Variations in political communication culture

New forms of political parallelisms and media-politics coalitions

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Abstract

This chapter compares the political cultures in the four countries analysed in this volume. Based on an inductive qualitative approach that singles out specificities in how political communication advisors and journalists interact within historical/institutional and professionalist/normative conditions and related constraints, the findings challenge earlier research on political communication culture. The chapter shows how political communication culture may act as a modifying factor in times of systemic change. It also reveals differences between and within countries that are often seen as forming distinct groups: Finland and Sweden as Nordic countries and Lithuania and Poland as Central European countries that have undergone recent fundamental system changes. The chapter ends with a discussion of how changes in the technological communication environment may affect political communication culture simultaneously in all four countries.

Keywords: political communication culture, comparative communication research, media systems, political journalism, political PR

Introduction

Comparative research of political and media systems has produced categorisations of countries into relatively homogeneous European regions (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Castro Herrero et al., 2017; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Hallin & Mancini, 2004, 2012; Peruško et al., 2015; Pfetsch, 2014). In this project we explore the interaction between political executives and the media in Finland, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden, allowing us to comparatively test the consistency of the proposed allocation of countries into groups. Furthermore, we include two East-Central European, new democracies in our study on political communication cultures around the Baltic basin. By doing so, we aim to also examine the potential consistency and consequences brought on by "path dependencies" (cf. Eckiert & Ziblatt, 2013) in societal relationships and routines practiced by media and political professionals in the studied region. As will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, histories and traditions (cf.

Gross, 2002, 2004; Rupnik & Zielonka, 2013) are some of the vitally influential factors that shape professional performance despite the influx of new technologies and global trends identified in the practices of the two groups of actors.

The current situation – which is dynamic in political as well as technological terms – calls for a reconsideration of some previous claims. Specifically, we wish to challenge understandings linked to the still-apparent persistence in comparative media analyses of the Cold War thinking and endurance of politico-geographic dichotomies and contrasts between Western and Eastern Europe. These understandings are most evident in overtly simplified attempts to allocate states from the former communist region of Europe into one group of East-Central European countries. The history of this region quite vividly shows that the pre-communist times as well as the communist decades in the region varied between countries. This diversity continues to prevail. The systemic features of the communist-ruled states in Central, Eastern, and Southern (Balkan) Europe reflect various ways of life and self-organisation and, quite analogously, today's Central and Eastern European (CEE) region is nothing more nor less than a heterogeneous collection of constituencies.

The studies that this chapter builds on call for a more detailed analysis that can specify similarities and differences among the four countries to better understand the currents that underpin the daily practices in political communication in various contexts. This chapter draws on a project that operates through in-depth discussions with political and media actors that surround the top political elites – the prime ministers – in four countries. Two of the countries are usually seen as part of a Nordic region, and two are seen as part of the formerly socialist CEE countries. The method of comparison applied in this chapter is open to observations that cannot be foreseen in broad comparative studies that are based on standardised questionnaires. We wish to maintain an open mind towards diversities within and among the four countries that could go undetected when studied through other approaches. We also look for eventual homologous developments in all four countries.

As revealed in the country-specific chapters, differences in the media–politics relationship may lie in various features that contribute to what broadly can be named *political communication culture*. Such features include historical differences in state formation and consequent homogeneity of its geopolitical position and its demography; structural differences based on legislation, regulations, and institutional practices; professionalisation of politicians and journalists; the size of the country in terms of geographical and social/professional proximity; and new trends in media and political currents that are fundamentally transforming the contemporary political landscape in today's Europe. In this paper, we identify political culture inductively and aim at approaching the concept through the observations that have been collected through qualitative research on the ground in the four countries.

Our curiosity is thus directed towards 1) how media infrastructures as well as media contents are nationally defined and restricted and 2) the influence of European and global politics as well as transnational infrastructures and contents that are growing

with accelerating speed, promoted in particular by the networked communications on the Internet and in social networks. How do these factors relate to intra-group and inter-group differences and similarities?

The following sections take a closer look at the impacts of these two factors, namely locally and transnationally fashioned stimuli that affect manifestations of specificities in media–politics interactions in the four countries. The chapter specifically looks at the systemic factors (which are highly specified by contextual conditions) and functional factors (which are nuanced by professional behaviour, roles, and functions) regulating media–political cooperation.

Theoretical insight: Cultures of political communication

Political communication is an exceedingly complex field that links together different functions and roles of actors in the media–politics relationship and observes how these are affected by a more general culture of a country (AIM, 2007; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Moring & Pfetsch, 2014). The question of what is decided by whom in the media–politics interaction remains the most important performance test in political communication. Speaking in normative terms, there is a clearly identifiable impetus setting the character of the relationship: ideally, political parties should mobilise citizens by recruiting political candidates and formulating commonly agreed policies, whereas political journalists are supposed to provide a platform for critical and thorough scrutiny of political views in the interest of represented citizens.

Though this arrangement might still be functional in the sense of manifesting different degrees of reliance and dependency, i.e., between the politicians and the press, recent developments in contemporary European democracies are signalling deviating and worrying tendencies. A clear tension, recognised globally, links increasing usage of networked communications and decaying political and civic engagement (Cardoso, 2011; Grabe & Myrick, 2016). Conventional forms of societal involvement, such as voting in elections or associational participation, seem to be in decline. Also, public trust in traditional societal institutions appears to be weakening, which is an additional feature that contributes to the rise of various oppositions, clashes, conflicts, and disagreements already firmly rooted in daily European realities (Berg, 2017: 14).

