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Capability of monitoring mediascapes in 14 European countries

AN INTRODUCTION

Epp Lauk & Martín Oller Alonso

WHY IS MONITORING MEDIASCAPES WORTH THE EFFORT?

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

The strengthening of ultra-right and populist political forces in Europe, and events like Brexit and Russia's aggression in Ukraine, demonstrate that the unity of European nations and their common goals and values are not self-evident. These developments sound alarm bells about the vulnerability and risks relating to informed decision making in contemporary democratic societies. The European Democracy Action Plan[1] emphasises the need to strengthen European democracy by "1) promoting free and fair elections, 2) strengthening media freedom and 3) countering disinformation". These aims would be achieved by "preserving open democratic debate", and empowering citizens "through education and increased media literacy" in addition to various regulatory and technological means. These tasks presuppose the existence of favourable conditions for deliberation in the public space and raising deliberative communication to become the focal point. In the current study, deliberative communication (see Chapter 2 for the concept) is perceived as a precondition for successful deliberative democracy, where collective decisions are made as results of public discussion in which citizens can participate on equal terms and for which they are provided with trustworthy infor-

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[1] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/european-democracy-action-plan_en

mation. In this way, deliberative communication functions as an intrinsic component of democratic decision making processes.

As most people receive their information about societal activity from the media, their ability to function well in true deliberative processes largely depends on the kinds of media they use, the type and quality of the content the media offer, and the excellence of their performance. For the electorate, possessing reliable information is vital for resultative argumentation and discussion, and informed choices. Regardless of rapid ICT development and the emergence of efficient and novel ways of information gathering and distribution, quality journalism has remained the most reliable information producer. Quality journalism appears in the news media, both offline and online, and therefore it is important to examine the health and resources of the news media regularly to reveal developments that generate potential risks for successful deliberative communication. Furthermore, systematic collection, analysis and application of adequate knowledge to withstand these risks (or to convert them into opportunities) will, in the long run, improve the conditions for the development of deliberative democracy.

However, media developments, especially rapid transformations – structural and technological – accompanying political and economic changes in societies, inevitably challenge deliberative ideals. Here, a question arises: What factors and in which configurations induce either or both risks and opportunities (ROs) for deliberative communication? This is a question about the quality, sufficiency and limits of the existing knowledge necessary to identify and explain specific RO factors that influence the implementation of deliberative communication. If this knowledge is acquired from existing research on news media transformations, the scope and quality of the publications, reports and interpretations of the gathered data reflect the capability of monitoring mediascapes (CMM) of any country. Hence, a direct relationship exists between identifying ROs for deliberative communication and assessing the CMM of European countries. We characterise the core concept of the CMM as the capacity (resources, motivations, expertise) of the relevant agents to observe and analyse the evolution or transformations of news media that trigger societal changes, subsequently producing risks and opportunities (ROs) for deliberative communication. This book demonstrates that the CMM could be considered a key factor for understanding how media transformations create risks and opportunities for deliberative communication. The book Monitoring Mediascapes presents the research process and results of the first stage of the Mediadelcom project, which assesses the developments of the CMM (see Chapter 2 for the definition) through the critical analysis of both the quantity and quality of the existing research and data in 14 EU countries during the 2000–2020 period. The term 'mediascapes' in this study encompasses not only media content, its providers and distributors (media industry structures, journalists, other media professionals, etc.), but also the consumers of this content, their media competency and the ways in which they use media.

WHAT IS MEDIADELCOM?

Mediadelcom is an acronym for the Critical Exploration of Media Related Risks and Opportunities for Deliberative Communication: Development Scenarios of the European Media Landscape[2] EU-funded research project, lasting from February 2021 to February 2024. The coordinator of the project is the University of Tartu, Estonia. The consortium consists of teams of scholars from 14 EU countries: five from 'old Europe' (Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden), and nine 'newcomers' from Central and Eastern Europe, joining the EU in 2004 or later (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) (see Table 1 in Appendix).

The leading argument of the Mediadelcom project is that political and cultural spaces evolve best if specific policies enhance the conditions for deliberative communication. The overall objective of the Mediadelcom project is to identify configurations of risks and opportunities (ROs) for deliberative communication arising from the transformations that the news media in European countries have undergone in the 21st century. Comparison of these configurations enables the project team in the next stage of the project to outline the scenarios of how the news media would enhance or obstruct the evolution of deliberative communication in Europe.

