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SELF-PRESENTATION, NETWORKING, PLAYING, AND PARTICIPATING IN POLITICS

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New Media, Old Inequalities: Technological Fixes, National Containers, and the Roma

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written and discussed about the potential of new media technologies for re-invigorating European democracies in the past 25 years by policy makers, activists, and academics. One of the widely recognized roles of the media in this respect is the provision of a space for public discussion where diverse opinions and representations thrive. This chapter argues that, while in the early 1990s policy makers – at least rhetorically – recognized the potential of new media (Web 2.0, in particular) in creating such a space, the underlying rationale for much new media policy has shifted toward economic and developmental goals. Also, from the onset, policy makers founded their expectations of new media as a technological fix for inequalities on misguided notions. This chapter contrasts the policy expectations linked to new media with the social and democratic roles that underlie policy making related to the "old" technology of public service broadcasting. It uses the example of the Roma – the largest ethnic minority in Europe and arguably the most marginalized one – to suggest that new media technologies do not automatically create an inclusive mediated public sphere. The Roma living in the European Union cannot fall back on a nation-state in which they would form a majority and, because the "national container" – the belief that the nation is the defining unit of political, cultural etc. life – still dominates policy making, more effort is needed to envisage media policies that would serve the Roma minority.

Keywords

technological determinism, new media, national container, Roma, European Union

INTRODUCTION

The spread of new media technologies in the past 25 years went hand in hand with developments in policies. In the early 1990s, the internet was linked to

a wide range of transformative powers in policy making circles at national, pan-European, and global levels. The internet enabled a much coveted vision of a global information society with political, commercial, and social benefits for all. Between 1993 and 1996, governments all around the world, as well as transnational actors such as the European Union, announced plans for a global information infrastructure (a concept established by Al Gore – then Vice President of the United States – in a speech at the International Telecommunications Union conference in 1994) that was largely driven by underlying economic goals (Hollifield & Samarajiva, 1995; US Department of Commerce, 1995).

Although the overarching focus of much policy making was the economic benefits associated with new media technologies, hopes were also raised about a re-invigoration of liberal democracies. Twenty-five years later it may well seem that policy makers lost sight of the democratizing potential of new media and shifted their attention to their use in the so-called War on Terror for mass surveillance (the National Security Agency scandal has been widely covered; see also McCoy, 2013). This chapter argues that from the onset, policy makers' understanding of new media technology as a ready fix for social inequality was deeply flawed. Indeed, policy making – at the national as well as the European level – has, in the 25 years since the emergence of the internet, lacked new approaches that would make the mediated public sphere more inclusive, particularly in relation to ethnic minorities. The "old" technology of public service broadcasting has been associated with policy goals related to the democratic and social roles of the media and, although it has been subjected to criticism, this chapter continues in the vein of those who have already argued for a re-thinking of public service media in light of socio-demographic and technological developments. Media policy – as it stands now – has serious shortcomings when it comes to multi-ethnic European societies as demonstrated in relation to Europe's largest ethnic minority without a nation state – the Roma.

NEW MEDIA: A TECHNOLOGICAL FIX FOR (ALMOST) ANYTHING

There is no doubt that the search for readily available technological fixes for social problems – by policy makers and others – pre-dates the emergence of the internet. A technological fix, Jeff Douthwaite argues, "is an attempt to answer a social or human problem using technological devices or systems without any attempt to modify or alter the underlying social or human problem." (1983, p. 31) Technological fixes are also problematic because technologies are often seen as a solution brought in from outside the society. In his seminal 1974

Television: Technology and Cultural Form, Raymond Williams argued against the conceptualization of technology in isolation from society. He argued that technologically deterministic accounts assume that

> *new technologies are discovered, by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions for social change and progress. Progress, in particular, is the history of these inventions, which 'created the modern world'. The effects of the technologies, whether direct or indirect, foreseen or unforeseen, are as it were the rest of history. The steam engine, the automobile, television, the atomic bomb, have made modern man and the modern condition.* (p. 5)

At the time of Williams' writing it was television that had supposedly altered the world, in the 1990s the same world altering – revolutionary – effects were associated with the internet. And this latest new technology followed the logic described by Williams in relation to its development as well as the conditions of progress.

