

Book Reviews

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**Epp Lauk, Martin Oller Alonso,
& Halliki Harro-Loit (Eds.)**

*Monitoring Mediascapes: A Premise of Wisdom-Based EU
Media Governance*

TARTU UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024, 235 PP.

In the age of disinformation, conspiracy theories, extreme-right trolls, social media influencers, and bot farms, it isn't unreasonable to expect systematic media monitoring to be a high priority in every country. In reality, the scope and quality of media monitoring, as well as access to data, vary from country to country, as demonstrated by the EU-funded research project "Critical Exploration of Media Related Risks and Opportunities for Deliberative Communication: Development Scenarios of the European Media Landscape" (Mediadelcom). The project focuses on

the capability of different European countries to collect relevant data, carry out research and analysis and finally assess risks and opportunities associated with media development in terms of the societies' potential for deliberative communication. (p. 1)

This ambitious project conducts a systematic comparative review of existing research on the institutionalisation and development of media-monitoring capa-

bilities in 14 European Union member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden. The project group comprises esteemed scholars from the respective countries, ensuring in-depth analysis. In the project's first phase, individual country reports were compiled and published. This book presents the second phase, a comparative analysis of those reports.

The selection of countries covers the differences and variations among the European Union member states, thus providing a comprehensive analysis of the studied countries' strengths and weaknesses. The countries differ in size (Estonia is the smallest country, and Germany is the largest) and level of wealth, and their academic histories of journalism, media and communication vary. The length of European Union membership and societal and historical contexts also differ. Several countries have gone through dramatic ruptures – the dissolution of the Soviet Union being the closest to our time. In its wake, Germany unified, Latvia and Estonia declared independence, Czechia and Slovakia separated, and Yugoslavia experienced a violent breakup. Making systematic comparisons is thus ambitious and challenging.

The analysis, departing from the individual country reports, shows how dramatic ruptures impact the development of media markets, journalism, academic disciplines, and research traditions. Data collection and research are, to some extent, more systematic and have better longevity in the more politically stable and wealthier countries.

This book, a comprehensive exploration of the topic, is divided into ten chapters. The first three chapters present the aim, main theories, and methodology; five chapters cover the empirical analysis; and the last two round up the discussion and offer a pathway forward.

In the introduction, Epp Lauk and Martin Oller Alonso explain the scope of the study. The overall aim of the research review is to map out the extent of our knowledge about media transformations in European societies. The central questions focus on the implementation of freedom of information and freedom of speech, changes in professional journalism, people's media use, and the development of media competencies. The analysis is based on four domains: legal and ethical regulation, journalism, media use, and user competencies. The study seeks to identify monitoring agents and information sources, such as journals, projects, research funding, national databases, and so on, as well as possible gaps in knowledge.

Chapter 2, by Halliki Harro-Loit, Tobias Eberwein, and Lars Nord, delves into key concepts and variables, with deliberative communication as a central starting point. The authors discuss its definitions, evolution, and necessary conditions based on classical thinkers such as Mill, Habermas, and Elster, as well as newer pragmatist proposals. The authors adopt the practical approach, enabling media monitoring analysis in the selected four domains, indicating risks and opportunities for deliberative communication. Lastly, concepts of agency and governance, structural conditions, risks and opportunities, and a data-information-knowledge-wisdom (DIKW) hierarchy are assembled in a wisdom-based media governance model, providing a framework for analysis and review.

In Chapter 3, Martin Oller Alonso, Halliki Harro-Loit, and Epp Lauk explain how the literature database was compiled and the bibliographic review was done. They present a three-level diachronic and comparative meta-analysis toolbox. The first level is theoretical, the second brings in the four domains, and the third operationalises them. In practical terms, a manual review was combined with a computerised content analysis using Antconc software. The combination of a diachronic approach, country-based case studies, and systematic comparison provides an excellent overview of general strengths and weaknesses and differences between countries.

Chapters 4–8 present empirical results. In Chapter 4, authors Epp Lauk, Martin Oller Alonso, Zrinjka Peruško, Tobias Eberwein, and Christian Oggolder present an overview of monitoring capabilities, the institutionalisation of the academic discipline, research activities, and changes over time. The authors find huge contrasts between poorer and wealthier countries regarding resources for research, education, and so on. In Chapter 5, Marcus Kreutler, Evangelia Psychogiopoulou, Michał Głowacki, Anna Kandyla, Jacek Mikucki, Gábor Polyák, Petra Szávai, and Ágnes Urbán compare research on legal regulation and media industry's self-regulatory system with codes of ethics, ombudspeople, councils, and so on. Although there is good quality research, weak implementation means the existing knowledge is not used well.

