



Western Balkans: It's Complicated

An Inter-ethnic Communication Interdisciplinary Examination

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Abstract: The western Balkans are persistently grappling with its unfavorable inter-ethnic reputation. Although political toleration has been consistently proposed as a solution for inter-ethnic tensions, this paper argues for the adoption of the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) framework, offering a fresh perspective to an old problem. Rooted in the 'communication perspective', CMM provides a crucial platform for stakeholders to interact meaningfully. This study aims to present compelling reasons for embracing dialogical methods in interethnic disagreements. The CMM model focuses on empowering participants with knowledge to collectively shape their social realities. To illustrate, we introduce a visual communication model seamlessly integrating political toleration and CMM concepts. This model establishes a dialogical platform, ensuring equal participation from public and civil society stakeholders, and fostering a harmonious social world. In conclusion, CMM offers an alternative communication perspective crucial for those involved in interethnic dialogue. By adopting this approach, individuals and groups can overcome challenges, opening new avenues for understanding and collaboration in the pursuit of peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Communication perspective, Political tolerance, interethnic relations, social worlds, Western Balkans

1. Introduction

In the context preceding the involvement of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in the Western Balkans, the public institutions of the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s primarily justified their often-discriminatory policies through the concept of toleration, specifically cultural toleration. An illustrative example of such policies unfolded following the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy in 1990, a significant shift in governance after the region had been granted substantial autonomy in 1963, subsequently compromised by Milosevic's actions in 1989. This situation was exacerbated as the Serbian government, representing the dominant culture of the time, neglected the basic political and economic needs of the local majority ethnic groups, thus fostering marginalization.

The failure or refusal of the dominant culture, which controlled the resources, to equitably distribute public goods and its demonstration of "dominating and inefficient control of the economy" led to the marginalization of subordinate classes. Consequently, this dynamic facilitated the emergence of ethnic groups at the local level, as evidenced by Blanton (2015, p. 9180). This research paper aims to delve into the implications of such historical developments and assess the transformative role of INGOs in the Western Balkans during this critical period. To avoid a constant toleration loop where the dominant culture will change places with one of the subcultures, we need to identify key stakeholders who in Kosovo during the period 1998 to 1999, encompassed various influential entities, such as Kosovo Albanians, Serbs, governmental bodies, religious institutions, political parties, military forces, and economic entities from both sides (Nowakowska-Krystman & akowska, 2015). We argue that the same stakeholders are important in the rest of the Western Balkans, which is still defined today by religion and language belonging (Serwer, 2019). While it is hard to put the whole complex interethnic tensions on these divisions, one cannot avoid being confused by the intricate web of regional and linguistic or religious diversity, which is later used as a reason for making these divisions even broader.

However, it is imperative to recognize and fully understand the implications of the concept of toleration within the contemporary global landscape. Failure to do so can inadvertently contribute to the growing influence of organizations founded on

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ethnocentric values. These organizations tend to propagate an ethnocentric narrative, which is frequently exploited by nationalist political parties in both the United States and Europe (Hafez, 2018). For this reason, ethnonationalism played a key role in the 2016 elections in states where, instead of ideology-based voting, it was more about where the voters were born, do they have European ancestry, and the ability to speak English, as well as if they belong to the Christian faith (Thompson, 2021). Sometimes, these organizations come in the form of tech companies like Cambridge Analytica, which targeted social media users to sway their political allegiances by exploiting strong emotions, which proved to be successful (Berghel, 2018; Bömelburg & Gassman, 2021).

Although there exists considerable research on political toleration and general toleration (Gibson & Duch, 1991; Köker, 1996; Gibson, 2001; Bessone, 2013; Galeotti, 2014; Forst, 2018), as well as communication and culture (Pearce, 1989, 2004, 2007; Craig, 1999; Barge, 2004; Parrish-Sprowl, 2011; Barkey & Gavrillis, 2016, Forst, 2018), a notable gap persists in the application of communication theories that seamlessly integrate these two domains. This paper aims to address this gap by establishing a clear connection between political tolerance and its interaction with communication and culture. In particular, the absence of applied communication theories has implications for interethnic communication, as it hinders the empowerment of participants through a dialogical approach. Integrating the coordinated management of meaning with political toleration emerges as a crucial avenue for achieving this goal. This effort is significant not only for enhancing our understanding of how political tolerance intersects with communication and culture in diverse contexts, but also for developing proactive measures to alleviate inter-ethnic tensions. In addition, this undertaking opens the door to innovative interdisciplinary approaches that hold promise for advancing both political science and communication studies.