The internet was to bring about improvements in every aspect of our daily lives as well as a new type of economy/industry and, indeed, society. The expectations for a new type of society quickly advanced to the highest levels of policy making as illustrated in Chapter 1 of the *Bangemann Report* , which outlined recommendations to the European Council on infrastructures in the sphere of information in 1994:

> *Throughout the world, information and communication technologies are generating a new industrial revolution already as significant and far-reaching as those of the past. It is a revolution based on information, itself the expression of human knowledge. Technology now enables us to process, store, retrieve and communicate information in whatever form it may take – oral, written or visual – unconstrained by distance, time and volume.*

Although the underlying policy goals were mostly linked to economic benefits (and competitiveness), politicians also voiced expectations in relation to democracy and the (political, cultural etc.) empowerment of ordinary citizens. Gore (1994), for example, envisioned that the global information infrastructure would promote a new Athenian age of democracy, "enhancing the participation of citizens in decision-making." Hence, the internet was a technological fix for social and political exclusion.

The aforementioned utopian visions have been criticized because they represented social problems and inequalities in contemporary societies,

exclusively in terms of a failure to communicate[25] (Robins & Webster, 1999). Policy makers embraced the internet as a way of solving "problems generated by the accelerating dynamics of marketization and the decline of public welfare systems. … It was relatively inexpensive in terms of the public investment required, it offered scope for partnerships with private companies, and it could be presented as a creative and forward-looking response to the inevitability of technologically driven change" (Murdock & Golding, 2004, p. 245). Critiques of these visions have been abundant since. In the late 1990s, Tod Gitlin argued that "there is one problem which the new means of communication do not address and may even worsen: the existence of a two-tier society. To those who are information-rich (or information-glutted) shall more information be given" (1998, p. 172). Indeed, critics have pointed out that gender, race, and socioeconomic status continue to be relevant in the case of new media technologies as well. The digital divide – a term that covers inequalities in access to and use of new media technologies – runs along gender, ethnic, and income lines. In her 2014 article, Celeste Campos-Castillo argues that with the growing uptake of the internet in the United States, studies of the digital divide shifted from questions of access to those of use; yet, in the period between 2007 and 2012, women and Whites continued to be groups most likely to have internet access.

Universal internet access continues to figure on policy makers' radars both in the United States and in Europe. However, compared to the initial (albeit arguably marginal) democratic benefits, market-based or commercial rationales have become dominant (McChesney, 2013; Stewart et al., 2006; Murdock & Golding, 2004). In 2011, following the Arab Spring revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, U.S. President Barack Obama referred to the utopian vision of the internet as a policy tool.

> *Across the region, we intend to provide assistance to civil society, including those that may not be officially sanctioned, and who speak uncomfortable truths. And we will use the technology to connect with – and listen to – the voices of the people. For the fact is, real reform does not come at the ballot box alone. Through our efforts we must support those basic rights to speak your mind and access information. We will support open access to the internet[26], and the right of journalists to be heard – whether it's a*

25 Politicians have, of course, evoked gaps in communication as a reason for a variety of failures, including the European Union democratic deficit, see e.g. Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2005.

