1 Introduction

In their description of the "Third Age of Political Communication", Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) suggested that to politicians the present-day third-age media system must loom like "a hydra-headed beast, the many mouths of which are continually clamouring to be fed. When something happens, they are expected to tell the media what they are going to do about it well before they can be fully informed themselves. For journalists, the news cycle has accelerated, since more outlets combined with increased competition across them piles pressure on all involved to keep the story moving and to find fresh angles on it." (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999, p.213)

Bulmer's & Kavanagh´s characterization of "the third age" of political communication was given at the turn of the century and has proven to be both influential and useful for the discussion of new realities facing political communication in a digital age. According to this characterization, the proliferation of the means of communication was shaped by five trends: intensified professionalizing imperatives, increased competitive pressures, anti-elitist populism, a process of "centrifugal diversification," and changes in how people received politics. (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999) These trends in turn were influenced by long-term social, economic and cultural background changes that occurred in the post-war period. Among these long-term changes were e.g. modernization with increased social differentiation and specialization, fragmenting social organization, interests and identities; proliferating diverse lifestyles and moral stances on the one hand and individualization on the other hand, where citizens had become more like consumers than believers in their approach to politics.

The change in political communication captured by the phrase "third age", has been widely recognized in the literature and has been referred to with different terms, "electoral glut" and "transformation of political communication" being cases in point (Negrine, 2008). Although much that has been written refers to an Anglo-American perspective (Gurewich, Coleman & Blumler, 2009), the Scandinavian countries, Norway and Iceland included, have experienced a similar transformation. In these countries as elsewhere this process has been a decisive and highly visible characteristic of democratic politics and media practices. The

political process as a whole and not the least the political parties have had to adjust to a very different media landscape and media technology at the same time as the media itself – both the old media and the new media – are faced with transformed political realities and conditions as well as a new role in the democratic process. In this paper an attempt is made to map out some of the main characteristics of the new realities of political communications in Iceland and in Norway. As will become apparent below, the notion of a "third age of political communication" certainly characterizes these two countries. At the same time this transformation of political communication is firmly rooted in and conditioned by the older, established and more traditional order, to the point that one can talk about coexistence of old and new modes of communication. This is indeed in line with what is suggested in some of the theoretical literature review that follows.

2 Political Communication in transformation

The theoretical literature on political communication and on the democratic nature of modern media systems identifies in general terms the significance of this change or transformation, but from somewhat different points of view. The seminal study of Hallin and Mancini can be seen as a general framework for a classification of media systems in Europe and to an extent it laid the foundation for a meaningful comparison and understanding of social, economic, and cultural difference and similarities (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However it does not and was not intended to focus on the changes or challenges these different systems face from technological advances.

Much of the literature addresses the changing situation only by implication, as it deals with specific aspects of the changing realities, such as new election techniques or through case studies and examples of how the new media affect political communication. (see e.g. Gibson & McAllister 2011; Nisbet & Myers, 2010)

However, others focus on the change itself and take a more comprehensive view in order to characterize the main features of the transformation. Dahlgren (2005) saw this change –

which is largely linked to the technological development of the internet but also to social, economic and cultural factors – through the lens of the public sphere perspective and defined it as a destabilizing factor for established systems of political communication.

With respect to the political communication aspect of this transformation, some major elements can be drawn from the literature, the most prominent being the emphasis on professionalization. Mancini (2001) spoke of a new frontier of political professionalism. This new frontier constituted a fundamental change in politics and government, where technical experts who operated on an open market had assumed a central place in decision-making and the way in which the political game was played. This technological professionalism was of a global nature, although it varied in form from one country to another, but the overall effect was to turn political parties into what Mancini called "communication machines", that sought to manipulate voters, and turn politics and decision-making into a technical assignment in communication strategy.

Professionalization of politics, electoral campaigns, strategies, parties and candidates has thus been the subject of study as has been the professionalization of the coverage of professionalized politics. Esser, Reinemann and Fan (2001) suggested a new theory of "metacommunication", which was based on a cross-country content analysis of spin doctors in the press. This referred to a new style of reporting which takes into account the interaction between political public relations on the one hand and political journalism on the other.

