

**SUSANNE FENGLER, TOBIAS EBERWEIN, MATTHIAS KARMASIN (EDS) (2022). *THE GLOBAL HANDBOOK OF MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY*. OXON AND NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 614 PP., ISBN: 978-0-367-34628-7. DOI: 10.4324/9780429326943.**

The book *The Global Handbook of Media Accountability*, edited by Susanne Fengler, Tobias Eberwein and Matthias Karmasin offers a theoretically based comparative analysis of media accountability regimes. The book is particularly relevant as the annual global freedom and human rights monitoring alert that democracy and media are challenged and ‘in crisis’, ‘under siege’ or ‘in retreat’ (Freedom House, 2022; Reporters Without Borders, 2022). Consequently, the need for accountable and responsible journalism is now more important than ever.

This book addresses the concept of media accountability and its instruments in 44 countries worldwide – it covers representatives of seven world regions: 1) Anglo-Saxon countries; 2) Western Europe; 3) Central and Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space; 4) MENA region; 5) Sub-Saharan Africa; 6) Asia; 7) Latin America. The publication constitutes (probably) the first interdisciplinary academic framework, which compares structures of media accountability across the globe, therefore it may be perceived as a follow-up to the *European Handbook of Media Accountability* (Eberwein et al., 2018).

Before addressing the *status quo* in each analyzed country, the introductory chapter provides an intelligible outline of media accountability. The editors offer a read through key concepts and definitions, with references to the works of Bertrand, Bardoel & d’Haenens, McQuail, Nieminen, and Puppis, who – among others – have attempted to analyse and describe it. They also elaborate on the notion of comparing media (accountability) systems, to key context factors of media accountability: political systems; journalism cultures and professionalization; media markets, audiences and technologies; transnational processes, globalization, and media development. Although the book does not formulate any new definition of media accountability, the editors explain in the introduction (p. 38) that they summarized and combined:

“(…) a stakeholder (and thus actor-oriented) and a structural (and thus interactional) perspective, (...) and we understand media accountability as a process, in which various models of media accountability are realized in a range of social settings”.

For the analysis, they used a five-frame model of media analysis (based on the one by Bardoel and d'Haenens, 2004), which distinguishes five groups of actors (professional, organizational, societal, political, international) involved in holding media accountable, which are characterized by the use of their own media accountability instruments to pursue their own accountability goals.

Following the introductory chapter, the succeeding parts cover an analysis by country, preceded by a regional overview. Although the editors argue that the phenomenon of media accountability is a genuinely Western idea (p. 3), one of the advantages of this book is its global perspective well beyond Western (and even European) borders. It is a valuable study on how historical background, political system and journalistic culture influence the amount and type of media accountability instruments all around the world. This is important especially because in many countries this concept has not been the subject of internationally recognized research before *The Global Handbook of Media Accountability* (p. 43).

Each chapter of the collection is structured in a similar way, providing an introduction with the context of the country's media system and journalistic culture, as well as the assessment of the media accountability instruments present in the analyzed country and conclusions. Such a system makes it easy and quick to compare the state of media accountability in countries selected from the research sample. The aspect that gives this book added value is looking beyond the well-known models of media self-regulation, which have attracted the majority of publications so far. The focus of this research is journalism studies, and therefore it considers multimedia approaches. Moreover, each chapter was written by the country's leading expert(s) in the field of media accountability, which, in turn, provides insightful information on the media system and media accountability instruments typical in each analyzed country. The study concludes that most media systems still rely on the traditional media accountability instruments, such as media councils and codes of ethics. Unexpectedly, *The Global Handbook of Media Accountability* proves that media accountability instruments exist even in repressive regimes, but they always face the risk of being instrumentalized (see country report for Russia, China and the MENA region).

On one hand, this book presents the advantages of large-scale comparative research: it shows an extensive overview of media accountability, crossing borders beyond the Western world. It also considers new developments, particularly those fueled by new technologies and de-Westernized approach to this issue, showing a new spectrum of media accountability measures: an amended version of the media accountability instruments axis model (p. 556). Complementing the measures established in the well-researched Western countries, new media-internal (i.e. journalism awards, festivals and whistle-blower activities), media-external (i.e. university observatories, media monitoring by NGOs, media criticism), and non-institutionalized (i.e. demonstrations, training projects) instruments were observed.

On the other hand, this book also shows the risks of conducting such large-scale research. The publication remains at a rather descriptive level, providing only outlines of accountability instruments available in each researched country. The focal point of self-regulation is not only the existence of such instruments, but rather their active use while creating an accountable journalistic culture. Unfortunately, some chapters mention the implementation of the accountability measures in a simple, brief way. Furthermore, the study excludes the accountability mechanisms for telecommunications and internet platforms, which deprives it of a holistic, convergent approach to the issue.

Nevertheless, the book is extremely useful, as it creates an invaluable basis for further research and policymaking. The comparative analysis helped to retrieve eight models of media accountability, which are introduced and detailed in the final, ninth chapter of the book. Among them are: 1) the professional model; 2) the company model; 3) the public model; 4) the dysfunctional model; 5) the foreign donor model; 6) the statutory model; 7) the mimicry model; 8) the regulation model. The editors are aware that they are only descriptive categories, therefore many hybrid forms of media accountability systems may occur around the globe.

In my opinion, *The Global Handbook of Media Accountability* is a valuable contribution to the discussion about the models of media self-regulation and newsroom transparency. The editors did indeed achieve their goal to de-Westernize the academic debate on media accountability by examining its current state in 44 countries around the globe, adopting the premise that the best way to evolve and bring about change is to learn from each other. I strongly believe that – besides functioning as a handbook for scholars and students of journalism and media studies, mass communication, sociology and political science – this publication may also appeal to policymakers and media practitioners.

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