A sizable literature review on the approaches and topics in journalism, media and communication (JMC) and related fields of research was conducted to identify areas of risk discourse. These discourses usually appeared in connection with information disorder or fake news, business mod els of news, the precariousness of journalism labour, decreasing autonomy and media freedom, low levels of media literacy, echo chambers and increasing platform monopolies, just to name a few. Based on identified risk discourses, four domains of research were defined to guide monitoring: journalism, the legal and ethical regulation of news media, media usage patterns, and media-related competencies. A system of categories was worked out for monitoring and analysis. In the context of Mediadelcom, journalism, media and communication studies (JMC) as the object of research is defined (and limited) by two aspects. First, JMC embraces the studies in the four mentioned domains. The second aspect is the researcher's identity, seen through involvement in national and international associations and conferences according to the researcher's self-identification with a discipline (journalism, communications, etc.). This is mainly relevant when the estimate of the number of researchers in a country is in question.

The Mediadelcom project argues that a good media policy is a precondition for the progress of deliberative democracy. This book introduces the idea of wis-

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[2] Grant Agreement No 101004811.

dom-based media governance (see Chapter 9 and Conclusions) as a premise for developing favourable conditions for efficient deliberative communication. The main difference for Mediadelcom between media policy and governance is that the latter focuses on collective coordination. The notion of governance depicts networks of public, private and civil society actors operating on a mainly consensual basis.

European policy visions depict evidence-based policy as dynamic and complex actions involving all relevant stakeholders (van Woensel, 2021), but often overlook the practical implementation of decisions. As Durrant et al. (2023) demonstrate, instead of focusing on implementation, there is a unidirectional "push" to get research findings accepted as "knowledge products" in policy and practice spheres (termed "research dissemination"). Durrant and colleagues advocate a more sophisticated "knowledge mobilisation" approach, emphasising relational interactions (including interaction between actors), the integration of diverse knowledge forms and adaptability to local contexts. Mediadelcom suggests that wisdom-based media governance is an approach that takes evidence into consideration as well as dialogue and co-operation between stakeholders as agents.

This kind of media governance presumes an agreement on which questions need to be asked to create awareness of the impact of change in both the media and in society's communication culture. Therefore, a strong capability of monitoring mediascapes (CMM) is a vital precondition for facilitating good media policy. The CMM starts with the question: What is known and what is not known about news media transformations in European societies? To answer this question, four essential issues need to be clarified: (1) How have freedoms of information and of speech been implemented? (2) How have professional journalism and journalists changed? (3) How do people use news media? (4) How have media competencies developed across segments of society? The *Monitoring Mediascapes* research task examines how JMC research in 14 EU countries has responded to these questions. The empirical basis for this book comes from 14 country reports (Case Study 1) that identified and analysed main information and knowledge sources (scholarly publications, projects, reports, etc.), monitoring actors, national databases and scholarly journals in the four domains (journalism, legal and ethical regulation, media usage patterns, and media related competencies), as well as funding systems of JMC research. An important task of the country reports was to identify the information and knowledge gaps.

WHAT ARE THE NOVELTIES OF MEDIADELCOM AND THE BOOK?

The study carried out by the Mediadelcom project is unique in many respects. CMM as a concept is empirically tested for the first time and consolidated for future research efforts. The CMM in 14 countries is examined from the point of

view of sufficiency and quality of data and knowledge on the media systems applying a holistic approach, which discloses various factors and their combinations that influence each country's monitoring capacity. The book diachronically analyses the institutionalisation and the disciplinary development of the field of JMC research in 14 countries (see Chapter 4), showing how important the length and continuity of research tradition are for successful CMM. Also, recognition of the JMC as an independent discipline raises its status and chances for securing research funding. Further, various configurations of structural conditions (institutionalisation, funding, technological and legal frameworks; see Chapter 9) determine the efficiency of the CMM.

Agent-oriented analysis (see Chapter 3 and 9) is employed to assess the activities of various agents (politicians, media professionals, media researchers, educators, regulators, etc.). The quality of both research and monitoring clearly depends on the agency of human resources, i.e. on the competencies, qualifications and motivation of researchers, primarily academics. Our study emphasises the agency aspect, which has, so far, remained an almost neglected area in JMC research.

The Mediadelcom team adapted the DIKW pyramid which defines the differences between and hierarchy of data, information, knowledge and wisdom, and enables researchers to assess the quality and usefulness of studies available for monitoring purposes and also to identify the ROs for developing a wisdom-based media policy, as suggested by the project (see Chapter 2).

