

PROJECT ON MEDIA GOVERNANCE

Marc Raboy (McGill University), Catherine Murray (Simon Fraser University), Florian Sauvageau (Université Laval), David Taras (University of Calgary)

Context

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada is funding a number of thematic “strategic research clusters” on critical intellectual, cultural and social issues, with a view towards enabling Canada “to showcase the best in social sciences and humanities research to its own citizens and to the rest of the world”. The project described below has received funding through this programme and we are currently seeking to establish links with the leading international centres of scholarship in the areas of media policy and global governance.

Project description

Mass media, information and communication are at the heart of social and political development. Media are also central to the quality of democratic public life. Media and communication content and technologies do not develop on their own, however, but are the result of strategic planning and intervention on the part of key actors involved in government, the corporate sector and civil society. Our project tracks and analyses the economic and political, social and cultural dimensions of media and communication policy development – a theme that we are describing in shorthand as *media governance* – with a view towards increasing public understanding and transparency of the processes through which media and communication are evolving.

We see media governance as a barometer of the quality of democracy. Communication is one of the key aspects of societal governance in general. Communication is not only a central element of government itself, but the monitoring of public policy by a critical mass media is an essential feature of a healthy democracy. Governance is increasingly devolving to civil society and the new forms of civic engagement, agenda-setting and policy formulation are increasingly dependent on the quality of mediated communication. This presupposes not only a vibrant mass media system, but a system in which guarantees of pluralism and cultural diversity are built in to the very governing structures.

There is, however, a general sense that today’s global media environment is marked by a crisis in media governance. The pressures of globalization and technological change are obliging governments everywhere to renew existing regulatory and institutional structures governing media. At the same time, they must find ways to overcome the constraints of international trade agreements on cultural policy generally and media in particular. New global policy arenas are calling on governments everywhere to respond to the demands emanating from civil society. New questions, ranging from communication rights to Internet governance, have forced their way onto the international agenda and are going to dominate global discussion on media in the coming years.

Project on media governance...2

Against this backdrop, our work is focused on one central question: ***What are the new rationales or paradigms for media governance today?*** In exploring this question, we see three broad themes, principles under attack, problems for governance, objects, sets of actors, and general issues:

Themes	Media and democracy	Media and cultural diversity	Media and citizens rights
Principles under attack	Public service philosophy	Culture as resource, not commodity	The right to communicate
Problems for governance	Globalization, neo-liberal ideology and technological change have challenged the conventional role of the state in mediating the public-private divide	How to promote cultural diversity (ethnoculturally, nationally and globally), in a context where culture is increasingly commodified, especially in international trade	How to create an enabling environment for citizens to realize their rights in culture and communication
Objects of study	Global forces and institutions (national and international)	Impact of technological changes	New social and political practices
Key actors	Governments	Cultural and creative industries	Civil society and citizens
Governance practices and institutions	National legislation, regulation and funding programs; defending the national interest on the global stage	International trade agreements and conventions; corporate self-regulation; innovation; intellectual property regimes	Participation in policy making; the state as facilitator; independent not-for-profit media; inscription of communication rights in international human rights framework

This is not a perfect matrix - problems, objects, practices and actors cut across themes and principle areas - but it gives an idea of the ***global media governance environment*** with which we are dealing. To add value to our focus on media as support structures for democracy, cultural diversity and citizens rights, we are linking our efforts to those of others working on governance and social justice issues in related areas.

Our goals are to strengthen the public policy capacity on media governance issues in Canada and globally, by bringing together a critical mass of academic researchers working in this area, involving non-academic actors, raising public awareness of media governance issues, and building a global network for research and critical thinking on the relationship between media governance and governance issues in general.

Core research team

The four core members of our team have each been involved in major Canadian media policy development reviews and initiatives as well as international policy research and consultations. In this project, we propose to seek non-academic partnerships with government as well as community-based actors both in Canada and internationally, in addition to academic collaboration with the world's leading centres of media policy and global governance scholarship.

Marc Raboy is the Beaverbrook Chair in Ethics, Media and Communications at McGill University. He is the author of numerous monographic and edited studies and research reports including *Missed Opportunities: The Story of Canada's Broadcasting Policy* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) and *Global Media Policy for the New Millennium* (University of Luton Press, 2002). In 2001-2003, he and David Taras served together as expert advisors to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for its study of the Canadian broadcasting system.

David Taras is University Professor and Professor of Communication and Culture at the University of Calgary. He is the author of *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media* and initiator of a biennial conference and refereed book series entitled *How Canadians Communicate*. He has just completed, with Florian Sauvageau and others, a study of media coverage of Canada's Supreme Court (funded jointly by SSHRC and the Max Bell Foundation), to be published shortly in book form.

Florian Sauvageau is Professor of communication and head of the Centre d'études sur les médias at Université Laval. He served as co-chair of the 1986 federal *Task Force on Broadcasting Policy* and is a frequent consultant on media and communication policy issues to both the federal and Quebec governments. With Marc Raboy, he is currently engaged in a research project on broadcasting governance, funded by the Canadian Media Research Consortium.

Catherine Murray is Associate Professor of Communication at Simon Fraser University where she has been studying social movements in communication, and especially the coalition in support of the Unesco convention on cultural diversity, as well as the intersection of social policy, social capital, cultural participation and media monitoring as a policy tool in broadcast regulation. Formerly Vice-President of Media and Telecommunications at Decima Research, she was a member of the 1996 federal Mandate Review Committee on the future of the CBC, NFB and Telefilm. She was a consultant to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for its study of the Canadian broadcasting system, serves on the board of BC Film and is a member of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council's panel on media standards.