Nation for Sale? Citizen Online Debates and the ‘New Patriotism’ in Post-Socialist Poland

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Introduction

In order to describe today’s socioeconomic condition, particularly in the West, scholars often refer to formulations such as ‘the neoliberal era’ (Hall & Lamont, 2013) or the ‘market times’ (Hochschild, 2012). The concepts of neoliberalism or neoliberal globalization are employed to point out the new logics of social life, where the language of the market and economic exchange encompasses almost all spheres of social and political life. According to a popular thesis sometimes summed up by the ‘commodification of everything’ thesis, everything now is ‘for sale’ and ‘market thinking so permeates our lives that we barely notice it anymore’ (Sandel, 2012). To describe the gravity of this situation the alarmed critical voices point out that even the historically ‘authentic’ and noncommercial spheres of life such as religion, creativity, politics, and nation have become subject to the process of commodification (Banet-Weiser, 2012). This means that such spheres are increasingly experienced, defined, and understood within the logic and vocabulary of the market. Consequently, it can be argued that to study how corporate and commodity logic permeates these spheres is also to look at how people think, make sense of, construct, and experience different aspects of social and political life in the era of advanced capitalism.

Nation is one of these ‘authentic’ spaces that has traditionally been a basis for collective forms of identification. In the majority of literature nation has been primarily defined as a political and cultural domain remaining outside market forces (cf. Anderson, 1983). However, as scholars point out, in the era of global capitalism what we
experience is the movement from political to commercial rituals, where the ‘market rather than the state has become the reference point for national identification’ (Edensor, 2002, p. 111).

This chapter aims to understand the way in which commercial logic shapes the way in which nationhood is articulated and communicated. More specifically it explores how citizens appropriate and reformulate nationhood in the post-socialist context; how cultural meanings about nation and national identity are produced in order to suit the global imperative of nation branding and its logic. The paper draws on the qualitative analysis of the material collected from Polish online forum discussions and citizenship journalism websites. Poland serves here as the context in which post-socialist society’s citizens make sense of newly emerging nationhood on the one hand and becoming part of global market, European, and Western society on the other.

The logic of nation branding

Together with the rise of global advanced capitalism, the transformation of forms of communication and reproduction of nationhood appears inevitable. This means both new ways of defining and communicating of nationhood (Roosvall & Salovaara-Moring, 2010). In the context where production of cultural meanings is organized by the principles of economic exchange and growth, nation states are defined in terms of their capacity to compete with each other for economic, social, and political capital in the global economy. In other words, in order to face global competition, nation states are increasingly inclined to embrace the logic of nation branding.

The logic of nation branding implies at least three types of intertwined process. First, as mentioned above, it means that nation states are becoming part of the global market and thereby compete against each other globally for different types of resources. Here one could mention the Nation Brand Index, a marketing tool introduced in order to measure and manage the global image, perception, and reputation of nations (Anholt, 2007). The index includes six dimensions that are taken into consideration. They include people, tourism, culture and heritage, governance, export, investment, and immigration. These dimensions serve as indicators of strength and quality of country’s ‘brand image’. The results are presented annually in a form of global ranking of countries. The idea behind this type of index and ranking departs from accountability and serves the purpose of positioning the countries in the global market in respect of their global image and reputation.