

Searching for the constituents of media systems

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Presentation in IAMCR Panel: Comparative Global Media Research: Issues and Case Studies at ECREA conference in Hamburg, 14 October 2010

Paolo Mancini's keynote yesterday reminded us about the slow pace of media studies in carrying out comparative research at the aggregate level of systems instead of individuals. While political science was well established in comparing system in the 1950s, media studies could display only one piece of this kind: the *Four Theories of the Press* by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm of 1956. Here is the main template of this classic:

SLIDE 1 (Siebert & al.)

The dimensions on which the classification is based were: historical development of the press system, its chief purpose, who has the right to use the media, how media are controlled, what is forbidden, ownership private or public and essential difference from others. Quite sensible dimensions but obviously *ad hoc* and not very analytical.

Yet, we may say the same of most other attempts to classify and compare media systems, including that of Hallin & Mancini (2004) nearly 50 years later. The characteristics as they call their dimensions are also quite sensible but obviously also *ad hoc*:

SLIDE 2 (Hallin & Mancini by Jakubowicz in the Polish book mentioned below)

Another "comparing media systems" book was published five years after Hallin & Mancini, in 2008 in Poland, displaying the media systems in Central Europe "between commercialization and politicization" (edited by Dobek-Ostrowska & Glowacki, 2008). There Andrej Skolkay's introductory chapter presents a number of media development scenarios in the 1990s with slightly different dimensions and references to more or less usual suspects:

SLIDE 3 (Skolkay)

Let us also recall the European inventory of media systems, edited by Georgios Terzis (2008). There Jo Bardoel's concluding chapter summarizes the current media governance arrangements in Europe with four dimensions under an overall social responsibility orientation which is typical for Europe:

SLIDE 4 (Bardoel)

A very thoughtful but little recognized proposal was made by the Swiss media scholar Roger Blum in 2005. Blum goes beyond the European and North American systems and lays down six models at the global level: in addition to the three of Hallin & Mancini based on the Atlantic "liberal", the North European "public service" and the South European "clientelist" models, a fourth what he calls

East European “chock” model, and then the Arab-Asian “patriotic” model and finally the Asian-Caribbean “commando” model. Blum’s classification is based on nine dimensions:

SLIDE 5 (Blum)

So there is no shortage of proposals, and we could add here contributions such as a special issue in the online *Journal of Global Mass Communication* edited by Thomas Hanitzsch (2008), as well as a chapter by Barbara Thomass and Hans Kleinsteuber (2010) in the latest book of the Euromedia Research Group. Moreover, we could take a look at the book *Normative Theories of the Media* by Clifford Christians, Theodore Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng and Robert White (2009), published by the same Illinois University Press that 53 years earlier issued the *Four Theories*. This book includes an overview of the many proposals over the past 50 years to classify media systems in the world, after which it suggests a typology of media roles in democratic societies, defined by two dimensions:

SLIDE 6 (Christians & al.)

Yet, surrounded by all this scholastics about media systems, models and roles, we are still puzzled by the question what actually is a media system. I tried to address the question few years ago by compressing the dimensions to only three:

- *regulatory framework* of media
- *ownership structure* of media
- *socio-political orientation* of media

The first begins with the constitutional status of the media and extends from relevant laws to various administrative regulations which all sets the basic rules for the media field. The second covers facts about the actual media structure including the ownership and economic parameters of the media sector. The third refers to the “soft” and “cultural” factors which exercise, in addition to the previous two, a significant influence on how the media operate.

The nature of such dimensions – both synthetic and those with more elaborate constituents – is partly *nominalistic* and partly *essentialistic* without too much care to specify the logic which is being followed.

Consequently, the core concept *system* remains unclear and hazy. A lot of homework is waiting to be done, including a Luhmannian approach.

References

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FOUR RATIONALES FOR THE MASS MEDIA

| | AUTHORITARIAN | LIBERTARIAN | SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY | SOVIET-TOTALITARIAN |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Developed | in 16th and 17th century England; widely adopted and still practiced in many places | adopted by England after 1688, and in U.S.; influential elsewhere | in U.S. in the 20th century | in Soviet Union, although some of the same things were done by Nazis and Italians |
| Out of | philosophy of absolute power of monarch, his government, or both | writings of Milton, Locke, Mill, and general philosophy of rationalism and natural rights | writing of W. E. Hocking, Commission on Freedom of Press, and practitioners; media codes | Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist thought, with mixture of Hegel and 19th century Russian thinking |
| Chief purpose | to support and advance the policies of the government in power; and to service the state | to inform, entertain, sell — but chiefly to help discover truth, and to check on government | to inform, entertain, sell — but chiefly to raise conflict to the plane of discussion | to contribute to the success and continuance of the Soviet socialist system, and especially to the dictatorship of the party |
| Who has right to use media? | whoever gets a royal patent or similar permission | anyone with economic means to do so | everyone who has something to say | loyal and orthodox party members |
| How are media controlled? | government patents, guilds, licensing, sometimes censorship | by "self-righting process of truth" in "free market place of ideas," and by courts | community opinion, consumer action, professional ethics | surveillance and economic or political action of government |
| What forbidden? | criticism of political machinery and officials in power | defamation, obscenity, indecency, wartime sedition | serious invasion of recognized private rights and vital social interests | criticism of party objectives as distinguished from tactics |
| Ownership | private or public | chiefly private | private unless government has to take over to insure public service | public |
| Essential differences from others | instrument for effecting government policy, though not necessarily government owned | instrument for checking on government and meeting other needs of society | media must assume obligation of social responsibility; and if they do not, someone must see that they do | state-owned and closely controlled media existing solely as arm of state |

