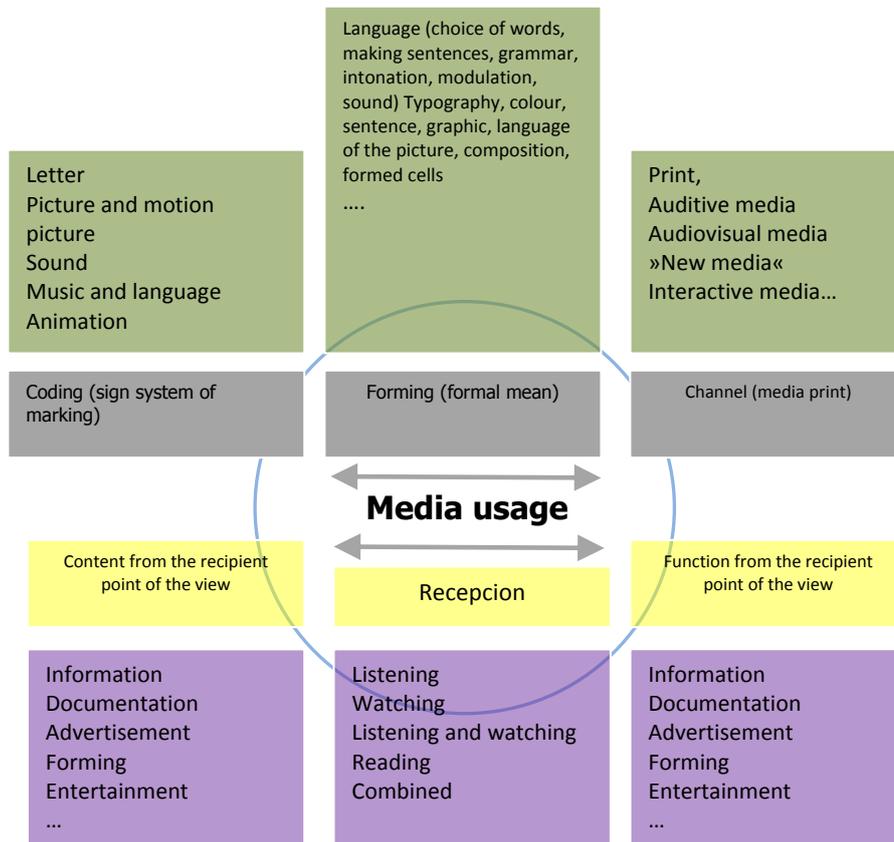
'E-visual culture' is an expression which is used in visual culture and in reaching wanted goals in visual and cultural media policies. E-visual culture refers to events in graphic arts, digital media, media institutions and cultural communications. 'Image' is a visual appearance or impression in public; behavior towards an audience; public and society in general. 'Advertising' is a form of communication which differs from persuasion, and its goal is to achieve the reaction desired by the author of the message. Advertising is a

structured and systematic attempt to form perceptions by manipulation of cognition and directing behavior, with the goal of the promoter getting the desired reaction.

'Propaganda' is a type of systematically disturbed and planned communication. 'Public opinion' is, according to J. Dewey, judgment formed by the ones who are making public, and it refers to public affairs. Walter Lippman in a wider definition asserts that public opinion consists of images in our heads about human beings, images about us, about others, and their needs, goals and relationships (Plenković, 2001).

4.2 Media and Visual Message

The process of using visual messages is defined, according to R.Lankau (2007, 78), by using media in the process of intermediation of visual communication (coding, forming and media print).

Language (choice of words, making sentences, grammar, intonation, modulation, sound) Typography, colour, sentence, graphic, language of the picture, composition, formed cells
….

Letter Picture and motion picture Sound Music and language Animation		Print, Auditive media Audiovisual media »New media« Interactive media…
Coding (sign system of marking)	Forming (formal mean)	Channel (media print)

Media usage

Content from the recipient point of the view	Recepcion	Function from the recipient point of the view
Information Documentation Advertisement Forming Entertainment …	Listening Watching Listening and watching Reading Combined	Information Documentation Advertisement Forming Entertainment …

5. Holistic Strategy of Public Action in Visual Communication

Every theory and theory of holistic strategy of public action also is a way of viewing the concrete problem of visual communication, with the goal of explaining position and the role of visual communication in strategic communication with the public. The basic hermeneutical question arises: Is visual communication in public action understandable to intermediated publics (the general public, special publics, the media public, a new public)? Visual communication is also communication language (message) which enables us to have joint experience of the message (language of communicating), because it uses visual communication code (visual language) as partial language of already experienced communication. Communication language of visual communication is not only a medium for attracting audience (public), but it is also an act of understanding in specific time, intermediated culture and political moment of intermediated message (Plenković, 2001). Holistic strategy of public action is aimed at public understanding and citizens' visual communication in five strategic communication levels:

