

Monitoring Mediascapes: A Premise of Wisdom-Based EU Media Governance

Lauk, E., Oller Alonso, M., & H. Harro-Loit (Eds.), *Monitoring mediascapes: A premise of wisdom-based EU media governance*. University of Tartu Press.

Bianka Francistyová

Today, there are problems with disinformation and the lack of trust in media. These increasing problems call for deliberative communication. The book *Monitoring mediascapes: A premise of wisdom-based EU media governance* proposes potential solutions to questions that have so far only been partially addressed. Deliberative communication cannot be excluded from public discourse, as the term *deliberative* is a fundamental component in describing democracy. This very aspect supports the relevance of the publication, as deliberative communication is indeed “a precondition to deliberative democracy” (Lauk & Oller Alonso, 2024, p. 1). The edited volume presents a comprehensive spectrum of the issues addressed, presenting in 10 chapters both the theoretical basis, the newly implemented methodology and various aspects of empirical research. The contributions to the book are even more significant as 14 European countries, namely Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden, have taken part in the research. The results are therefore applicable not only to them but also serve as a starting point for further research and exploration of the issue.

The first chapter, “Capability of monitoring mediascapes in 14 European countries: an Introduction”, aims to introduce the Medielcom project. The intention of the project was, amongst other things, to produce a publication highlighting existing mediascapes, also mentioning the obstacles the project faced as well as the very limitations of the research. The chapter further focuses on various aspects of monitoring legal regulations, the different components of journalism and collaborations within it, and the development of monitoring capabilities in 14 European countries. The project focused on wisdom-based media governance, for which data collection and analysis are important for a better understanding of the media. At the same time, this method of research more easily highlights unanswered questions and gaps in data availability, and overall interest from media and communication studies. The Medielcom project presents a holistic approach underpinned by data in different languages, thus contributing to the relevance of the research due to its transnational perspective.

The second chapter, “Monitoring mediascapes: Key concepts and basic variables”, focuses on a comprehensive grasp of deliberative communication and media transformation. The authors discuss the importance of examining media monitoring capabilities and their impact on society. Through descriptive analysis, the Medielcom project seeks to identify good and bad practices in media monitoring. They point out the importance of cooperation and interaction between different components in media governance. Among other things, the chapter also highlights the potential problems that come with data interpretation, knowledge extraction, and the role of media monitoring in advanced democracies.

The third chapter, “Medielcom’s approach and methodology”, presents the qualitative meta-study approach that the authors used to process the data during the Medielcom project. The developed method synthesises theoretical concepts and creates tools for researching possible risks and opportunities in media transformations. The model is based on a 3-level structure formulating the theoretical knowledge linked to empirical research, highlighting the importance of being able to detect capability levels for media monitoring. The method used in the Medielcom project is thus holistic, based on a diachronic and comparative qualitative meta-study.

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The fourth chapter, “The evolution of capabilities of monitoring mediascapes in 14 European countries”, examines the evolution of research on journalism, media and communication in the 14 European countries, mostly focusing on their ability to monitor media. The authors note the importance of researching the capability of monitoring mediascapes. The chapter further focuses on the evolution of journalism, its institutionalization, and mentioning the funding and sourcing of research activities across the countries. The chapter focuses, among other things, on a wide range of topics such as digital competencies, media accountability and media-democracy relations. The authors also present an insight into the dynamics of academics’ focus on the diversity of journalism, media and communication.

The fifth chapter, “Monitoring legal regulation and media accountability systems”, explains the significance of media accountability systems and monitoring practices. The authors highlight the challenges in implementing the methodology but also acknowledge the potential hazards in the absence of its application to the media accountability structures. The chapter revolves around the legal and ethical dimensions of media regulation. The authors demonstrate that a thorough analysis of monitoring capacities is necessary. To accomplish this, it would necessitate a profound comprehension of the freedom of expression and right to information. Subsequently, the optimal approach would be to employ the instances by comprehending the advantages and disadvantages that accompany media accountability systems.