We argue that not addressing the mentioned dynamics through an integrated theoretical lens may unintentionally contribute to the rise of stakeholders who further push for ethnocentric values. Coordinated meaning management offers a pragmatic approach to analyze and respond to potential interethnic complexities by providing actionable insights supported by asking specific questions when engaging in interethnic communication.

2. Literature review

Toleration is still rooted in its understanding as putting up with someone or something that one disapproves of (Verkuyten & Kollar, 2021). Our review of the literature identified historical instances that highlight cultural diversity and coexistence that precede modern liberal democratic governments. Thorne (2013, p. 491) explores Spain's "watchful co-existence" or Spanish *convivencia*, emphasizing the rejection of detrimental interactions and the cultivation of a diverse yet interconnected society. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire utilized the "millet system," categorizing the population by religion, with less emphasis on linguistic and cultural characteristics (Barkey & Gavrillis, 2016). Post-Empire decline witnessed a resurgence of ethnic identity, fueling interethnic conflicts through notions like Greater Serbia, Greater Albania, and Greater Greece (Hagen, 1999).

Examining the complexity of achieving long-term stability beyond war cessation reveals a literature gap, often focusing on civil war causes rather than the post-conflict aftermath. Dyrstand (2012) highlights postwar ethnonationalism, contrasting preexisting dynamics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo, where Kosovo had a widespread ethnonationalist movement before the war. Färte (2020) argues that in the 1990s Yugoslavian conflict, Western US allies, France, Germany, and Great Britain, aimed to contain escalation through economic sanctions and an arms embargo. Prioritizing peace, the US advocated for negotiations but remained neutral despite military activities. Despite extensive NATO efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the war caused the local population to shrink, and ethnonational divisions became prominent (Henig, 2021). Lessons unapplied, the prolonged Kosovo conflict underscores the need for effective intolerance management to avoid the risk of the continuous Balkanization of the region, which will make the process of joining the European Union almost impossible.

Approaching "toleration" cautiously, McClure (1990) warns against oversimplifying it as a universal solution for ethnic intolerance. Refraining from labeling "toleration" as the exclusive remedy for religious and interethnic challenges in the Western Balkans is crucial, considering the complexity of the issues.

Our examination of religious tolerance adopts McClure's (1990) perspective, acknowledging its political neutrality in personal matters. By viewing religious tolerance as a nuanced and multifaceted phenomenon, we avoid oversimplifying it as a simplistic solution to intricate social and cultural challenges.

Fleming's essay, "Orientalism, the Balkans and Balkan Historiography" (2000, pp. 1218-1233), contributes insights into distinguishing Balkanism and Orientalism, expanding on Maria Todorova's discussions. Fleming utilizes Hergé's character Tintin in imagined Balkan countries like Syldavia and Borduria to illustrate geopolitical, colonial, and religious disparities, yet highlights the unfortunate perpetuation of negative stereotypes, reinforcing the Balkans' portrayal as confusing and corrupt.

Regarding the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, Kolst (2016) argues against oversimplified political discourse, emphasizing the persistence of binary categorizations. Europeanization is proposed as a potential solution to counteract Balkanization resulting from conflicts in the ex-Yugoslav nations. Despite decreased global attention after September 11 and conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, Joseph (2005) and Sletzinger (2011) assert that the Balkans remain fragmented and prone to regional upheavals, suggesting ongoing potential for instability. Economic challenges, including hyperinflation and drastic local currency devaluation (Lyon, 1996), further characterized the region during this period. According to Dopchie (2022), Serbia cannot become a member of the

European Union without a formal agreement between the two parties. This is because the EU has made it a requirement in Chapter 35 of its negotiating framework with Serbia. The emergence of new powers in the Western Balkans, such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and China, can challenge the current dominant role of the EU in the region. These emerging powers have their narratives, sometimes religious, educational, or business-oriented. To overcome the existing contradiction in the accession process, policymakers from both countries need to reimagine what it means to co-create better social worlds for all involved stakeholders. However, we argue that this does not seem to be a priority for policymakers in the Western Balkans (Bulawka et al., 2023; Li & Chow, 2023).

When we look beyond the Balkans, there are cases where specific political dynamics require collaboration with populist political parties. At first, it seems counterintuitive to do such a thing in developed democracies; however, as Bos et al. (2023) point out, the division of the political landscape in Dutch politics requires politicians to make deals with their opponents. This may lead to greater political tolerance, even among populists. Bos et al. (2023) argue that Dutch populist voters are generally less supportive of democratic norms and less tolerant of their opponents. Populists may display prejudice towards their political opponents, but they may not necessarily support intolerant measures.