On the whole, the acquired impression of direct correspondence between evident system changes and transformations and arising public uncertainties is nothing new. As noticed, the feelings of insecurity and societal discontent or even apathy and vagueness stem from and are maintained by the general atmosphere of uncontrolled societal change (Balčytienė, 2015a; Balčytienė & Juraitė, 2015; Bauman, 2000). Significant layers of society air feelings of uncertainty that reflect today's democracy; economy; and social, cultural, and moral values (Bauman & Donskis, 2013). What appears novel is the fact that these trends (of dissatisfaction and discontent) are identified in European

states that have been consistently labelled as solid European democracies, such as the five Nordic countries with their stable economic structures and a general feeling of egalitarianism, social trust, satisfaction, and happiness.

All in all, the identified appearances suggest that what was previously recognised and known as an apparently "symbiotic relationship" between politicians and journalists (Nygren & Niemikari in this volume; Pfetsch, et al., 2014) should be reconsidered by taking into account the impact of contextually infused nuances in political communication. In the political sphere, a clearly identifiable turn from mass political belongingness to entrepreneurial and performative political affiliation has taken place. In both older and younger European democracies, there are signs of shifts from systemic to anti-systemic forms of political inclusiveness (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014; Berg, 2017; Navickas, 2017). In the past decade, mass parties in many countries around Europe have gradually transformed into campaign organisations in which entrepreneurial leaders try to win elections by shaping their teams of loyal politicians, communication advisors, marketing experts, sponsors, volunteers, policy experts, and spin doctors (Albaek et al., 2014; McNair, 2011). These tendencies are especially noticeable in younger European democracies, where parties have gradually grown into political organisations reliant on financial inputs and marketing communication rather than public popular support (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014). Pressured by wide-ranging marketisation and mediatisation, political parties are more inclined to shape their media presence and influence and control the media by establishing direct contact with media owners and editors and pushing promotional news, or, alternatively, by pressuring journalists through leaks and off-the-record briefings. Journalists, on the other hand, try to penetrate the political process of agenda setting and debate and control its outcome. In short, in political communication, both parties appear to be on the winning side but in different situations.

As will be shown in our study, both groups of actors – political journalists and their sources – in all four countries engage in professionally shaped communication that involves continuous shifts of power in informational exchanges within established hierarchies and personal networks. None of the country studies prove the independence of journalists or a comprehensive and deeply penetrating control of the media by political sources. Instead, the political–media interactions described are varied and manoeuvrable within contextually defined power hierarchies, suggesting nuanced and evidently deviant outcomes.

In fact, the diversity of political communication practices disclosed in this project should not come as a big surprise. Though certain similarities might be identified between the histories and cultures of Finland and Sweden, on the one hand, and Lithuania and Poland, on the other, the most decisive factor contributing to diverging paths in the evolution of political communication practices in each country is determined by its own patterns of today's politics, socio-economic development, and media structures.

Multi-directional comparisons: Constructing culture inductively

Comparative research is often guided by the theory of agreement and difference, as inspired by the work of J. S. Mill in *A System of Logic*. National comparisons are thus designed according to alleged similarities and differences between groups of nations, where a *most similar systems design* anticipates that "if some important differences are found among these otherwise similar countries, then the number of factors attributable to these differences will be sufficiently small to warrant explanation in terms of those differences alone" (Przeworsky & Teune, 1970: 32). On the other hand, a *most different systems design* focuses on eliminating irrelevant systemic factors, assuming that the data are drawn from the same population: "systemic factors are not given any special place among the possible predictors of behavior" (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 34).

Whilst these strategies are mostly applied in quantitative research based on statistically significant sets of data, we use this method as an inspiration for our way of organising observations derived from in-depth qualitative studies. We are looking at four countries that due to their "economic, cultural and political characteristics" (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 32) are expected to form two relatively homogeneous groups, although we operationalise these characteristics through historical, institutional, professional, and technological differences.

It goes without saying that the richness of background variables cannot be systematically covered in terms of quantifiable measures with the number of cases (four) at our disposal. Thus our comparison will build on principles that are closer to case studies based on qualitative data. By showing deviant observations, we may be able to falsify some claims, and by showing unexpected similarities, we may suggest heuristically valuable paths for further inquiry.

Our data are qualitative and focus on relatively particular processes in the interaction between politicians (through their communication advisors) and journalists. We focus on the top of the iceberg, the prime minister's office and journalists who cover news related to this particular institution. We will thus have to accept that the explanatory power of our analysis is limited to tentative suggestions with regard to broader layers of politics–media relations.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the identification of a political communication culture by studying relationships between the two core professions, politicians and journalists, requires an understanding of several aspects that underpin these linkages. According to Gross (2008: 139), it is crucial in the study of media and politics to understand the histories of development as well as "the dominant values, attitudes, behaviours and mentalities that fuel the functioning in politics, political, economic and social systems and institutions". We suggest that this argument can be turned around by looking at the arising mode, i.e., the specific manner and qualitative features that underpin the attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of these two groups of actors. We mentioned above a number of comparative indicators, namely historical differences in state formation and consequent homogeneity of geopolitical

position and demography; structural differences based on legislation, regulations, and institutional practices; professionalisation of politicians and journalists; the size of the country in terms of geographical and social/professional proximity; and new trends in the media and politics. We will discuss these aspects from the perspective of two dimensions: political roles that are shaped by historically/institutionally determined routines and media roles shaped by professional/normative intentions (see Figures 10.1 and 10.2).

