

## THE 72<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL ICA CONFERENCE “ONE WORLD, ONE NETWORK?” PARIS, MAY 26-30, 2022

Media and communication scholars from around the globe participated in the hybrid 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA). The Polish Communication Association organized a panel “One Region, Different Contexts: Media and Journalism in Central and Eastern Europe.” The goal of the panel was to examine current relations between political systems and media systems in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. Despite sharing some historical, political and cultural heritage, countries in the CEE region have been developing their own public spheres where the media constantly alters under political, economic, social, and cultural pressures. Therefore, papers in this session traced and evidenced factors affecting media markets and journalistic role performance across political contexts.

In the session sponsored by the Polish Communication Association there were five presentations. The first, entitled “Comparing the *longue durée* in the Balkan and Baltic media systems development” was offered by Zrinjka Peruško from the University of Zagreb (Croatia). In her contribution, Peruško showed those conditions, which contributed to media freedom and media market development in the six countries of southeast Europe—the six countries that used to be part of Yugoslavia. Using the fsQCA and the historical institutionalist approach, the paper investigated how the same theoretical and methodological framework can be applied to the three Baltic countries – Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, and whether different *longue durée* conditions produce other configurations and receipts leading to various outcomes of media system transformations.

In the second, Marju Himma-Kadakas from the University of Tartu, (Estonia) shared findings of a study on “Unperceived self-censorship among Estonian journalists conditioned by public attacks on journalism”. The year 2020 was exceptionally challenging for Estonian journalists, because besides the COVID-19 pandemic, the right-populist government repeatedly attacked journalism. Marju Himma-Kadakas, Signe Ivask from Masaryk University, and Sol Agin from Karlstad University (Sweden) conducted a discourse analysis of media texts that discuss attacks on Estonian journalism. The findings of this qualitative research showed that accusations towards journalists were frequently related to discourses regarding journalists’ interventionist or watchdog roles. Juxtaposing these results with quantitative data, it became evident that when aspects of interventionist and watchdog roles were criticized in the media texts, the performance

of these roles decreased in the news. However, journalists' self-assessment does not show the perception of this change. Scholars argued that self-censorship conditioned the discrepancy between the performance and perception of roles, created collectively but unknowingly within the newsroom. The external pressures, such as public politically motivated attacks on journalism, may promote the unperceived collective self-censorship.

Participants of the panel sponsored by the Polish Communication Association at the ICA Conference from left to right: Zrinjka Peruško (University of Zagreb), Aleksandra Krstić (University of Belgrade), Agnieszka Stepińska (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan), Marju Himma-Kadakas (University of Tartu), and Gabriella Szabó (Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest).



Next, Aleksandra Krstić from the University of Belgrade (Serbia) presented a paper entitled “ ‘Let us entertain you’: infotainment as the leading journalistic role in Serbia’s polarized media context”. The papers co-authors were Ana Milojević, Nikola Jović and Kristina Milić. Their study, conducted under the framework of international project *Journalistic Role Performance*, examined the dominance of infotainment as the leading journalistic role Serbia: a country with a high societal and political polarization, rising competitive authoritarianism and the rapid decline of press freedom. Building on quantitative content analysis of media texts across news outlets (print, radio, TV and online) and a survey with journalists, the paper discussed the power of infotainment role of journalism in Serbia. Infotainment, seems not only to be used as a storytelling technique aimed at relaxing the audience, but also as a powerful device used

to divert attention from important societal and political topics. The paper also revealed high media polarization between elite and popular news outlets regarding the infotainment role, which is most often read through categories of highly emotional language, frequent personalization and exaggerated sensationalism.

Then, Gabriella Szabó from the Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest presented research that establishes a link between emotion regulation theory and communication studies to dig deeper into the role of news media in the emotional public sphere. Gabriella Szabó (with Balázs Kiss) offered a framework for identifying phases of media's strategies to tune in audience's emotions. They analyzed articles collected from the website of the two most-read online news media portals in the first wave of the pandemic. The study revealed that the political color of the news media portals matters the most in explaining the differences between the applied emotion management strategies.

Finally, Agnieszka Stępińska from the Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland), presented her study on how journalists perceive the dynamics of relations between media and politics. In particular, the study addressed how increasing political polarization affects professional journalists across media outlets and their performance. The data came from a series of in-depth interviews with Polish journalists working for five types of media (quality print press, print tabloid, radio, television, and online platforms) and journalists' associations representing various political orientations. The qualitative approach employed enabled the study to recognize the main challenges and threats journalists have been noticing and experiencing during the last decade.

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