26 For a nuanced analysis of the actual role that social media played in the Egyptian revolution, see Lim, 2012.

> *big news organization or a lone blogger. In the 21st century, information is power, the truth cannot be hidden, and the legitimacy of governments will ultimately depend on active and informed citizens.*[27] (Obama, 2011; cf. Morozov, 2011)

However, a different approach to new media technologies became gradually evident. In 2013 – with Edward Snowden's National Security Agency leak – it became worldwide knowledge that the Obama Administration's approach to openness and the internet has a more restrictive side. In addition, one of the most debated cases of 2014 was a ruling by a U.S. Appeals Court that undermined the so-called net neutrality rules which the U.S. Federal Communications Commission had adopted in 2010 to guarantee transparency and prohibit blocking and unreasonable discrimination. In other words, these rules aim to guarantee that internet service providers treat all traffic the same, not giving any clients, for example, "fast lanes"(for more, see http://www.fcc.gov/openinternet. For a summary of criticisms of President Obama's internet policy, see Ammori, 2014). It is clear from this short discussion that, although the inclusive and emancipatory potential of new media has been recognized in policy, it has been based on the underlying search for a quick readily available technological fix for inequalities in contemporary liberal democracies. Turning the World Wide Web into the 20th century equivalent of the Greek agora proved to be a marginal and short-lived policy goal.

THE "OLD" TECHNOLOGY OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

Economic goals are clearly demonstrated in policies related to new media; for example, the roll-out of broadband is understood to bolster regional economic development. Although policies also refer to the social benefits of broadband, these are much more difficult to trace and – even more importantly – it appears that the most deprived groups do not benefit (see van Winden & Woets, 2004 for an overview; LSE Enterprise, 2012; OECD Development Centre, 2011). Actual uses of new media technologies for democratic purposes have been widely explored in academic scholarship in the past 25 years (for an illustrative range see Metykova & Sapag, 2014; Dahlgren, 2013; Jenkins & Thornburn, 2003); however, I would like to turn to an "old" technology that has been associated with democratic and social roles in a number of European societies and that has been recognized as such in national and pan-European policies – public service broadcasting. Public service broadcasters – such as the British

27 One should also remember another policy tool – the US Congress-funded Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc., see http://www.bbg.gov/broadcasters/mbn/. For academic studies on these broadcasters, see Fahmy, Wanta, & Nisbet, 2012; Christie & Clark, 2011.

Broadcasting Corporation, Czech Television, and the German ZDF – operate under special provisions. The now-defunct Broadcasting Research Unit (from the United Kingdom) identified the following principles of public service broadcasting: universal accessibility (geographic); universal appeal (general tastes and interests); particular attention to minorities; contribution to a sense of national identity and community; distance from vested interests; direct funding and universality of payment; competition for quality programming rather than for audiences; and guidelines that liberate rather than restrict program makers (as quoted in Raboy, 1996, p. 6). In more abstract terms, Garnham identifies the strengths of public service broadcasting in that "(a) [it] presupposes and then tries to develop in its practice a set of social relations which are distinctly political rather than economic, and (b) at the same time attempts to insulate itself from control by the state as opposed to, and this is often forgotten, political control" (1986, p. 45). According to Hall (1993) the public service idea clearly has its basis in the claim that there is "such a thing as 'the public interest' – a *social interest* – at stake in broadcasting" (p. 24, original emphasis), he goes on to identify some of the roles of broadcasting in modern societies (source of knowledge, creator of a discursive space, a key link between 'the governed' and 'the governors') to argue that "access to broadcasting has thus become a condition, *a sine qua non*, of modern citizenship" (ibid., p. 25, original emphasis).

Public service broadcasting thus takes into account that we are not only consumers but also citizens within a democratic system with a right to be adequately informed about matters of public importance. This right, Curran argues, is best guaranteed by public service broadcasting because "it gives due attention to public affairs, and is less dominated by drama and entertainment than market-based broadcasting generally is"(Curran, 1998, p. 190). The role that public service broadcasting plays in European Union member states is also recognized at the pan-European level, in the *Protocol on the System of Public Service Broadcasting in Member States* (part of the *Treaty of Amsterdam)*, which acknowledges that the public service broadcasting system is "directly related to the democratic, social and cultural needs of each society and to the need to preserve media pluralism" (*Treaty of Lisbon*, 2007). However, similar to many national policies, the European-level document, remains vague in defining exactly what these needs are. In the 1990s, Curran pointed out "access" was defined as access to broadcast signals (an entitlement to reception rather than expression) and "diversity" was understood in terms of delivery (mainly invoked in relation to non-political programs)(1998, p. 191). More than a decade has passed since Curran's observation and policy documents now use

a different jargon (Malik, 2013), and formulations in relation to provisions for minorities remain vague.