Collectively, these authors contribute to a more coherent narrative that highlights the scholarly examination of Balkannism and Orientalism, the complexities of Balkan conflicts, the proposed Europeanization remedy, and enduring challenges with potential instability, including economic difficulties. This comprehensive exploration underscores the Balkans' portrayal through negative stereotypes, the intricacies of regional conflicts, and the ongoing potential for turmoil, emphasizing the importance, as suggested by Joseph (2005), of addressing minority treatment in the Balkans for achieving sustainable peace.

3. A Critique of the Toleration Concept

In our quest for a comprehensive understanding of toleration, we recognize its multifaceted nature and diverse interpretations. Edyvane and Matraverse (2011) contribute to this discourse by analyzing John Rawls's works on social institutions and justice, asserting that "toleration is the virtue of social life" when justice assumes primacy within social institutions (p. 283).

Turning our focus to political toleration in the western Balkans, Gibson and Duch (1991) addressed the prevalent perception of its confinement to a select intellectual group, challenging this as "democratic elitism." They argue that Western European politics adhere to an "elitist theory of democracy," suggesting that elites exhibit a stronger commitment to democratic principles of political tolerance than ordinary citizens (p. 191). In particular, their definition of elites challenges the assumed wide gap between opinion leaders and the public.

While toleration commonly entails permitting unpopular political views (Gibson & Gouws, 2001), the critical question revolves around its conditions for persistence and effectiveness, especially when the agent loses intervention power. The Balkan wars of the 1990s exemplify this, with the dominant ethnic group exerting power over others, leading to violent conflicts. The Toleration Loop emerges, as after each war, the previously subjugated culture assumes dominance and exercises so-called toleration over the previously dominant ethnicity.

In the realm of state policy in the Balkans, Dovi (2009) presents an alternative perspective emphasizing inclusivity. Contemporary democracies, Dovi argues, justify the inclusion of historically disadvantaged groups by limiting the influence of overrepresented and privileged groups. Aligned with the "oppression principle," this suggests that democracy can marginalize those perpetrating and benefiting from oppression. Dovi underscores the ethical considerations in discerning justified and unjustified forms of marginalization, highlighting the potential advantages of certain forms for democracy (2009).

4. Coordinated management of meaning CMM

The study of communication encompasses diverse theoretical perspectives, emphasizing the communication perspective's central role in shaping social reality (Craig, 1999; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Among these perspectives, social constructionism serves as a foundational paradigm for theories like the coordinated management of meaning (CMM), emphasizing communication's role in social reality construction (Burr & Dick, 2017). Notably, Burr and Dick (2017) explore critical aspects of social constructionism, including language, cultural specificity, discipline, relativism, and power relations, the latter defined by individuals' positions in society, influencing the establishment of social rules and norms.

CMM, developed by Pearce and Cronen in 1989, has evolved into a practical theory applied in various fields (Pearce, 2004). Pearce (2000) asserts that conversations shape prevailing realities by delving into coordination, coherence, and mystery in meaning-making. Coherence challenges singular interpretations, while mystery acknowledges the multitude of stories in social reality construction (Pearce, 1989).

Central to CMM is the understanding that one's "self" is constructed through narratives, guiding principles presented through storytelling and retelling. Holmgren (2004) emphasizes this in situations such as interviews or discussions, where individuals engage in retelling narratives.

In summary, CMM, developed by Pearce and Cronen, is an interpretive framework for interpersonal communication with practical applications in organizational development and political consulting. Highlights the influential role of conversation in shaping realities, emphasizing the complexity of meaning-making through

coordination, coherence, and mystery. CMM recognizes the significance of narrative construction in shaping one's sense of self, advocating for exploration and transformation through diverse storytelling practices.

4.1. Why a practical approach?

The dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is a complex and challenging process characterized by intricate negotiations that have produced limited practical results. This dialogue traces its origins back to the negotiations that commenced in Rambouillet in early 1999 (Weller, 1999). Subsequently, discussions continued in Vienna between 2006 and 2007, with a specific focus on determining the final status of Kosovo (Weller, 2008). Despite these significant milestones, the negotiation process remains ongoing, facilitated by the European Union and the United States, with Kosovo's primary objective being the attainment of recognition from Serbia. On the contrary, Serbia approaches the dialogue with a predominant emphasis on economic terms, placing considerable importance on the concept of "economic normalization" (Stanicek, 2021). The ongoing negotiations reflect the complexities and divergent priorities of the parties involved, making the achievement of tangible outcomes a formidable challenge.