An important aspect of the transformation or "destabilization" of existing systems of political communication is the view of authors who have seen the advent and possibilities of communication through the internet (e.g. blogging) as an emancipatory democratic revolution that opens up the hierarchical power structures of traditional media by enabling everyone to express himself in an unlimited digital public sphere (Gilmour, 2004). While the notion of grass-root democracy based on the advent of new media has been expressed through the writings of bloggers, independent activist communication networks and social media, there is nonetheless much evidence of continuity with traditional media in the production and framing of content. A suggestion of this kind has been made with respect to traditions and journalism principles that remain unchanged or little changed from the old media to the new media (Wolfsfeld, 2011). Also, an indication of continuity between the new

and old media has been pointed out in terms of the theory and practices of viewing media effects. In particular, the conditions and the processes by which news influence the public, i.e. the content of the message, the level of exposure and the existing predispositions, are central to all media, old and new (McCombs, et.al. 2011).

The transformation of the media environment and destabilization of existing systems of political communications is massive and important, but it is also imperative not to lose sight of the continuities in the development. Indeed it has been a tendency within the literature of political communication to neglect the historical dimension or the historical perspective. Ryfe (2001) has pointed out the absence of a historical consciousness in the study of political communication and traced it to the field's roots in social psychology, political science, and early mass communication research. Yet much of what is written quite often "depends upon implicit, unquestioned historical narratives" (Ryfe, 2001, p.407). Thus it seems imperative to focus not only on the fragmented media condition, the new media and the professionalization of today, but also on what has not changed and how the continuities from older media express themselves with regard to political communication and the democratic process itself.

Some authors have emphasized the importance of history as well as the concept of professionalization, and both were at the heart of Ralph Negrine ´s seminal analysis of the transformation of political communication (Negrine, 2008). The idea of adaption receives special significance in this approach, i.e. the continuous adaption or adjustment of politics to the changing media environment and the on-going adaption or adjustment of the media to new political realities. The study of the transformation or professionalization of political communication thus becomes a study of both changes and continuities. Negrine suggested a condition of an on-going flux as "it is important to note how parties and media adapt constantly to one another and that in longer term process of adaptation relationships are forever being negotiated and renegotiated" (Negrine 2008 p. 45).

3 Research questions

In Norway and Iceland this process of adaption can be expected to have developed and ripened considerably in the last decade or two, whereas both countries have a tradition of extensive public media use and a diverse professional market-oriented media system as well as an established tradition in democratic practices. Furthermore, both countries score high when it comes to household internet connection and the use of social media such as Facebook (Quintly, 2013). In particular, the question of how this process of adaption manifests itself with the major political actors in these two countries is of interest here. Drawing on the existing literature, two points are of special concern. First is the question of the degree of professionalism, both within the political parties themselves and among the journalists of the traditional media. The second aspect relates to the technological advances and the proliferation of possibilities in communication through digital means on the internet in general and through social media in particular. This brings forth at least three research questions about the way in which the parties deal with and adopt in the continuous "negotiation and renegotiation" of changing relations within political communication.

The first question relates to the new media and the explosion of communication possibilities and asks: *How do the political parties in Norway and Iceland adapt to and utilize the new communication technology and the new internet-based media?*

The second question relates to the communication between the professional journalists (traditional media) and politics (guided by professional communication people) and asks: *What are the characteristics of the relationship between traditional media and politics in a transformed system of political communication?*

The third question focuses more on the parties themselves and their role as an organisation that articulates opinions and demands into a coherent policy package and asks: *Does the adaption of political parties to a transformation in political communication influence party policy and organizational structure?*

4 Method

In order to answer these questions a qualitative research was conducted consisting of ten semi-standardized interviews with the leading communication people of most of the national political parties – five in Norway and five in Iceland. Those interviewed had all the job title "chief of communication" of the central offices of the parties or something comparable, but in two cases others were interviewed, i.e. people who the communication chiefs themselves specifically asked to answer the questions in their place. In Norway three women and two men were interviewed, whilst in Iceland three men and two women. A question sheet with 10 main questions and some follow-up questions was prepared on the grounds of the above research questions. The questions dealt with: a) what media outlets are the most important and why; b) the division between old and new media; c) the extent of the influence of communication on structure and policy; d) the relations between political parties and professional journalists.

