

## PAST CHALLENGES TO JOURNALISM

### Great ideas of the Seventies and Eighties revisited<sup>1</sup>

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#### ABSTRACT

#### **Past challenges to journalism. Great ideas of the Seventies and Eighties revisited**

This paper focuses on the particular role of the mass media research in transformation of the post-Yalta world political system, in 1960–1990 and in particular in the seventies. The role of the inspirer, organizer and transmitter of the idea of solving social and political problems with the use of the mass media was played by the UN and UNESCO. They made communication research one of the most important and politically most influential disciplines among social sciences. The conference in Montreal, organized by Unesco in June 1969, has become the foundation stone for the worldwide political career of mass communication research. Very active participation of media researchers in the world discourse on communication contributed later to the adoption, by the UNESCO General Conference, in 1978, of the “Media Declaration”, and, in consequence, to the MacBride Commission and the creation of its Report, then to the “International Program for the Development of Communication” (IPDC). Communication research in the seventies contributed, arguably, to the acceptance of the compromise solutions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> basket of the Final Act of the CSCE, which opened the first legal clefts to the uncontrolled two direction flow of information in the Soviet monolith hermetic system. In this regard, one can say that *Everything started in Montreal* in 1969 – the paper concludes.

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**Key words:** mass media, communication research, the sixties, the seventies, the eighties, UNESCO, Free Flow of Information, New World Communication Order, Final Act of the CSCE, Montreal Conference

Once upon a time... maybe with these words I should begin my story on the last century's seventies as the golden decade of communication research and its impact on global politics.

Research on communication in general and on mass communication in particular has been, for the last couple of centuries, a niche, hobby subject of interest and activity, though there is no denying that a reflection, at least parascientific, on what we today call the mass media, is as old as these media themselves<sup>2</sup>.

As early as at the beginning of the thirties, all over the world, not excluding the United States of America, this research was only peripheral to the social sciences.

Until the thirties, little or none had been done on communications, with the exception of literary criticism, a few studies on propaganda and other surveys commissioned by the media to ascertain their impact upon the public and its tastes (Many Voices 1980, p. 223).

In the second half of the thirties, communication research was mobilized (in metaphorical, but real sense of this word) – at least in countries that were preparing then for the expected war. Communication researchers moved from Europe to the USA, fleeing from persecution in Nazi Germany. But sometimes, young European sociologists were sent to the USA on scholarships, in order to learn from the American experiences and to see, with their own eyes, how propaganda and advertising was done and studied there. The best-known examples of these two types of voyages from Europe to the USA, at the close of the thirties, were, as we know, Paul Lazarsfeld and Elisabeth Noelle.

Wars and international tensions have always created favorable conditions for research on persuasion, as well as research on communication, peeking, eavesdropping, and transportation. It is widely known how much electronic calculation technology, telematics, as well as social and experimental psychology owe to undertakings dictated by reasons of the so-called national defense. The principle of inadmissibility of manipulation is admittedly declared, but it is absolved by justifications that it is better to fight with words and images than with bullets and swords. *Better jaw jaw than war war*, as Annabelle Sreberny reminded these Churchill's famous words, in Paris in 2007 on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IAMCR.

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<sup>2</sup> To remind Kaspar von Stieker's: *Zeitungs Lust und Nutz*, published in Hamburg in 1695.

After World War II, the permanent state of friction between the so-called First and Second World, known as the Cold War, bolstered research dictated by reasons of defence, including research on the effectiveness of propaganda. At the same time, in the fifties and the sixties, the most fashionable fields of communication research included the problems of modernization, in particular: the acceptance of new solutions in agriculture, efficacy of education (already including lifelong education), and the role of media in the social and economic development of countries and regions. In the sixties, researchers became interested not only in the political and commercial problems of the efficacy of propaganda and advertising messages but also in the general effects of media reception.

At the close of the sixties, critical media researchers became even more inquisitive and began to ask questions:

- about the possible alternative models of media ownership, media policy makers, control of the media and the impact of control on the media,
- about the possible economic solutions of alternative communication systems,
- about the ways in which people satisfy, through the use of media, their needs concerning information, interpretation, and entertainment, and finally,
- about the effective routes to “demonopolization of truth” and “decolonization of information and protection of national cultures”, to use this impolite today expression. In this context, there appeared the hottest potato, both for the capitalist liberal West and the communist totalitarian East: the problem of access (to the media in the roles of both receivers and senders) and participation in public communication.