An important concept elaborated in the current study is monitoring governance concerning coordination mechanisms, cooperation and networking between the various agents (researchers, institutions, etc.) involved in monitoring (see Chapters 2 and 9).

As English has largely become the dominant lingua franca of academic publishing and interaction, knowledge produced in English-speaking countries finds its way to international forums much more easily than knowledge coming from other languages, especially those of small countries. The transnational character of Mediadelcom is one of the project's peculiarities: in addition to international sources, the data and information used comes from a vast number of national language sources. In the Mediadelcom country reports[3], and in this book, knowledge based on sources in languages other than English becomes available internationally. The transnational framework of the project once again demonstrates the importance of including in the consortiums of large research projects

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[3] All 28 country reports are available at: http://hdl.handle.net/10062/89296 (for the 14 Case Studies on National Research and Monitoring Capabilities 2000–2020) and
http://hdl.handle.net/10062/89316 (for the 14 Country Case Studies on Critical Junctures in the Media Transformation Process in Four Domains of Potential Risks and Opportunities 2000–2020).

those (peripheral) countries which individually are unable to carry out such large-scale studies.

A central proposition of this book is that contemporary democratic societies ought to cultivate a culture of deliberative communication through the implementation of wisdom-based media governance (see Chapter 9). In a mediatised society, wisdom-based media governance presupposes a meticulous monitoring of mediascapes because, as it stands, there is no comprehensive overview available of the capability of monitoring mediascapes across Europe. Building on the results of the Mediadelcom research, we propose that proactive media governance would frame the reactive media policies that inevitably accompany a crisis. A proactive media governance requires the establishment of a media monitoring system in EU member states to detect emerging risks and to analyse continuously the resilience of society's communication culture. The core objective of wisdom-based media governance is the transformation of disparate and clustered information into distinct knowledge and wisdom. It transcends merely providing information to experts, leveraging knowledge to benefit governments, journalists, researchers, stakeholders and the public. The analysis of the CMM helps to identify the risks resulting from media transformations, and the conditions for the opportunities to mitigate these risks. The purpose of the CMM is to continuously renew the research agenda and to review the efficiency of monitoring methodologies to ensure that they give a valid picture of the changes in mediascapes and the potential risks. In this way, a robust capability of monitoring mediascapes serves as the foundation for the development of effective media policies.

MEDIADELCOM CHALLENGES

The Mediadelcom project involves 14 of the 27 EU member countries – large and small, wealthy and less wealthy, and with dissimilar democratic frameworks and media cultures. It is a theoretically and methodologically challenging task to compare 14 countries against any criterion, let alone the capability of monitoring their mediascapes. Regardless, this is the ambition of the current book. Among the selected countries, there are those with better conditions for monitoring research and media development, such as Germany, Austria and Sweden, which all have more opportunities than risks relating to their CMM and deliberative communication and can be viewed as 'best practice' cases. However, bearing in mind the quality of democracy, our study is biased towards identifying and analysing risks both for the capability of monitoring the media, as well as the conditions for deliberative communication.

Another challenge appears when comparing the countries. How, for example, to compare Germany (with its 16 federal states) and Estonia? The former is immeasurably larger than the latter in many respects (e.g., the population of Estonia, 1.35 million, is less than that of Munich, Germany's 3rd largest city). When making

such a comparison the importance of contextual factors appears clearly. Consequently, in the course of our research exercise, clear-cut country groups did not take shape because each country could appear in several groups.

In many countries there are significant gaps in data collection and availability, which undermines the possibility to detect ROs at the national level. There is insufficiency of relevant data, information and scholarly interest on numerous important aspects of journalism and media and communication (JMC), which makes an assessment of the monitoring capability of some countries difficult.

A general observation is that comprehensive data on the democratic roles of news media — crucial for deliberative communication discourse — are often less routinely produced compared to basic statistics on media reach and ratings, which are easier to interpret and have an immediate use for marketing purposes. Although the body of existing information and knowledge about media transformations has expanded rapidly, especially during the first decades of the 21st century, this knowledge is fragmented and dispersed (Kraidy, 2018; Mihelj & Stanyer, 2019). Moreover, many research findings are primarily circulated in national languages, notably in the 'third wave' European democracies (Štetka, 2015). None of the existing studies has asked whether or how media research has been affected by national research policies and higher education systems, or how countries have funded and used media research. No research yet exists that would summarise the results of hitherto national and cross-national studies on the media and news ecosystems from the perspective of ROs for deliberative communication. Mediadelcom endeavours to help alleviate these knowledge gaps by mapping and analysing relevant research and information sources in the 14 countries under investigation within the 2000–2020 time frame.