We propose the integration of CMM (Coordinated Management of Meaning) with the concept of political toleration due to CMM's proven efficacy in addressing various issues related to human communication coordination. Numerous practitioners have successfully utilized CMM as a practical theory to analyze and resolve a wide range of challenges arising from communication breakdowns (Barge, 2004).

To demonstrate the practical application of CMM, we examine the approach employed by the Public Dialogue Consortium (PDC) in a case study called the Cupertino Community Project: Voices and Visions. This approach can be adapted and implemented to tackle complex social projects in cities with significant interethnic populations. The comparison table below highlights the key distinctions between the traditional communication transmission model and the CMM model. By embracing the CMM perspective, new opportunities can be explored for resolving interethnic disputes. Therefore, we propose that the critical stakeholders involved in the negotiations shift their approach from a transmission-based model to the CMM model outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Two concepts of communication, Pearce and Pearce (2000, p. 413)

Transmission Model	CMM Model
<p>Definitions: The transmission model explains communication as the means of exchange of information. Effective communication happens when the receiver understands the meaning of that message. It is suggested that communication works best when it is simple and objective.</p>	<p>Definitions: The CMM model relies on social constructivism. Moreover, it empowers participants in the program. Communication process by pointing out that they are the ones who co-construct their own social worlds in that same communication process. Form and content are equally important because they influence whether that conversation helps or hinders relationships, personalities, and institutions.</p>
<p>How communication works: What is being said, what is being meant, and what is understood? What is said? What is meant? What is understood?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How clear is the information? • How accurately is it heard? • How completely is it expressed? 	<p>How communication works: What are we creating and making of what we say and do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What contexts are created for the other? • What does the language used prefigure? • What form of speech is elicited? • Who is included and who is not? • Who is addressed and who is not?
<p>The work communication: What do you get?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the uncertainty reduced? • Is the question answered? • Is the issue clarified? • Is the problem resolved? 	<p>The Work Communication: What is made?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What acts of speech? (Insults, compliments) • What relationship? (Trust, respect) • What identities? (Shrill voices, reasonable persons, caring persons) • What cultures/worldviews? (Strong, weak, or democracy)
<p>The Role of the Facilitator: Create a context where defects in communication processes will not interfere with other, more important, processes of decision making, coalition forming, deal making, and persuading.</p>	<p>The Role of the Facilitator: Shape emerging patterns of communication so that multiple voices and perspectives are honored and the tensions among them are maintained.</p>

According to Pearce and Pearce (2000, p. 406), PDC approached the city manager of Cupertino, California, in 1996 and proposed a project designed to identify the most pressing issue in their community and incorporate it

into an effective form of communication. After a few debates, the city manager and the city council members agreed to the PDC project. Before we continue to go into details about this project and how it was developed by using the CMM perspective, it is essential to mention that a swift change in the ethnic composition of the city was the main issue raised by the community (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). This change is seen by many as a problem in the making that will eventually blow off. Although no confrontations have been reported yet. According to the authors, the city has tried to increase its capacity to deal with inter-ethnic relations positively. The results of a city survey showed that most of the respondents thought that the city 'is doing enough to ensure that members of all ethnic groups feel welcome in Cupertino' (Pearce & Pearce, 2000, p. 407).

One of the main ideas of the CMM recommendation for people involved in the communication process is to avoid existing cause-and-effect viewpoints and see opportunities that are not used, except that they can be created socially. Related to the Cupertino communication process between city officials and community members, it was about 'creating conversations where they otherwise would not have existed and shaping these conversations in specific ways' (Pearce & Pearce, 2000, p. 408). One might argue that this approach requires the participants in the communication process to go beyond the existing dialectical view on political procedures, such as supporters vs. opponents, which often depend on polls to evaluate the support of the opposition for political decisions. The list continues by including what is known as vote counting, persuasive political speech, rallying supporters, targeting the uncommitted, and disempowering those who disagreed (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). Accordingly, we ask the following question: How can Coordinated Management of Meaning help create an alternative form of communication to better manage interethnic relations in the Western Balkans?

