

# Comparing Media Systems in Central and Eastern Europe



**Interview with Prof. Daniel C. Hallin and Prof. Paolo Mancini  
on models of media systems, journalism, new technologies and a Central and  
Eastern European perspective in comparative media studies**

Significant changes that occur in contemporary social, political and media structures create real opportunities for renewing the traditional concepts of media systems and the professionalization of journalism. Hence, as a part of the empirical workshop of the 7th EC Framework Programme “Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe” (MediaAcT) consortium, the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of Wrocław organized a conference, entitled “Journalism Culture in Different Media Systems in the Theoretical Perspective and Practice” (23 February 2011). Keynote speeches on the development of journalistic culture in an era of convergence, market competition and the growing importance of citizen journalism were delivered by Krzysztof Bobiński (The Polish Journalists’ Association), Tomasz Hanitzsch (University of Munich), Thomas Schiller (Evangelischer Pressedienst), Adam Szynol (University of Wrocław) and Ognian Zlatev (Media Development Center in Bulgaria). Among the guests of the conference were Prof. Daniel C. Hallin (University of California, San Diego) and Prof. Paolo Mancini (University of Perugia) — the founders of three models of media and politics, one of the most influential conceptualizations in contemporary studies on media systems. Prof. Hallin and Prof. Mancini have talked about the current situation of media in Central and Eastern Europe, the impact of new technologies, as well as strengths and weaknesses of three models of conceptualization and the future of comparative media studies.

**To what extent are you familiar with the Polish media system and research on relations between media and politics conducted in Central and Eastern Europe?**

**Paolo Mancini:** This is my second year at Oxford University, where I’m involved in a project on media and democracy in Central and European countries. This project is headed by the political scientist Prof. Jan Zielonka, who has Polish roots. We are working a lot on the current situation of Poland and thus, first of all, I’m discovering that there are many good Polish scholars both in media and political science. With-

in the same research project, we had a very interesting meeting with representatives from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which is an original and independent newspaper even though it has very clear political profile. This newspaper is introducing many innovations with respect to Polish journalism. For instance, I think this has been a novelty for Poland and Polish political elites in general putting together some sort of neutral ideology of journalism together with clear political choice. At the same time the newspaper has been independent from political parties and groups and thus may be treated as a model for other countries in the region.

**Daniel C. Hallin:** I think it is interesting that the East Europeans were the first ones to translate our book “Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics” not taking into account the Italian translation. I think it reflects a rapid development of studies in Eastern Europe on media and politics. Thus, we see that there is a huge community of scholars working on this kind of topic. Paolo and I have learnt something about the media systems in Eastern Europe. We even wrote a chapter for a book edited by Peter Gross and Karol Jakubowicz in which we speculated on how our analysis might have to be revised or extended to further apply to Central and Eastern European conditions. However, we agree that we do not have an in-depth knowledge on the situation of Central and Eastern European states as we do for Western European democracies.

**But do you have any idea in which direction the Polish media system is evolving?**

**Daniel C. Hallin:** To me it seems it is a mixture in terms of our models. This means it makes sense to try to develop a new model and to conceptualize this kind of approach. Media scholars in Eastern Europe often observe strong similarities with our Polarized Pluralist model above all in the fairly high degree of politicization of the media, particularly public service broadcasting. But there is also a lot of similarity to the Liberal model. Central and Eastern European countries became democratic in the period of neoliberalism and hence there is a strong commercialization of media. I think there are also some examples that may be applied to the Democratic Corporatist countries with most notably a combination of political identity with strong professional culture, which you can find at least in the case of *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

