

The shaping and development of Europe very much depend on media and communication. As Europe itself is a changing concept, so the media operating in Europe in the individual states, between regions in states, and between countries, expand and change. At the same time this changing Europe is part of a changing global scene, a scene which individuals to a large degree experience through media, media that are themselves influenced by the global flows of money and culture.

The development of media is part of the modernisation and globalisation of society.

Changing Media – Changing Europe

An ESF interdisciplinary programme in the social sciences and the humanities



A study of the changing media in Europe, therefore, is indeed a study of changing Europe. Research on media is closely linked to questions of economic and technological growth and expansion, to questions of public policy and the state, and more broadly to social, economic and cultural issues.

From the historical birth of traditional print-based mass media and the rise of visual media such as film and television, we are now entering a new phase in which the 'information society' and interactive media are posing new questions and creating new possibilities for both analysis and practice. At the same time all European countries are experiencing great changes, where traditional national norms are challenged and changed.

In this context, interdisciplinary research on media at a European level is of increasing importance. Many of the basic problems and questions raised by researchers in different European countries could benefit from a joint European and a comparative empirical perspective. At the same time, a research programme on media in Europe is of vital importance for our understanding of how media reflect and influence the economic, social, political and cultural development of Europe.



The European Science Foundation acts as a catalyst for the development of science by bringing together leading scientists and funding agencies to debate, plan and implement pan-European initiatives.

Aims and objectives

During the last twenty-five years, a number of research projects in communication and media have been selected for special funding by European universities and research councils. These projects often have a basis in national priorities, but also include cross-European cooperation, and some have generated empirical data on different aspects of media in Europe.

However, our knowledge of how the media work at a European level, how the media are received and used in the different national communities and on a comparative, transnational level is rudimentary. We need research on the use of media in Europe, further studies on how national media products (film, television and radio programmes, books, newspapers, magazines etc.) are circulated and received in other European countries; and we need research that focuses on European problems and history in relation to the media from political, social, economic, cultural and aesthetic perspectives.

A research programme on media in Europe is vital for the understanding of our cultural heritage and the multifaceted aspects of a future European identity. What is needed, however, is not primarily a collection of isolated, comparative European media studies, but the development of more innovative and theoretical frameworks, that can serve as a way to meet general problems behind a number of related and more concrete and specific European media topics. The aim of this programme is to establish such

frameworks and address general themes and problems that can be studied through concrete analysis of the history, structure, content and effects of the media, and at the same time open up new avenues for comparative empirical and theoretical perspectives.

The comparative perspective is especially important for this programme as much media research has generated data on the national specifics of structure, content and form, and consumption of cultural goods. Comparative analysis will require reconciling datasets based on differing approaches, often rooted in different intellectual and political foundations and traditions. Some superficial and misleading generalisations are frequently made about national differences in media content or consumption which, on closer inspection, reflect the artefacts of data categories or the construction of variables.

The programme will further our critical understanding of how better to arrive at reliable and valid comparative data, based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. This will be one of the major methodological challenges and aspirations for the programme. Small sets of researchers with interests and skills in the analysis of relevant data will be encouraged and facilitated by the programme to develop appropriate methodologies and procedures to advance comparative work in the field.

Another key feature of the programme is the development of stronger interdisciplinary cooperation between the humanities and social sciences in media studies and research in Europe. The composition of the four programme teams will enhance networking and dialogue between humanities and social sciences. In the themes and research areas of each team, the aim is to combine foci across media institutions, production and distribution, media content, genres and aesthetics, and the question of media consumption and reception.

Each team will try to analyse these areas of the media in Europe from both a political-economic dimension, a socio-cultural dimension and an aesthetic-discursive dimension. The programme will mainly focus on European media in a

post-1950 and contemporary perspective, but in dealing with recent media development in Europe a broader historical perspective will also be maintained.

The core of the programme will be the work of the four teams that will explore different aspects of the changes and transitions in European media and European societies. These will be conceived as reflecting tensions and contradictions in media policy and analysis.

The first team will deal with the tension between citizenship and consumerism, that is the relation between media, the public sphere and the market; the challenges facing the media, cultural policy and the public service media in Europe; the shifting boundaries in cultural values, hierarchies and norms.