All aspects considered, the challenge in comparing political communication cultures lies in the multilayered character of the comparison. Research is expected to, on the one hand, highlight the orientations of different actors within countries that may be more or less converged, and at the same time cover professional orientations of the two groups of actors (politicians/political communication advisors and journalists) whose orientations across countries may be more or less similar (Pfetsch et al., 2014: 78). We look at institutional system characteristics through their historical and proximity aspects and the professional characteristics through their professionalisation and technological aspects. The fundamental similarities as well as differences in media–politics interactions across the four studied countries can be identified at the intersection of the two dimensions, presented in Figures 10.1 and 10.2.

The first dimension, based on earlier research by Hallin and Mancini (2004, 2012), can be named the *mode of political institutional functioning*. The specificities of this dimension are determined by a number of factors, such as historical development, institutional structures, and traditions that underpin the characteristics of the political system in each of the four countries. By functioning, we are inspired by the approach taken by Gross (2008: 139), quoted above, as we need to include modes of action within a system. Thus this concept is used here in a wider sense than in a more limited reference to how systems function. This dimension has two contrasting continuums (or modes) identifying possible variation and manifestations of norms that guide the institutional performance of political actors. One continuum is defined as *pluralist,* with two competing characteristics of how such a mode is achieved: *corporatist* and *liberalist/individualist* (or organised vs. individual pluralism, cf. Hallin & Mancini, 2004). We call the other end of the dimension *restraining*, with two possible variations: *controlled* and *clientelist* (Mancini et al., 2007; Örnebring, 2012).

Figure 10.1 Variations of modes within norms denoting characteristics of institutional political functioning


The left side of Figure 10.1 denotes a pluralist mode that is determined by *institutional political functioning* and might be achieved in two ways: negotiations and agreements

(as is typical for corporatist political systems) or, to the contrary, through individually shaped and competing processes leading to a diversity of actions (as achieved within the liberalist political system). The other end of the dimension presents modes of restraining institutional political functions with different qualitative characteristics. They denote a directly or indirectly managed control that might be achieved either through explicit power manifestations (as in the controlling mode) or hidden hierarchies of interactions sustained through clientelist and manipulative arrangements.

Correspondingly, the other dimension, *mode of media professional functioning*, looks closer into the norms that guide the actual roles and practices of the media (Figure 10.2). The two extremes of this dimension are *intrusive* (denoting adversarial or collaborative, i.e., collegial media aspects and professional norms) and *passive* (norms that support loyal or instrumentalised media practices).

Figure 10.2 Variations within norms denoting the mode of media professional functioning

Adversarial   Loyal

Intrusive ← - - - - - **Institutional political logic** - - - - - → **Passive**

Collegial   Instrumentalized
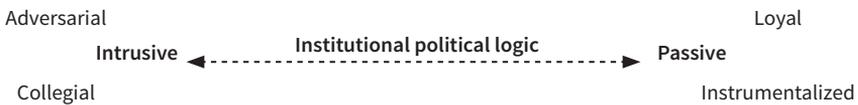
Intrusive media professional roles functioning is characterised by a journalism that acts within a framework that in (Western) academic literature is described as "professionalised" norms (Hanitzsch, 2007; Nygren, 2008). Such norms might refer to whether journalists tend to perform a socially responsible role by being interventional, for example by acting in an adversarial way (as a watchdog or professional activist, see Esser, Reinemann & Fan, 2001), or by collegially participating in communicating elite-level politics (i.e., partnership and cooperation, cf. Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In both cases, journalists function with a high degree of professional autonomy, although – as we will see – they may be affected by political communication advisers in different ways.

The other end of this dimension denotes an opposing type of performance – the type of journalism that plays a passive role of a mere observer/transmitter of information. Here, two qualitative characteristics appear significant – that of loyalty, which is straightforwardly adopted by the media, and that of instrumentalisation, which is determined not by the media but by some influences (e.g., for political or economic reasons) from the outside.

As has been shown by Pfetsch and colleagues (2014: 94-98), the communication culture in the two Nordic countries in this study (Finland and Sweden) is considered more media driven than the culture in many other Western European countries.[1] The autonomy of the media is pronounced among both politicians and journalists. As in other Western European countries, the authors found intra-country convergence in understandings of systemic features and inter-country convergence in self-perceptions of the two professional groups. In other words, politicians and journalists in the

countries of the study had similar views on systemic features but diverging views on the roles of the other professional group. And, vice versa, the authors found that the understandings of professional roles converged among countries, whereas they differed in regard to systemic features.

We hypothesize that our four-country comparison will show a similar pattern in the two Nordic countries, namely: 1) a convergence in the views on institutional characteristics, which falls into the *pluralised* category; 2) a convergence in the understanding of the respective roles of politicians and journalists as characterised by professionalisation, however tainted by a diverging understanding of the nature of their respective roles, which falls into the *intrusive* category. On the other hand, the hypothetical expectation for the two younger democracies in Lithuania and Poland that experienced a dramatic system change in the 1990s would be: 1) a convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the *restraining* category; and 2) a convergence in the understanding of the respective roles of politicians and journalists that would fall into the *passive* category.

Media–politics interaction in the four countries

We proceed towards our analysis on the basis of the underpinning studies (see Johansson & Raunio in this volume).

