International Communication Gazette

<http://gaz.sagepub.com/>

The European and Global Dimension : Taking Small Media Systems Research to the Next Level

Manuel Puppis, Leen d'Haenens, Thomas Steinmaurer and Matthias Künzler

International Communication Gazette 2009 71: 105

DOI: 10.1177/1748048508097936

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://gaz.sagepub.com/content/71/1-2/105>

Published by:

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *International Communication Gazette* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/content/71/1-2/105.refs.html>

THE EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL DIMENSION

Taking Small Media Systems Research to the Next Level

**Manuel Puppis, Leen d'Haenens, Thomas Steinmaurer
and Matthias Künzler**

Abstract / State size matters. However, small states do not only share structural peculiarities but also feature different political and historic traditions. This helps explain why the connection between smallness and media regulation is far from clear. Thus, it is suggested here to amend existing typologies of media systems with the notion of smallness, which would allow for more systematic comparative research. In addition, future research on small states needs to consider issues of Europeanization and globalization, examining the role of small states in decision-making on the supranational and international level.

Keywords / communication science / diversity / Europe / media policy / media regulation / media system / small states

In this special issue it has been argued that a small states perspective remains useful when analysing media systems and media regulation. Each contribution in this issue deals with a geographical context within which concrete regulatory and policy measures are taken, aimed at protecting or promoting media diversity. In the introduction, it was suggested that small states tend to adopt an interventionist regulatory approach as, due to the economic realities of small media markets, competition fails. Additionally, small states with giant neighbours sharing a language might even sacrifice media diversity in order to preserve a domestic media landscape of their own. Considering Dan Hallin's comment, it is first argued that the small state perspective needs to take political traditions into account. Thus, it is suggested that existing models of media systems be amended by the notion of smallness. Second, lines for future research on small media systems are presented in terms of Europeanization and globalization.

A Small Media System Approach: Still Useful

In his comment, Dan Hallin agrees with the perspective taken in this special issue: state size does matter. He, however, adds some valid points. On the one hand, he doubts the usefulness of population size as the basic characteristic for smallness.

Such absolute definitions are obviously oversimplifications. Definitions of small states should try to incorporate relational and attributive features of smallness. Nevertheless, population size is a common measurement and easy to handle. On the other hand, Hallin stresses that state size interacts with other variables. And, of course, he is right: while a small states perspective remains important, smallness alone cannot explain media regulation. Each of the former contributions in this issue illustrates that small states not only share structural peculiarities but also feature *different political and historic traditions*. Hence, despite their similarities, small states react differently to their environment. Their policy choices are determined by past behaviour (Goetschel, 1998: 27–30). Taking political traditions into account implies, as argued in the introduction, that the issue of smallness should be decoupled from the particular tradition of corporatism. This is not to say that corporatism does not play a crucial role in many countries (e.g. Austria or the Scandinavian countries). Not all small states, however, share this tradition (e.g. Ireland).

Instead, our suggestion is to amend the widely used typology of Hallin and Mancini (2004) with the notion of smallness. While the three models of media and politics offer valuable insights and emphasize different political traditions, the significance of the structural peculiarities of a small media system is disregarded. Additionally, the post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe should be included (see Figure 1).

Combining the small states perspective with the notion of different political traditions allows for widening the perspective beyond certain countries in Western Europe. And it helps us to understand why the connection between smallness and regulatory measures aimed at enhancing or promoting media diversity is more

FIGURE 1
Small and Big EU and EFTA Member States

	Small states		Big states
	With giant neighbour sharing the same language	Without giant neighbour	
Liberal countries	Ireland	–	UK
Democratic-corporatist countries	Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland	Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden	Germany
Polarized pluralist countries	–	Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Portugal	France, Italy, Spain
Post-socialist countries	–	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia	Poland, Romania

Source: Authors’ own depiction.

ambiguous than initially suggested. While the proposition that small states tend to interventionist media regulation 'makes a lot of sense' (Hallin), interventionism seems only to play a role in the Scandinavian countries. Protectionism appears to be more important (albeit not connected to the existence of a giant next-door neighbour sharing the same language). The contributions in this issue acknowledge that protectionism is a reason (or at least a rhetoric) for media regulation or the lack thereof (e.g. in the case of ownership regulation).

