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Mediating Change, Changing Media: Dimensions and Perspectives


Vaia Doudaki

 ORCID: 0000-0002-6341-9963
Charles University, Czech Republic

Nico Carpentier

 ORCID: 0000-0002-8996-4636
Charles University, Czech Republic

Michał Głowacki

 ORCID: 0000-0003-1876-6568
University of Warsaw, Poland

INTRODUCTION

Societies (have to) deal with change permanently. They struggle over the nature of change and its desirability, and they strive for, and resist, change. But analyzing change is far from easy, given its complex nature, especially when looking at all communication and media changes related to the aftermath of the ‘Fourth Industrial’ (Floridi, 2014) and the ‘Data-Driven’ revolutions (Manovich, 2013; 2019). In this introduction – and through the Special Issue of the “Central European Journal of Communication” (CEJC) – we propose a broad definition of change, approaching it as an alteration of a condition, situation, state or phenomenon, that constitutes a difference over time (Kopřivová et al., 2021). Change is dealt with in configurations of the present and societies’ future visions, entailing struggles of the presents and pasts with the ongoing re-constructions of cultural path dependencies. Moreover, we can look at change via the lenses of persistence, adaptation, or transformation. Change can be embedded in continuity or manifested as a rupture with existing or past conditions (Herrfahrdt-Pähle & Pahl-Wostl, 2012). Our apprehension of the features and dimensions of change drives specific political, economic and cultural responses at the highly interwoven individual, organizational and collective (societal) realms. Furthermore, change

is perceived as a positive or negative outcome or prospect, as an opportunity or a threat, driving the social actors' struggles for maintenance or reconfiguration of power positions (Freedman, 2014), technology (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014) and the values of communication (Lowe, 2016).

This Special Issue of CEJC, entitled “Mediating Change, Changing Media”, looks at change processes taking a broad approach to media, mediation and communication. Our holistic view on change enables us to illustrate a wide range of communication and media (studies) approaches that address change, which open up future, more integrative research trajectories advancing our knowledge of institutions, policies and organizational/media systems (Deuze, 2021). The salient questions to be addressed are:

- How phenomena and dimensions of change are represented, negotiated, resisted, contested and redefined in media and communication? (**Mediating Change**)
- How do communication and media scholarships approach adaptation and change? (**Mediating Change**)
- How media and practices of communication are adjusted and modified (or fail to do so), in order to address or respond to new or emerging phenomena and conditions? (**Changing Media**)
- How to approach communication and media practices to address and respond to the complexity of societal and technological conditions? (**Changing Media**)

This Special Issue of CEJC widely demonstrates the blend of Mediating Change and Changing Media. It brings together studies concerning various types of media and communication practices (e.g., public service media, newspapers, social media, music, photography, poetry, and so on), and subjects of investigation (e.g., climate change, pandemics, homelessness, social protests and activism). All the while the Special Issue maintains an international perspective – with studies situated in Europe (Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden, the Netherlands), Africa (Egypt) and Asia (Lebanon, China, Indonesia). Furthermore, these studies on change comprise a diversity of methodologies (e.g., semi-structured interviews, arts-based research, interventions, content analysis-quantitative and qualitative) and theoretical premises (embedded, e.g., in discourse studies, critical theory, journalism studies, participatory theory, alternative media studies). To this end, we believe that the scholarly contributions of this collection address the complex and multidimensional character of change. We also hope that the specific case studies shed light on the diversity of dimensions and concepts of change.

DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

In a film essay, Kopřivová, Carpentier and Doudaki (Kopřivová et al., 2021) identified five main conceptual and theoretical dimensions of change. Their multidimensional prism can serve—also in this Special Issue—as a point of departure to understand the interdisciplinarity and plurality of today’s communication and media scholarship that addresses change. These five dimensions are the following:

- Normativity,
- Scale and intensity,
- Focus and context,
- Control,
- Time.

First, as argued by the authors of the film essay, any attempt to study change – at, for instance, the micro or personal level or at the broader societal level – engages with **normative evaluations** about change. On the one hand, change is sometimes evaluated as constructive, as an (aspired or even necessary) evolution, as progress, or as a pursuit or struggle aiming to improve one’s situation, position, or the overall well-being and public good (Murdock, 2021). On the other hand, change can also be evaluated negatively, as threatening or as destructive, and thus to be stopped or reversed. In a related manner, a wide range of scholarship highlights protectionism and resistance against change in the media and societal fabrics. For instance, Marxist and liberal ideologies have historically been evaluating societal processes of change differently regarding what is desired and what is a threat to societal order (see e.g., Devine, 1989; Friedman, 1988). More recently, the normative lens has been used to understand the clash of conservative and liberal values in the field of media, concerning, for example, the sustained attacks on the democratic visions of pluralistic and inclusive media, in Poland or Hungary (see, e.g., Bajomi-Lázár, 2017).