In order to give the respondents as much space as possible to express themselves, all the questions were open-ended and the interview was allowed to float freely. In general, communication officers of political parties can be expected to be articulate people and thus open questions were thought to suit them well. However, it was made clear in the beginning that a certain list of questions would be addressed and that the interview would not be longer than 30-45 minutes, since that has been suggested as a sensible length for interviews of this kind (Jónsdóttir, 2003).

The interviews were conducted in the fall of 2012 in Oslo, Norway and in the early spring 2013 in Reykjavík, Iceland. The language used was English in Norway (with the possibility of using some Norwegian if needed) and Icelandic in Iceland. All interviews were taped and then written out word for word to enable thematic analysis. In Norway the representatives interviewed came from *Arbeiterpartiet* (Workers Party), *Fremskrittspartiet* (Progressive Party), *Højre* (Right Party), *Sosialistisk Venstreparti* (Socialist Left Party), and *Kristilegt folkeparti* (Christian Peoples Party). Due to technical problems, representatives of two of the parties that have members in the Sorting were not interviewed, i.e. *Senterpartiet* (Centre Party) and *Venstre* (Left Party). However, because of the qualitative nature of the research and the relative smallness of the *Venstre* with only 2 seats in Parliament at the time, this should not have a major effect on the outcome.

In Iceland the representatives came from *Sjálfstæðisflokkur* (Independence Party),

Framsóknarflokkur (Progressive Party), *Samfylking* (Social Democratic Alliance), *Vinstri græn* (Left-Green Party), and *Björt framtíð* (Bright Future). These are the traditional four core parties of the Icelandic party system and in addition a representative of a new party, *Björt framtíð*, which was at the time of the interviews getting considerable support in the polls and received six seats in parliament in the spring elections of 2013. The reason for including this party in the sample was to broaden the perspective and see if a new, apparently successful party using new methods of communication would give additional insights into the process of adaption.

5 Results

Analysis of the interviews suggests that five overriding themes are present in modern-day political communication of the political parties in Iceland and Norway. These are themes that present themselves in some way in all or almost all the interviews and they are interrelated, but some are also somewhat contradictory. Sometimes sub-themes can be detected which suggests that the five main themes are to be seen as broad generalisations. The five themes are the following:

Agenda setting: Setting the agenda for the general discussion in society (the public sphere in general)

Target groups: Targeting of special groups in a fragmented (media) reality (different public spheres)

Internal Communication: The importance of the possibility of a party to have its own means of communication for personal contact and organisational purposes

Professionalization: The need for communication specialists, communication capable politicians, and change in organization and practice.

Holistic communication approach: The need to coordinate a wide variety of means of communication into a coherent communication strategy

Each of these themes needs further elaboration and explanation. In the following this will be discussed with reference to the two selected countries and the similarities and differences that can be detected in the interviews.

5.1 Agenda setting

In all interviews, both in Iceland and in Norway, the importance of the traditional media – television, radio, newspapers, and local newspapers – was very apparent. In particular, the interviewees stressed the importance of traditional media in relation to directing the agenda for discussion in society at large. Both implicitly and explicitly they expressed the view that the traditional media, especially the large national media, dictated what was being discussed and controlled the definition of what is considered an important issue within a given day. In Norway this is not only the case with the national media but also for the local and regional media, which the Norwegian interviewees believed to be very important in this sense. Indeed when pressed to suggest one type of media that was most important for their parties, most respondents mentioned the traditional media and television in particular.

5.1.1 A valuable general public sphere

The emphasis on the traditional media was seen to be the podium for the parties to talk to the "public" or the voters at large, a sort of national (or regional) public sphere. This view was present within all the parties in both countries, but in particular within the bigger parties that have a broad support base. However, the usefulness of this presence in the traditional media was confined to editorial content. Advertisements were not seen to have the same effect as they are not direct enough and do not shape the agenda of discussion in society. There was a strong sense in both countries that the agenda of this general public sphere was of great importance to politics and therefore very valuable for the parties to

participate in it as much as possible and influence it.