**Paolo Mancini:** We have observed that in the case of *Gazeta Wyborcza* the young generation of journalists have a good knowledge of English language and some international experience. Hence, in the case of this particular newspaper the heritage of the Communist regime is totally forgotten. This means that there might be some indications that Poland is taking a new route, which is different from all the previous ones. In my opinion Poland represents a mixture of Polarized Pluralist and the Liberal model. First of all, we may speak about a strong level of media partisanship. Secondly, in some countries political partisanship results in a mixture of interests of politics, business and media. In the case of Central and Eastern Europe we can ob-

serve political orientation of the media, while at the same time relations between politics, business and media are overlapping. This means this is not only political parallelism but this is something completely new in connection to experiences in other parts of the world. Here, political parties are weak. In addition, there are important examples of personal parties built upon the personality of one single politician. In such cases the political ideology behind this kind of party is weak. This does not allow the formation of party press as was the experience of Western Europe. Moreover, there is also an issue of commercialization. We have just conducted a study proving that foreign media owners and investors are leaving many Central and Eastern European media markets. They may have realized this may not be as profitable as they expected. To this end they may have also realized that media organizations in this part of the world are still threatened by local authorities in political means.

**Have you ever considered the fourth model of media and politics emphasizing the media-politics relations in Central and Eastern Europe?**

**Daniel C. Hallin:** I think this would make a lot of sense to try to think of another model that would capture media and politics relations in Central and Eastern Europe. However, I assume that to deal with all the post-Soviet countries you would actually need several different models with several different patterns. There are a lot of characteristics that distinguish this group of countries from the ones that we studied in Western Europe. A model is just an intellectual tool that allows you to conceptualize that kind of interrelated set of factors and relations to other systems. I think this would be useful.

**Did you expect that the three models conceptualization might become so popular in different parts of the world?**

**Daniel C. Hallin:** I would say: “Yes, we did expect”. Even before we started the project we had thought that if we could write this book, it would create a huge sensation. This has been something which was needed in the field for a long time. Please do not forget that there has been a lot of criticism as well. Maybe I would say that I expected more scholars from particular countries to say: “No, you got this country wrong”. This has happened in some cases but maybe not as much as I felt it might.

**Do you think that your models can travel and might be used in developing democracies, such as Egypt, Georgia or Azerbaijan?**

**Daniel C. Hallin:** I would say no. The models are not intended as a kind of abstract universal framework to apply all over the world. They are intended as an analysis of a particular set of cases. They might be useful as a point of comparison but they

should not be transferred to other contexts. What we hope can travel is the approach and the concepts.

### **What are the strengths and weaknesses of three models of media and politics?**

**Paolo Mancini:** First of all, I would say that the biggest weakness is new media. For instance, the idea of homogenization, convergence towards the Liberal model that we stress in the last part of the book is in part contradicted by the development of new media that are responsible for the growing level of fragmentation. In addition to this, new media might push the neutral model of news reporting towards the advocacy model that, for example, we can observe in the case of Fox News or many blogs. Hence, the development of new media has pushed the evolution of media systems and professional models into the direction of fragmentation rather than homogenization. New media are responsible for the introduction of new media actors/mediators responsible for spreading news and communication. Due to the development of new media and citizen journalism, the traditional figure of a professional journalist doesn't seem to be central to democracy anymore.

**Daniel C. Hallin:** I agree that one of the biggest limitations is the fact that it does not deal with new media since there have been many changes in media systems. In some ways I also think that the strengths and weaknesses of the book are tied together in a certain way. In the processes of engaging in the dialogue with scholars from other parts of the world, there are a lot of ways in which you can see the limitations of our analysis. You can see the way in which our analysis reflects an experience of our particular context. When we think about political parallelism we were thinking in terms of several different countries that have a tradition of stable political parties, clear identities, social interests etc. In order to study a wider range of cases you really have to rethink the concept of political parallelism to adopt it to other kinds of political realities. You can say this is the limitation of our framework but at the same time we would say that our framework was always intended as an analysis of a limited set of cases. We didn't try to make too general a framework but to go fairly deeply into a particular context. This may be a strength to contribute to a wider global study on media systems.