How to realize diversity in small media markets and how to support this goal with media regulation continues to be an important question. That diversity is not easy to acquire in small states became clear from each of the contributions. Because of the small market, diversity in programme supply is a 'luxury'. Moreover, for broadcasters competing for advertising revenues, striving for diversity contradicts the logic of the market. While some competition in television markets contributes to diversity, more intense competition may reduce diversity. In markets with sharp competition it is considered risky and irrational to launch distinctive products (van der Wurff, 2004). In all, the market logic has become an increasingly dominant force in the programme policies pursued. Whether a diversity of formats and issues, of different viewpoints, of persons and groups represented and of geographical coverage (McQuail, 1992) can be delivered in small and purely commercial media markets is highly questionable. Hence, we are convinced that focusing on small media systems and assessing how they regulate the media by resorting to different degrees of protectionism and interventionism is a useful angle to look into.

Considering a European and Global Dimension

So far, research on small media systems was mainly focused on the national level. This is true for the present special issue's approach as well. Nevertheless, by associating the small states perspective with issues of Europeanization and globalization (which increasingly influence national media regulation), we suggest new allies for future research – thus literally bringing small states research to the next level.

The European Union and Small States

Regarding the European dimension, the impact of the EU's policies on media regulation in small states, the influence of EU membership on domestic institutions in the communications sector, as well as the role of small states in the EU's decision-making processes are vital factors.

First, one should consider *the impact of the EU's audiovisual and competition policy on media regulation* in small states. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (Directive 2007/65/EC), the MEDIA support programme and competition law apply to small and big member states alike. However, due to diverging economic conditions and structural factors, in addition to market size, the impact of support programmes at EU level and competition law may prove to be different (see also Iosifidis, 2007). Particularly challenging for small states, certainly with a view to the costs of producing and acquiring premium content and making it accessible on digital portals, is the reliance on relatively secure and future-proof funding mechanisms without

too high a dependence on the government, a partner who proves to be far from always consistent. Small media systems are probably more affected by supranational decisions and regulatory measures. The provision, for instance, that audiovisual media services are subject to the jurisdiction of the residing state and that their transmission to another member state may not be restricted allows for circumventing the media regulation of small states. The MEDIA programme was set up as an industrial programme in the first place and was meant to create a prolific audiovisual industry climate as well as to address the inequalities between large and small states at the EU level. The European Commission itself has viewed these support programmes positively (Biltereyst and Pauwels, 2007). Nevertheless, Biltereyst (1998), for instance, wondered how the many parallel policy lines could all lead to the safeguarding of Europe's cultural diversity. Moreover, this EU approach, favouring the bigger companies and thus stimulating convergence trends even more, was harshly criticized, despite all good intentions (Picard, 2000). To this day, the EU has not adopted a media-specific approach with regard to media concentration. While the European Parliament sees concentration as a threat to democracy, the Commission concluded that pluralism could primarily be achieved by relying on *competition law* (Biltereyst and Pauwels, 2007). Competition law includes the prohibition of state aid, which may have important consequences for the future of public service channels, in particular the poor ones in small countries: de facto public broadcasters are tolerated as an exception as long as they do not hinder internal market competition. While member states – referring to the protocol on public service broadcasting annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam – claim that the funding of public service is their sole responsibility, the Commission's Directorate General for Competition applies the state aid rules to public service broadcasting as well. However, the European Commission's position regarding state aid and public service broadcasting could also be a chance rather than a threat. While competition law alone cannot safeguard media diversity, there might be three positive aspects. First, conforming to the European Commission's requirements (i.e. definition of remit, installing an independent regulator, transparency of finances) can help to strengthen the public broadcaster. Second, the independent regulators define the parameters for the influence of national governments on the public broadcasters. Third, the pressure from the EU might help public broadcasters redefine their remit and understand the need to be accountable. This does not imply that public broadcasters should keep away from a broad range of programming and should keep a low profile on all kinds of digital platforms. But they need to be different from private commercial television initiatives. Additionally, the EU leaves most broadcasting decisions, including the public broadcaster's remit and future, up to the member states themselves.

Second, however, scholars should *not limit themselves to the European influence on policies only but also look at polity and politics* as well. How, for instance, does EU membership affect domestic politics and institutions? Existing research in political science suggests that governmental adaptation merely consisted of ad hoc responses: no major organizational adjustments occurred and the basic structures and procedures of governance remained untouched (Klöti and Dosenrode, 1995; Soetendorp and Hanf, 1998: 186–7). Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether

small and big states adapt differently in the areas of audiovisual or telecommunications policy. Communication scholars have yet to analyse the creation of regulatory authorities in these areas, the EU's role herein and the prevailing differences or similarities between big and small states.