The second team will focus on the dichotomy and relation between culture and commerce, and the conflict in a media policy caught between cultural aspirations and commercial imperatives. The specific aim of the team's work is to analyse media policy in a European perspective deriving from political, legal,

ethical and socio-cultural perspectives; and including a mapping and analysis of media competition, concentration and the question of diversity in the media.

The third team deals with the problems of convergence and fragmentation in relation to the development of media technology and the information society on a global and European level. This team will assess the concepts of the information society, the network society etc., and focus on new media such as the internet and multimedia, the impact of these new media on society, culture and our work, education and everyday life.

The fourth team will work with media and cultural identities and the relationship between processes of homogenisation and diversity. The team will explore the role of media in everyday life, the questions of gender, ethnicity, lifestyle, social differences, and will look at cultural identities in relation to both media audiences and media content and with the influence of American culture in Europe.

Programme activities

During the five years of the programme (2000-2004) the four teams will devote most of their time to comparative European research on their main theme, and each team will meet twice a year. But the programme will also encourage collaboration between the teams and networking with other European researchers working with related problems. There will also be three major conferences with more general discussions and links between the teams and with a focus on general theoretical, methodological problems and themes that will cut across the work of the four teams. The teams and the programme as a whole will work towards the publication of a series of working papers and a final series of edited volumes on European media.

Team 1: Citizenship and consumerism: Media, the public sphere and the market

Team Leader: Professor Jostein Gripsrud, Norway (e-mail: jostein.gripsrud@media.uib.no)

People confront the media in two roles. They are consumers buying goods and

services in the market place, in which the products of the media compete for scarce spending power and attention with a range of other goods and services. At the same time they use the media to acquire the information and symbolic resources that enable them to act socially, as citizens in the political system, and as social actors in their wider community.

The tradition of public service media is one of the central areas of concern in relation to the question of citizenship and consumerism, since on a European level it represents an ideology of media in the service of democracy and sustaining the development of national culture and citizenship.

In the last twenty years great changes have already taken place and are still continuing: public service culture is now approaching a new era where the former appeal to, and presumption of, a broad and unitary national audience is breaking down. Specialisation and new distribution

technologies will change the role and form of public service in the future. Public sector broadcasters, both in radio and TV during this period, have developed new types of programming, but have also, in a number of countries, lost a significant share of their former audience to other and more commercial channels.

The team will be conducting a comparative analysis of public service media in Europe involving the relation between national and international channels, different types of channels, on programming statistics and audience reach; and involving both an historical, a more political and economic focus as well as questions related to the social and cultural impact and the importance of public service. It also involves more aesthetic and discursive questions on a comparative, qualitative level of developments in important programme genres, such as national fiction/drama, national news, documentaries and programmes for young people and children.

The team will also focus on questions related to media, cultural production and cultural values, the role of media in the processes of modernisation and democratisation of culture, and the cross-fertilisation of high culture and popular culture. Behind the same development however there is also a growing commercialisation and globalisation of more and more sectors of communication, culture and media. It is therefore important to study the processes linking media, cultural forms and cultural values, cross-cultural forms and media types, and to look at the interrelated and sometimes opposing tendencies of democratisation and commercialisation. One of the aims will therefore be to study such processes and forms as 'tabloidisation' and 'infotainment' in documentaries, news and journalism. It may be that commercial intentions meet specific aesthetic and rhetorical forms transforming public issues and more serious forms of public debate into more privatised, sensational forms of journalism and rhetoric. Tabloidisation and associated accusations of 'dumbing down' have been around for some time in discussions of European newspapers, but the era of deregulation of radio and television has also resulted in

the transformation of genres in broadcast journalism and in other factual genres, in the hybridisation of public and private discourses, and in new programming strategies.

Team 2: Culture and commerce: media between cultural policy and industrial policy

Team leader: Professor Els de Bens, Belgium (e-mail: els.debens@rug.ac.be)

Both national governments and European institutions have found themselves uncertain as to the proper direction of policy in relation to the media. On the one hand they wish to protect national culture (itself a problematic concept), and intervene for the protection of vulnerable groups from 'harmful' material. On the other hand they are anxious to liberate the market in order to foster economic growth, especially of newer media industries, or to protect embryonic new industries from the gargantuan competition of multinational players from the USA or Japan. The emergence of cross-national ownership of media industries poses new questions for the role of the state, and acute difficulties for regulation and intervention at a European level. These contradictory impulses have produced much anguish within the policy debate, which needs to be well informed by well-resourced, relevant and comparative research.