**Paolo Mancini:** I took several trips in the last few months to East Asia. If you look at the reality of East Asia, the idea of neutral journalism is stress. Nevertheless the political structure, the culture and traditions push East Asian media systems into a completely new direction. For those who know the reality of this part of the world, they often use the expression "partisan polyvalence", emphasizing that the media are not working just for political reasons but you have a mix of different reasons and motivations within the media. And if you look at this beyond Western Europe, this is the reality that you can find in different parts of the world.

**What kind of criteria could we use to emphasize all of the dynamics that are related to current changes in contemporary media structures?**

**Daniel C. Hallin:** One thing that might be said about our analysis is that we are focusing on media *systems* and perhaps it puts the emphasis a little bit more on continuity and the static character of our analysis, although we also paid a lot of attention to history. But there are others who have said if we are doing a comparison of change, we need to think of shifting the emphasis from system to the process. Media systems are always in fact in a process of change. You could see the development of media system not as a straight line development towards a particular ideal but as an ideal type that may persist for a certain period, but then there will be changes in technology, changes in political systems and changes in economics that will disorganize this kind of system.

**Paolo Mancini:** We are probably at the moment when new technologies play the most significant role in current changes in media systems. New media are completely reshaping the field of media but also society.

**Daniel C. Hallin:** Also it is clear that in the case of Central and Eastern Europe very sudden political changes took place a fairly short time ago. It is certainly normal to expect that it will take quite a while after a change like that for media systems to be established. It is certain that media institutions will need time to evolve to the point where their relations with other institutions, their place in social structure as a whole are relatively stable.

**What would you change if you were given the opportunity to write a book on comparing media systems again?**

**Paolo Mancini:** First of all, we would certainly include the role of new media and how they reshape the contemporary media landscapes. Secondly, we would reshape the issue related to the process of commercialization observed from the 1980s as well as secularization that took place in the 1970s and 1980s and ended in the 1990s. We have learnt that we need to analyze a connection between media and politics in a new light. For instance, when we started to write our book in 1997 we concentrated our original study on the processes of pillarization and depillarization of Dutch society. Nowadays this process is over and we are facing a completely new situation.

**Daniel C. Hallin:** Media systems that we described in the book are those that reached the classic point of their development in the 1970s. They had been in a process of change all along in some ways but particularly since then their integrity has changed again. If ten years from now you are writing another book similar to ours you are probably dealing with a rather different constellation of systems. It would be

clear at that point how the new media systems look like and what their structure is. New media, in fact are just beginning to form as institutions. It is really hard to know at this point how they will develop. Some years ago, maybe ten years ago, there was a very sharp dichotomy between traditional established media structures and decentralized and citizen-oriented new media. Now we know that America Online just bought *The Huffington Post* in the USA and *The Huffington Post* has just introduced a large newsroom typical to traditional media and started to look like an established media institution. We still don't know the future of the Internet and how it will continue to change the existing media structures in the near future.

**So what is the future of the framework introduced in “Comparing Media Systems”? Will people stop using it?**

**Daniel C. Hallin:** I am not sure that will be true. Some things may have to be qualified to account for change in media systems. But many of the differences persist. Partisan media have grown in the US, for instance, but you will still probably emphasize the issue of neutral journalistic professionalism as characteristic of liberal countries as we did on our book.



**Daniel C. Hallin** is a professor at the University of California, San Diego. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of California, Berkeley. His research areas include political communication and media and war, as well as the role of mass media in contemporary democracies. His latest research focuses on comparative analysis of the news media's role in the public sphere, concentrating on Europe and Latin America. He is the author of several books, including *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) (co-authored with Paolo Mancini).

**Paolo Mancini** is a professor of sociology of communications at the University of Perugia and contributing editor to *The European Journal of Communication*. He is the author of several books, including *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) (co-authored with Daniel C. Hallin). He has been active in many international workshops and projects dedicated to comparative studies on media systems and journalistic professionalization, including *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* and *Foreign News on TV*.

The interview was conducted by Adam Szynol and Michał Głowacki during the international conference *Journalistic Culture in Different Media Systems in the Theoretical Perspective and Practice* on 23rd February 2011, in Wrocław.