Table 1. The three models: main political and media system characteristics

| Characteristics | Polarized pluralist model | Democratic corporatist model | Liberal model |
|---|---|--|--|
| Political system | | | |
| Political history: conflict vs. consensus | Late democratization, polarized pluralism | Early democratization, moderate pluralism, | Early democratization, moderate pluralism |
| Consensus or majoritarian government | Both | Predominantly consensus | Predominantly majoritarian |
| Individual vs. organized pluralism | Organized pluralism | Organized, democratic corporatism | Individual representation |
| Role of State | Dirigisme | Strong welfare state | Liberalism |
| Rational Legal Authority | Weak, clientelism | Strong | Strong |
| Media system | | | |
| Political parallelism | High. Politics-over-broadcasting | External pluralism, politics-in-broadcasting with substantial autonomy | Internal pluralism (external in the U.K.), professional broadcast governance, formally autonomous system |
| Professionalization | Weak | Strong | Strong |
| Role of state in media | Strong | Strong, but freedom of media protected | Market-dominated (but strong PSB in U.K. and Ireland) |

Source: (Hallin, Mancini, 2004, pp. 67–68).

Table 2. Media development scenarios in the 1990s

| Model | “Standard model” | “Westification” | Germanification | Italianization | “Gaullization” | Continuation of two media cultures | Perestroika in W.E. |
|------------------------------------|--|---|------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Authors or supporters | Johnson (1995) Gross (1996) Sparks (1999) | Fabris (1995) | Fabris (1995) | Splichal (1994) | Školkay (2007 (based on Sparks 1998) | Fabris (1995) | Fabris (1995) |
| State – media relationship | Ideological pluralism and/or relative independence of public service media | Acceptance of the dominant Western media philosophy | | Strong state control of the media | Public TV and radio under control of the government | Authoritarian and semi-fascist regimes (exc. Czech Republic) | Repoliticization of the public sphere |
| Civil society – media relationship | Free press, popular and serious, sometimes with political affiliation | Market segmentation | German language predominance | Pronounced political partisanship of the media | Free but politicized press | No civil society | |
| Market – media relationship | | An additional market for W.E. production | German investment | Close integration of media and political elites | Some access of opposition to public media, especially during election | W.E. influence only in the market | Questioning commercialization and commodification of the media |
| Ethics | Common standards of ethics in journalism | | | Lack of consolidated and shared professional ethic | Various media ethics | | |
| Examples | Sweden, Denmark, United Kingdom | Hungary – print media Czech Republic | East Germany in general | Central/Eastern Europe | Slovakia, Hungary and Poland | Hungary – broadcasting East Germany for some time in certain sectors Czech Republic | No example |

ORGANISATION OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MEDIA

| MECHANISM | Principle | Decision | Participation | Instrument | Effects |
|-------------------|--|----------------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| MARKET | Competition, companies | Demand and supply | Purchasing power, money | Market share, market research | Economic growth, flexibility, but: bias towards 'mainstream' |
| POLITICS | Hierarchy, bureaucracy | Law and regulation | Authority, force | Budget, annual review, contract / charter | Social justice, but: slow, steering of 'content' problematic |
| PROFESSION | Professionalism, ethics | Self-regulation | Education, 'peer review' | Reflection, code, Council for Journalism | Independence, but: lack of representativity |
| PUBLIC | Voluntarism, associations, pressure groups | Discussion, dialogue | Commitment | Openness, feedback: hearings, ombudsmen | Shaping of public opinion, social capital, but: voluntarism |

Reference: Bardoel (2003)

Roger Blum's dimensions:

| 1.Regulatory system | Democratic | Authoritarian | Totalitarian |
|---------------------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| 2.Political culture | Polarized | Ambivalent | Collaborative |
| 3.Media freedom | No censorship | Occasional c. | Permanent c. |
| 4.Ownership | Private | Private & Public | Public |
| 5.Financing | Market | Market & State | State |
| 6.Political parallelism | Weak | Middle | Strong |
| 7.State control of media | Weak | Middle | Strong |
| 8.Media culture | Investigative | Ambivalent | Collaborative |
| 9.Media orientation | Commercial | Diverse | Public service |

Four normative roles of media (Christians & al. 2009, 125)