In Chapter 6, Lenka Waschková Císařová, Sergio Splendore, Martín Oller Alonso, Iveta Jansová, Jan Motal, Peter Berglez, Lars Nord, Christina Krakovsky, and Nadezhda Miteva highlight the importance of collaboration for good media monitoring. Education, professional culture, competencies, markets, public service, working conditions, and other organisational conditions are investigated. The overall conclusion is that quality of data, fragmentation of research, over-reliance on Western theories, and lack of cooperation are the primary risks associated with monitoring capabilities. Despite the rather pessimistic results, there are positive points, such as existing research on organisational conditions, formulation of normative ideas, and regular international studies, such as the Worlds of Journalism Study.

Chapter 7, authored by Ragne Kõuts-Klemm, Lilia Raycheva, Iveta Jansová, Neli Velinova, and Mart Ots, assesses media use research. There are issues with the quality of available data; for example, due to a lack of funding for academic longitudinal studies, data is regularly collected by commercial agents, nongovernmental organisations, and media industry associations. Their data is not always public, and commercial agents are not interested in doing sophisticated studies. As a result, international collections, such as the Eurobarometer, remain essential sources of information. However, international monitoring projects and indexes use different methods, and their selection of countries varies. Some focus on media, while others include only specific aspects of media. In brief, although regular international collections and studies are good sources of information, their value for media monitoring is not self-evident.

In Chapter 8, the last empirical chapter, Slavomir Gálik, Norbert Vrabec, Ioana Avadani, Anda Rožukalne, Ilva Skulte, Alnis Stakle, Filip Trbojević, Peter

Krajčovič, and Lora Metanova focus on user competencies. They point out research gaps, inconsistencies, and a lack of continuity, and show that media literacy policies range from well-articulated to underdeveloped and are often weakly anchored in legislation. The authors bring forth the need for a universally accepted definition of media and information literacy, harmonisation of visions, and coordination concerning data gathering about user competencies.

The last chapters, authored by Halliki Harro-Loit, are a comprehensive discussion of countries' risk levels and media monitoring capabilities. The author concludes by suggesting a shift towards wisdom-based media governance.

As I write this review, the FBI has revealed Tenet Media, a vocal Trump supporter, received millions of US dollars from the Russian state. Podcasters with a large following on YouTube and other social media platforms harm democracy and deliberative communication if their work is based on stealth communication and dodgy funding. This example raises questions about media industry actors' attitudes to professional standards, ethics, responsibilities, and awareness of foreign influence operations. Should actual or alleged ignorance remove the producer's responsibility? This incident also shows that the legal system and the audience should be vigilant.

Considering the mentioned example, the reviewed volume makes a significant contribution by emphasising the importance of systematic, long-term media monitoring. The project group rightly points out that media monitoring initiatives' focus on traditional media is insufficient and outdated. Political influencers with a large following on social media may shape public perceptions more than traditional news media. While research on public diplomacy, media literacy, and different forms of stealth communication is crucial, the book's focus and emphasis on media monitoring fills a vital gap in the field.

Although the book's primary goal is to provide a pathway to wisdom-based media governance, all empirical chapters discuss the consequences of fragmentary and insecure research funding. The authors also state that the academic discipline of journalism, media, and communication doesn't traditionally value review publications. Thus, the "publish or perish" demand and project-based funding systems don't encourage regular, systematic analysis and review of existing research and industry changes. On the other hand, the authors point out the positive effects of EU-funded projects. They are a valuable addition to less-wealthy countries and provide opportunities for comparative approaches. However, even EU projects cannot remedy the problem of fragmentation.

The authors' suggested solutions include network-based research funding and agendas, evaluating and digging deeper into existing knowledge, and creating open data collections outside universities. The suggested strategies are sound and well-anchored in the empirical results, but the question is: Who will pay? Systematic, long-term data collection and analysis requires funding. The authors mention the European Media Freedom Act, which could potentially enhance monitoring capabilities; however, the current mission statement does not include it. The Act speaks mainly of protecting journalism from interference, monopolisation, and surveillance. The European Board for Media Services, composed of

representatives from the national media authorities and a Commission secretariat, will start operating in 2025 and have primarily advisory roles. Nevertheless, they could perhaps be geared to facilitate systematic data collection and open access to data, enabling better media monitoring.

To conclude, the reviewed book provides a novel and insightful analysis of the challenges and opportunities of media monitoring. It is a valuable resource that provides scholars, media industry organisations, journalists, and policymakers with new knowledge and insights.

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