Third, in political science, there exists a growing body of literature regarding the *role of small states in the EU's decision-making processes*. In communication science, however, these findings have not yet been noticed. Today small states are overrepresented in EU institutions in order to reconcile the size of states with the principle of equality of states. While reforms (e.g. extending the scope of qualified majority voting and reweighting votes in the Council and limiting the Commission size) will modify these privileges, small states will still maintain more than proportional influence in decision-making (Baillie, 1998; Geurts, 1998; Kuosmanen, 1998; Zbinden, 1998). In light of this overrepresentation, Thorhallsson (2000) expected the behaviour of small states to differ from that of big states. Analysing the common agricultural and the regional policy, he concluded that small states 'have a different approach towards the commission and their negotiation tactics differ from the negotiating tactics of the larger states in the Council of Ministers, the European Council and in bilateral negotiations with the Commission' (Thorhallsson, 2000: 232). These differences can be explained by the lack of resources of the smaller administrations. Small states cannot follow all negotiations (Thorhallsson, 2000: 232). Advancing the argument, Thorhallsson and Wivel (2006: 659) argue that the influence of small states varies with policy areas and institutions. While large states tend to be proactive in all sectors, small states necessarily prioritize between EU policy areas: they are proactive where important economic and political interests are at stake, but they are reactive in sectors of limited interest to them. In addition, coalition-building is decisive for small states to influence EU policy:

The small states look at the Commission as a key partner in their attempt to build coalitions and thus try to their utmost to get the Commission on their side before facing the large states in the Council of Ministers. (Thorhallsson and Wivel, 2006: 660)

While some policy areas have been investigated, so far no research has systematically assessed the EU's audiovisual and telecommunications policy from a cross-country perspective, particularly investigating the small states' behaviour in these areas of decision-making. Given the growing importance of European regulation in the communications sector, future research should do so, and who would be more qualified to look at these areas than communication scholars in these small states themselves?

Small States in a Globalized World

Like all countries, small states are affected by globalization. One of the driving forces behind globalization is the change in distribution technologies. 'Equally potent as a cause is the rise of global media business (and global markets for media products), which provides the organizational framework and driving force of globalization' (McQuail, 2005: 130). Many cultural consequences are predicted. We should examine

how globalization affects small media systems. Given their structural peculiarities, the inflow of foreign programmes and the growing significance of transnational media corporations could complicate the preservation of a domestic media industry as well as a local media culture.

In addition, global media governance increasingly influences national media regulation. Thus, the role of small states in the decision-making of international organizations needs to be investigated further. We should ask whether the interests of small states differ from those of big states, and what their chances are of bringing their concerns to the negotiation table. The World Trade Organization's stance could soon be an additional burden for the future of public service broadcasters, for quota regulations and for support programmes. While this danger is not imminent, future trade negotiations might cause the liberalization of the audiovisual sector. In this respect, UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions adopted in Paris on 20 October 2005, aiming to fill a legal gap in global governance by establishing a series of rights and obligations at both national and international levels in the cultural diversity domain, may be a welcome counterweight, although it is still uncertain how strong this signal for cultural diversity and subventions will be in practice (Biltereyst and Pauwels, 2007; Puppis, 2008).

Conclusion

In the end, it remains highly important to consider state size when analysing media systems and their media regulation. It is necessary, though, to keep in mind that small states not only share certain structural peculiarities but also feature different political traditions. The suggested combination of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) typology of media systems with the small state perspective pays attention to both aspects. However, it is necessary to acknowledge the considerable internal economical, political, cultural and societal differences within countries (e.g. in the Belgian case) as well.

Aside from using a typology that combines smallness and traditions, communication scholars need to look beyond the national level when dealing with small media systems. Here we can learn from political scientists, i.e. how to analyse the role of small states in the EU's audiovisual policy decision-making processes.

Only systematic cross-country research, considering big and small states with and without giant neighbours sharing the same language, will help us answer the question of how size matters.