(I) Public action as a programmed definition of intention and aim of visual communication; (II) Planning of the visual message in public action regarding structural difference of the recipient of visual message, and conflict of different ideologies, and citizen's religious and political orientation;

(III) Theory of public action is strongly based on communication traditions and empiricism. Managing with visual communication, with skills and techniques of creating and intermediating messages is the basic strategic commitment of creative management in creating and using symbols, signs and the drama of visual message;

(IV) Production and content function of visual message is professional responsibility for accomplished relationships between different social groups, which originated from public action of visual communication in the construction of social reality;

(V) Visual communication in communicating with the public contributes to the construction of the reality image, which puts the synthetic information which deals with some thematic question to the spotlight or puts upon some suggestive advertising message in the process of public action, or it forms public citizen opinion.

A holistic strategy of public action via visual messages can not be apart from the role and the selection of the media in the process of communicative public action. Understanding visual communication is media, dialectic, linguistics, designer and communicative creative events. From the holistic and hermeneutic point of view, visual communication in a strategic public action is an anthology and phenomenology of understanding visual communication in specific media code. Keys of the success of visual communication are not manipulation and the obtruding of false visual values, but rather communication, graphics and designer creativity worked out in eventful public dialogue. This should occur in the process of public action

and citizen understanding. Visual communication in the holistic strategy of public action is focusing on communicative needs of public to visualize ideas about events, products, commercials or objects (what?), skills, colors, directions and movements (how?), reasons and causes of communicating (why?) and communication timing (when?).
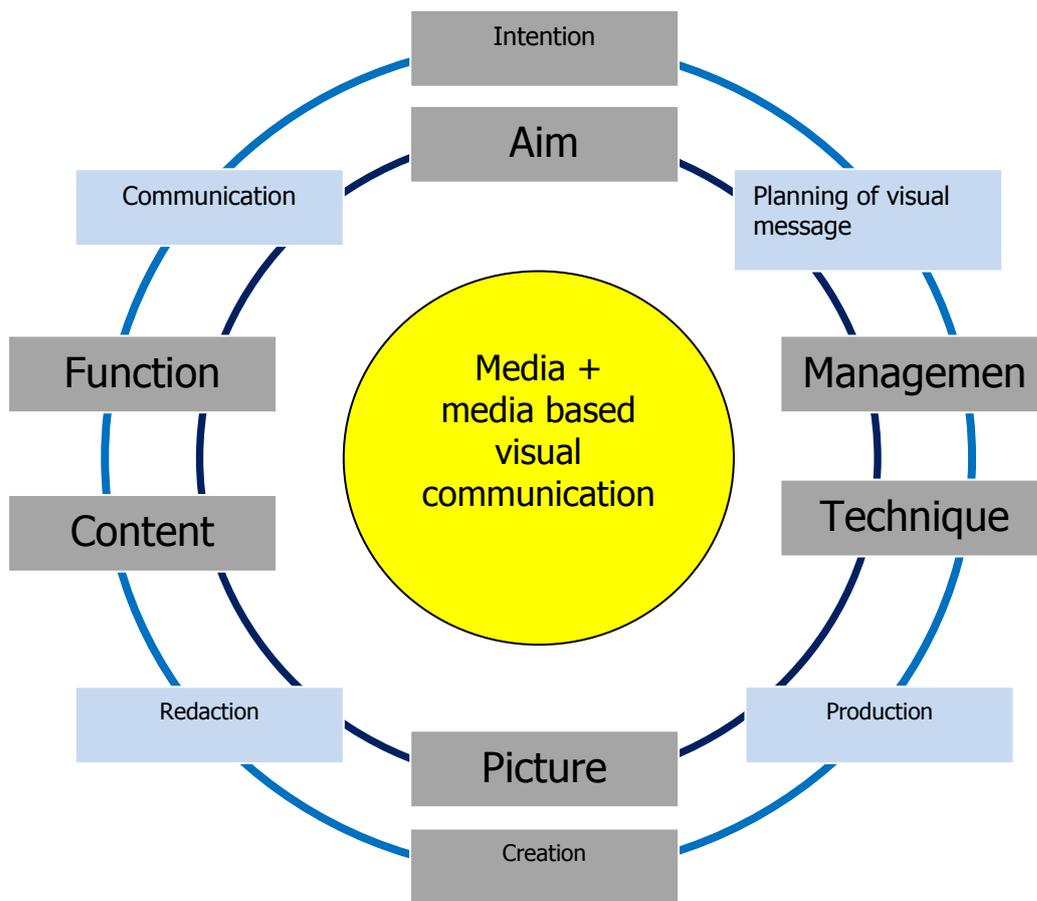
6. Concluding Comments

Visual communication and the holistic strategy of public action is the professional and social preoccupation of every communication scientist, graphics and media designer, creator and distributor of visual messages, marketing and designer agencies, creative media and education institutions, advertisement and

propaganda institutions, economy and parties' subjects, civil society and government and non-government institutions.