5.1.2 Credibility and relations with traditional media

The interviewees referred to and responded to open questions on the changes in the media landscape. Two things are important in this respect. Firstly, there are the changes that are brought about by the digital revolution, i.e. the multiplication of news outlets and the increased speed of communication. Secondly, the professional standards of journalism dictate that news is (or should be) reported on the terms of the journalist but not the politician. That means that a general journalistic criterion of newsworthiness would be applied to what gets into the news and what not. Some difference could be detected between Iceland and Norway in the respect of the interviewees for the professional work of political journalists. The Norwegian respondents almost universally believed the journalist to be independent and professional, while some of the Icelandic respondents believed journalists to have their own political agenda or be prepared to swallow well-prepared spins from the parties.

Both these points, the increased speed and the journalistic principles, have however called for a response from the parties, as it becomes steadily more important to be responsive to each and every request of the media. The importance of being so responsive stems from the credibility of the traditional media, a credibility that the media gets from adhering to the journalistic principles. This fact often came through in the interviews. Things that have found their way into the traditional media have much more credibility than most other forms of information and that is also the key to the importance of the general public sphere that is largely based on the traditional media.

5.1.3 Facebook and traditional media

An important element demonstrating the importance that the respondents placed on the agenda-setting power and credibility of the traditional media is their view of the relation

between social media, especially Facebook, and traditional media. Practically all interviewees brought up the distribution power of Facebook and the possibility of creating what one male respondent in Norway called the "long tail effect". He said:

"Well we see that the discussion that takes place in the new media is of course based on what is being said in the old media so if you get through in NRK og VG, which is the largest daily, then you can take that story into the new media and hype it up there. That way you get the long tail principle we are looking for. If you get through in the traditional media you can utilize the new media to keep the issue alive as long as you can. Thereby increasing the number of people that sees the story" (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 7th of September 2012).

5.2 Target groups

Media fragmentation, audience segmentation, and direct marketing are concepts that the respondents seemed to be very familiar with in one form or another. All of them stressed in the interviews that it was a very ineffective approach to try to talk to the general public, without analysing first the target group the message is aimed at. As an Icelandic male respondent said:*"I think that 'spray and prey' is not a good strategy in political communication today except maybe in very exceptional circumstances"* (Interview, Reykjavík, Iceland, 8th of March 2013).

This analysis and targeting of certain groups can be casual and not very thought out, but it can also be thoroughly calculated and planned. The categories the respondents most often mentioned first are rough groupings such as "old" people and "young" people. Young people would be more likely to follow the new media whereas older people would follow the traditional media. Similarly there seemed to be a general awareness that different types of traditional media, e.g. different newspapers, had their own special readership. This is true also for the local- national dimension. As one of the Norwegian male respondents said:"*If you want to push an agricultural issue you don't go to* Aftenposten*, you would go for* Nasjonen" (Interview Oslo, Norway, 7th of September 2012).

This sort of targeting is of course not new, but there is reason to believe from the interviews that this kind of thinking goes further now than before. Speculations and methods in marketing of goods and services in a fragmented market are clearly being adopted in political communication. In general this may be seen as somewhat paradoxical in light of the emphasis and value placed on the general public sphere or the national discourse in society that was discussed above. On the one hand there is an important general public sphere, but at the same time great emphasis is put on the fragmentation of the public sphere, or perhaps more correctly, on the multiplicity of public spheres. However, these different public spheres can certainly coexist with the general public sphere and are both the subject of important consideration for the parties.

5.2.1 Targeting and Facebook

The answers and elaborations of the interviewees on the matter of Facebook clearly demonstrate how the concepts and methods of marketing have influenced the field of political communication. This is demonstrated by the emphasis of most respondents on Facebook´s possibility to single out particular groups by putting certain parameters on the message – but that is primarily a function Facebook promotes as an effective marketing tool. A male respondent from Norway puts this point this way:

"*Our problem is that we only have had one channel for everyone, men, women, old, young, family people – everyone in Norway! Facebook has the instrument to split this up and we try to use that. We really sense that if things are relevant for people personally they continue to follow us and make comments*" (Interview Oslo, Norway, 21st of September 2012).