The sixth chapter, “Journalism: collaboration is the key to monitoring”, provides an overview of the evolution of journalism from 2000 to 2020 in the participating European countries. It focuses on media landscapes, journalistic competencies and normative ideals. The chapter presents the opportunities but also the challenges journalists face in the current digital age. The authors note that long-term monitoring of the development of journalism is necessary. The research also underscores the need for a systematic examination of journalists’ roles, values and skills. At the same time, the authors point out the discrepancy between normative ideals and real practices that threatens deliberative communication. To eliminate the existing gap, they call for collaboration between academics, industry, and non-academics to improve journalism research.

The seventh chapter, “Assessing media usage research from the perspective of access, trust and news consumption”, provides an overview of media usage research and how it is impacted by deliberative communication. The chapter presents diverse methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of media practices in countries such as the Czech Republic, Austria and Bulgaria. The authors, among other things, also address the issue from the perspective of audiences’ behaviours and trends in media consumption, but also take on the influence of public-service broadcasters on political knowledge. The chapter also discusses the role of academic research in analyses of accessibility, trust and news consumption patterns.

The eighth chapter, “Monitoring media user competencies”, discusses the state of media-related competencies. The chapter concentrated on understanding users’ cognitive abilities as well as their ability to navigate in the digital space. The authors acknowledge the need for effective media education that should take on topics such as hate speech, disinformation or developing critical thinking skills. The chapter critically reports on the disparities in monitoring levels across countries, identifying both strengths and weaknesses in promoting media literacy. The authors offer solutions and improvements, ranging from the integration of media education into formal curriculum to teachers and education institutions fostering media literacy.

The ninth chapter, “Risks to the capability of monitoring mediascapes across Europe”, presents the potential risks and challenges encountered in journalism, media and communication research in the context of the Medielcom project. It highlights knowledge gaps and the uneven distribution of knowledge as potential risks. The authors note the importance of funding and resource concentration in the research but also mention that structural concentration could cause problems in journalism, media and communication development.

The last chapter, “Conclusions: A pathway to wisdom-based media governance” declares the need for wisdom-based media governance, as evidence-based media governance raises many questions, such as whether knowledge of existing theory is sufficient for policy making. The authors believe that precisely evidence-based media governance, which is built on knowledge, is only applicable in countries where knowledge is complete. Post-socialist countries, however, have incomplete knowledge and therefore deliberative communication cannot work in these

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countries in the same way. Mediadelcom's research has thus identified several indicators and issues that undermine the quality and relevance of existing – available – information, which are creating problems for the mediascape. The authors acknowledge that although the vision of wisdom-based media governance appears simple in theory, in practice it needs long-term exploration, with which come many challenges and barriers.

The book *Monitoring mediascapes: A premise of wisdom-based EU media governance* is a novel uptake on the research of media and media systems. It is proof that mediascapes are constantly evolving and suggests that research should address these changes. The Mediadelcom project as well as the book bring new insights into the media discourse and understanding of media landscapes. The authors of the chapters attempt to grasp media development and highlight the complexity of media monitoring. Apart from that, the book brings to light media accountability and its impact on society. The utilized holistic approach enriches media and communication studies with an additional perspective on mediascape research. The newly employed multi-dimensional analysis is proving to be beneficial for further media governance studies.

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On Online Disinformation as a Challenge for School Teaching: Practical Demonstration of How It Can Be Done in an Interesting and Effective Way

Káčinová, V. (Ed.). (2023). *Onlinové dezinformácie ako výzva pre školskú výučbu – Príklady dobrej praxe výučby mediálnej výchovy na základných a stredných školách IV* [Online disinformation as a challenge for school teaching – Examples of good practice in teaching media education in primary and secondary schools IV]. Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius

Matej Majerský

The current period is associated with several negative phenomena that we encounter in the media environment. The wide range of dangers, including disinformation, is even more perceptible in the case of minors. Developing media literacy through education in schools is a systematic effort to build positive habits in pupils. With these habits and knowledge, they should be able to navigate themselves across the world of media better and more safely. Publication *Onlinové dezinformácie ako výzva pre školskú výučbu* [Online disinformation as a challenge for school teaching] is the fourth sequel to the educators' guides addressing this problem. These handbooks provide examples of good practice in teaching media education in primary and secondary schools. The reviewed book is published by the IMEC – International Media Education Centre together with the Media Training Centre of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the UCM in Trnava. The handbook was compiled from the materials submitted by Slovak educators in the framework of a competition carried out within the international project CEDMO – Central European Digital Media Observatory, which received financial support from the European Commission.