5. Methodology

Current research employs a qualitative methodology, specifically using conceptual framework analysis, to explore the interconnections, perspectives, and relationships related to political toleration and the coordinated management of meaning. The theoretical foundation of the investigation is grounded in the integration of political toleration and the coordinated management of meaning, forming the basis for the study. A thorough examination of the literature on both theories guides the formulation of a research question aligned with the theoretical underpinning of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM), aimed at addressing gaps and contributing to the body of knowledge in inter-ethnic research.

Following this, the study relies on a conceptual framework comprising interconnected concepts (Leshem & Trafford, 2007) and employs conceptual framework analysis, as elucidated by Li et al. (2022), to facilitate the generation of new concepts and categorize existing fragmented literature. Selected texts from Galeotti (2014), Köker (1996), Besson (2012), and Pearce (2007) serve as sources for conceptual framework analysis. Incorporating the central feature of constant comparative analysis into a conceptual framework model is developed based on political toleration and the coordinated management of meaning theory.

This model is visually represented in Figure 1, where the relationship between the core political toleration concept and the coordinated management of meaning is merged, providing a robust rationale for employing an applied communication theory to enhance interethnic relations.

6. Discussion

The application of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) is paramount to addressing the limitations of transmission-based communication inherent in political toleration. As demonstrated in the case study of the Cupertino Community Project of the Public Dialogue Consortium, CMM offers a dynamic framework that surpasses the traditional transmission model. Political toleration, rooted in transmission-based communication, can benefit from CMM's emphasis on shared meaning-making and relational processes. By adopting the CMM model, critical stakeholders can navigate complex interethnic issues more effectively, fostering a collaborative understanding that goes beyond mere tolerance. The applicability of CMM is evident in its ability to transform rigid communication structures, offering new avenues for resolving disputes and promoting genuine recognition in diverse democratic societies.

The combination of political toleration concepts and the principles of coordinated meaning management (CMM) presents a compelling argument for stakeholders engaged in complex inter-ethnic dialogue. This synergy offers a practical framework to understand the intricate implications of tolerating individual choices while considering their political context. By delving into a sensitive case, specifically the "headscarf affair" examined by Köker (1996), we can critically examine the limitations of perceiving toleration as a universal solution within a political system.

In the case of the Headscarves affair, it is commonly assumed that the "left" political sphere would exhibit greater tolerance. However, both the left-wing and the Christian Catholic right-wing movements joined forces to portray the wearing of religious headscarves as a threat to French national identity. This reaction stems from the concept of French modern national citizenship, which originated during the French Revolution and emphasizes a unified framework for all individuals (Köker, 1996). Nevertheless, Köker argues that the liberal-democratic vision of freedom should not overlook individual or group differences, highlighting the significance of universal standards of equality and justice. It is crucial to navigate a path that avoids falling into conservative hermeneutics or absolute relativism (Köker, 1996).

Through this argumentative analysis, our objective is to shed light on the multifaceted nature of stakeholder actions and challenge the notion of toleration as a definitive answer to interethnic situations. By examining the complexities of the headscarf affair, we emphasize the need for a nuanced understanding of political dynamics, individual rights, and societal contexts when considering toleration as a solution. This discussion serves as a reminder that the application of toleration requires thoughtful examination and consideration of diverse perspectives, moving beyond simplistic assumptions, and acknowledging the complexities inherent in interethnic dialogue. The dialectic between individual- and group-specific cultural characteristics and how one chooses to tolerate them is part of an ongoing debate. One way of making this argument clearer is to use Bessone's research on multicultural toleration (2013). Bessone looks at what it means to use the "multicultural" concept when discussing "multicultural toleration" and why not simply use the liberal concept to describe both concepts. Moreover, Bessone maintains that "what makes toleration specifically multicultural, as opposed to simply liberal, is that it comes to refer to recognizing as distinct and refraining from interfering with the beliefs, attitudes, or ways of life of cultural groups or their members" (2013, p. 271).

Galeotti presented three conceptions of toleration, including the "standard notion, the political conception based on the neutrality principle, and toleration as recognition" (2014, p. 93). Similarly, Köker's approach using toleration as recognition or respect was a suitable concept for political toleration issues in democratic societies. In addition, the author offers an example in which Muslims from Vercelli (Italy) requested a place of worship and were denied, which is not acceptable in a democratic society (Galeotti, 2014).

Going back to the example of the Vercelli Muslim community's request for a place of worship, Galeotti (2014) argues that the denial of such a place is resolved through "toleration" by allowing them to use a warehouse to complete their religious rituals (at least from 2004 to 2011). The author categorizes this as "disrespectful tolerance," which has a restrictive version of what is described by the standard notion of toleration. In this case, one side is the political authority. For this reason, the standard notion of toleration should be acknowledged as appropriate only for dealing with social relationships.