Targeting certain groups and sending out messages that the parties believe would interest this particular group is for all intents and purposes a form of direct marketing. As we shall see better a little later in this paper the messages being sold are not necessarily very political or about political issues but not less about image and sentiment. It is therefore not surprising that the respondents almost unanimously spoke of Facebook and indeed the new media as a more effective way to advertise than to remain in the traditional media. It is also a much less expensive way to place ads. But sometimes this targeting does not revolve

around limiting or defining the boundaries of groups. The contrary can be the case. Most of the respondents believed it was important to be able to buy so-called “sponsored statuses” in addition to putting some parameters on their messages. That way they do not only target certain groups that are “Facebook-friends”, but a much larger group. Most of the parties in both countries use these sponsored statuses to get selected messages into a wider circulation within desired groups and bypass of course the gate-keepers of the traditional media.

5.3 Internal Communication

The vision of Facebook as a modern way to maintain personal contact between politicians and voters is probably the strongest message coming through in all of the interviews, Facebook is seen as a new way to reach out, its most important being internal communication in a broad sense of the word. Three points can be drawn out specifically from the interviews that are important for this theme: the emphasis on the personal touch; organisation and dissemination of the “party spirit”;and the party platform.

5.3.1 The personal touch

Most of the respondents made a point of the possibilities the social media created for politicians to be in direct contact and dialogue with voters, or rather supporters. Facebook is the most important tool in this respect and in most of the parties in both countries members of parliament and other party representatives are urged by the communication people to be on Facebook. The Facebook page of the party itself is certainly important, but the personal pages of the politicians are even more so. A female Norwegian respondent put it this way:*“You see the social media is exactly that, social. You have to have friends here and there and that is more focused on people, so we try to… well we put more effort in promoting the page of the party leader… seeing how this figure is a person. It is more*

interesting than seeing… Okay what´s with the party now?" (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 17th of September 2012).

According to the interviewees, most politicians and especially party leaders were quick to get the hang of their Facebook sites and enjoy the feedback they get there. Interestingly, the respondents all seemed to agree that it was not possible for some communication official to put in statuses for the politicians: the personal nature of a politician´s Facebook page simply would render such an exercise futile.

5.3.2 Organisation and dissemination of "party spirit"

The nature of social media, Facebook in particular, is to be a community where all participants consent to becoming "friends". It ensues therefore that those who follow the political parties or politicians on Facebook are likely to be supporters or at least sympathisers. This seems to be clear to most of the interviewees, who all emphasised in some way the importance of Facebook as a facilitator for building internal party communities. To quote one of the Norwegian male respondents:

Yes Facebook is the most important in this sense. We are not going to talk to our opponents on Facebook! But we use it to talk about our policies and talk to our people. To be there for our people, which perhaps are not prepared to call us up or send us an e-mail, but maybe want to comment on a status on Facebook. In that way they can come in contact with us or other likeminded people that are thinking about the same things. You see, when social media first came, everyone thought this would be a meeting place and a great forum to debate for or against matters, but that did not happen… It is a place where people that agree with each other gather. On Facebook things tend to be positive, you like this or that and people that support some cause get together (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 7th of September 2012).

This view of Facebook is strong and some of the respondents also pointed out that it was not necessary and could even be a drawback if there was too much politics on the Facebook. The point was to show pictures, social gatherings and meetings, and emphasize the human-

interest side of the party organization. But while fulfilling that role, Facebook has become an important communications tool within parties – both disseminating information about organised events and not less importantly about the "party spirit". Thus Facebook and to a lesser extent other social media serve as tool for the party leaders and officials to play the role of "shepherds attending to their flocks".

Yet another point the interviewees stressed, and which is a part of this theme, is the role of the party homepage. This page is vital and is in a way the confirmation of the very existence of a party. Or in the word of one of the Icelandic male respondent: *"The party homepage is in many ways our electronic signal that we exist as a party. It is stuffed with information and we keep a watch on it and it is directed by an editorial committee that takes all strategic editorial decisions. It is a place where people can go to find us as a serious political party, look up our policies and practices, although all content is not necessarily very serious"* (Interview, Reykjavík, Iceland, 8th of March 2013).

Most of the respondents suggested that the homepage of the party was first and foremost a tool for communicating with supporters or party members, but not only that. It was clear from the interviews that considerable value is put on the homepage as a reference point, i.e. that in discussions conducted somewhere in society, they can refer people to the homepage for further information about the policies and actions of the parties. A Norwegian male respondent put it this way:*"The website is important for internal communication, but also more important in elections when voters start to search for information. The web then becomes more important, but between elections people don't use the party websites"* (Interview Oslo, Norway, 21st of September 2012).