Even in a rather protected and regulated European media sector like that of the 1970s and the early 1980s, both television and cinema were heavily dominated by American products. The debate on a European level, and at the national level about the role of quotas for European and national products to protect national culture is based on the assumption that the import of media products will result in a threat to important cultural identities, and in media conformity. Policies of this kind vary greatly between different countries and different media sectors. Most media, especially in the print sector and in the music and recording industries, have received little public support or regulation other than newsprint or distribution subsidies in some countries for purposes of democratic equity. Studies assessing the link between different cultural traditions and differing regimes

of public intervention both between sectors and across nations will tell us a good deal about the future prospects for such statutory action in a fast changing European media system.

The team will focus on conceptual frameworks for contemporary communication policies in an historical perspective, in order to find the roots of the public purposes of communication policy in relation to democracy theory. This will include questions of law and ethics as instruments of media policy in a European perspective. The team will also focus on the actual development in contemporary media politics and how it is implemented in contemporary European media, and will investigate the actors influencing this development and the media policy on a national, European and global level. The team will consider how changes in political communication resources, processes and activities are changing the character of the political process itself. Finally the team will work with the development and influence of media competition on innovation and diversity in both media and media content.

Team 3: Convergence-fragmentation: Media technology and the information society

Team leader: Professor Jean-Claude Burgelman, Belgium/Spain
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In recent years there has been much commentary on the collapse of conventional and familiar distinctions between the media, as technological changes render such distinctions redundant. In particular the integration of computing, telecommunications and broadcasting has opened up a whole range of new forms of distribution that are changing the communications environment rapidly. However, to let this analysis remain at the technological level is clearly inadequate, and we can consider three other senses of convergence linked to this theme:

First, at the level of economic and organisational structure, the growing horizontal and vertical integration of media companies, and their integration into wider corporate structures, is creating a wholly new set of issues for policy and for analysis. Secondly, at the level of

social institutions, the convergence through communications of other spheres – work, education, family life, leisure. Thirdly, on the level of aesthetics, the new multimedia raise a number of questions concerning transgressions of familiar forms and genres, and the chances of survival of previously established, traditional media and forms of expression. In each of these areas the contradictory tendencies of convergence (implying a similarity and increasing unity of experience) with fragmentation (implying a growing differentiation of experience) need further examination and assessment.

The team will work with general aspects of this development and the question of whether we are moving into a new information society or a network society. The convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and computing is altering the form and consumption of cultural services in ways which cut across all sectors. However these trends can be overstated and treated with undue euphoria or paranoia. The term ‘information society’ calls for theoretical and analytical clarification, and we do need a great deal more information about these changes across Europe, not least the range of more or less possible changes in our culture and norms.

Therefore the team will also focus on more specific developments of new media such as the internet and the world wide web, both new interactive forms of communication, where at the same time we find a certain kind of anarchic, bottom-up type of activity and strong top-down economic interests. Studies of the structure of the internet, the world wide web and its users could lead to a more concrete understanding of future trends in communication and information.

The internet has been much hyped as offering not merely new ways of obtaining information but as revolutionising the character of democracy (through interactive and deliberative citizenship), commerce (through on-line marketing and purchasing), community (through the development of virtual relationships transcending limitations of space, time and access), and culture (through the transgression of familiar boundaries of nation, group, and association). The team

will work towards a more solid empirical assessment on a comparative and European basis, and to elaborate a theoretical framework and conceptual language adequate to the new opportunities and changes which the internet has provoked.

Besides the study of the internet, there is also the question of multimedia and the new information order: the term 'multimedia' is used extensively in recent debates, and points to the future merging of former separated media such as TV, telephone, computer, radio, CD etc. in a new integrated form. It still remains to be seen if and how this integration will in fact be a widespread and much used phenomenon, and this will also be included in the team's agenda.