While public service broadcasting is explicitly tasked with providing programming for minorities, we also need to bear in mind that it is a national institution that plays an active role in building a national culture and, hence, it is of key importance to understand which minority groups in a given society are included in the national cultural project and which remain at the margins. Smith (as quoted in van den Bulck, 2001, p. 54) alerts us to the crucial role of media in the nation building project.

> *In looking at the role of the media in creating a certain uniformity within the nation-state, we are in essence looking at the process of nation-building, and at how the media are consciously brought into play to construct a 'national' culture and a 'national' community. Nation-states must have a measure of common culture and civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland.*

This focus on national culture can be problematic, particularly in relation to the changing make-up of European societies, which is linked to greater social and ethnic diversity and "the consequent pluralisation of cultural authority, which makes it increasingly difficult for broadcasters to see society as 'a public' at all or to speak to it as if it were still part of a homogeneous, unified national culture" (Hall, 1993, p. 28).

Hall goes on to argue that broadcasting has a role –

> *perhaps the critical role – to play in this 're-imagining of the nation': not by seeking to reimpose a unity and homogeneity which has long since departed, but by becoming the open space, the 'theatre' in this which cultural diversity is produced, displayed and represented, and the 'forum' in which the terms of its associative life together are negotiated. ... This cultural negotiation about the terms on which the centralised culture of the nation can be reconstituted on more openly pluralistic lines, remains broadcasting's key 'public cultural' role – and one which cannot be sustained unless there is a public service idea and a system shaped in part by public service objectives to sustain it. (ibid.)*

In the 2010s – the age of on-demand online content – it may seem unfounded to explore whether public service broadcasting offers a more focused policy tool

for dealing with inequalities in the mediated public sphere. However, there are at least two distinctive features of public service – as compared to commercial – broadcasting: a commitment to programming for minorities and a focus on news and current affairs that results in "higher levels of political information in [European] nightly TV programs and foster greater knowledge of public affairs among viewers. The more market-driven and entertainment-centered television system of the United States, on the other hand, was shown to offer smaller amounts of hard news and to trigger less awareness for public affairs in the audience." (Esser et al., 2012, p. 248).

MARGINALIZED VOICES: MEDIA AS A THEATER OF DIVERSITY?

The scope of this chapter is not sufficient to discuss media and diversity in relation to the "new" and "old" technologies at length, instead I will briefly discuss how Czech public service broadcasting policies define service to minorities and are then translated into actual structural components in broadcasting. The Czech Republic is one of the "new" European Union member states (joined in May 2004) and it has been 25 years since it became a liberal democracy in the aftermath of the fall of the former Eastern bloc. The Czech public service broadcasting system crystalized in the early 1990s. Public service is defined as

> *the production and dissemination of programs and the provision of a balanced selection of programs for all groups of citizens with regards to religious beliefs, culture, ethnic, or national origin, national identity, social origin, age, or gender so that these programs reflect a diversity of opinions and political, religious, philosophical, and artistic currents with the aim of strengthening mutual understanding and tolerance and supporting cohesion in a pluralist society.* (Act of the Czech National Council No.483/1991 Coll.[28])

European Union legal obligations also apply to Czech public service broadcasting. The abovementioned *Protocol on the System of Public Service Broadcasting in Member States* importantly ensures that jurisdiction over public service broadcasting remains with the individual member states; however, legislation aiming to secure fair competition (e.g., in relation to state aid funding for these broadcasters) applies also in the case of public service broadcasting (for a compilation of state aid rules see http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/legislation/compilation/index_en.html).The example of programming for the Roma in particular shows the limitations of broadly worded policies and

28 All translations from Czech are by the author.

also of policy thinking caught within the national container (Beck, 2006). Such policy thinking is seriously flawed, as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) argue: "almost no thought was given to why the boundaries of the container society are drawn as they are and what consequences follow from this methodological limitation of the analytical horizon – thus removing trans-border connections and processes from the picture"(p. 307).