Often, research on political toleration focuses on a particular cultural group distinct from the dominant culture. Other research deals with political tolerance while focusing on individual rights and freedoms. Regarding this distinction, Besson argues that it is not enough to apply what is known as the non-interference dimension towards the tolerated groups, but rather more political toleration. One side's "readiness" to grant specific rights or exemption from specific duties to group members of cultural groups is often done in the name of the acceptance of specific and inherently signifying ways of life or practices (Besson, 2012, p. 277). Of course, one of the deficiencies of doing so requires identifying who belongs to those groups.

Most of the debate revolves around the critique of the necessity for a legal framework on what will be the details of political toleration. Today's liberal-democratic system relies on political parties appointing individuals to represent their communities and then going to parliament as an extension of the people's political will. However, this system is not without flaws. Therefore, even when the parliament approves specific laws that pertain to the entire society, it does not necessarily accurately reflect the will of the people. Similar deficiencies arise when a political system attempts to implement specific policies for a cultural group that is not the dominant culture.

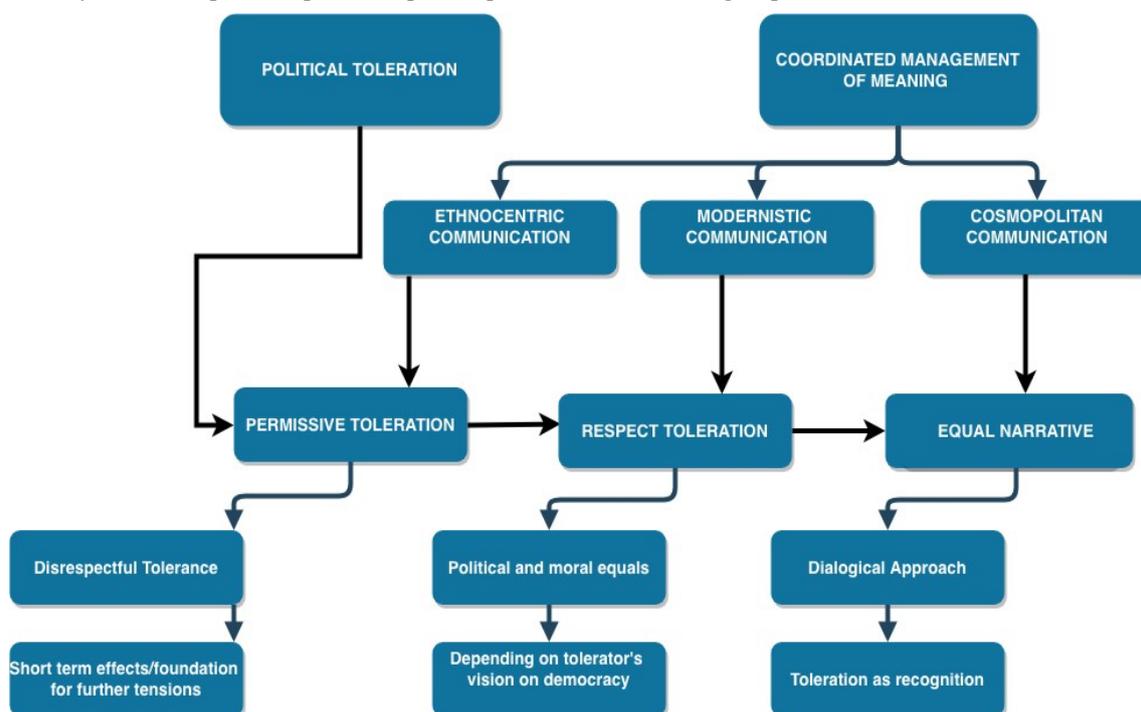


Figure 1: The Synergy of Political Tolerance and CMM Chart/Model. Source: Modified by current authors Galeotti (2014), Köker (1996), Besson (2012), and Pearce (2007)