The publication has been compiled by using contributions from educators who have implemented media education topics in their teaching in a variety of ways. It is a collection of twenty well-tested activities that educators can use to present media education topics in an interactive way. For better orientation in the text, a legend is

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provided for each activity, which helps the reader to find, for example, for which age group of pupils the activity is intended and also in which subject it can be used.

The subsections on the activities themselves indicate whether the activity can be implemented as an integrated part of a subject lesson, alternatively as a stand-alone project, or, for example, as part of a school club. It also includes an annotation, a methodological description of the activity, the material and technical requirements and the teacher's evaluation of the activity itself. However, an important part is the annexes, which contain documentation of a good practice example but also supporting materials for the implementation of the activity.

The first chapter focuses its attention on examples of teaching disinformation topics in primary schools. In total, eight examples are presented in the publication, which can be used in lessons of national language (in this case Slovak), foreign language, history, informatics, ethics education, art education or as an independent project. The target group of the activities also varies; some are intended for both levels of primary school attendance, others for one of them only. One example also focuses on pre-primary education for kindergarten children. All these activities present topics of disinformation to pupils in different social contexts using appropriate and suitable methods. A particular example of good practice, for instance, highlights a way of presenting the topic in a history lesson, in which pupils have to research the background to sensational hoaxes about the Slovak language being the hardest language in the world or about the rumoured origins of the James Bond story, which was supposed to be based on reality. Another interesting demonstration is, for example, an activity in which the pupils must create their own hoax to better understand how easy it is to create such fake news. An example of good practice that can be used in kindergartens is an activity in which pupils watch two fairy tales (one educationally appropriate and one educationally inappropriate). Through discussion with the teacher, they then come to understand the differences in why and how we should behave in society and how we are influenced by what we watch on our TV screens, smartphones, tablets, or laptops.