The case of the Roma is highly relevant for a number of reasons. They are the largest (trans-national) European ethnic minority group with about 10–12 million Roma (Gypsies, Sinti, Travellers, etc.) living in Europe (of these about six million are in European Union member states). The Roma do not have a nation-state in which they form a majority group and this has serious implications for media policy because, despite the existence of the pan-European EU legislative framework, individual nation-states are responsible for aspects of the media that relate to cultural and language rights and empowerment. In the words of a European Commission civil servant, "Who funds the media? It's national states. If you are a transnational community then it's a deal breaker basically, if you are not based in a country. Maybe these [the Roma] are the people who should be equipped with iPhones from day one. Perhaps that's the future. But basically not much is happening"(Anonymous interviewee, personal communication, May 27, 2009).The Roma are among the poorest and most discriminated against people in Europe (see report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_implement_strategies2014_en.pdf; see also European Roma Rights Centre http://www.errc.org/; Poole, 2010; Fekete, 2014; Pogány, 2012) and their media representations have been described as stereotypical and outright racist (Schneeweis, 2012; Schneeweis, 2013; Imre, 2015). However, policies at the national and pan-European levels have focused almost exclusively on a few select areas, and the media and the broader cultural industries do not figure among these. The focus of the latest EU-level initiative, the 2011 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 targets socioeconomic issues, more precisely discrimination against the Roma in education, employment, healthcare, and housing (see http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm).

According to data from the 2011 census, there are 10.4 million people living in the Czech Republic, including more than 5,000 Roma. However, estimates put the number of Roma living in the country between 150,000 and 200,000; these estimates suggest that the Roma are the country's largest ethnic minority

group.[29] The Czech public service broadcasters – Czech Television (Česká televize) and Czech Radio (Český rozhlas) – have special obligations in relation to minorities and supporting social cohesion; these, however, are not stipulated in much detail in legal documents. As already suggested, television systems that include public service broadcasting tend to better inform citizens about news and current affairs. This also applies in the case of the Czech Republic: regular monitoring of television news and current affairs broadcast on Czech Television and its two commercial counterparts (Prima and NOVA) shows that the public service broadcaster represents minorities "mostly in a balanced and sensitive manner, with effort made at not succumbing to stereotypical thinking" while its commercial counterparts "devote minimum attention to this issue" (RRTV, 2014, p. 8).[30] In the section on the representation of ethnic minorities, the report argues that Czech Television news and current affairs pay very little attention to "the everyday lives of national minorities, e.g., their cultural and social events, actually no such coverage was found in the monitored period [February and March 2014]. … In this respect the broadcaster can refer us to special programs[31] in the schedule which focus specifically on the lives of national or ethnic minorities …" (ibid., p. 7) In contrast, the report notes about one of the commercial broadcasters, Prima: "news that involve the Roma minority have become something of a characteristic, particularly in the program Crime News [Krimi zprávy]. In all cases when Roma are mentioned, they are identified as perpetrators" (ibid.).

