Communication Policy Research: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges

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Communication Policy Research: Tradition and State of the Art

based on:
Overview of the Field

- **meaningful area of research** but
  - communication policy issues are low profile (Havick 1983)
  - communication policy and communication policy research (CPR) regarded with suspicion (McQuail 1994)

- **multidisciplinary field** that is “a widely disparate body of work about whose dimensions there is relatively little agreement” (Rowland 1984)

- **emergence** often dated around the 1970s (Pool 1974)

- **definition of CPR** (Laswell 1970; Harms 1980)
  - research **about** communication policy; and
  - research that **informs** communication policy-making
From Self-Consciousness to Self-Confidence

- **looking back**: highly *self-conscious* field of research
  - history of debate about lacking influence in theory development and communication policy-making
  - good reasons to be more self-confident
- **moving forward**: how to be of relevance
  - choose topical subjects
  - advance theoretical and methodological foundations
Moving Forward (I): Topical Subjects

- necessary to choose subjects that are of societal relevance
- **existing research** (Reinard/Ortiz 2005; Galperin 2004; Streeter 1990)
  - often focuses on regulatory details and specific policies
  - sometimes looses sight of broader structures and of the policy-making process
- tasks for **future research**
  - keeping pace with convergence
  - consider tensions between national, regional and global levels
  - focus on political processes and the actors involved
Moving Forward (II): Theoretical Foundations

- most of communication policy research is **problem-driven** (Reinard/Ortiz 2005; Rowland 1984; Mosco/Rideout 1997)
  - high degree of technical expertise
  - but more descriptive than theoretically grounded, thus limited to ad-hoc explanations

- **conceptual work** needed that connects communication with social and political theory (McQuail 1994)
  - interest, institutions and ideas in regulation
  - media governance
Moving Forward (III): Methodological Skills

- methodological approaches **seldom explicated**
  - there is plenty of empirical work, including comparisons
  - yet neither disclosed nor critically discussed

- **more thorough engagement necessary**
  - what does comparing mean?
  - scrutinizing and advancing qualitative document analysis and interviews
Theories:
The Concept of Media Governance

based on:
Origins of Governance

**Political Science**
- global governance
- multilevel governance
- democratic governance
- “new” governance

**Economics**
- new institutional economics
- corporate governance

**Politics**
- good governance

Governance
Label (I): Narrow vs. Broad Definitions

new polities, politics and policies

narrow definitions: governance vs. government

traditional statutory regulation

broad definitions: governance includes government
Label (II): Horizontal and Vertical Extension

Governance

Global level
Regional level
Statutory Regulation
Co-Regulation
Self-Regulation

Government

vertical extension
horizontal extension
Dual Meaning of Governance

- **Label** for (new and old) regulation: media governance refers to the regulatory structure as a whole, i.e. the entirety of forms of rules that aim to organize media systems

- **Analytical concept:**
  new way of describing, explaining and criticizing the entirety of forms of rules that aim to organize media systems
  - integrated view on rules
  - theoretically open
Analytical Concept (I): Integrated View

Collective Media Governance

- statutory, co- and self-regulation of the media
- statutory or self-regulatory framework of self-organization

Organizational Media Governance

- self-organization (internal rules and control mechanisms)
Analytical Concept (II): New Institutionalism

- new institutionalism helps in analyzing influence of regulatory structure on media
- **three pillars of institutions** (Scott 2001)
  - cultural-cognitive pillar
  - normative pillar
  - regulative pillar
Analytical Concept (III): New Institutionalism

- regulation has **punitive, normative and cultural-cognitive quality**
- **strategic responses** of organizations: acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, manipulation (Oliver 1991)
- organizations do not respond to all pillars in the same ways
Methods: Comparing Media Policy and Regulation

based on:
Benefits & Pitfalls of Comparative Research

+ general: revealing patterns; advancing theories
  specific: identifying best-practice models and pointing at possible solutions

- general: lack of theory-driven research; mostly descriptive
  specific: documents unavailable/outdated; documents vs. regulatory reality; different institutional environments
Defining Comparative Research (I)

comparing means to relate at least two units of analysis to each other and to look for similarities and/or differences

- **beyond nation-states**: not only nation-states but also sub-national units as well as world regions
- **beyond systems**: not only macro- but also meso-societal level of analysis
- **beyond space**: not only cross-space but also cross-time comparisons
Defining Comparative Research (II)

- "simple" comparisons
  - systematic analysis of similarities and differences
  - developing classifications and typologies

- causal comparisons
  - hypotheses testing in order to explain similarities and differences
  - conventional methods: methods of agreement/difference (John Stuart Mill)
  - macro-qualitative comparisons,
    e.g. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Charles Ragin)
Steps of Comparing Policy & Regulation

1. Case Selection
2. Identifying Dimensions
3. Data Collection & Analysis
4. Comparison
Overview of Comparative CPR (I)

- case studies of foreign countries
- handbooks

“nation-by-chapter reporting which leaves the making of comparisons up to the reader” (Livingstone 2003)
Overview of Comparative CPR (II)

- “genuine” comparisons
  - regulation in Europe/North America
  - regulation in other world regions
  - self- and co-regulation
  - public service broadcasting
Overview of Comparative CPR (III)

- mostly interested in **instruments and measures of media regulation**, often looking for successful models and best practices
- mostly focused on **broadcasting**
- mostly **descriptive** comparisons with the aim of developing typologies and classifications
- mostly comparing (Western) **European** countries
Challenges for Future Comparative CPR

- advancing the **craft** of comparing
  - **theory-driven approach** is essential (selection of cases; identification of dimensions)
  - adopt **macro-qualitative methods** (e.g. QCA)
- moving **beyond the North Atlantic** zone
- analyzing **neglected and novel subjects**
  - self- and co-regulation
  - internal governance and regulatory organizations
  - internet and convergence
  - politics (actors, interests, power)