The eighties brought, at least in Poland, at first euphoria of possible fulfilment of hopes concerning freedom, and then growing bitterness of disappointment and a feeling of being lost (Pisarek 1982a, 1982b). The nineties and the beginning of the new millennium buried erstwhile delusions, creating new problems with a brand new (politically, economically, and technologically) market, but also brand new possibilities of solving them. The best-known exponents of these feelings were authors: John Keane (1991), Claude Jean Bertrand (2000) and Karl Popper with his last publication on television (Popper 1995). But in the nineties, a new tale started, one that I do not intend to tell here.

For I want to focus on the fate of a particular career of the mass media and mass media research in plans of a transformation of the world with the use of communication. If I may add: in the plans created by media researchers, in their specific conspiracy which may have contributed, in part, to the fall of the post-Yalta world political system, in particular in its European sector. My present tale concerns the thirty years from 1960 to 1990. However from these three decades, the first (i.e. the sixties) comprised the period of preparations, and the third (the eighties) brought the period of decline, while during the second decade (the seventies), the international activity of communication researchers

was the most successful. I will devote the most time, place, and attention to this second decade.

The role of the inspirer, organizer and transmitter of the idea of solving social and political problems with the use of the mass media was played by the UN<sup>3</sup> and UNESCO, not without the influence of the (today often ridiculed) Non-Aligned Movement of the Developing Countries, growing in power. Let us recall facts which made communication research one of the most important and politically most influential disciplines among social sciences:

The General Conference of UNESCO adopted in November 1968 a new strategy for promoting communication research and policy and authorized the Director-General “in cooperation with appropriate international and national organizations, governmental and non-governmental, to undertake a long-term programme of research on technological progress in means of communication and to promote study on the role and effects of mass communication in modern society” (Hamelink and Nordenstreng 2007, p. 15).

Executing this delegation, UNESCO put the foundation stone for the worldwide political career of mass communication research by organizing, in June 1969 in Montreal, a legendary, today, conference which included a platform paper by James Halloran, and then appointing three expert panels with the task of drawing up: (1) proposals for an International Programme of Communication Research, (2) a work plan for the selection and drawing up of the National Communication Policy and Planning, and (3) a plan for a worldwide network of mass communication research documentation. All three panels and their programmes were interconnected not only by their subject, but also personally. Above all, they were united by a common goal of contributing to a situation in which a communication

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<sup>3</sup> Several UN resolutions and declarations from the sixties reminded of the significance of the media in the diffusion of socially desirable attitudes; these included: “Declaration on the Promoting among the Youth of the Ideas of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples” (December 1965) and “Declaration on Social Progress and Development” (December 1969). In the latter, the following was pointed out as the principles of action for “social process and development” (Article 5):

“The social progress and development require the full utilization of human resources, including in particular:

- a) the encouragement of creative initiative under conditions of enlightened public opinion;
- b) the dissemination of national and international information for the purpose of making individuals aware of changes occurring in society as the whole;
- c) the active participation of all elements of society, individually or through associations, in defining and in achieving the common goals of development with full respect for the fundamental freedom embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- d) the assurance to disadvantaged or marginal sectors of the population of equal opportunities for social and economic advancement in order to achieve an effectively integrated society”.

As the means to achieve social progress and development, in conformity with those principles, the declaration mentioned, among other things (Article 21): “Raising the general level of education, development and expansion of national information media, and their ration and full use towards continuing education of the whole population and towards encouraging its participation in social development activities, the constructive use of leisure, particularly that of children and adolescents”.

policy served “peaceful cooperation and social development”, both at the national and international level.

Future research was to answer questions that had not been asked before on such a scale in mainstream mass communication research. John Willings, Head of the UNESCO Division of Communication Planning and Research, wrote on the pages of *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze*:

Questions are asked: Who manages and runs the mass media? Whose interests do they serve? What funds do they use? What do they disseminate? What needs do they satisfy and what needs do they not? What are the consequences of their entire activity? (Willings 1974, p. 17).

And furthermore:

In different parts of the world, development plans too often failed because communication factors had not been considered when they had been drawn up. The main problem, however, is that governments usually do not know the nature of communication in a society sufficiently, and they know too little about the possibilities and orientation of communication systems, both public and private, in their countries (Willings 1974, p. 18).