There is reason to stress the importance of this point, as most of the interviewees mentioned it in one way or another, and then to pinpoint the need for the parties to have a place or an organ where the party's message and policies are put forth on the terms of the party itself. Many of the Icelandic respondents mentioned that it was important to "bypass the media" or deliver information "undistorted by the gate-keepers", which some respondents clearly suspect to have their own political agenda(Interviews, Reykjavík,27th of February 2013). This thought was also prevalent in Norway, although there was much more trust in the journalist´s motives in Norway than in Iceland. A female Norwegian respondent said somewhat jokingly, however: *"Well, it is definitely a plus for our homepage and indeed the*

social media that we do not have to speak to people through journalists!"(Interview Oslo, Norway, 6th of September 2012)

The party homepage and indeed some other digital forms of communication now serve as important tools for internal party communication. The homepage is seen as an independent information centre that gives out information and opinions on the terms of the political party itself, "undistorted" by the interpretation of media gate-keepers.

5.4 Professionalization

The professionalization of politics and media plays a major part in the general discussion on the transformation of political communication. The interviewees are all communication professionals, and thus a considerable share of the interviews revolved around the importance of communication professionals both for policy and structure. The general theme – as could be expected from this kind of people – was that politics could not be conducted in a modern way without active and massive assistance from communication professionals. Furthermore, practically all of the respondents, working for very different parties in terms of policy, size and economic standing, seem to believe that more funding and more manpower would be needed in the parties for these purposes. Three sub-themes or points can be detected under this general theme and these are: speed and pressure; the supremacy of politicians; and the changing requirements of politicians.

5.4.1 Speed and pressure

Increased speed of the flow of information is a common feature in the answers of the interviewees responding to open questions on recent changes in the media environment of the political parties. There are no longer single deadlines once a day and in addition there are now much more media outlets than just few years ago. All this increases the pressure on the parties, they have to be alert and ready all the time. Indeed it seems to be a universal command – at least with the parties in Norway and Iceland – that requests and questions

from the media need to be processed quickly in one way or another. So if the politicians themselves are too busy to respond, the information departments of the parties have to be able to provide some information or service to the press. The exact way in which this service is processed varies, but a common point is that all requests and questions are attended to. An Icelandic male respondent explains for his party:

I think the interaction with traditional media is in a more formal process now than some years ago. Then a journalist would talk casually with politicians from different parties, but now it has become more formal. Requests go to certain people that process them; we have had a lot of questions for our leader and that is all processed through his personal assistant. And the questions directed to parliamentarians now increasingly go through the adviser of the parliamentary party. But we think it is important to answer all inquiries (Interview, Reykjavík, Iceland, 27th of February 2013).

And similar points were made by the Norwegian respondents, as can be seen in a comment from an experienced male interviewee:

There are more of us (communication people) now than before, but the most important change is how fast everything is going. You cannot hide a news story for days, you cannot wait two days before going out and communicating on some issue. Everything is going fast with the internet and newspapers and social media. So things happening early in the day can be old news in the evening or the day after. So it's a challenge because we have to decide very quickly which message to use (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 21st of September 2012).

5.4.2 The supremacy of politicians

None of the interviewees was prepared to say that the communications professionals had anything to do with, or influence on, what policy issues or what kind of policies the respective parties adopted. It was quite consistent between different parties in both countries that the respondents stated that the politicians have supremacy when it came to politics and policy. They did however agree that on issues of tactics, e.g. the timing of

launching a political issue or the way in which and where a policy issue was presented, would often be a matter of consultation with communication officials. One female respondent in Norway pointed the following out:*"We are only advisors. I work for the party secretary, who sits next door to me, and I could advise him all day long, but it is his responsibility and decisions what he wants to look like and what he wants to say. And you know, I can only give advice but not tell him to do anything"* (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 6th of September).

In all cases, the interviewees stressed their roles as advisers and not as politicians. Sometimes even they complained about the lack of communication insight with politicians as in the apparently honest statement of an Icelandic female respondent:*"Well sometimes I think our members of parliament and leaders don't care at all about the media and public opinion, they always go for the difficult issues, the issues that is difficult to dress up and present"* (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 17th of September 2012).

