

The 69th Annual ICA Conference “Communication Beyond Boundaries”

Washington DC (USA), May 24–28, 2019



Photo by: Marek Wiczerzak

Media and communication scholars from all around the globe gathered in Washington in the United States of America for the 69th Annual meeting of the International Communication Association (ICA). The Polish Communication Association organized a panel “Power Struggles: State, Media and The Public.” The goal of that panel was to bring together a range of scholars from several European countries whose studies focus on the notion of “power struggle” — an umbrella term for communications networks and partnership relations between the agents involved. The salient questions

addressed during the session were: How do the media outlets serve the public good and their citizens? What are the existing mechanisms to limit political pressures and to foster journalistic objectivity and independence? To what extent media power is nowadays affected by the public’s needs and expectations? How do the media use their power in relation to state and the publics?

The PCA session was chaired by Iwona Hofman — the President of the Polish Communication Association. In her opening speech, Iwona Hofman introduced the Polish Communication Association to the audience, while Agnieszka Stepińska promoted the most recent issue of the *Central European Journal of Communication* (Spring 2019) and invited the audience members to submit their paper proposals to the Journal.

The first paper was presented by Paweł Surowiec from Bournemouth University. The paper focused on public media policy changes in Poland, asking what and how media policy solutions facilitate the rise of illiberal trends in a hybrid media system. The paper unfolded the logic underpinning the new politics of media regulation and argued that these paint a nuanced picture of democratic backsliding in Poland. Drawing from media policies, policy-makers’ statements and media industry insights, Paweł Surowiec and two co-authors of the paper (Magdalena Kania-Lundholm from Uppsala University and Małgorzata Winiarska-Brodowska from Jagiellonian University) problematized exogenous and endogenous trends underpinning the rise of illiberal trends at the cross-roads of the Polish hybrid media system, politics and democracy. These trends, as Authors of the paper claimed, unfolded along the lines of tensions between political parties and civic society actors, ownership structures, cultural politics, partisanship and polarisation. Indicative of illiberal turn in politics, they are steps towards executive aggrandizement and deepening politicisation of public service media as a sector of the Polish hybrid media system.

Then, Manuel Puppis from University of Fribourg/Switzerland and Etienne Bürdel from University of Fribourg/Switzerland discussed topics that dominated debates regarding the necessity and role of PSM were raised by which actors. Building on a stage-based approach to the policy-making process, Authors performed a qualitative content analysis of policy documents. Results of their study showed that actors across the political spectrum have become more critical of the Swiss public broadcaster. However, young libertarian politicians and the association of small and medium-sized businesses aside, a strong majority considers public funding crucial to sustain a strong media landscape.

Next, Gabriella Szabó from the Centre for Social Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences shared findings of her exploratory research on the dynamics between social media and news media in discussing politics. The study was driven by the question: what kind of news media content works in a sharing environment? To answer the question, Gabriella Szabó measured the specificities on news sharing patterns on the social media platforms of the 40 most read news media outlets in Hungary during the 2018 legislative election campaign period and one year prior (2017). The investigation revealed that the proximity of the election increases the circulation of news on politics. Data also suggested that political contents tend to generate more comments and shares than other posts. Such findings provided valuable contextual information to the mechanism of the algorithmic publics.

Finally, Agnieszka Stępińska from Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland), Dorota Piontek from Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland), and Agnieszka Hess from Jagiellonian University (Poland) shared the findings of the quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the media coverage of populism and populist actors in Poland. The paper addressed several research questions: (1) Which political actors are perceived by Polish journalists as populist? (2) How much attention the media paid to these political actors during the election and a non-election period? (2) What was a tone of the media coverage (positive, neutral, or negative) of these actors? (3) What are the journalists' attitudes towards populism? (4) What factors may explain Polish journalists' attitudes towards populism? Through content analysis the paper examined an amount of attention paid by the media to populist statements a relation between the media and populist political actors and discussed a potential power (or a lack of power) of the media over populism in Poland.

Text: Agnieszka Stępińska

The 12th Central and Eastern European Communication and Media Conference CEECOM 2019

Sofia, Bulgaria, June 19–21, 2019

The Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” hosted the 12th edition of CEECOM — Central and Eastern European Media Conference. More than 190 experts and researchers from Europe and beyond participated in the three-day event. Participants represented research institutions from Spain, Portugal,

Romania, Russia, Belarus, Pakistan, Hungary, Turkey, Macedonia, Kosovo, Hong Kong. This year's theme of the conference was "Communication Management: Theory and Practise in the 21st Century." The organizers aimed at discussing the following research problems: theoretical aspects of communication management; practitioners' perspectives on communication management; integration of different communication channels; the role of context in communication; public diplomacy; digital impact on the communication landscape. In total 30 panels were organized in line with different subject sessions.

The participants were welcomed by the rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Anastas Gerdjikov and the Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication Teodora Petrova. A lecture by Andreas Schwarz from Technische Universitat Ilmenau about "Global Risk and Crisis Communication Management in the Digital Age: Are we missing the essentials?" was given. The second keynote speaker Gevisa La Rocca from the University of Enna focused on the mediatization of emotions. This subject was also one of the topics



Photo by: Albert Narbekov

of a separate research panel. Themes of other panels included: "New Frontiers in Communication," "Propaganda and Journalism," "Social Media Anthropology," new research topics related to television in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as public diplomacy in the 21st century. The special panel devoted to the future of media research in Central and Eastern Europe was chaired by Epp Lauk from the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) with valued contributions by Brindusa Armanca (Romania), Lilia Raycheva (Bulgaria)

and Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska (Poland). The second day of the conference began with the speech by Elena Vartanova (Lomonosov State University, Russia). The CEECOM conference created an excellent opportunity to promote the scientific journal "Central European Journal and Communication". Participants of CEECOM were further informed about the forthcoming CEECOM meeting in Brno (2021). On the last day of the conference, the participants also presented research reflections on the importance of the context in communication, the perspectives of media research in post-Soviet countries, contemporary media practices in terms of ethics, and the management of public service media.

Overall, participants experienced extraordinary kindness and hospitality of the hosts. They were given a chance to attend a cocktail on the first day of the conference, as well as an evening walk with a guide around Sofia.

Text: Dominika Popielec