WHAT DOES THE MEDIADELCOM PROJECT NOT DO?

When reading this book, it is good to keep in mind that the Mediadelcom project does not aim to measure the extent to which single countries fulfil ideal preconditions for deliberative communication, nor does it analyse or compare the status of deliberative democracy in EU countries. The task, instead, is to detect and examine media related ROs for conditions and values inherent to deliberative communication. The project serves as a raster for holistic analysis rather than as a normative goal.

The monitoring is representative only for the defined four (traditional) domains of the JMC, where deliberative communication primarily takes place, with the temporal limit of the initial two decades of the 21st century (see Mediadelcom Bibliographical database[4]). This leaves out several JMC research areas in their broader meaning, such as social media and platformisation, policies and practices

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[4] https://datadoi.ee/handle/33/515

of media entrepreneurship, convergence developments of the media industry with other branches of entrepreneurship, digital culture, media innovation policies and practices and many other new fields. The EU's media policy and respective documents are represented in the country reports to the extent that they influence the ROs related to research and monitoring in member states. Although one of the main ideas resulting from the study is the concept of 'wisdom-based media governance', the project does not delve into an analysis of the EU's media policy, which could be the topic of another research project. The above statements and explanations can be seen as the limitations of the Mediadelcom study. On the other hand, this study can also be viewed as an attempt to bring a new perspective to JMC research and perhaps also the beginning of an additional direction in JMC studies.

CONTENT AND CHAPTER SYNOPSES

As previously mentioned, this book focuses on the capability of 14 European countries to collect relevant data, carry out research and analysis and finally assess the risks and opportunities associated with media development in terms of the societies' potential for deliberative communication. The empirical analysis is based on the results of the Mediadelcom project. We explained in the previous section why media monitoring can enhance the conditions for deliberative communication – a precondition of deliberative democracy.

The book takes a critical approach to research policy related to the four domains, consistency of data collection, and data overproduction, knowledge formulation and knowledge usage in media policy formulation. The book aims to show whether poor data, lack of data, restriction of access to relevant data sources and finally lack of knowledge of the media create risks for a good information and communication environment for deliberative communication. In addition, the traditions and development of media research, the financing of research projects and the competitiveness of media researchers internationally and nationally are discussed. The book raises several important questions: For what purpose is data collected, for example, in the interests of advertising sales or also in the interests of society? Are the data collected by public authorities or private companies? What kind of data are collected systematically and allow research studies to assess the dynamics of change? Where are the gaps in data, information and knowledge?

Spread across eight chapters, of which Chapter 1 is the Introduction, the book addresses these fundamental questions at various levels. The book includes a theoretical analysis (Chapter 2), a methodological exploration (Chapter 3), a diachronic review (Chapter 4) and empirical examination of the four domains (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). After presentation and discussion of the results, the Con-

clusion to Chapter 9 suggests broadening the extant media policies from evidence-based to wisdom-based.

Chapter 2, "Monitoring mediascapes: Key concepts and basic variables" co-written by Halliki Harro-Loit, Tobias Eberwein and Lars Nord, embarks on a journey to explore prerequisites and core values such as transparency, trust and truth, which underpin deliberative communication in our media-saturated societies. The chapter is centred on an exhaustive review of literature related to these critical aspects. Moreover, the authors introduce a model of awareness that considers the evolution of deliberative communication within the societal context. This model emphasises the prerequisites and values that constitute the normative framework for media monitoring. Furthermore, it involves a critical reassessment of existing data and knowledge associated with monitoring.

Chapter 3, "Mediadelcom's approach and the methodology", authored by Martín Oller Alonso, Halliki Harro-Loit and Epp Lauk introduces a novel method of diachronic and comparative qualitative meta-analysis for researching ROs for deliberative communication. Why? Because one of the core objectives of the Mediadelcom consortium's work is to devise a diagnostic tool that serves as a multi-scenario construction model. The proposed method provides an assessment of the risks and opportunities linked to media monitoring and the degree of research focused on deliberative communication within the European Union. This methodological approach fosters the continuous creation of knowledge, wisdom and scientific understanding on a European scale.