This was the premise of this whole enterprise: governments in most countries do not realize, in the first place, that they always, even subconsciously, conduct a communication policy, and secondly, that the right communication policy may be conducted only on the foundation of relevant studies.

Prepared by the first expert panel<sup>4</sup> and sent to all governments of the UNESCO member states, “Proposals for an International Programme of Communication Research” (Paris 1971) assumed multidisciplinary of research, warned against unilateral dismembering of the research issues into isolated parts, be it according to disciplines or according to aspects of the communication process, separated from the social system.

The second expert panel in the field of communication policy and planning, while discussing the selection of principles and goals of this policy and means of its realization, emphasized the necessity of having indispensable data and up-to-date knowledge, possible to achieve through empirical research. The preliminary condition for the sense of the propositions of both these panels was the recognition, by governments of individual countries, of the need for such studies and ensuring the possibility of their realization.

As one of the means of increasing the degree of access and participation, the appointment of national councils for communication policy was proposed. Their members would be recruited from “high-profile executives from the field of politics, management specialists, mass media practitioners, and media rese-

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<sup>4</sup> Among its members were: Luis Beltran, Bogota, Columbia; S.O. Biobaku, Lagos, Nigeria; Nabil Dajani, Beirut, Lebanon; James Halloran, Leicester, UK; Tomo Martelanc, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia; Kaarle Nordenstreng, Helsinki, Finland; Walery Pisarek, Krakow, Poland; Y.V.L. Rao, Singapore; Pierre Schaeffer, Paris, France; Dallas Smythe, Regina, Canada and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, Mainz, FRG, as Rapporteur.

archers” (Willings 1974, p. 22). Each council was supposed to start its activities by critically assessing the mass media control, and then concentrate on the state of the technical base of the media, personnel and its training, media economics, legal conditions, and international connections (Willings 1974, pp. 23–25). Such a wide scope of communication policy would require participation of state, executive and legislative authorities, ministries and planning commissions, media institutions, professional organizations, research institutes of various social sciences, and, among them, institutes for communication research, as the most important.

The role of the proposed institutionalized council for Communication Policy issues will be thus fulfilling the function of “supervision”, adviser, and coordinator in the wider framework of national development policy. [...] This is why there is an urgent necessity to create a team of scholars focused on the issues of communication and able to undertake appropriate research endeavors

– wrote John Willings (1974, p. 22).

The review of the popular, some say – celebrated, others – notorious, watchwords of that period should be commenced from, arguably, the best-known and most famous term of “New International Information Order”. This was the initial form of this slogan, which was soon reformulated as “New World Information and Communication Order”<sup>5</sup>.

It was a challenge for the flagship postwar slogan in the field of communication “Free Flow of Information”, treated by the *free* world of the West as the foundation of the information order, both in individual countries and worldwide. In the *just* East it was interpreted as a smokescreen for the doctrine of domination of the stronger. In the sixties, it was formulated anew, on behalf of the Third World, as “Free and Balanced Flow of Information”. The illustration of the “old”, ripe for change information order was a chart with two bars, one of which was several times taller than the other. This taller bar represented the amount of information pressed by the First World media to the Third World, while the shorter one depicted the amount of information delivered by the Third World to the First.

The FFI slogan, promoted by the US, summarized the ideal state in the sphere of world, national, and local communication, while being one of the best-known watchwords (one of the icons) of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Realization of this ideal was seen (openly – mainly in the West, silently – also in the East) as a measure favouring social development and, at the same time, preventing totalitarianism in individual countries and war in international relations: due to the lack of free flow of information, Hitler was able to gain power and unleash war. One could argue about the rightness of this opinion, but it was obvious for almost everyone that the principle of free flow of information could not be reconciled

<sup>5</sup> The motivation for this innovation is obvious: the point here is not only about the diffusion of information among people, but also ensuring that they do not content themselves with the reception of information, that they comment on it and share it. The order should be *worldwide*, it should be an order between people with no regard to state borders, and not an order ensuing from agreements between countries, which could be implied from the term *international*.

with the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union. Thus, everyone who challenged the FFI, risked being named an enemy of freedom and an enthusiast of the domestic and foreign policy of the USSR.