Second, change varies as it concerns **scale and intensity**. Large-scale change can be structural, sometimes changing the status-quo in an entire society, impacting on large parts of the population or even having a global impact, as with the case of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Small-scale change may impact on specific population segments or sectors, as in the ongoing adaptation of legacy media’s organizational structures, as production and distribution blend (Głowacki & Jackson, 2019). Large-scale or structural change might be the outcome of a forceful disruption (e.g., through a violent conflict, a revolution or regime change) but it might also concern slow and hardly noticeable processes. The latter can, for example, reflect the broader democratic changes,

which followed the introduction three decades ago of democratic governance systems in Central and Eastern Europe (Jakubowicz, 2004).

Third, the interest in change is usually focused on novelty, while stability, continuity or the importance of cultural path dependencies seem to generate less attention. Therefore, such a narrow **focus** on change might lead to the overestimation of the role and impact of alterations in societies, and to deterministic interpretations of how a single or small set of factors, or forces, can enact structural change. For example, in communication and media studies, technologically-centered approaches have led scholars to evaluate ‘new’ technologies of media and communication as drivers of structural change and as revolutionary, disregarding societal, cultural, political and economic (co-)determinants (Fuchs, 2013, pp. 201–203). Whatever is defined as ‘new’ or ‘old’ is part of the same problematization; whereas the ‘new’ tends to be seen as an agent of progress, the ‘old’ is translated as outdated, reactionary or anachronistic. Furthermore, while overestimating change and how easily it can be achieved, such approaches underestimate the force of established practices, cultures, networks and institutions, and how societies function through elaborate webs of connective tissue. Also, given that change is inextricably tied with stability and continuity (Herrfahrdt-Pähle & Pahl-Wostl, 2012; March, 1996), we tend to apprehend it through its relation to stability and continuity, in an interplay between pasts, presents and futures.

Fourth, the **control** dimension of change addresses whether change is planned, organized and intended, or whether it is accidental, not orchestrated and informal. Therefore, researching change requires examining whether it is controlled or not, and whether it is externally driven or organic. Similarly, identifying the subjects and objects of change, but also who benefits and who is harmed by the outcomes of change, is needed. The evaluation of processes of change as successful or as destructive is often dependent on who has (relative) control over these processes, and who manages change. For instance, the management structures of today’s media have implications on the media’s ability to be adaptive to varying conditions. The same applies to proactive or reactive media policies and self-regulation, which now need to deal with digital phenomena, such as fake news, misinformation, filter bubbles and increased polarization (Farkas & Schou, 2018; Pérez-Escolar & Noguera-Vivo, 2021; Spohr, 2017).

The fifth and final component in the examination of change is its **temporal dimension**. History is formed through long-lasting processes of alteration and short eruptions that produce distinct shifts and modifications in social formations. The field of communication and media studies engages with these longitudinal change processes and short-term outbreaks. Furthermore, by identifying start-points and endpoints, one constructs the duration of a phenomenon of change. History and historiography, archeology, but also scientific fields such

as evolutionary biology or paleontology, function on the basis of decisions about defining the beginning and end of eras, historical periods, evolution periods, but also of events, such as wars, during which significant changes occurred (see, e.g., Gerschenkron, 1962). A related scholarly challenge is whether specific events in time are isolated or these events are viewed as part of a long process of evolution. What matters is to look at communication and media change as a nonlinear, multidimensional process, and further acknowledge the importance of social, cultural, political, and historical embeddedness (Peruško, et al., 2020; Siebert, et al., 1956).

These five dimensions point to a number of questions and approaches to capture the contingent nature of change. Change is developing in a dynamic fashion, shifting in shape and form. It does not follow linear patterns, nor does it maintain a steady pace and rhythm, but it evolves through (altered) continuations, disruptions, reboots and reappearances. Time and intensity, space, context, involved actors, issues of contestation and power dynamics impact in always specific ways on change, producing unique outcomes.