In this analysis, we follow an approach that might be best identified as a cultural approach to institutional change. It seeks to capture cultural aspects in behavioural practices – and their formal and informal variations – that are performed within certain institutional structures (Balčytienė, 2015a; Gross, 2002). Such an approach advocates the idea that institutions provide certain schemes and structures within which people create order by following certain professional roles and functions and performing routine behaviours (North, 1990). Naturally and to a certain extent, such practices also are inclined to reproduce some part of the more general societal culture, which leans on specific characteristics determined by historical experience and are authenticated in that particular context (Carey, 1989; Chalaby, 1998).

There are several reasons to choose this approach. As popularly conceived, history and traditions play a powerful role especially in times of unprecedented institutional change; hence, the disclosure of these features seems to be amongst the most vital questions social scientists aim to understand. One important finding from the studies of democratisation is linked to the fact that all changes in younger European democracies have happened in a very "compressed period of time" (Balčytienė, 2015a). Even more, these changes have been implemented within an atmosphere of high impulsiveness, volatility, and flux, requiring rapid design of rules and simultaneous adaptations and adjustments to changed societal conditions (Balčytienė, 2013; Donskis, 2011). Our approach is sensitive to the idea that dramatic change by itself appears to be one of the reasons why specific cultural manifestations, such as widely disputed informality,

emerge as essential characteristics shaping society's life. This corresponds to observations made across Central and Eastern Europe today (Kryger, 2015; Rupnik & Zielonka, 2013; Voltmer, 2015). So it is not surprising that spontaneity, the absence of agreed-upon social guidelines and moral rules, as well as other features, are often described as emblematic qualities detected in various types of political, economic, and legal changes and instabilities typical of post-communist societies of today (Balčytienė, 2015b).

Institutions, in general, offer some "rules of the game" (North, 1990), whereas people engaged in them are defined as players with some purposeful activity. The constraints imposed by the institutional framework, which might be both formal and informal, define the field of opportunities and choices and hence shape what kind of organisational cultures will come into existence. Changes in the formal rules, for instance, may come about as a result of the adoption of and adaptation to new governance or business models or as a result of legislative changes. On the other hand, informal constraints, which go hand in hand with formalisation and institutionalisation practices, are adjusted within the framework of personal values and norms (such as popularly conceived principles of fairness, honesty, trustworthiness, or service), which are deeply rooted in the cultural context and have a much steadier character (Eckiert & Ziblatt, 2012). Hence formal rules may change overnight, but informal constraints do not.

Still, as also explored by North (1990), changes in informal constraints have the same originating sources as changes in formal rules, but without the rapidity. Informal ways change gradually and slowly, and also quite unconsciously, as individuals develop alternative patterns of behaviour consistent with newly perceived needs, costs, and benefits. The change of informal constraints may also be looked at as an ongoing, almost endless process of the marginalisation of behavioural patterns incompatible with the newly emergent understanding, and the stabilisation of those in harmony with it (Bajomi-Lázár, 2008).

In spite of its obvious limitations, the approach suggested here demonstrates the importance of culture in the study of how societies function – how humans behave and on what standards, ideals, and imaginaries they create, manage and change institutions. While the main emphasis of our chapter is on commonalities as well as differences that can be detected in political communication cultures, the chapter also highlights other aspects pertaining to the particularities of media–politics interactions in the four studied countries.

As stated earlier, political communication, in general, appears to be a complex and multidimensional process. The two broad groups of actors, namely the journalists and the politicians/political communication advisors, who are in the centre of this type of interaction, are not acting in a vacuum. They are both functioning according to norms and principles of their own distinctive and diverging professional ideologies. The two groups are also pressured and driven by their own systems of benefits, i.e., the complex structure of actual inputs and perceived returns. Politicians need the media to be seen and to reproduce political messages. Information management from that perspective is hence linked with political public relations, such as selecting a special

time for information announcements, spin doctoring, and other aspects of communication with both journalists and the general public. From the media's point of view, news management is related to giving publicity to political messages according to the rules of a particular news organisation. Journalists need background information that news sources can offer and therefore forge close partnerships and acquire information in off-the-record and confidential situations.

To summarise this point, the interaction between the two groups is governed by certain professional ideologies as well as cultural norms. Hence it is important to question where these norms are rooted, whether it is political or media logic, i.e., their rules and customs, that takes the upper hand, and whether this process is in any way determined by the specificities of politico-economic (i.e., national) conditions or shaped by transnationally equivalent and analogous trends.

As verified by a large-scale comparative political communication analysis (AIM, 2007), the system of prospective arrangements of interactions between the media and politics across Western European countries tends to follow the logic of country groupings as projected in the seminal book *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* by Hallin and Mancini (2004). The founding statement of this book presents the idea that characteristics of a distinct political communication culture are dependent on characteristics of the local politico-economic context, which, evidently, also acts as a core determinant for particular journalism cultures. The distinct national context also sets the character of how politicians perceive communication and media relations in general. This argument also appears to be verified when comparing post-communist media and political systems, which allows detection of supplementary categories of countries that have different contextual characteristics.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the relationship between politicians and journalists covering politics in older European democracies (Germany, the Netherlands) appears to be a close partnership and characterised by cooperation rather than an obvious rivalry, whereas the media in countries classified as liberalist (the UK) tends to critically report on politics and play a watchdog role. Yet in some other political cultures (the Nordic countries), this relationship is based on mutual understanding and respect for each other's (politicians' and the media's) goals. In younger, and hence more volatile, European democracies (the CEE countries) that are still challenged by systemic shifts, the media tends to be characterised as practicing a consumerist approach towards their audiences while at the same time favouring the agendas of politicians (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

As previously observed, all societal institutions, generally, are cultural organisations that operate within institutional and normative contexts. Their culture predominantly tends to become important in times of change and in conditions of vulnerability and extreme instabilities; then all societal institutions – political, economic, legal, as well as media industries – grow increasingly differentiated yet remain mutually interconnected and interdependent. For our analysis, the key problem is to detect how the actual interaction between the media and politics is sustained in different conditions

of societal change. Following the line of the above argumentation, the mechanism of sustainability is an indicator of a certain functioning logic and internal rationality for how societal relations are maintained and how democracy functions on a daily basis in each of the four countries. As will be further discussed in the next section, though, certain convergences might be identified in the professional habits of professionals in different countries. It is the cultural element that acts as a moderating factor, affecting the nuances in the actual professional performance and functioning.