Her male colleague with another Icelandic party however wondered where the interview was going when it came to this issue and said:*"It is the politicians that determine the politics and the policies, but not the communication people, but I know that this is also what you expect me to say as I am a communications person! But the only thing I can do is to tell this to you as convincingly as I can, because this is the fact of the matter"* (Interview, Reykjavík Iceland, 8th of March, 2013).

If the uncertainties raised by the last quote are set a side it seem that communication people have by and large important influence on the way in which policy is presented by the parties, but that the politicians determine the policy and the politics. Or to use a metaphor from one of the Norwegian female respondent, the communication people are somewhat like "translators, translating the messages of the politicians" into a language and a form that the voters can understand and be bothered to notice (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 6th of September 2012).

5.4.3 Changing requirements of politicians

The third sub-theme or point that presented itself under the general theme of professionalization relates not to the professional people but to the politicians. It seems that all the respondents in both countries were quite preoccupied with the task of training and teaching the politicians how to use and benefit from the variety of communication tools and outlets available. A Norwegian respondent put it this way:

We get new MP´s into parliament or municipal representatives in the communes and some of them are very powerful in communicating their ideas and policies. Others may not be as powerful in that field even though their politics is just as good – they might be coming from a background that is very far from communication and find it very difficult to sell their point to the press. In these cases communications people can help and I believe that this arrangement helps making the parliament more accessible for all (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 7th of September 2012).

And beyond doing the training and teaching, the communications people see it as one of their major tasks to ensure that the politicians are using these tools. The transformation of political communication seems to introduce new requirements of the politicians and basically demand that they have considerable skills in communication and communication technology. This is something an Icelandic male respondent stressed:*"Well the times have changed and someone who wants to make it in politics has to be skilled in communications, either be a natural at it or someone who has acquired these skills. I think what is happening is that more and more politicians with background in communication are entering the scene, in a way they have a head-start on those who are not familiar with these kinds of things"* (Interview, Reykjavík, Iceland 28th of February 2013).

It was clear from the interviews that in practically all parties in both countries the role of a politician now requires a considerably greater degree of communication capabilities that just a few years ago, and that might also have some influence on the recruitment of politicians.

5.5 Holistic communication approach

The fifth and final theme can be seen as a logical conclusion of the other four, a sort of synthesis of different and somewhat contradictory themes. As the interviewees were pressed to suggest a short version of successful political communications on behalf of a party, they most often suggested it was best to use a mixture of means of communication integrated in a holistic strategy. This holistic approach is extremely important in times of elections according to most of the respondents, but also in between elections. Each and every method of communication has its merits and its drawbacks and thus the interviewees suggested that the big challenge was to find a successful combination, find the right strategy. A female Norwegian respondent suggested this:*"It is a mix, every time we are getting out a message we have a strategy for both traditional media and online media and also social media so we work those together. It is a kind of integrated strategy for all of them."* (Interview, Oslo, Norway, 7th of September 2012).

As the number of communication outlets increases and they become more specialized the level of complication increases calling for an overview and rigid organization of the allocation of party resources. This, many of the respondents seem to think, is instrumental for successful political communication in the present-day media environment.

5.6 General comparison – beyond the themes

Norway and Iceland share many political, cultural and economic traditions and values, it is therefore not very surprising how similarly the interviewees in both countries responded to comparable issues. Indeed there was only one point in which a marked difference could be detected, and that was in the attitude towards the traditional media. In Norway the respondents expressed a far greater trust in the professionalism and party impartiality of journalists than was the case in Iceland. Thus it can be said that while comparison between the two countries was a part of the exercise, with the expectations of finding important differences, those differences were only found in this one area. However, in light of the

importance of the general public sphere in political communication, this difference is important. The reason may relate to the fact that professionalism in traditional media in Norway appeared earlier and is more developed than in Iceland and the Norwegian media system is by and large stronger, receives more public support and has therefore the conditions to be more independent than the Icelandic one (Harðarson, 2008; Krumsvik,2012) .