Consequently, the demand for a perfect democratic political system and a flawless approach to political toleration is not entirely feasible. On the other hand, there is an urgent need for public discussions concerning the latter in the Western Balkans. In Eastern Europe, ethnic and cultural groups like the Roma are either "left alone" or "forcefully integrated," neither of which represents an ideal integration process into society. As Silverman (1995) highlighted in an article on the persecution and politicization of Roma in Eastern Europe, when socialist governments attempted to integrate Roma people, their goal was to undermine their culture by attempting to break apart their extended families through assimilation. Thus, should the state develop an active tolerance policy where the Roma community has a chance to be heard and accepted as equal members of society? We often encounter situations when a government in the Western Balkans decides to implement positive quotas during national elections and appoints a member of the Roma community as a Member of Parliament. Sadly, the overall impact on the group or cultural progression is almost non-existent. The inclusion of a person in the highest policy-making institution does not necessarily translate into the inclusion of the entire community in the political system. Although this approach is not merely multicultural, it insists on the differences between cultural and political settings and argues that the issue of toleration is fundamentally related to the political dimension (Bessone, 2013). To elevate the inter-ethnic dialogue beyond an individual's likelihood of being tolerated or not, we must include civic society organizations and other formal groups. We included NGOs as one of the leading key players in making the Western Balkans a more inclusive region precisely because the notion of "culture" itself is somewhat complex. Therefore, when NGOs are involved as institutions that have established their political existence through civic engagement, it is more inviting, since it is a voluntary organization (Besson, 2013, p. 282).

In integrating Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) into the framework, we propose complementing Galeotti's political conception based on the neutrality principle and toleration as recognition (2014, p. 93) with CMM's ethnocentric, modernistic, and cosmopolitan description of culture. Köker's assertion that freedom, equality, and justice are universal standards, not blind to individual or group differences (1996), aligns with our argument. Pearce's insights into ethnocentric, modernistic, and cosmopolitan forms of communication enrich the context of political toleration concepts.

Notably, our discussion delves into the synergy between political toleration and CMM, giving rise to a "certain social world." While Pearce's communication forms aid understanding, we intentionally exclude monocultural communication from the chart as it lacks the dual dynamic of tolerator and tolerated.

Examining communication forms, monocultural and ethnocentric approaches accentuate a stark "us" versus "them" distinction, demanding unwavering commitment to one pattern. Modernistic communication, celebrating diversity until the next trend emerges, hinges on the concept of "time" and constant change. On the contrary, cosmopolitan communication embraces and celebrates differences, seeking coordination in a social world where diversity is not merely resolved but acknowledged as integral (Pearce, 2007, p.161).

In policymaking, Krause (2013) emphasizes the dilemma faced by elected officials, torn between adhering to popular requests and turning to bureaucracy for expertise. The complexity of policymaking in the Western Balkans, marked by a perception of untouchable political figures and intricate processes, necessitates a shift from the transmission model to a participatory model empowering stakeholders to co-construct their social worlds. It is viewed that if a disliked group gets policy-making powers, the rest of the groups that perceive their lack of influence in what happens politically will feel even more threatened (Stoeckel & Ceka, 2022). Therefore, our suggestion for this transition aligns with our proposal for a logical combination of permissive toleration, respect, and equal narrative toleration, as illustrated in Figure 1. The integration of CMM enriches the overall framework, providing a more effective approach to address the complexities of political toleration in the Western Balkans.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, while advocating for universal tolerance may be impractical and unnecessary, we can still strive to establish a platform for dialogue facilitation rooted in the communication perspective. Political leaders in the Western Balkans have the opportunity to utilize their resources to shape a more promising future. Throughout history, numerous cases have demonstrated how people acted responsibly and transformed their lives for the better. A notable example is Abraham Lincoln's renowned "Gettysburg Address" delivered on November 19, 1863. The proposition that "all men are created equal" and the sacrifice made by those who believed in a government "of the people, and for the people" served as a guiding principle for constructive progress (Pearce, 2007, p. 19). Similarly, the European Recovery Plan, commonly known as the Marshall Plan, initiated by the United States in the 20th century, exemplified a transformative endeavor that helped create a brighter future for all (Jackson, 1979). Such processes require individuals to transcend transient emotions and become part of a larger collective. Pearce argues that both the Gettysburg Address and the Marshall Plan are instances where divisive rhetoric was absent, and instead, the focus was on shaping a better world. These significant historical moments serve as examples of harnessing productive energies that extended beyond the mere problem-solving envisioned by their initiators (Pearce, 2007). By embracing a communication-based approach and fostering a collective vision, it is possible to lay the groundwork for a more tolerant and prosperous future in the Western Balkans.