Chapter 4, "A Diachronic Perspective on the Evolution of Monitoring Capabilities in 14 European Countries", composed by Epp Lauk, Martín Oller Alonso, Zrinjka Peruško, Tobias Eberwein and Christian Oggolder, endeavours to explore the monitoring capabilities of 14 EU countries by delving into the evolution of the field of JMC, the institutionalisation of the discipline, and the funding and governance of the research activities in these countries. Using diachronic approach, the chapter points out some universal trends in the capability of monitoring mediascapes, as well as the uniqueness of each country.

Chapter 5, "Monitoring legal regulation and media accountability systems" by Marcus Kreutler, Evangelia Psychogiopoulou, Michał Głowacki, Anna Kandyla, Jacek Mikucki, Gábor Polyák, Petra Szávai and Ágnes Urbán, adopts a dual-perspective strategy of the law and accountability. The chapter starts by examining monitoring capabilities within the legal and accountability subdomains. The chapter then merges the perspectives to contrast the situation across the 14 countries scrutinised by Mediadelcom. This methodology underscores the linkages between law (regulation) and accountability systems, enabling an exhaustive analysis of monitoring abilities in each subdomain. Ultimately, scrutinising the monitoring of legal and ethical regulation is paramount for understanding the current state of the freedoms of expression and information, the accountability structures in place, and the prospective risks and opportunities.

Chapter 6, "Journalism: Collaboration is the key to monitoring", developed by Lenka Waschková Císařová, Sergio Splendore, Martín Oller Alonso, Iveta Jansová, Jan Motal, Peter Berglez, Lars Nord, Christina Krakovsky and Nadezhda Miteva, embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the domain of journalism from 2000 to 2020. Over the span of the two decades, the authors bring into focus both commonalities and disparities in the data available across the 14 countries. The co-authors investigate multiple facets of journalism, which encompass the conditions of: the market, production, public service media, working and organisational as well as professional culture and journalistic competencies.

Chapter 7, "Assessing media usage research from the perspective of access, trust and news consumption", written by Ragne Kõuts-Klemm, Lilia Raycheva, Alnis Stakle, Iveta Jansová, Mart Ots and Neli Velinova, examines the research on patterns of media usage, as it can shed light on the risks associated with the media's deliberative role within specific societies. These risks could stem from a lack of access to relevant content, the poor quality of media provision and manifest low trust in media, a diminished interest in communal matters or inadequate skills to use and evaluate media content. To assess the risks and opportunities arising from the monitoring of audiences' media usage (or the absence thereof), the authors focus on three key indicators: access to media, relevance of news media and trust in the media. The competency of audiences in media usage, another factor significant to participation in deliberative communication, will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 8, "Monitoring media users' competencies", is composed by Slavomir Gálik, Norbert Vrabec, Ioana Avadani, Anda Rožukalne, Ilva Skulte, Alnis Stakle, Filip Trbojević, Peter Krajčovič and Lora Metanova. The chapter departs from the presumption that how people understand and evaluate media content depends on their media-related competencies. Thus, the concept employed to examine user competencies derives from interaction between media and users. The authors examine studies of institutional, strategic and legislative contexts of media-related competencies, users' cognitive abilities (rational argumentation, knowledge and understanding of communication contexts, etc.), digital and technological skills, data protection skills, etc. Finally, risks and opportunities for monitoring and studying user competencies are identified.

Chapter 9, "Risks to the capability of monitoring mediascapes across Europe", authored by Halliki Harro-Loit, compares the 14 investigated countries according to risk level – low, medium, high – estimated on the basis of configurations of conceptual and operational variables (as defined in Chapters 2 and 3). Lastly, the chapter examines the risks and opportunities tied to monitoring capability and the utilisation of knowledge to foster the growth of deliberative communication.

Note

The book has a minor deviation from the strict academic convention of referencing. The purpose of the 14 country reports (Case Study 1) was to serve as the main, holistic material for the comparisons of countries in the chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. As each of the 5 chapters (4–8) consists up to 10 subsections and each paragraph in every subsection had multiple Case Study citations the risk was that the texts of chapters 4–8 would be oversaturated with Case Study citations. So, the chapters are not only based on country reports but also use excerpts from these texts without explicitly referencing them as sources. All other, non-Case Study sources are referenced in the usual way.

For presenting the authorship and accessibility of the Case Studies, we have added a list of the country reports in alphabetic order together with the names of the authors and the links to the texts (see p. ix).

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