Similarly, not much difference was observed between the political parties themselves. Although the interviewees represented very different organisations both in terms of ideology, history and size, same or similar views emerged in terms of political communication. Still, a point is worth making, even if this may be really a question of shades of grey rather than black and white. The parties on the left, partly including the social democratic parties, seem to have bigger problems with the very concept and terminology of the "new means of communication" than more market-oriented parties. This may be because of ideology, since much of the strategic thought in political communication now is based on marketing principles – something that is traditionally held in rather low esteem by the left.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

The description of the system of political communication in Iceland and Norway as drawn up in the interviews of this research is a good concrete example of "third stage" political communication. The characteristics embodied in the five themes all suggest and support the notion of a transformation in this field similar to the one discussed in the general literature. In fact these five dimensions can be seen as a characterization of the main traits of political communication in these two countries and even give some suggestions on something that might be called a Nordic type of political communication.

Three questions were asked at the onset about political communication in Iceland and Norway and it is useful to have a look at these questions in light of the five themes derived from the research.

The first question was: *How do the political parties in Norway and Iceland adapt to and utilize the new communication technology and the new internet-based media?* This matter is directly addressed under the theme “target groups”, “internal communication” and also indirectly under the other three themes. The new communication technology, in particular the social media, is used to target different groups in a fragmented public sphere and it is also used as an important internal communication and organizational tool. Furthermore, the new means of communication have enabled the parties to maintain an independent voice where they can put forth their message without going through the traditional media.

The second question was: *What are the characteristics of the relationship between traditional media and politics in a transformed system of political communication?* This question is dealt with at length under the “agenda setting” theme and also under the theme “Professionalization”. Traditional media are clearly still extremely important as there exists a very valuable “general public sphere” that the parties need to have access to and participate in. Much of the time and communication effort of the parties is devoted to addressing this point, not only by trying to be in the traditional media, but also by using new media to prolong and increase the spread and influence of having been in the media. The value of this general public sphere, which is mainly based on the traditional media, is to a large extent based on the credibility of the media and their adherence to professional journalistic principles.

The third question was: *Does the adaption of political parties to transformation in political communication influence party policy and organizational structure?* This question is the main subject of the considerations that fall under the theme “professionalization”. It is however also addressed in part under all the other themes. The changing media environment has increased the speed and pressures of daily decision-making calling for a twofold professionalization within the parties. On the one hand, communication experts and communication departments have become important parts of the structure of all parties, although their size and influence varies somewhat between parties. On the other hand, an even greater time and effort of the politicians goes into communication. They need to demonstrate certain communication skills, and make sure they acquire them, if they do not have a background in communication. This might have become an important factor in the recruitment of politicians.

In spite of the growing importance of successful communication and the fact that some issues and policies are easier to communicate than others, the supremacy of policy-making and of politics seems – still at least – to be largely with the politicians and not with the communication people. Therefore, Mancini´s point about "communication machines" might not be as determining in Norway and Iceland as in some other countries, although the point must be kept in mind that the present research is based on interviews with communications people, who would probably find it in their interest to downplay their role in politics rather than the opposite (Mancini, 2001).

In general this research pinpoints two dimensions for further research and discussion. Firstly, it gives a glimpse of the way in which parties in Iceland and Norway are adapting to changing conditions and how – as Negrine put it – "relationships are forever being negotiated and renegotiated" (Negrine, 2008 p. 45) This continuous process of adaption needs to be examined more extensively with quantitative research methods in both these countries to enable more definite generalizations. Furthermore, it is of particular interest to come up with a more comparative dimension to see if there is indeed something that could be labelled a "Nordic" or "North European" type of political communication that might correspond to, and be explained in terms of, Hallin & Mancini´s more general North/Central Europe or Democratic Corporatist Model of a media system. Such a type of political communication might be somewhat different from the characteristics of political communication in the two other types of media systems, the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model and the North Atlantic or Liberal Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Secondly, the research highlights the importance of marketing techniques in present-day political communication and draws attention to the general background process mentioned among others by Blumler and Kavanagh (1999), where voters or citizens have become consumers. This discussion connects the discussion of political communication and the new media to the conceptual discussion of the meaning of such terms as "the public", "a citizen" and indeed the very notion of the "public sphere" (Coleman & Ross, 2010). Presently, the "general public sphere", where the traditional media is an instrumental player, is considered of extreme value in political communication. Yet at the same time the different fragments of the public sphere, all the various niches, are also of utmost importance. What is more, this apparent contradiction between the whole and the parts of the public sphere might well be at the centre of the process of adaption and dialectical transformation of

political communication in the near future.

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