References

- Baillie, S. (1998) 'The Position of Small States in the EU', pp. 193–205 in L. Goetschel (ed.) *Small States Inside and Outside the European Union: Interests and Policies*. Boston, MA, Dordrecht and London: Kluwer.
- Biltereyst, D. (1998) 'Television Programming Dynamics and Policy Responses', pp. 69–90 in L. d'Haenens and F. Saeys (eds) *Media Dynamics and Regulatory Concerns in the Digital Age*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Biltereyst, D. and C. Pauwels (2007) 'Our Policies Keep on Reinventing the Past: An Overview of EU Policy-Making in the Audiovisual Domain', pp. 25–59 in L. d'Haenens and F. Saeys (eds) *Western Broadcast Models: Structure, Conduct and Performance*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Geurts, C.-M. (1998) 'The European Commission: A Natural Ally of Small States in the EU Institutional Framework?', pp. 49–64 in L. Goetschel (ed.) *Small States Inside and Outside the European Union: Interests and Policies*. Boston, MA, Dordrecht and London: Kluwer.
- Goetschel, L. (1998) 'The Foreign and Security Policy Interests of Small States in Today's Europe', pp. 13–31 in L. Goetschel (ed.) *Small States Inside and Outside the European Union: Interests and Policies*. Boston, MA, Dordrecht and London: Kluwer.
- Hallin, D.C. and P. Mancini (2004) *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Iosifidis, P. (2007) 'Public Television in Small European Countries: Challenges and Strategies', *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 3(1): 65–87.
- Klöti, U. and S. von Dosenrode (1995) 'Adaptation to European Integration: Changes in the Administration of Four Small States', *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 54(2): 273–81.
- Kuosmanen, A. (1998) 'Decision-Making in the Council of the European Union', pp. 65–78 in L. Goetschel (ed.) *Small States Inside and Outside the European Union: Interests and Policies*. Boston, MA, Dordrecht and London: Kluwer.
- McQuail, D. (1992) *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest*. London, Newbury Park, CA and New Delhi: Sage.
- McQuail, D. (2005) *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 5th edn. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage.
- Picard, R. (2000) 'Audience Fragmentation and Structural Limits on Media Innovation and Diversity', pp. 180–91 in J. van Cuilenburg and R. van der Wurff (eds) *Media and Open Societies: Cultural, Economic and Policy Foundations for Media Openness and Diversity in East and West*. Amsterdam: Spinhuis.
- Puppis, M. (2008) 'National Media Regulation in the Era of Free Trade: The Role of Global Media Governance', *European Journal of Communication* 23(4): 405–24.
- Soetendorp, B. and K. Hanf (1998) 'Conclusion: The Nature of National Adaptation to European Integration', pp. 186–94 in K. Hanf and B. Soetendorp (eds) *Adapting to European Integration: Small States and the European Union*. London and New York: Longman.
- Thorhallsson, B. (2000) *The Role of Small States in the European Union*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Thorhallsson, B. and A. Wivel (2006) 'Small States in the European Union: What Do We Know and What Would We Like to Know?', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19(4): 651–68.
- Van der Wurff, R. (2004) 'Supplying and Viewing Diversity: The Role of Competition and Viewer Choice in Dutch Broadcasting', *European Journal of Communication* 19(2): 215–37.
- Zbinden, M. (1998) 'Implications of the Intergovernmental Conference and the Treaty of Amsterdam for Small EU Member States', pp. 207–41 in L. Goetschel (ed.) *Small States Inside and Outside the European Union: Interests and Policies*. Boston, MA, Dordrecht and London: Kluwer.

Manuel Puppis is a senior research and teaching associate at the University of Zurich's Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research (IPMZ). His research interests include media policy, media regulation and media governance, media systems in a comparative perspective, political communication and organization theory.

Address University of Zurich, IPMZ – Institute of Mass Communication, and Media Research, Andreasstrasse 15, CH-8050 Zurich, Switzerland. [email: m.puppis@ipmz.uzh.ch]

Leen d'Haenens is Associate Professor at the Centre for Media Culture and Communication Technology at the Catholic University of Leuven and at the Department of Communication of the Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. She teaches, among others, European media policy and analysis of media texts. Her current research interests include media diversity, ethnic minorities both as content and users of the media, media governance and accountability measures. Leen d'Haenens held a Jean Monnet Chair in Media Policy (2001–7).

Address *Catholic University of Leuven, Centre for Media Culture and Communication Technology, Parkstraat 45, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium. [email: leen.dhaenens@soc.kuleuven.be, l.dhaenens@maw.ru.nl]*

Thomas Steinmaurer is an Assistant Professor at the University of Salzburg's Department of Communication Science. His research interests include media systems, communication history and social change.

Address *University of Salzburg, Department of Communication Science, Rudolfskai 42, A-5020 Salzburg, Austria. [email: Thomas.Steimaurer@sbg.ac.at]*

Matthias Künzler is a senior research and teaching assistant at the IPMZ. His academic activities focus on comparative media policy, Switzerland's media system and research about public service broadcasting.

Address *University of Zurich, IPMZ – Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research, Andreasstrasse 15, CH-8050 Zurich, Switzerland. [email: m.kuenzler@ipmz.uzh.ch]*