A major challenge in studying change across disciplines, and in communication and media studies in particular, concerns its pervasiveness; change is everywhere, being an integral part of the social, cultural and communicative contexts (both national and international). Hence, researchers themselves are both actors and recipients of change, not always being in a position to dissociate or distance themselves from the phenomena they study. For example, researchers who experience the 'Fourth Industrial' revolutionary processes and the related erosion of traditional media models (such as the sender → receiver model, or the classical distinction between production and distribution) are subjected to change themselves (Deuze, 2021). Similarly, change is elusive in nature, and thus difficult at times to grasp and study in a concrete fashion. On top of that, new theories and methodologies call for new ways of capturing the dynamics of the mediation of change, alongside the complexities of an ever-shifting communication and media environment. The practices of mediation themselves may function as aesthetic and ideological filters that add particular color or light, soften or highlight contrast, or even edit objects and actors in, or out, of the picture, complicating the researcher's task of deciphering the workings of change and their outcomes. At the same time, we think that addressing change in our field allows to further explore how societies are organized, how they were organized in the past, and how they may change.

PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA CHANGE

The focus of this thematic CEJC issue is on mediating change, changing media and the entanglement of the two. While the Special Issue's contributions are embedded in communication and media studies, they do not adopt a media-centric position (see, e.g., Moores, 2018). This is translated in a twofold fashion. First, the contingent, ever-shifting, dynamic and pervasive nature of change is acknowledged, coupled with the recognition that forces and processes of societal, cultural, political, and economic change exist and occur outside and beyond the sphere of media. Media is only one of the spheres in which change is addressed, reflected and given visibility, represented and co-constructed. Hence, the mediation of change is not privileged over other processes and practices in defining the social reality of change.

Still, recognizing that the media is one of the spheres in which the struggles over the framing and the definition of the time and scope of change take place, is important. Media and communication spaces function as a signifiatory battlefield, in which involved actors propose their preferred understandings and interpretations of change, reflecting different ideological positions and interests. Hence, identifying and giving visibility to phenomena of change may impact policy or action taken, and the resources and forces that will be mobilized to address them (see, e.g., Allan et al., 2000; Cottle, 2006).

Secondly, our non-media-centric position acknowledges the interplay between change phenomena, media and society, and the future-oriented communication scenarios. The contributions of this Special Issue demonstrate that media are not outside the societal realm, and that they do not escape the forces and workings of change that are sometimes manifested in unprecedented ways, causing significant disruptions in how media and practices of communication are organized and performed. While we suggest two lenses to look at today's change processes, we argue that mediating change and changing media are highly interwoven. This means, among many other things, the need for an exploration of the media change phenomenon, alongside the practical implementation of new practices of communication.

MEDIATING CHANGE

Two key areas of investigation that are addressed in this thematic issue, in relation to how phenomena and aspects of change are represented in media and practices of communication, are news media and social media. Legacy news organizations tend to use established norms and practices of dealing with, and reporting change. When journalists are asked to report on evolving, unprecedented phenomena, such as, for instance, an erupting war, they are confronted with a high degree of uncertainty. One way of dealing with uncertainty is the

deployment of established and top-down newsgathering and news-reporting routines and practices (Gans, 2004; Tuchman, 1978) but, alternatively, it is also possible to turn media organizations into more agile, hybrid and community-oriented structures (Głowacki & Jackson, 2019). A related role of journalism and news media is their attempt to create a sense of order or stability in either rapidly evolving and unprecedented phenomena (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) or long-term phenomena (e.g., climate change). Such practices serve journalistic performance and the delivery of news about the world in a steady, uninterrupted fashion. Still, the legacy of organizational cultural routines might be proven to be outdated, inadequate or not appropriate when reporting on, and trying to make sense of, novel phenomena of rapid transformations, that call for social entrepreneurship (see, e.g., Karayianni, 2018; Marques & Dhiman, 2020).

Furthermore, as highlighted by numerous scholars, mainstream news media tend to use a narrow pool of news sources, who represent the established political, economic and other elites, and who are given the opportunity, through their privileged presence in the news to offer the interpretative frameworks that support their positions and interests (Doudaki & Boubouka, 2020; Hall et al., 1978). Such elites tend to resist structural change and attempt to dominate the public discussion about how the phenomena of change shall be interpreted and evaluated. In the case of news organizations that operate in environments that have close ties with the political establishment, maintaining a critical distance from the political elites' and the governments' policies, views and rhetorics, is not easy. This is highlighted in the analyses regarding both the single-party-rule government of China (see the article by Zhang), and countries with democratically elected governments such as the Czech Republic (see the article by Motal) and Poland (see the article by Gajlewicz-Korab and Szurmiński).

