

**Book:** Comparing Media Systems in Central Europe: Between commercialization and politicization

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**Publisher:** Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego (2008)

**Reviewer:** Roberto Suárez Candel

This book is the result of “Comparing Media Systems: West meets East” – an international conference held at Wrocław and Kliczków in 2007 and organized by the Department of Communication and Journalism in the Institute of Political Science at Wrocław University. The conference aimed to review the main development vectors followed by central European media systems in the last 20 years. Moreover, the event offered an opportunity to reflect on the resulting scenario. The final discussion focused on how to fit those media systems within the three models propounded by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and whether a new and particular model for central Europe should be defined.

In their introduction, the editors raise three questions: To what extent have democracy and its main concepts and ideas consolidated in central European countries? Are central European mass media free and independent? In which direction do those media systems evolve? Next, they identify and clearly describe how politicization and commercialization have become the main features of the transformation processes experienced in the region.

The book is structured in two parts. The first part includes five chapters and it is titled *Central European Media in Comparative Perspective*. However, the editors describe it as a comparative approach to media and communication studies carried out in the region. In the end, it is neither the first option nor the second, which seems a bit puzzling. The reader will find five contributions that address quite diverse issues: from an analysis of the quality of several books considered references for the study of media in central Europe, which later turns into a description of the evolution processes in several countries (A. Skolkay), to the particularities of public service broadcasting (J. Jacobowicz) and public radio (S. Jędrzejewski). Moreover, A. Wyka compares the particularities of the Mediterranean model and those that characterize central European countries, pointing out the current Italianization of the later ones. Finally, J. Krone addresses the foreign investment in the field of the press, which has been a common phenomenon in the area.

Despite the fact that the above contributions make it possible to identify some of the main characteristics of the central European media systems (interference of the state, media tabloidization, low professionalism, strong commercialization and relevance of foreign investments), it must be said that achieving that overall picture is not an easy task. Depending on his/her familiarity with the region, the reader might have some problems. Considering that the five papers are not as related as they could be and the fact that the depth of their analysis is not homogeneous and their quality is variable, a contribution by the editors identifying and systematizing those particularities and drawing some conclusions would have been very appropriate. In fact, the introduction seems to play that role and therefore becomes the most valuable part of the book.

Part two of the volume focuses on the development of media in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania. The first issue that must be pointed out is that no reason for the selection of these countries is provided. Moreover, there is huge difference in the relevance given to each of them. While Poland, the conference host country, is analyzed in five papers, the Czech Republic is discussed in three and Slovakia and Romania are treated, each of them, only in only one. In addition, the content of the contributions is extremely diverse in terms of their analytic approaches and the means of communication studied. As a result, no comparison among the countries can be properly carried out.

In the case of Poland, the issues covered include its television system (B. Łódzki), the political pressure on public television and the national council (M. Głowacki), an econometrical measurement of public radio's mission (B. Nierenberg), the presence of foreign groups in the press market (A. Szynol) and the impact of foreign ownership in the region of Lower Silesia (J. Wozna).

Concerning the Czech Republic, the authors deal with the transposition and impact of the *Television Without Frontiers* directive (V. Stetka), foreign ownership in the local and regional press markets (L. Waschková) and the attitudes of journalists towards their own profession (B. Köpplová & J. Jiráček).

Finally, the paper on Slovakia describes the regulation of media ownership as well as concentration and competition trends in the field of broadcasting (B. Ondrášik). With regard to Romania, C. Chirea-Ungureanu and A. Seceleanu review the evolution of its television system, focusing on the complexity of its public-commercial duality and its programming tendencies.

The text ends without a set of conclusions by the editors, so it is very difficult to achieve the comparative vision that the volume aimed to offer. Moreover, the initial questions are not answered and the debate concerning the need for a new model to act as a corrective to those defined by Hallin and Mancini is not addressed. As a result, the book is more a digest addressing the evolution of media in several central European countries than it is a comparative perspective to that process.

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References:

Hallin D. & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. New York: Cambridge University