Media–politics interaction in the four countries

The two Nordic countries, Finland and Sweden, share many systemic features despite their differences. They have a common history in the ancient past, similar legislation, a relatively stable economy as the basis of a welfare state, and a relatively stable five-party structure that has gradually developed with the emergence of an environmental party and the later emergence of right-wing populism (Strömbäck et al., 2008). The two countries in the southern part of the Baltic basin, Lithuania and Poland, also share systemic features. They have a common history in the ancient past, a period of socialism coloured by external oppression, a sudden and profound system change in the early 1990s towards independence and a market economy, and a subsequent instability in the political party structure.

The media structures also manifest characteristic similarities, although these are more consistent in the case of the two Nordic countries. In Finland and Sweden, a dual media system was established already in the early 20th century. It featured a relatively strong public service sector that had a dominant position in broadcasting until the early 1980s, when deregulation and rapidly growing commercial broadcasting followed. The commercial press had high readership and close to total reach, although it has gradually moved away from political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Moring, 2008; Strömbäck & Nord, 2008). Today, the commercial press is complemented but not substituted by politically active social media communication on blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

Lithuania and Poland, commonly studied and identified as the young players in the consortium of European Union democracies (Dobek-Ostrowska & Głowacki, 2015), have gradually taken divergent approaches in their political development. Politics in Lithuania still appears to be highly preoccupied with a drive towards interests and benefits-oriented thinking that permeates all actions, including relationships with the media. On the other hand, current political developments in Poland seem to suggest changes towards steady and systemic de-democratisation. Speaking in terms of viability and profitability, the Lithuanian media functions in a clearly less advantageous position in terms of market size. This factor, combined with dominant liberal policies, appears to be the strongest determinant of structural media specificities. In contrast to the other three countries, two broad media sectors are decisive in setting the po-

litical agenda in Lithuania: broadcasting and online media. In the other countries, print media formats (dailies, weeklies and political news magazines) still succeed as sources of political information.

Based on the studies conducted in each of the four countries included in this project,[2] the characteristics of the four countries in terms of the two dimensions presented in Figures 10.1 and 10.2 can be presented in a matrix as shown in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1 Combined modes of political institutional and media professional roles functioning in the four studied countries

			Mode of media professional functioning			
			Intrusive		Passive	
			Adversarial	Collegial	Instrumen-talised	Loyal
Mode of institutional political functioning	Pluralist	Liberalist/individualist				
		Corporatist	Sweden	Finland		
	Restraining	Controlled (centrally)			Poland	
		Clientelist (interests controlled)	Lithuania			

The analysis gives support to our reluctance to accept expectations derived from the typologisation of the four countries into two homogeneous groups. Table 10.1 shows quite fundamental variations in the combination of government institutional vs. media professional logics in all four countries. As previously specified, the behavioural routines on both sides are evolving within two sets of determinants (i.e., functioning logics or occupational reasoning): governmental institutional/organisational arrangements and media professional orientations. These are explored more in depth below.

Finland

The historical development of independent Finland is closely related to its long common history with Sweden (until 1808), followed by a formative period of nation building as an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire under the rule of the Russian emperor (1809-1917). According to some historians, liberalism developed differently in Finland compared to Sweden in that Finland kept traces of the authoritarian constitutional system that prevailed in Sweden before the Russian takeover (Stenius & Turunen, 1995). This has left traces of bureaucratic control and hierarchic state structures that deviate from the system that developed in Sweden during the democratisation of the monarchy in the 19th century. The overall Finnish political culture (see Niemikari, Raunio & Moring in this volume) is often described as

pragmatic and consensual, with party-political cooperation across the political spectrum and active links with various stakeholders such as trade unions and other interest groups. Recent constitutional reforms have nonetheless quite radically changed the Finnish political regime, with the PM and the Government emerging from the shadow of the president as the political leader of the country ... Interestingly, the Finnish political system has also been noted for the small scale and tight connections among its elites that cover not only the political side but also business interests, trade unions and the media.

Thus Finland qualifies for a position in the corporatist/collegial cell of the matrix. This is further supported by how the professional role divisions between politicians and journalists are described by Niemikari, Raunio, and Moring (this volume) as a continuation of the historically strong position of civil servants, who are in many cases independent of changes in the political composition of the government.

Lithuania

Lithuania is the smallest of the four countries in the study.[3] In addition to its size, which plays a decisive role in determining its social and political identification as well as the specificities of institutional performance, the country's peripheral location and its marginality evident in linguistic exceptionalism also contribute to the cultural character of interactions (Balčytienė, 2006, 2012). The historically embedded centrality of isolationist and protectionist attitudes still permeates the ideological thinking and policy making of elites, and, by such undertakings, differentiates Lithuanian politics from politics in other countries in the region. The exercising of cultural specificity has also played a decisive role in nationalist awakenings of the country (Balčytienė, 2012).