In conclusion, the successful application of a new communication model based on the coordinated management of meaning is crucial in overcoming ethnocentric mass behaviors that hinder productive energy. The assumption that others think, reason, and perceive in the same way as one's group can lead to significant misconceptions and in-group preferences. However, a more cosmopolitan approach, which preserves unique

cultural identities while considering other cultures, is recommended. Although it is impossible to fully understand the intricacy of every culture, it is important to strike a balance between cosmopolitanism and cultural preservation.

Taking the communication perspective requires examining past conversations and actions that have shaped current realities. By closely analyzing the turn-by-turn process of communication, critical moments can be identified to create a different future. This perspective offers numerous possibilities for political and policy studies, providing stakeholders with the awareness of their power to shape social realities.

The shift from a transmission-based communication model to the coordinated management of meaning model is crucial. It allows for a transition from short-term toleration to recognition, supported by cosmopolitan communication. The synergy between existing political toleration concepts and those derived from coordinated meaning management provides a strong foundation for the research question. It guides key stakeholders involved in interethnic relations on how to effectively manage problems through alternative forms of communication.

Here, we offer how such a form of communication might look if stakeholders combine the political toleration concepts with the ones suggested by the CMM model:

To develop a dialogical model of communication for interethnic issues based on the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) perspective, we need to recognize the limitations of the transmission model of communication highlighted in the analysis of political toleration and intercultural tensions. The multifaceted nature of toleration, as acknowledged in the examination of Rawlsian social institutions by Edyvane and Matraverse (2011), requires a communication approach that goes beyond the mere exchange of information. To address these limitations, CMM-based questions can be introduced to foster a more inclusive dialogical model.

1. Contextual Understanding: CMM Question: What contexts are created for the broader public to engage in discussions on political toleration?
2. Inclusive Participation: CMM Question: Who is included and who is not in discussions about political toleration, and how can inclusivity be enhanced?
3. Narrative construction: CMM Question: What stories and narratives contribute to the understanding of political toleration among diverse communities?
4. Power Dynamics: CMM Question: How can power dynamics be recognized and addressed to ensure a more equitable distribution of political tolerance within communities?
5. Reframing Perspectives: CMM Question: What language and communication strategies can be employed to reframe perspectives on political toleration beyond the elitist theory of democracy?
6. Toleration in Action: CMM Question: How can discussions on toleration lead to tangible actions that promote inclusivity and understanding among different ethnic groups?

In the case of the "Toleration Loop" phenomenon observed in the Balkan wars, the transmission model's limitations in understanding the conditions for effective toleration become evident. CMM-based questions can help break the cycle by addressing the complexities of interethnic relations:

7. Breaking the Toleration Loop: CMM Question: What communication strategies can disrupt the repetitive cycle of political domination and misappropriation of toleration in post-conflict settings?

Dovi's (2009) alternative perspective on state policy in the Balkans, emphasizing inclusivity and the "oppression principle," aligns with the CMM framework. To operationalize this perspective in communication practices, the following question can be posed:

8. Ethical Considerations in Marginalization: CMM Question: How can ethical considerations guide discussions on justified and unjustified forms of marginalization, ensuring a democratic and inclusive dialogue?

Given the prevailing challenges identified in the Western Balkans, where political toleration is perceived as confined to a small group of intellectuals, the shortcomings of the transmission model become evident. Gibson and Duch (1991) labeled this as "democratic elitism," where elites are presumed to have a stronger commitment to political tolerance. However, their definition of elites as individuals with influential opinions reveals a narrow divide between opinion leaders and the general public.

In summary, incorporating CMM-based questions into the dialogical model of communication for interethnic issues addresses the limitations of the transmission model and provides a more nuanced and inclusive approach to understanding and promoting political toleration.

Civic society has started many campaigns regarding government accountability in the Western Balkans; regrettably, they have minimal or no effect. Arguably, the political life cycle of the Western Balkans starts with the beginning of elections and ends when elections end. Also, there is a significant drop in protests. Political apathy is a real threat to the democratic process in the Western Balkans. Parish-Sprowl (2011) points out that "as long as stories constructing ethnic identities are told in a manner to include rivalry as part of those identifies, the Balkans will remain potentially lethal and underdeveloped," the author also presents us with the great potential of the communication perspective mainly based on CMM theory, where, among other things, participants in communication process should be aware of the difficult but not impossible task of telling stories to initiate the

process of "collective conversational differences rather than merely set of policy changes" (Parrish- Sprowl, 2011). In conclusion, the application of the coordinated management of meaning model offers a promising path toward improved inter-ethnic relations and the creation of a more inclusive and tolerant society.

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