

Searching for the constituents of media systems

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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.

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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)

