

## Reflections of a veteran

by Kaarle Nordenstreng, Professor Emeritus at University of Tampere, Finland

Presentation at keynote panel: “Can we talk about a successful transition of the media from the communist model to what we see today?”

Conference “25 Years After: The Challenges of Building the Post-Communist Media and Communication Industries” (<https://toleducation.org/courses/25-years-after>)

Prague, 20-22 November 2014

Dear colleagues,

As a kind of veteran who has been active in the field for 50 years, I wish to begin my 15 minutes by pointing out that we should remember not only the Velvet revolution 25 years ago but also the Prague spring and autumn in 1968. It was then – 46 years ago – that we got a hard lesson of the dialectic between state power and people’s power.

Let me take a short personal excursion to Prague in September 68 – just a couple of weeks after the Warsaw pact forces came to Czechoslovakia.



Here I am with my Mustang in front of the Prague Castle, posing also at the fountain. I came to a meeting scheduled for heads of audience research of the European broadcasting companies. The meeting was cancelled but I still came to Prague after attending another conference in Yugoslavia, since I had got a visa from the Czechoslovak Embassy in Helsinki – by the way headed at the time by Ambassador Urban whose son Jan was a teenager. I drove with my wife through Europe having the Czechoslovak flag half up in the radio antenna, thus showing solidarity to the Prague spring being crushed, which was fashionable on those days.



Driving from the Austrian border to Prague led us to see some military vehicles. And all over there were signs of civil disobedience, including distraction of directions. Even in Prague many street signs had been taken down. One of them was laying on the pavement just around the corner of this building in the beginning of Karlova.



Since it carried my name and my car was parked next to it, I picked it up as a souvenir and placed it on the bottom of my Mustang's trunk. It was successfully smuggled through the border check points on way to the DDR and in Berlin.



All these years it has been on the wall of my flat in Tampere, but now I brought it back. I shall pass it over to the City of Prague Museum.

After this excursion to 68 let's move on to 89, noting that it was another station in a historical journey.

I happened to be President of the International Organization of Journalists IOJ, here known as MON, which was one of the “international democratic organizations” following the Soviet line. So here you have a live case of what Lenin called “useful idiots” – their progressive friends in the West. I had accepted this role in 1976, one year after the Helsinki Accords were signed in the same Finlandia Hall where the IOJ held its congress. I deliberately chose to be an instrument – not for the Soviets but for détente, to build bridges between in East and West, North and South. As the Soviets at that time advocated the same line, it was naturally even better. History will show who was naïve and who was smart.

Anyway, the IOJ had headquarters in Prague since the late 1940s and by the late 80s it had grown to be the largest international non-governmental organization in the mass media field. In Czechoslovakia it was an empire with 1200 people in its payroll in the secretariat as well as in various commercial enterprises, not to count thousands of freelancers recruited for example in its translation service – the largest in East Europe which by the way handled Havel's first international press conference. The IOJ was indeed an island of capitalism in a sea of socialism.

However, Velvet revolution brought it into sharp conflict with the journalists and authorities of the new regime. It began to lose its economic ground and members in Europe, and the decline was speeded up by internal fights. My presidency ended already in 1991 and the IOJ itself ended ten years later.

Currently the IOJ is just history. I am writing this history for publication next year.

Just a little bit more on the IOJ-Czechoslovak relations:

Until 1989 the IOJ was formally based on a mandate given to it by the Czechoslovak Union of Journalists, but in reality it was in the country under the blessing of the Communist Party and Government of the CSSR.

In January 1990 the Union was dissolved and thus the IOJ had no longer a member in the host country, which was naturally an anomaly.

The Syndicate of Journalists, which was established already in late 1989, not only refused to join the IOJ but accused it for serving the earlier totalitarian regime and neglecting to defend persecuted journalists for 40 years.

The IOJ did indeed carry burdens of the past, including Secretary General and Director of enterprises related to the Communist Party chief. They were removed in February 1990 and the IOJ renewed itself at the congress in early 1991. However, for the Czechoslovak Syndicate it was all too little, too late.

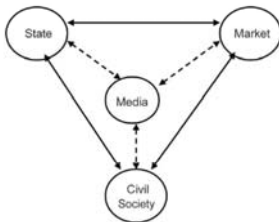
And now to the panel's question: “Can we talk about a successful transition of the media from the communist model to what we see today?”

While several papers in this conference present empirical evidence on what we see today, I just suggest a *sweeping generalization*:

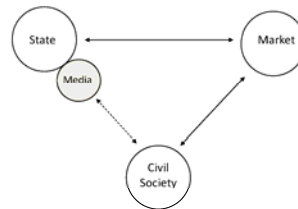
- Yes, there is media freedom (kind of – see last slide)
- But the public space that emerged has not fulfilled its potential (sure, countries differ a lot)
- Mainstream media under economic pressure go to instant, superficial, stereotype, infotainment content

I shall continue with more general *academic remarks* with the following slides about media in the Velvet revolution 25 years ago and the changes thereafter until today.

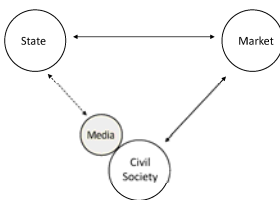
Galtung's triangle



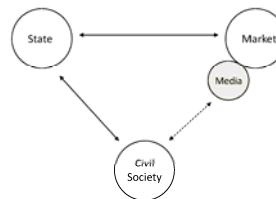
Pre-Velvet Revolution



Velvet Revolution



Post-Velvet Revolution



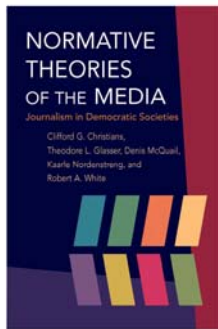


Figure 1. Four media types

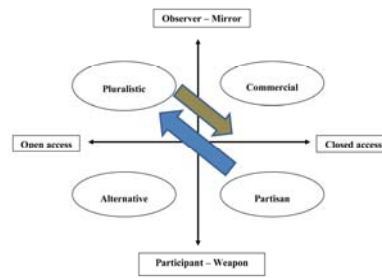
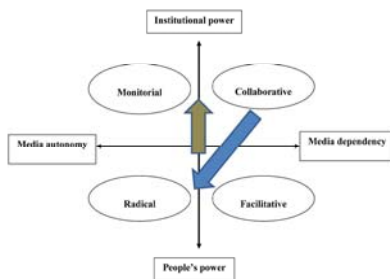


Figure 2. Four media roles



Press freedom revisited

World map of freedom by American Freedom House

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press>

World press freedom index by French Reporters sans frontières

[http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013\\_1054.html](http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013_1054.html)

See article *Deconstructing Libertarian Myths About Press Freedom* by Nordenstreng

<http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:uta-201309231372>