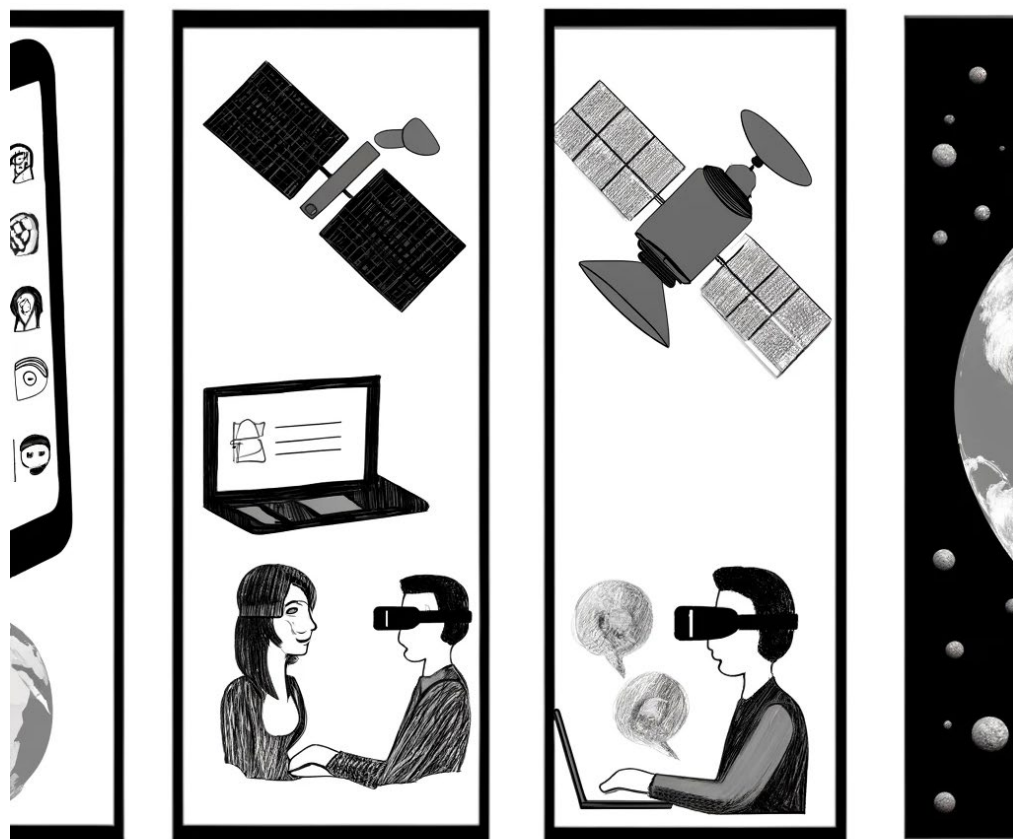
The second chapter focuses on examples of good practice that have been implemented in secondary schools. The activities presented were implemented in both grammar and vocational schools. The activities that include this topic in vocational education subjects are particularly useful. The presented examples of good practice for secondary schools can be used especially in the subject of computer science (informatics) but also in civics, foreign language, accounting or as part of project teaching or school clubs. An important factor is that while the activities for primary schools presented the topic of disinformation to pupils very simply and at a basic level, we can see a significant advance in these activities in terms of the complexity of the issue. The activities present important and complex topics to pupils in a way that can engage them. This factor is also noted by many teachers who reflect on the positive feedback from pupils at the end of their own sub-chapters. In one of the activities, the pupils have to actively look for information about a fictional animal; in this example the teacher shows them how well and credibly fake news can be handled by their authors. Next, the topic can be presented to the pupils by working with statistics. Their task is to analyse statements made by well-known persons who have referred to data, and in doing so, prove that they have interpreted the statistical data in their favour. In another activity, they can examine periodicals, including conspiracy media, or explore misleading content disseminated by political parties. We positively evaluate the methodological sophistication of each activity, as it is obvious that the teachers have taken into account the necessary balance, political impartiality or the safety of potential victims when compiling them. In particular, the last-mentioned example was the task treated in the activity, where the students had to create a fake e-mail account through which they would attempt a phishing attack on the teachers. The scam e-mail requested access details to the electronic pupil book (EduPage) from the teaching staff under the pretext of the need for technical maintenance. However, the educator presenting this activity points out that the school management needs to know about this activity and that the password to the fictitious account created needs to be known (and created) by the educator themselves to avoid possible loss of real data. Other examples of good practice also focus on pharmaceutical hoaxes and disinformation, for example.

The reviewed publication is a really useful tool for primary and secondary school teachers to introduce their students to the issue of disinformation in the online environment. The activities are interesting for the pupils, but just as rigorously, they clearly define the learning objectives set by the teachers. The fourth volume of such a

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publication is therefore not only a methodological guide, but also a signal that interest in innovative ways of teaching media education still persists and that a significant percentage of teachers in Slovakia reflect on this issue in their classes.

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European Media Landscape under Scrutiny: MediaDelCom Project and Its International Significance

Jana Radošinská – Ľudmila Čábyová

The international research project entitled "Critical Exploration of Media Related Risks and Opportunities for Deliberative Communication: Development Scenarios of the European Media Landscape" (abbr. MediaDelCom) is, in many respects, one-of-a-kind. Establishing firm and dynamic academic cooperation involving scholars and research teams from 14 different European countries, MediaDelCom embraces the essential foundations of deliberative communication and purposefully looks beyond the boundaries of firmly established European democracies, additionally shedding light on transforming and developing Central and Eastern European societies. This perspective itself is quite unique, given that in the recent past, many of the participating countries (for instance, the Balkan countries or V4 countries) were rarely included in similar research schemes and considerably overlooked, which is why we have not known much about their media landscapes and capacities to foster society-wide deliberative communication.

