

Eric Klinenberg (2007), *Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media*. New York: Metropolitan Books, pp. 339, ISBN 13: 978-0-8050-7189-0.

Scientific and popular literature on the intensifying focus on the media market and changes in their ownership structures is quite rich, and every year new analyses devoted to these issues appear. Among them, there is a book by Eric Klinenberg, sociologist at the University of New York, that is worthy of special mention. Written in a journalistic style, the book is devoted to the functioning of the local media in the era of the overwhelming reign of global media concerns. *Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media* is a very interesting picture of dealing with the fight for airtime in the American area of broadcasting.

Klinenberg, as befits a sociologist, refers in his argument primarily to the relations between media and society. The author's analysis shows the influence of global media on impoverishment and impairment of the current role of local communication. Local communities are thus deprived of the diversity of information provided so far by local media, which, according to Klinenberg, can threaten democracy. Arguments cited by Klinenberg cannot be classified as extremely revealing but they are certainly a true reflection of the situation in today's media market in the United States.

Klinenberg talks about the real dangers faced by local broadcasters during the reign of global media companies. The reader seeking more in-depth theoretical considerations should not read *Fighting for Air*: .. because they are simply not in the book. The author does not devote too much time to detailed analysis of social antagonisms such as: *Does big global always mean dangerous? Should local always be the synonym of quietness? Should local problems be considered from the perspective of size, or rather wealth? What impact will the weakening of local communication have on contemporary democracy?* Instead of theoretical considerations and digressions, the author presents fairly "strong" and "pictorial" evidence of how the global media, occasionally supported by government regulations, have often led to very adverse changes in the local media market in the United States. During the first decade of the establishment of the Telecommunications Act (1996), the increasing concentration of media in the United States could be observed. According to Klinenberg, global "trends" of development in the media market dictated of course by transformation of the media from "public body" into "media company" caused "much harm" to local media which have shaped local societies so far.

In Klinenberg's opinion, local media "have been forced" to generate revenue, which means that they move away more and more from the local community and their role in the creation of local identity is smaller and smaller. The most important thing is to ensure positive economic growth for the heading or the TV station. However, the needs and expectations recede into the background, which according to Klinenberg is clear, when one analyzes the content of American local newspapers, radio and TV season schedules.

Klinenberg, on the very first pages, introduces us to the current reality prevailing in the U.S. local media market describing the history of the train that derailed in Minot, North Dakota, on January 18th, 2002, spilling 240,000 gallons of toxic chemicals used to manufacture fertilizer . At that time, residents were surprised by the behaviour of local radio stations. None of the six radio stations in the city mentioned the derailment. It turned out that all the stations belonged to Clearnet Channel Communications, with its main base in Texas, which at the time when the disaster happened, emitted prepared earlier recordings. What is worse, the institution responsible for compiling and transmitting messages about imminent threats (later renamed the Emergency Alert System), also failed because the local authorities were unable to use the equipment. Minot residents were left alone to fight against an unknown threat. As a result, one person died and more than a thousand had to undergo treatment.

The way of beginning the publication concerning the risks posed by the ubiquitous global media is quite meaningful, all the more so, that the style of work is also unique. We can have the feeling that we are reading a novel, rather than a scientific monograph. The remaining chapters of the book describe — step by step — how global media have changed the image of communication — in the author’s opinion, unfortunately, almost always for the worse. The most important thing is that due to Klinenberg’s journalistic style, almost everybody can understand the intricacies of economic and social determinants of contemporary local media in the USA.

The monograph presents not only traditional media such as: newspapers, radio and television. The author refers also to the alternative weeklies and the Internet. Each chapter of the book is supported by statements of many respected authorities, with whom Klinenberg met during his five-year research. The author takes readers into the studio of Sinclair Broadcasting’s News Central, which provides TV stations with “local” information. We also visit Florida to learn people’s opinions of Media General’s Tampa News Center, and confirm the convergence of information appearing in television, radio, newspapers and networks. Klinenberg describes how the reduction in staff in the various editorial offices causes “death” of the reportage referred to the problems of the city or state. He suggests that those who believe that the Internet will save local media should look at the Pew Center report, which shows that the network is dominated by the global media. The chapter on the history of strengthening the ownership of alternative weeklies on the market, illustrates how frustrated and at the same time powerless are some owners of local weeklies. Their frustration is obviously the result of fear of being absorbed by leading media corporations.

Apart from spreading the vision of common “unification” of local media in the world of global corporations Klinenberg, as befits a sociologist, describes in the pages of his book, the social reaction to the situation. The author describes in detail how the local community and emerging within it “civic groups” were able to unite to create a unique movement that Klinenberg has called “an unlikely social move-

ment for media reform”. The history of this social initiative is certainly worth telling, and Klinenberg takes up this task with unconcealed enthusiasm. The author introduces readers to the world of individuals, groups and institutions that attempt to recover the local news for local receivers. Self-appointed committees are struggling with further strengthening of ownership and media concentration, directing the sting of criticism primarily at media group companies. Their activities are focused on national legislative institutions. They try to persuade federal lawmakers to take up the challenge and try to solve this problem. Klinenberg in his work acquaints the reader with the activities of such organizations as: the American Free Press or Prometheus Radio Project, whose mission is to support community radio stations. The author of *Fighting for Air* concentrates a bit less on the role played by trade unions in shaping the reform movements in the world of the media.

Klinenberg is mainly focused on showing how devastating an impact on social communication global media have. His concern raises the fact that interest in any initiatives that reduce this negative impact is relatively small. Actions taken by global media meet with criticism from both scientists and ordinary recipients. However, according to Klinenberg it is still a “drop in the bucket”. While the “catastrophic” vision of the pervasive power of global media is a bit exaggerated, Klinenberg’s monograph seems to be extremely valuable since it shows us that the subject of his research, although sometimes somewhat marginalized, is important and inspiring for contemporary media studies .

Fighting for Air is a book that allows for a moment of reflection: Global Media — Dangerous Media? In addition, the book is very friendly to the reader who will not get bored while wading through the subsequent pages. It is also a valuable work devoted to the issue of media ownership.

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