The cultural specificities show in media–politics interactions. In Lithuania, typical of all small countries, the fields of both politics and media are evolving as a joined assemblage of connections. The partnership, however, has been closer in times of democratic breakthrough than it is now when the aims and goals of the two actors have separated. Among the most obvious is the objective "distanciation" between the two groups. "Fighting for common goals" belongs to the past, whereas "scrutinising each other" appears to be a trend of the current practice (Balčytienė & Malling in this volume).

This places Lithuania in the interest-controlled/adversarial cell of the matrix. In general terms, the media appears to be a place where power relationships in society are negotiated, and politicians cannot resist the temptation of being there. The media takes an active part and appears to be an active player in setting political–media interactions.

In other international comparisons, Lithuania is also described as a country with a more liberal media market than European countries in general. And state intervention in the media is indeed moderate. The media acts as a critical scrutiniser: It declares independence, closely monitors the national political life, and has a very adversarial

relationship with political figures. Even though media professionals strive for and desire to achieve an objective balance, their reporting is tainted by their interests. Strong clientelist habits in the country result in an acceptance of a publicly hidden agenda in which parties tend to act like in-groups and even clans instead of defenders of the public interests. Weak civil society, weak professional associations, and a lack of social responsibility by public actors create an atmosphere of hybrid – clientelist–liberal – arrangements in media–politics relationships. This contradicts practices observed in media–politics in the pluralist and structured contexts of the two Nordic countries.

Poland

While manifesting clear parallels to societal changes and transformations in the other post-communist countries, Poland's historical experience portrays a distinctive story. Poland has traditionally been a country of two-fold diversions. It is a big nation[4] and a large media market; its distinctiveness and principled standing were predominantly prevailing and convincing during the political breakthroughs in 1989.

During the years of Soviet rule, the Polish media and journalists functioned under so-called atypical conditions: the Polish media was more liberal and more open than in other communist states of the Soviet-bloc countries (Hadamik, 2005; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012). It is not by accident that the strongest and most organised opposition to communism developed in Poland. The systemic duality of official and unofficial discussions and communist-controlled and semi-private ownership permeated all societal spheres, including that of politics and the media.

The tradition of political embeddedness is present in contemporary media–politics relationships. According to Dobek-Ostrowska and Nożewski in this volume, the "media take sides in the political conflict and play the role of a participant in the political process ... The high polarization is noted not only in the political arena. It is reflected strongly also in the media." As a result, an instrumentalised version of parallelism appears to be a reality in Poland. Polish journalists confessed to feeling most comfortable in the company of people most similar to them; liberal politicians are more likely to feel comfortable among liberal journalists, just as right-wing politicians feel better among right-wing journalists.

This places Poland in the instrumentalised/politically controlled cell of the matrix. Though the data did not indicate any direct impacts of instrumentalised communication, they did register indirect ones: The instrumentalisation of politically managed strategic communication permeates official infrastructures. Communication professionals working as civil servants in ministries have political affiliations. "A significant number of spokespeople are members of political parties and they speak in the name of the ruling party and their chiefs" (Dobek-Ostrowska & Nożewski, this volume). The communications pyramid is well structured: the prime minister plays the main role in the communication process of the government, political advisors are located just below, while civil servants are in the shadow and not independent.

To conclude, the exceptionality of Poland in the context of the cross-country comparison results from many factors. Yet the most evident one is the public invisibility of the mechanisms of instrumentalisation. Recently, a tradition from the decades after 1989 giving the leader of the major political party the ruling post as president or prime minister was broken. As verified in the analysis, the official state functionaries are performing public functions whereas the political leadership is in the shadows (Dobek-Ostrowska & Nożewski, this volume).

Sweden

The historical development of Sweden has formed a strong base for what is today called "bloc politics", consisting of two blocs around which there are parties on the left (led by the Social Democratic Party) and the right (today led by the liberal-conservative Moderate Party). This dualism has been challenged in recent years as the populist and right-wing nationalist Sweden Democrats have gained a position that prevents the two blocs from gaining a majority in parliament. The dualism has gradually also affected the administrative layers of government, where appointments follow the political colour of the government.

The media sector was also divided for a long time, with newspapers that had a leaning towards parties within either bloc and a strong state-owned broadcasting sector with a national monopoly. However, beginning in the late decades of the past millennium, this division has been breaking up, press parallelism has been reduced, and the private broadcasting sector has been growing.

The role of the media in political communication has become more important, but at the same time political control of the media is weaker after the decline of the party press and commercialisation of the media system. Politics is to a large extent mediatised, and the need of the political system to influence media images of politics has been increasing for many years (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). As elsewhere, there is an ongoing professionalisation of political/government communication (Falasca & Nord, 2013; Strömbäck & Nord, 2008). The professional role divisions have been accentuated in recent decades. According to Johansson, Malling and Nygren (this volume), "The resources allocated for government communication have grown massively over the past five decades. A very concrete expression of this decades-long process of change is the significant expansion in staff, including staff for press and information, at the GO and the PMO specifically over this period of time." Journalism has been professionalised as well. Johansson, Malling and Nygren report a growing influence of the political administration, partly due to downsizing of newsrooms, but conclude that a balance remains:

> Relationships between the political system and political journalists have changed in many ways the last 20-30 years in Sweden, according to the interviews with political journalists and government press advisors. The relationships have evolved from a system of cooperation and understanding with the roots in the old system of party

press to a system based on professionalisation on both sides. The relationship is still close, but as one press advisor formulates it – it is "professionally symbiotic".