For example, **Jan Motal**'s critical analysis of Czech public television news during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the narrow range of perspectives regarding the social dimensions of the pandemic. Employing post-political rhetorics, the public broadcaster is shown to privilege a technocratic discourse that helped to naturalize the measures that the Czech government adopted for the management of the crisis, dissociating these measures from their political and social foundations. This type of news coverage created a false sense of consensus, concealing the fact that the pandemic, as all major crises, are the object of political struggle. One of the conclusions of the analysis is that Czech public service media did not create the conditions for a public discussion and democratic dialogue that can accommodate the diversity of voices and perspectives over such a complex and pervasive phenomenon as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also, **Mengrong Zhang**'s critical discourse analysis explores how the Chinese newspapers reported on, and discursively constructed, the climate change phenomenon in 2000–2020. The analysis highlights that in China's system of tight

media control by the state, news reporting on climate change has consistently been functioning as a vehicle for promoting the ruling Communist Party's environmental policies, constructing its image as a global leader in environmental policy and management, and consolidating its political hegemony. Zhang further argues that the mediation of change through the reporting on climate change, is instrumentalized to maintain stability and the status-quo.

Hence, Motal's study concerns the media's response to rapid and unexpected negative change—that of the COVID-19 pandemic which is large-scale and of high intensity, affecting all parts of the population and spanning a then undetermined time period. As illustrated in his analysis, the Czech public broadcaster constructed a narrow space, in which this major crisis would be discussed and debated upon; this, combined with the naturalization of the measures adopted by the government, attempts to construct and attribute a sense of control over the handling of the pandemic crisis, to the government, legitimating its authority. Zhang's study deals with a long-term and pervasive phenomenon of negative change, namely that of climate change. Its discursive handling by the Communist party-affiliated newspapers in China shows that these media tend to mediate change by either resisting or denying it. At first, climate change is largely absent from the newspapers' coverage, or heavily downplayed, hardly presented as a negative phenomenon with destructive repercussions. Later on, it is presented as a phenomenon successfully controlled by the Chinese government.

At the same time, we observe alternative communication spaces and means of change. For example, **Vaia Doudaki** and **Nico Carpentier** studied how environment-focused Facebook groups in Sweden address environmental sustainability. The study highlights the strong support by the majority of the groups for counter-hegemonic, ecocentric positions towards sustainability, apprehending humans as part of, and in co-existence with nature. At the same time, these groups resist the hegemonic anthropocentrism, which positions humans at the center of all sustainability discussions, privileging human needs and economic interests, over nature's wellbeing. The anthropocentric and ecocentric positions towards sustainability reflect opposing understandings of change. Anthropocentric sustainability on the one hand promotes technological change and interventions in the environment, as the means to human progress and prosperity (in economic terms), and opposes any rebalancing of the prevailing capitalist model of socio-economic organization. Ecocentric sustainability, on the other hand, apprehends human intervention in nature as damaging and resists it, supporting the structural reconfiguration of the dominant socio-economic model of organization. Still, the study addresses a plea not to overemphasize the potential of social media to mediate and facilitate social change, as the latter requires broad societal alliances and the mobilization of a multitude of affordances, resources and actors, that extend the media sphere.

CHANGING MEDIA AND PRACTICES OF COMMUNICATION

The second cluster of articles included in this collection focuses on how organizational settings and practices of communication deal with change themselves; how media settings may be altered, subjected to forces of change, that drive them to reconfigure their practices, rituals and modes of organization, or how they resist change or fail to change. Taking a broad approach to media, mediation and communication, the contributions of this cluster look at media practices that suggest alternative models of communication and novel means and modes of expression, which may also have the potential to facilitate processes of societal change. Still, a dichotomization of mainstream versus alternative media, with the former always resisting change or failing to change and the latter being constantly open to change, is to be avoided. This Special Issue's contributions demonstrate that all types of media are constantly subject to forces of change, resisting some of them and being receptive and adaptive to others, being the instigators of some of these forces and the recipients of others.

The article by **Katarzyna Gajlewicz-Korab** and **Łukasz Szurmiński** addresses the difficulties of established public service media that operate within a media culture of close ties with the political system, to engage in self-change. Analyzing TVP's news program "*Wiadomości*" in two time periods (with two years' difference), the authors aimed to explore whether the Polish public service media serves its societal mission or the government. The findings show that the Polish public service media are consistent in their employment of propaganda techniques and rhetorics, supporting the government, while also being subjects of cultural path dependencies (Jakubowicz, 2008). The analysis by Gajlewicz-Korab and Szurmiński points to an increasing news media politicization and the dominance of an old media logic, which renders unsuccessful TVP's remit of objectivity, impartiality and balance (Donders, 2021). Public service media in Poland are shown to be struggling with fostering processes of democratization. Rather, they seem to contribute to the deepening of polarization in political life and social divisions reflected in, and created by, the blend of politics and media.

