

# Foreword

In recent decades the world has undergone fundamental changes related to geopolitical, economic, cultural, religious and other conditions. New divisions, no longer based on territory, have complicated or partially replaced the old East-West and North-South dimensions of the world system, generating differences and distinctions that cut through local life worlds, between cities and suburbs, between the expanding metropolis and the countryside. We have witnessed the globalization of traditional group identities and affiliations along ideological, religious, class, gender and ethnic lines, at the same time as new transnational affiliations are being formed.

Different media and media genres are related in different ways to these developments. The most common media representations, it seems, simply ignore global cleavages, by masking them or framing them in “Western” terms. This is most evident in the context of an emerging new world order. This in turn is related to a range of other divides, the digital divide being perhaps the most frequently noted, with its repercussions for transnational media structures. These divides can be characterized as simultaneously technological and social, generated by markets and socio-political orders. They are further reflected in an array of media genres and formats, as well as in the segmentation of national, regional and worldwide audiences, as seen for example in divisions between elite and popular media productions. There are at the same time cases where these distinctions are increasingly blurred, particularly in the most rapidly modernizing and expanding media systems, which often place commercial and transnational media forms in the service of political governance. Challenging this trend, we see the expansion of democracy movements around the world, placing inequality on the agendas of both mainstream and alternative media.

These transformations point to media as increasingly significant actors and as establishing new arenas on a global scale. Comparative and in-depth study of these developments, both as distinct phenomena and as intrinsically interdependent, both as factors internal to media and as they affect the media’s increasingly complex relationships to other factors, together constitute a major challenge for media and communication research as we face the second decade of the new millennium.

These words define the focus and scope of the IAMCR World Congress, *Media and Global Divides*, held in Stockholm, 20-25 July 2008. They were written by Professor Jan Ekecrantz at the Department of Journalism, Media and Mass Communication at Stockholm University only months before he died of cancer, all too young. The conference theme, *Media and Global Divides*, lay close to Jan Ekecrantz’ heart; it was an area he had explored in his research in different parts of the world for many years.

The aim of the conference – “[to examine] relationships between media and contemporary global divides, be they historical or emergent phenomena, [to] explore the pivotal, yet under-researched roles of the media with regard to today’s global inequalities” – was realized when more than 1000 scholars from 90 countries gathered in a summery Stockholm. Many of the vital and far-ranging discussions were imbued with the ideas in Jan Ekecrantz’ last article, ‘Media and Communication Studies Going Global’ (*Nordicom Review*, 2007), where he expresses his personal conviction that “globalization calls for regional, not universalistic epistemologies and for cross-disciplinary, not intra-disciplinary research offers”. At the end of the World Congress, surely a majority of the participants have taken the following combined diagnosis and prescription to heart: we need to regain our sense of context and to broaden our perspectives in a holistic direction – that will be a necessary prerequisite for a robust development of knowledge in the media and communication field.

Early in the planning of the conference the idea of collecting the various plenary address on the theme of *Media and Global Divides* was present. Fortunately, the authors of the addresses agreed that it was a good idea and were willing to take the time to edit their manuscripts for publication in the volume you have before you. Their contributions represent a variety of perspectives and cultures and offer many valuable reflections. It is my hope that the chapters presented here will stimulate further intercultural/crosscultural research dialogues and inspire new research initiatives.

I am deeply indebted to all the contributors all around the world who have made this publication possible. I also wish to express my great appreciation of the support provided by IAMCR and the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at Stockholm University. Thanks, also, to the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO without whose financial support the publication would never have seen the light of the day.

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