Exchanging visual communication in publics is a complex communication process. Because of these reasons, visual communication is an extremely complex and creative mission, which must be based on relevant communication theories and media models. When we look for the specifics of visual communication in praxeological theory and sense of all creative participants, it is necessary to conduct holistic and interdisciplinary analysis and to think about the creative future of visual communication. To understand communication essence and the core of creating visual communication, it was necessary to define basic operative terms for scientific research and praxeological creative determination of the phenomenology of visual communication in this paper.

Audience as a recipient of visual messages is numerous, heterogeneous, dissipated, anonymous and autonomously defined (citizens choose for themselves intermediated visual messages). In the process of mass communication the recipient of visual communication are the key for the process of usage of visual communications.The new historical era of visual communication is more and more defined by citizens of Internet and the strong development of media digitalization and the influence of modern ICT technologies in the convergent media environment.

Visual communication opens new avenues of communication and political possibilities for establishing participative media democracy. These goals can be accomplished by utilitarian use of visual advantages for creation of civil society and affirmation of social and economy sector. The development of visual communication should be observed in the context of reaching social, economical and political cohesion and media support for Croatians to join the European Union and Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

References

Anić, V., & Goldstein, I. (2002). *Riječnik stranih riječi* (2nd ed.). Zagreb: Novi Liber.

Arnheim, R. (1974). *Art and visual perception : a psychology of the creative eye*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London : University of California Press, cop.

Elezović, S. (2006). *Antropologija komunikacije*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko antropološko društvo & Hrvatsko komunikološko društvo.

Fiske, J. (2005). *Uvod v komunikacijske študije*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede.

Inglis, F. (1977). *Teorija medija*. Zagreb: Barbat & AGM.

Jenks, C. (2002). *Vizualna kultura*. Zagreb: Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Hrvatsko sociološko društvo.
Kepes, G. (1995). *Language of Vision*. New York: Dover.

Kerestin, A. (2007). *Konpendium der visuellen Information und Kommunikation*. Belin Heidelberg: Springer Verlag.

Kučiš, V. (2008). Competence Development for Translators and Interpreters – The Case of the Department for Translation Science at the University of Maribor, *Informatologia.* Vol. 41, No. 2, 149-155.

Lankau, R. (2007). *Lehrbuch Medingestaltung, Grundlagen der kommunikation und Visualisierung*. Heildelberg: Dpunkt Vrlag GmbH.

McNair, B. (2004). Uvod u političku komunikaciju. *Politička misao*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 173-179.

McLuhan, M. (2003). *Understanding media : the extensions of man*. Corte Madera (CA) : Gingko Press.

Plenković, M. (1980). *Demokratizacija masmedija*. Zagreb: Biblioteka komunikacijske znanosti, Centar za informacije i publicitet.

Plenković, M. (1988). *Suvremena radiotelevizijska retorika*. Zagreb: Stvarnost.

Plenković, M. (2001). Holistička analiza odnosa s javnostima (javnošću). *Informatologia*, Vol. 34, No.1-2, 1-165.

Plenković, M. (2002). Krizno komuniciranje i teorija odnosa s javnostima. *Media*, *culture* and *public relations*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1-129.

Plenković, M. & Plenković, J. (1999). Kvalitativna holistička klasifikacija ljudskog znanja i znanosti. *Informatologia*, Vol. 32, No.1-2, 1-136 (28).
Prpić, I., Puhovski, Ž. & Uzelac, M. (1990). *Leksikon temeljnih pojmova politike*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

Ruisinger, D. (2007). *Online Relations, leitfaden fur moderne PR im Netz*. Stutgart: Schaffer-Poeschel Verlag.

Seckel, A. (2007). *Optische Illusionen 2*. Muenchen: Basermann.

Tomažič, T., Udir Mišič, K. & Plenković, M. (2008). Communicative and persuasive role of the event and spectacle in the city promotion as a tourist brand in: *Tourism & Hospitality Industry 2008 : new trends in tourism and hospitality management : congress proceedings*, Opatija: Faculty of Turism and Hospitality Management (1083-1094).

Vreg, F. (1988). *Humana komunikologija*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko komunikološko društvo & Nonacom.

Wehmeier, S. (ed.). (2000). *Oxford Advanced English Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.