MediaDelCom aims to fill this void, making sure that the body of existing knowledge on European media systems and deliberative communication patterns will now include systematic, concrete, research-based data on multiple EU countries and their media environments. This also means that the project's aim to identify and systematically explain different development scenarios related to specific EU Member States is the first step towards a better understanding of the differences between national media landscapes and to identifying the risks and opportunities associated with deliberative communication. Some of these risks and opportunities might be relevant only for specific countries, others are serious and pervasive enough to cross any cultural, historical, and political boundaries, challenging mature and developing democracies alike.

The Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia has always been interested in international partnerships and research projects involving multiple countries or regions. When offered the unique opportunity to participate in the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, the faculty's most renowned media researchers saw this complex research inquiry as an opportunity to learn more about deliberative communication, as domestic media and communication scholarship has barely used this concept, overlooking its significance and potential in terms of understanding the country's media system and communication structure.

Nevertheless, the last three years of academic cooperation coordinated by the Estonian research team led by Professor Halliki Harro-Loit, have told us a lot about not only the Slovak media landscape, but also about media structures in other European countries. For example, it is now obvious that some crucial topics associated with the domestic media system have not aroused the academic attention they deserve. Furthermore, the obviously turbulent political situation in the country results in a lack of open, inclusive professional and public discussion on key legislative measures concerning media communication. Moreover, people's trust in the media and the content they produce has never been lower; this also means that multiple unfavourable scenarios predicting the media's future

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development need to be considered. In particular, issues such as efficient protection of information sources, emotional society-wide debates replacing matter-of-fact, professional discussions on legal frameworks regulating the national media environment or the country's vague attitude towards European media legislation have emerged as the most prominent problems to address in the near future. Specific publications affiliated with the project (especially monographs focused on all participating countries and scholarly studies focusing on specific states and/or topics) cover a wide range of problems which are obvious in any country aspiring to foster deliberative communication.

Academics from European research centres, represented also by the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of UCM in Trnava, identified problem areas and opportunities in European media systems. The result is a set of recommendations for improving the media environment for national governments.

The findings suggest that Slovakia faces a number of challenges in the area of trust in the media, where it is ranked on a par with countries such as Greece and Hungary, which raises some concerns about the independence and objectivity of news coverage influenced by political and business interests. In terms of media literacy, Slovakia is in a group with Croatia and Italy, with only Bulgaria and Romania performing worse. On the contrary, Slovakia scored better on press freedom in 2023, outperforming even Germany, ranking 17th out of 180 countries assessed.

Based on domestic and international reports, research and analysis, MEDIADELCOM researchers have identified a number of risk areas and formulated recommendations for policymakers, academics and other involved parties.

The main problem areas in Slovakia are:

- Inadequate research on media issues, in particular the regulation of freedom of the press and expression,
- the absence of a recognised journalists' organisation and the high concentration of the media market,
- the politicisation and reduction of plurality of public service media,
- the lack of clarity on media ownership and the relatively high potential for manipulation of content,
- insufficient media accountability tools and low media literacy.

Recommendations for Slovakia:

- Legislative steps to strengthen the protection of journalists and media independence,
- the creation of new media oversight bodies,
- support for ethical journalism and educational initiatives,
- improving communication between politicians and journalists and supporting professional journalists' organisations,
- increasing transparency of media ownership and funding,
- implementing programmes to increase media literacy.

Even though the MediaDelCom project is now reaching its inevitable conclusion, its results clearly indicate that the need to evaluate and explain communication particularities bound to European media landscapes is maybe more urgent than ever before. The theoretical and research framework established by the multinational research team is not exhaustive and static; on the contrary, it is just a beginning of something even bigger. This would be the opportunity to create new project proposals able to follow up on the given line of inquiry and even more intensive international cooperations aiming to contribute to the emergence of well-informed, open-minded, pluralist societies able to respect and promote the principles of deliberative communication.