In spite of this, it was already in the fifties that arguments, initiated in the East, that not all information deserved the free flow equally, and those coming from the South (or raised in the name of the South) that the FFI meant in practice the domination of the richest countries and the richest media, appeared in the international debate on the state of communication in the world. And in the sixties, the absolute principle of free flow of information was challenged, in the international market of ideas, by demands of:

- 1) free flow of information serving peace and international cooperation (which, in practice, meant approval for blocking information regarded as harmful for peace and international cooperation);
- 2) free and balanced flow of information, which (from the point of view of the Third World interests) was generalized in the formulas of:
- 3) decolonization of information and, ensuing from it:
- 4) “New International Information Order”, or “New World Information and Communication Order”.

The fuel for the slogans of NIIO/NWICO were the accusations, directed at the major Western international news agencies (AP and UPI, AFP, and Reuters), that they limited themselves to showing *coups and earthquake news*, while having a monopoly on incoming and outgoing information from the Third World countries. The enormous disproportion in the flow of television programmes (i.e. the absolute domination of American, French, British, and German producers) was revealed in a well-known study by K. Nordenstreng and T. Varis, popularized by UNESCO (Nordenstreng & Varis 1974).

Perhaps the greatest success of the NIIO/NWICO idea on the world scene was the fact that the Declaration on the Mass Media was adopted by acclamation at the 20th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO held in Paris on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1978. According to S. MacBride, it was

the first international instrument referring directly to moral, social, and professional responsibilities of the mass media in the context of the universally recognized principles of freedom of expression, information, and opinion (MacBride & Roach 1993, p. 7).

But the feeling of success among the NIIO supporters was not absolute, because

The final version of the resolution did not include – because of Western demands – proposals to make national governments responsible for the action of communications companies working within their jurisdictions (MacBrid & Roach 1993, p. 7).

Since governments weaseled out of the responsibility for actions of the media in their territories, the major media had to defend themselves against potential

consequences of the UNESCO Media Declaration of 1978. The response came two and a half years later. Let me remind that a conference of media representatives and political scientists from several dozen countries of the world took place in May 1981 in Talloires, France (World Press 1981). The conference ended with adoption of a declaration, which, in the name of the FFI principle, staunchly vetoed the idea of NIIO and the entire UNESCO policy in the field of information and communication in the world. Within UNESCO, this declaration was received as a *sui generis* declaration of war.

The Talloires Declaration included both demands that were ethically and factually rightful as well as difficult to challenge on the ground of the European system of values, and opinions that met opposition from both the Right and the Left.

How could we not – at least in my opinion – agree, on the one hand, with such demands as:

- Censorship and other forms of arbitrary control of information and opinion should be eliminated; the people's right to news and information should not be abridged.
- Access by journalists to diverse sources of news and opinion, official or unofficial, should be without restriction. Such access is inseparable from access of the people to information.
- There should be no restriction on any person's freedom to practice journalism. Journalists should be free to form organisations to protect their professional interests.
- All journalistic freedoms should apply equally to the print and broadcast media [...].

On the other hand and today – in my opinion – not everyone would easily and entirely agree with opinions such as:

- There can be no international code of journalistic ethics, the plurality of views makes this impossible. [...]
- The press's professional responsibility is the pursuit of truth. To legislate or otherwise mandate responsibilities for the press is to destroy its independence. The ultimate guarantor of journalistic responsibility is to the free exchange of ideas.

The naivety of manifestations of ambition and usurpation of media researchers (if not all, then perhaps most of them, recalled here), exploited by politicians, seems to be self-evident. Let us take as an example the question of media councils. In the liberal democratic countries, especially in the USA, the proposed media councils were treated as an attack on the freedom of the media; in the planned economy countries, as countries dominated by the USSR were euphemistically called, they were received with mixed feelings, because while activities of such institutions as the “national council for communication” fell into their centralized administrative system, the prerogatives of such a council would violate the principle of the leading role of the ruling party<sup>6</sup>. In developing countries, the propos-

<sup>6</sup> The idea of the media council, supported by the Polish Solidarity movement in 1981, was realized three years later by the Polish Press Law of January 26<sup>th</sup> 1984 (now the institution of media council does not exist in the present media law in Poland).

als in the field of communication policy were, in turn, admittedly received with a kind interest and sympathy but with the condition of obtaining funds for their implementation.