Finally the team will focus broadly on the relation between social institutions, both public and private, and new media. The new media will influence our social institutions, both in households and in the public and private sector. They will also perhaps enhance the blurring of boundaries between traditional sectors, thus influencing both our social and cultural norms. Some of the social institutions which the team will be looking at are: socialisation and education, politics and the 'digital citizen', new media and the world of work, new media, leisure, cultural industries and entertainment.

Team 4: Homogenisation-diversity: Media and cultural identities

Team leader: Professor William Uricchio, Netherlands/USA (e-mail: w.uricchio@let.uu.nl)

The cliché that we live on a planet of diminishing dimensions as communications dissolve older patterns of space and time, is clearly problematic. However it is undoubtedly the case that changing forms and sources of socialisation, many of them engendered by changes in media and cultural consumption, are creating new forms of identity formation.

Our interest here is in the changing boundaries of identity. Within sociology much attention has been given to the replacement of identities forged in the sphere of production (primarily class) by those derived from consumption (sectoral divisions, habitus and so on). But studies of gender, locality, ethnicity and

generation have also been at the centre of a number of debates, suggesting that behind common reception patterns we also find different styles of reception in use and preference of media and media content and, thus, a diversity of consumption reflecting these differentiated patterns of identity.

A study of homogenisation and diversity must focus on the extent to which the media provide the resources for such identity mobilisation. There is no doubt that the media as a whole, and seen in a larger historical perspective, have contributed to the homogenisation of cultures, and that global centres of production, mostly located in America, have had an impact on the evolution of cultural identity all over the world. However, at a time of apparent homogenisation of cultural distribution (the 'coca-colonisation' of everything) the evidence of resilient local, regional, and ethnic identities seems compelling, while analysis of the hybridisation that results from these trends is as yet elementary. Equally, in a European context, the role of transnationalisation is important; the transnational impact of a global culture, and the fluidity of European boundaries (both geo-political and cultural) confront strong and resilient local and regional cultures, and modes of expression in which the role of the media is critical.

The impact of changing patterns of work, family structure, urban living and income distribution have all made inroads into a range of social and cultural behaviours, including identity formation and expression, lifestyle, political behaviour and association etc. In all of this, media act as sources for symbols and ideas as well as important sites of debate - a role complemented by their absorption of peoples' times and resources.

The team will work with the question of homogenisation and diversity and the question of media and cultural identity in relation to a number of more specific questions. We need both the development of new data, new theoretical positions and more qualitative studies of the flow of information, programmes, money etc., between European countries, and not least between Europe and the rest of the

world. We need more focused and varied studies with a both quantitative and qualitative perspective focusing on the European dimension of this whole process.

The team will also consider the role of media in everyday life, the question of how our use of media differs according to educational background, family structure, age, gender, ethnicity and other socio-cultural and psychological factors. The study of media and children and young people has for decades been on the research agenda, among other things because the relationship gave rise to moral and educational concerns. The team will integrate European studies and empirical data on this matter. However, newer studies have approached this problem from other angles, focusing more on ethnographic and qualitative, reception-based or cognitive psychological studies

of the relation between generational cultures and media use. The same can be said about European studies of gender, ethnicity and the media.

The team will assess how to shed new light on the cultural identities in Europe and the role of media in this process, through a combination of sociological and ethnographic approaches, as well as approaches that focus on media content and media reception.

And finally, local culture needs to be related to globalisation. Globalisation can, from a national and regional perspective, be seen as a threat to national and regional identities. But, at the same time, the strengthening of regional cultures could be seen as the result of the need for a new kind of national and regional culture, reflecting and responding to globalisation in different ways.

Young scholars grants

Plenary conferences

The programme will have three plenary conferences where all the teams meet and outside researchers and speakers will be invited. The first conference will be from 24-27 August 2000 in Il Ciocco, Italy; the second will be in April 2002 and the third and final conference will be in December 2004.

The programme will launch a minor young scholar grant scheme from 2001, allowing young scholars (doctoral or postdoctoral) to participate in workshops and conferences for a limited period or in other ways be linked to one of the teams. Information about this young scholar grant will be available through ESF from August 2000. The first round of applications will be in Autumn 2000.

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