Moving further, **Nico Carpentier**'s article offers examples of alternative and transformative practices of communication. Employing a discursive-material analysis, the author reflects on the findings from the "*Silencing / Unsilencing Nature*" project. This is a research project with arts-based research and educational components, that explores the human-nature relationship in both its discursive and material dimensions, sheds light on how nature tends to be silenced by humans, and experiments with creative ways that open up paths and spaces where nature can be unsilenced. The study presented in this collection looks at one particular species, wolves, and explores the wolf's position in the zoo assemblage. The research first critically addresses how wolves are silenced in the zoo assemblage. It then deploys interventionist arts-based research methods and

tools to suggest ways the wolves' voices may be rendered audible, regaining some of their agency (even through human intervention). The "*Silencing / Unsilencing Nature*" project exemplifies how to use artistic means of expression to communicate research output and theoretically embedded reflections, and perform academic research moving beyond the sometimes narrow scope of scholarly written text-based communication. More broadly, it illustrates how to develop and implement creative and transformative means and ways of communication, moving beyond the legacy media, to instigate societal and media change.

In a similar vein, the article by **Loes Witteveen, Pleun van Arensbergen** and **Jan Fliervoet** reflects on mediated participation for environmental governance. The authors argue for the need to enhance experimental and innovative approaches concerning participation in environmental governance. Such approaches, the authors argue, need to move beyond the development and implementation of externally designed interventions that do not include the involved communities throughout the entire process and all stages of design and implementation, and rather treat them as simply beneficiaries of implemented interventions. To counter this, this study reflects on projects and spaces where participatory and deliberative governance processes have been deployed more structurally, in order to support environmental governance transformation. Drawing on experiences from two specific mediated participation methodologies – community art and visual problem appraisal – the authors address the potential relevance and challenges resulting from such practices towards more inclusive and participatory forms of environmental governance.

MEDIATING CHANGE – CHANGING MEDIA

This Special Issue contributions include scholarly approaches that address the interwovenness of the changing media and mediating change perspectives. Still, the final two studies lie more explicitly at the intersection of these perspectives, demonstrating their entanglement. These studies reflect on alternative practices of communication that challenge organizational structures and cultures of the legacy media and further offer genuine opportunities for public participation and the ability to foster media change (creation + production + distribution). These cases not only address change in their content, but also practice change in the ways that they are organized and operate.

For example, **Vojtěch Dvořák** studies the preparatory stages of a participatory media project involving homeless people. This research explores homeless people's attitudes towards self-representation and enhanced participation in the prospective publication of their community-driven media. The analysis highlights that homeless people are positive towards self-representation, through the creation of their news stories about themselves and about other homeless people. At the same time, they are reluctant towards the prospect of them managing

‘their’ newspaper. Looking at change, two equally important issues are raised here. Firstly, the community-driven media of a certain societal group can serve as a participatory media outlet, offering opportunities for a polyphony of voices and for genuine participation and empowerment of marginalized groups. Still, instigating and implementing long-lasting positive societal change, by engaging vulnerable and marginalized societal groups in participatory processes of empowerment, involves the creation of mutual respect and spaces of trust, and a culture of inclusive and democratic participation.

Finally, **Sahar Bou Hamdan’s** and **Bouthaina El-Kheshn’s** article focuses on protest media and revolutionary music in Egypt and Lebanon. Their study lies at the intersection of mediating change and changing media, as, on the one hand, revolutionary music mediates the societal claims for change, and, on the other, it is a mobilizing tool itself, facilitating protestors and civil society to contest and oppose the hegemonic forces of suppression (political elites), or the institutions of engineering consent to the suppression (media close to the political system), demanding change. This article concludes that revolutionary bottom-up movements can serve as an alternative route for legacy media and journalistic practices. It is at the same time an example of a means of communication and expression, that is changing itself, using different and novel musical forms and content, in its efforts to mediate and mobilize systemic change. The case studies in this article illustrate the complex relationship between societal changes and the media’s ability for change, and the potential, but also the limitations, of societal change spillovers.

This volume marks the 30th issue anniversary of the “Central European Journal of Communication”. Over the last 15 years, the Journal’s team has worked hard to provide a forum for communication and media change, and we agree with them that we can already see significant research shifts resulting from these dynamics of change. We are happy that the 30th volume was given the opportunity to provide spaces for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, allowing the opening up of new ways and areas of investigating change. Moreover, this volume is the result of international collaboration and dialogues with(in) a global scholarly community – one of the most important values of CEJC. Finally, we are grateful for the financial support we received from Mistra, the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research (through its Mistra Environmental Communication research program) and from the 4EU+ European University Alliance. The latter supported the “Mediating Change” project – a research collaboration of Charles University, Czech Republic,

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