Even if we assessed today, with an indulgent superiority, activities of media researchers, we could not deny that the seventies might be regarded as a period of remarkable social and political successes of their discipline. The crucial moment – let us remind – in the extraordinary career of communication research in those years was a meeting of experts organized in Montreal in 1969 by UNESCO. Participants at the meeting agreed that “a practicable and effective way of better studying and comprehending the role of mass communication on a world-wide basis is urgently required”. According to this recommendation, authorized by the General Conference, UNESCO made it possible:

- to prepare, through cooperation of researchers from many parts of the world, an international programme of studies on mass communication and guidelines concerning national and international communication policy,
- to create a worldwide network of regional centres of mass communication research documentation (some of them as Nordicom exist till today) with an up-to-date thesaurus, and
- to draw up a fairly reasonable – for those times – World Communication Report.

Furthermore, in my opinion, very active participation of media researchers in the world discourse on communication contributed, during those years, to the adoption, by the UNESCO General Conference, in 1978, of “Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement of War”, and, in consequence, to the MacBride Commission and the creation of its Report (“Many Voices, one World”), and then to the International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC).

Apparently nothing but recollections remained of those big ideas and programmes. However, looking at the same endeavours from a different perspective, one can say that not all is gone with the wind. Communication research in the seventies contributed, arguably, to the acceptance of the compromise solutions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> basket of the Final Act of the CSCE. I would like to point out the simultaneousness of activities of media researchers, working under the auspices of UNESCO in the field of communication policy and planning, and the discussions in Helsinki, within the framework of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe; the formal establishment of the Network of Regional Centres for Communication Research Documentation COMNET coincides with the signing of the Final Act of CSCE.

Most people in Poland believe that the process of decay of the Soviet monolith system has started in 1980 by the Solidarity movement in Gdańsk. Some of the visitors to Gdańsk have seen here the posters: *Everything started in Gdańsk!*

From the Polish perspective, it is obviously true. However, taking into account the third basket of the Helsinki Conference which opened the first legal wholes to the uncontrolled two direction flow of information, allow me as a communication researcher to confess my deepest conviction that *everything started in Montreal* in 1969.

Let us remind once more the great ideas of the 70s in the field of world communication: Free Flow of Information, Free and Balanced Flow of Information, New World Information and Communication Order with its ideas of Decolonization, Democratization and Deregulation of Information, Access and Participation, Right to Communicate, Power Free Communication, Internal Freedom in the Media, Press or Media Councils and so on. To tell the truth, not much or nothing came out of these Great Ideas. At least, the potential solution came from another direction. In accordance with McLuhan's technological determinism, this potential solution is offered by two or three billion personal computers with an access to Internet resources.

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## STRESZCZENIE

### **Dawne wyzwania dla dziennikarstwa. Odświeżone spojrzenie na wielkie idee lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych**

Artykuł zwraca uwagę na szczególną rolę badań nad mediami masowymi w przekształcaniu pojałtańskiego światowego systemu politycznego w okresie 1960–1990, a w szczególności w latach siedemdziesiątych. Rolę inspiratora, organizatora i popularyzatora idei rozwiązywania społecznych i politycznych problemów z pomocą mediów masowych odegrały ONZ i UNESCO. Dzięki nim badania komunikacji społecznej stały się jedną z najważniejszych i najbardziej wpływowych dyscyplin spośród nauk społecznych. Konferencja w Montrealu, zorganizowana w czerwcu 1969 r. przez UNESCO, stała się kamieniem węgielnym w światowej karierze politycznej badań nad komunikowaniem masowym. Bardzo aktywny udział medioznawców w światowym dyskursie o komunikacji społecznej przyczynił się do przyjęcia później, w 1978 r., przez Konferencję Ogólną UNESCO „Deklaracji w sprawie mediów”, następnie do powołania Komisji MacBride'a i powstania jej raportu, a wreszcie do przyjęcia „Międzynarodowego programu rozwoju komunikowania” (IPDC). Badania komunikacji społecznej w latach siedemdziesiątych przyczyniły się zapewne do akceptacji kompromisowych rozwiązań trzeciego koszyka aktu końcowego KBWE, który stworzył pierwsze legalne szczeliny dla niekontrolowanego dwukierunkowego przepływu informacji w monolitycznym, hermetycznym systemie ZSRR. Z tego względu można powiedzieć, że *wszystko się zaczęło w Montrealu w 1969 r.*

**Słowa kluczowe:** media masowe, badania komunikacji, lata sześćdziesiąte, lata siedemdziesiąte, lata osiemdziesiąte, UNESCO, wolny przepływ informacji, nowy światowy ład w komunikacji, akt końcowy KBWE, konferencja w Montrealu