Czech Radio has had a Roma editorial group since 1992 that produces a weekly one-hour program "O Roma vakeren Romové hovoří" at the time of this writing. The program title is in Romani and Czech, and translates as "The Roma speak". The program is broadcast on Saturday evenings, mainly in Czech and it forms part of the radio's news and current affairs programming. Its main aim (http://www.rozhlas.cz/radiozurnal/porady/_porad/114) is to promote positive representations of the Roma. Programs have covered successful Roma individuals from all walks of like (intellectuals, singers, business people etc.), non-governmental organizations that work on improving the lives of the Roma, the history of the Roma etc. The program aims at reaching not only the Roma but, importantly, also the majority population. The usage of Czech

29 On issues related to statistical data on the Roma population, see Clark, 1998.

30 All translations from Czech are by the author.

31 Czech Television does not have a production group or a specific television program devoted to the Roma but they produce and broadcast series of programs – often documentaries – that deal with the everyday lives of minorities (such as Babylon, see http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1131721572-babylon/).

may indicate this opening up to the general population, at the same time it can also be a pragmatic choice as there are a number of Roma dialects spoken in the Czech Republic and they are not necessarily mutually understandable. The program can certainly be understood as part of the public service mission of "strengthening mutual understanding and tolerance and supporting cohesion in a pluralist society". The wording of the legal document is broad and for Czech public service broadcasters – similar to others – it has been crucial to "translate" broad policy aims into measurable and – importantly – quantifiable goals that can be monitored, and that would satisfy the supervisory bodies to which the public service broadcasters are accountable.

In 2013, Czech Television introduced a new system of measuring and quantifying its service to the public, following the examples of the UK's BBC and the Dutch NPO. Czech Television's 2013 annual report is the first that worked with the new methodology[32] and some of its findings are relevant to my arguments here. While the report provides information on Czech Television's age and qualification structure, no data are provided about the ethnic makeup of the staff. Interestingly, 67% of respondents were satisfied with the space that Czech Television devoted to the representation of national and ethnic minorities in its broadcasts (Czech Television, 2013, p. 188) yet less than half expect the Czech Television to devote space to genres that are typically associated with public service, such as programs for minorities, children, on culture, music, or religion. The report goes on to point out that the majority of viewers do not consider such programs to be important for themselves; indeed, fewer than 5% of respondents thought it was important for Czech Television to broadcast minority and religious programs (ibid., p. 193). While concerns have been expressed about the ways in which value associated with public service broadcasting is measured in a number of European countries (on the BBC public value test, see Goblot, 2014 and Michalis, 2012; and on Dutch public service broadcasting, see Bardoel & Vochteloo, 2011), it is striking that such a small number of respondents share the underlying policy goals associated with public service broadcasting. It is clear that there are limitations to the ways in which public service broadcasting policy and its actual manifestations serve diverse European publics, particularly marginalized members of these societies. However, public service broadcasting has important social and democratic roles to play even in the digital age.

32 Unfortunately, neither the annual report nor easily accessible documents explain the exact methodology behind the so-called tracking research that is conducted every six months.

CONCLUSION

While conducting fieldwork on Roma media in the Czech Republic, Ivan Veselý (the founder of the NGO Dženo) told me about his failed attempt to establish an online transnational Roma radio station – Radio Rota – to provide a voice for the Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Spain. This is just one example that illustrates that the availability of cheap and accessible technology in itself does not serve as a fix. The case of the Roma is also an example of policy making in which the reliance on the national container results in failure. Some of the Roma I have spoken to expressed high hopes for European Union policies and ways in which they can improve their access to the mediated public sphere. However, these hopes have not materialized due to the limited jurisdiction that the European Union has in the spheres of media and culture, as argued in this chapter. This chapter has also argued that, in order to respond to changes happening on the ground in Europe, policy makers do not necessarily need to replace an "old" technology that was intended to serve social and democratic roles with a "new" one. It seems important that the social and democratic roles of "old" public service broadcasting are better defined and embraced (rather than questioned or dismissed) by policy makers. It also seems that – at least in the case of the Czech Republic – the public needs to have a clearer idea of what the roles of public service broadcasting are and why these are important for the society at large. And, most importantly, what is required from policy makers is new thinking, "there are arguments by scholars that Europe should be about new political identities. Are we building those through current national media policy? The answer is no, we're entrenching more or less the 19th century" (Anonymous interviewee, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

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