Based on earlier research, Johansson, Malling and Nygren further note that "Professionalisation is strong in Swedish legacy media, with a large degree of autonomy both in relation to owners and sources, at least according to answers from journalists in surveys". Also, unlike in the other countries included in this project, "The standards of professional integrity also make it difficult to move between journalism and the political sphere – only two of the press advisors in the interviews have any experience as professional journalists."

This places Sweden in the corporatist/adversarial cell of the matrix. In conclusion, the Swedish system has historically developed a vivid political dualism around two blocs. Revolving doors between professions is rare; few press advisors have a background in journalism. The traditional media system, based on a politically engaged press and a state monopoly in broadcasting, has been replaced with an equally strong but depoliticised press that maintains an adversarial approach to politicians while still being dependent on the increasingly skilful communication strategies of the political advisors.

Discussion

Above, we hypothesised that our four-country comparison would show a similar pattern in the two Nordic countries: 1) convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the pluralised category, and 2) convergence in the understanding of the respective roles of politicians and journalists as being characterised by professionalisation, however tainted by a diverging understanding of the nature of their respective roles that would fall into the intrusive/invasive category. These expectations were supported in our analysis (see Table 10.1).

On the other hand, the hypothetical expectation for the two younger democracies Lithuania and Poland, which experienced a dramatic system change in the 1990s, were: 1) convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the restrictive category, and 2) convergence in the understanding of the respective roles of politicians and journalists that would fall into the passive/inert category. Here the first hypothesis was supported, whereas the second was not.

Politically controlled governmental communications combined with potentially instrumentalised media functioning was detected in Poland, while clientelist-adversarial arrangements characterised the interaction in Lithuania. In addition, corporatist-advocating activities were noted in Finland, but corporatist-adversarial intentions and combined logic were identified in Sweden.

The analysis also shows similarities among the four countries. It strikes the eye that one row and one column in Table 10.1 remain empty: the media are not loyalist and the institutional characteristics are not overly individualistic (liberalistic). When looking closer at the similarities, one of the dominant observations is that the journal-

ist–source relationship is professionally maintained in all four countries. This notion is supported by several tendencies, for example the growing accessibility and availability of political information and sources. Several factors contribute to this outcome. In all four countries, political communication via social networks and greater participation in such communication by both politicians and journalists have significantly intensified over the past years. Another factor is related to increased efforts to coordinate governmental communication and evidently increasing investments and attempts to institutionalise information management. Even in countries where governmental communication appears to be predominantly individualised and personified, and, hence, de-centralised (as in Lithuania), the evident struggles and efforts by governmental press and communications officers to impose greater management and control of communications appears to be a prevailing practice. However, what appears as a mere generalisation is bound up with characteristics eventually producing slightly deviating outcomes: while greater information supply and source availability to comment on political issues may manifest professional distanciation and lead to autonomy in both the political and the journalistic fields in some countries (as in Sweden and Finland), the same phenomenon in other political-economic contexts might be a straight indicator of increased one-directional political influence and media capture (as in Poland), or predominance of media–political hierarchies and syndicates (as in Lithuania).

Another observed tendency in all four countries is linked to a homogenisation or a kind of blending of journalism practices. Equally so, we also would like to highlight a kind of internationalisation of political communication professionalisation, which, as it appears from our analysis, is a process that becomes less dependent on the specificities of national contexts. With the influx of interactive and networked communications, journalists in general appear to be more and more influenced and dependent on what information seems to be available online. They are pressured by the economic changes within the media industry (such as downsizing of newsrooms, increased requests for news production to fit all platforms, and increased competition for unique news content, which makes them even more dependent on sources). Social media and developments in information and communications technology (ICT) unmistakably promote shifts in the setting of agendas – in politics as well as in the media.

Predominantly the latter aspect, i.e., intensified networked communications, contributes to making political information provision the principal supervisor and even controller of the public agenda. This outcome appears to be determined by the institutional roles of both the media and political sources; though journalists are concerned and preoccupied with ethical aspects in setting the tone and character of the interaction, the political side does not seem to be disturbed by such issues. This is apparent in all four countries despite the nuances in their political cultures. Indeed, the last aspect linked with declining political responsibility appears to be neglected in most contemporary political communication analyses.

To conclude, societal change by itself and the existence of shifting conditions may be two of the reasons why informality appears to be an analogous factor shaping and

determining the relation between the media and politics in all four countries. Whereas volatility is perhaps the most indicative feature predominant in the younger democracies (Lithuania and Poland), where variations between clientelist and controlled governmental communications were registered, feelings of instability permeate media–politics relationships in the two Nordic nations as well. Still, these two countries have a functioning safety net, i.e., reputable conventional media (predominantly print media and public service broadcasting sectors), and relatively stable professional and civil society associations ensuring gradual equilibration of people's reactions and adjustments to the arising changes through negotiations and agreements. In such socially unbroken and uninterrupted conditions, all requests for choices among people fall within well-designed and established routines and behaviours. Hence less extreme instabilities or turbulences are documented or felt in the Nordic countries.

Departing from the fact that ongoing institutional change increases the likelihood of uncertainty and hesitation and thus the probability of conflicts and confrontations that might lead to ambiguous choices, at least two findings appear to be of central importance. One is the fact that contextual circumstances (histories and traditions, values and ideals, and other cultural legacies) appear to be of high significance in the shaping of the transformations in each of the countries, contributing to the observed outcomes. Another central finding is related to the outcome of a more global, i.e., transferrable, nature, namely the impacts that come from information abundance, on the one hand, and intensified communications and the infusion of ICTs in all professional fields, including the media and politics, on the other.

A key focus throughout this study is how contextual circumstances (history and traditions, which we have discussed under the heading *mode of institutional political functioning*) could reveal values and ideals as well as other cultural legacies that are shaping the trajectories of media–politics relationships. We expected our four-country comparison to show a similar pattern in the two Nordic countries: Convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the pluralised category. The expectation for the two younger democracies, Lithuania and Poland, that experienced a dramatic system change in the 1990s was to find convergence in the views on institutional characteristics that would fall into the restrictive category. These expectations were supported in our analysis. However, we also found some particularities that contrast with the intra-group similarities. In the three small countries (Lithuania, Sweden and Finland), direct access to ministers is normal; in the political culture of the largest country, Poland, this is less so.

With regard to our second dimension, picking up on the professionalisation of journalists and political media advisors, we expected the two Nordic countries to show a convergence in the understanding of the roles of politicians and journalists as being characterised by professionalisation, tainted by a diverging understanding of the nature of their respective roles, that would fall into the intrusive/invasive category. For the two new democracies, we expected convergence in the understanding of the respective roles that would fall into the passive category. Here Lithuania is the deviant

case, falling into the adversarial mode of the intrusive category, even passing Finland. Finland, in turn, appears to represent a less adversarial and more advocational political culture in the professional aspects of media behaviour. We also found new forms of political/politicised parallelisms stemming from the professionalisation of political communication advisors in Sweden, Lithuania, and Poland. This does not appear to be the case in Finland.

However, there are also similarities among the four countries. Social media forms new information links between politicians and journalists – as well as between these two groups and the audience – that sidestep traditional media. This aspect appears to be most pronounced in Finland, whereas the legacy media in Sweden, with its digital extensions, appears to have maintained a relatively stronger grip as a forum for political communication. This finding, however, requires further qualification, as our research does not cover audience behaviour.

In reality, it appears that the grouping of countries turned out to be a much more difficult exercise than we initially envisioned. One feature that appears to explain the falsification of some of the hypotheses is the existence of a shared professional culture among political journalists. Particularly younger journalists appear to maintain similar visions and ideals of what professional journalism is and ought to be. Much more varied and contrasting views and patterns of performance were uncovered on the political side. Within particular institutional frameworks, on the systemic level, historical as well as cultural factors appear to have the fiercest influence and weight over outcomes. However, we also find variation that counters our expectations of intra-group similarities. In Sweden, it appears to be almost out of the question for journalists to enter careers as political communication advisors, whereas this appears to be more or less the rule among the top-level political communication advisors in Finland and also quite normal in Lithuania and Poland. In all countries, informal contacts between politicians and journalists appear to raise ethical issues among the journalists but not so much for the politicians. Apparently it is seen as a legitimate part of the game for the politician to try to influence the media, but not for the journalist to succumb to such influence.

One of the fundamental societal transformations identified in diverse political and media environments across Europe is, as illustratively argued by various social thinkers (Bauman, 2000; Eriksen, 2001, 2016), a shift from "momentous changes" to "accelerated acceleration" (Eriksen, 2016). Since the turn of the millennium, changes in political environments have only accelerated, and changes in media environments and political communication practices have been amplified (Blumler, 2016). As argued by various social thinkers, critical time periods – or specific situations and modes charged with dramatic developments – are exceptional in their various calls and urgent requests for significant choices and decisions. Perhaps the biggest challenge with change arises from the fact that a changing society (Lithuania and Poland) lacks a solid and comforting social and ideological base that can support institutional continuity. Thus impulsiveness, volatility, and flux appear to be amongst the most dominant cultural qualities

identified in all social fields (politics and the media included) in these two countries. Changes of such magnitude are not recognised in societies where societal structures and conditions have been stable over a longer period of time (Sweden and Finland). Changes are taking place in those contexts as well, but are followed by uninterrupted, marginal adjustments. These allow for a gradual equilibration of people's reactions and the design of formal institutions and agreed-upon rules. When considering these contextual features, what meets the eye is the similarities rather than the differences detected in our analysis – specifically, how professional cultures appear to have stabilising potential in times of change.

A question that arises is how the role of professional cultures will interact with the dynamics in today's interconnected world, where stability is challenged and geographic distance does not leave people free from intellectual or ideological influence. In today's Europe, current crises, battles, and conflicts appear to be ongoing and organic rather than temporary and transitional. We would like to end our analysis with the note that societal change by itself may be one of the reasons why informality appears to be an analogous factor determining the relationships between the media and politics in the four studied countries.

Notes

1. The countries compared by Pfetsch and colleagues were Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. See Pfetsch (2014).
2. See Balčytienė & Malling, Dobek-Ostrowska & Nożewski, Johansson, Malling & Nygren, and Niemikari, Raunio & Moring in this volume.
3. With a population of 2.8 million (as of 2016), Lithuania can be defined as a small media marketplace, yet relatively varied and dynamic. The country is described as an ethnically homogeneous country, with Polish and Russian speakers being the largest minorities (6.6% and 5.8%, respectively, of the total population). The official language of the country is Lithuanian.
4. The national media environment in Poland is shaped by population size, demographic structure, and economic conditions. Poland's population of 38.4 million creates a relatively big market for the sectors that comprise the national media. The ethnic and linguistic structure of the population is relatively homogenous, with 97 per cent of the country's citizens identifying with a Polish nationality.

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