Chapter 9

Media logics as parts of the political toolkit
A critical discussion on theories of mediatisation of politics

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Abstract

In research on mediatisation, the political system is often described as a victim of media logics. According to this theory, the logics of politics are overruled by media logics, and the political institutions become dependent on the media. This chapter questions this dichotomy between the two logics and asks to what extent media logics are used by political actors to achieve political goals. Based on the results from interviews in four countries, the relationship between politics and the media is discussed from both perspectives. The chapter also discusses different logics and functions of the media and describes a complex picture of interdependency and mutual interests. It concludes that new types of political instrumentalisation of the media are developed in the close relationship between the news media and their sources in government.

Keywords: mediatisation, political journalism, media management, media logic, political logic

Introduction

When Congressman Frank Underwood and political reporter Zoe Barnes meet for the last time in a dark train station, the result is tragic. Zoe Barnes knows too much about the hidden and cruel struggles in top politics. Frank Underwood has been her lover and given her a lot of news stories, but this time she herself becomes the news as she gets pushed in front of the train.

The intimate relationship between the characters had at one time been useful for both – in the political game for one and for the journalistic career of the other. Ultimately, however, it becomes clear that one person held the power – and one person ended up under the train. *House of Cards* is TV fiction, but just like many successful fictional stories its roots can be found in real life. In real life, the power relationship between the media and politics is more complicated than in this fictional story, but *House of Cards* still offers a different view than many media studies.

During the past decade, the relationship between the media and politics has often been described as a process of *mediatisation*. According to this theory, politics is a kind of victim of the central mechanisms of media logic: "mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media and is continuously shaped by their interactions with mass media" (Mazzoleni & Schultz, 1999: 250). Hjarvard describes the process as "the political institutiongradually becoming dependent on media and their logic" (2013: 43). In later definitions, mediatisation of politics has been described as a long-term process where the importance of the media for political processes, institutions and actors, and "spill-over effects" has increased (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 6). This theory assumes that different logics dominate these two spheres: political logic and media logic. Political logic is supposed to have three major dimensions: polity (the institutional framework), policy (decision-based production of politics), and politics (power and the winning of support). Media logic, on the other hand, is supposed to be guided by norms such as professionalism, commercialism, and the technical conditions of news production. According to this definition of mediatisation, media logic is taking over political logic and is to an increasing degree deciding political processes (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 14-19).

Is this really the case, though? Probably not in the relationship between Frank Underwood and Zoe Barnes, where the young female journalist becomes a victim of the older cynical politician. What if we turn to the real world? Is this theory useful to explain the relationship between the media and politics, or is there something else to this relationship? Is an increased power of the media visible in the daily interaction between journalists and political actors, or are there other fundamental factors, not included in theories of mediatisation? These two logics can indeed be considered as opposites, but there is also another possibility: That the political sphere can use mechanisms of media logics to achieve a political *instrumentalisation* of media. This would ultimately mean that in the end, political logic is working on another level than media logics in news production, and that political actors use media to achieve political goals.

In political processes, media is both an *arena* for political actors and an *actor* on its own (Petersson & Carlberg, 1990). In today's politics, political actors demand increasing attention in the public sphere to gain influence and legitimacy (Marcinkowski & Steiner, 2014). In this struggle for attention, media logic determines the basic rules of admission to the public sphere. The relationship between the political need for attention and the internal logics of the media sets the basic conditions for daily politics. From a political perspective, it can be described as a mediatisation of politics. However, from a communication perspective, when political actors use media logic in the daily struggle of agenda setting and framing of politics in the public sphere, it can be described as a new form of political instrumentalisation of the media.

The purpose of this chapter is to critically discuss the theories of mediatisation. On the basis of empirical studies of the relationships between political journalists

and their sources in four countries – Finland, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden – the chapter poses four questions:

- Are the *dimensions of mediatisation* visible in the interaction between political journalists and their sources? If so, to what extent and how?

- How is the relationship between *media logic and political logic* visible in this interaction? To what degree is the political system adapting to the media logic, and what does this mean for the political logic?

- What is the relationship between *mediatisation* of political communication and *political instrumentalisation* of the media? Is it mutually exclusive, or can it be mutually reinforcing?

- What are the main similarities and differences regarding mediatisation in the four countries? What are the explanations, for example differences in political cultures and media systems?

In this chapter, we first seek to understand political logic in relation to media logic. Based on literature in political science and media research we discuss the two kinds of logics and whether they are mutually exclusive. We also list some examples of recent critics of mediatisation theories. In the second part of the chapter, we assess the empirical findings in the four countries in light of the power relationship between the political sphere and the media on the micro, meso, and macro level.

Mediatisation and the two logics

The relationship between the media and politics is often analysed as a question of power: What kind of influence do these groups of actors have on each other and in society? This question of power has two dimensions (Asp & Bjerling, 2014). The *first dimension* is the power of the media to influence the audience and public debate – the question of media effects on democracy. There are conflicting theories regarding this issue: the media may be a negative factor undermining democracy (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995) but might still contribute to political interest and participation (Norris, 2000). The *second dimension* concerns power over media content: Who and what mechanisms influence the content? Some schools emphasise that sources are the decisive actors, while others assert that journalists decide what news should be reported and how issues are framed in news reporting. There is also a middle ground describing the relationship as an ongoing negotiation and a mutual dependency (Berkowitz, 2009). These two dimensions are related, but there is no given relationship beforehand. It is possible that the media has a great influence on audiences and the behaviour of citizens in democratic processes. It is similarly possible that the media/journalists have a minor influence over the actual media content. Conversely, it is also possible that the media has full control over content but only a minor influence in society.

This chapter focuses on the second of these dimensions of power, asking who has the decisive influence over media content and the mechanisms and structures in the relationship between the media (journalists) and politics (political sources within the government).

As already mentioned, a key notion in this field of research is *mediatisation*. The term has been defined as a general social process in which the media has become increasingly influential and deeply integrated in different spheres of society (Hjarvard, 2013; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a). It is a slow and structural change in society and a question of how society in general has adapted to the logics of the media. In the field of politics, mediatisation is defined as a long-term process that has increased the importance of the media and various spillover effects on political processes, institutions, organisations, and actors (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 6).

This mediatisation of politics has four strongly interconnected dimensions. Each of them is a matter of degree, and varying degrees of mediatisation can occur in each one (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 7-9). The four dimensions of mediatisation are these:

(D1) The degree to which the media is the most important source for information about politics.

(D2) The degree to which the media is independent from other political and social institutions.

(D3) The degree to which media content is guided by media logic (instead of political logic).

(D4) The degree to which political actors are guided by media logic (instead of political logic).

Strömbäck and Esser (2014a) note that the four dimensions work together, with D4 dealing with "the very essence of the mediatization of politics, that is, the ripple effects of media in political processes and on political actors and institutions", while D1 – that is, the degree of *mediation of politics* – serves as a prerequisite for D2, D3, and D4.

Thus, the ideal mediatised system would be one in which there is a maximum degree of mediatisation in all four dimensions. In an earlier work, Strömbäck (2008: 240) notes that while D3 means that political actors "adapt" to media logic, they have completely "adopted" it in D4, making the mediatisation process complete. Conversely, a non-mediatised system would be one in which the media is not the most important source of information about politics (D1), the media is mainly dependent on political institutions (D2), media content is guided mainly by political logic (D3), and political actors are mainly operating according to political logic (D4).

Strömbäck and Esser raise the important concern of how the key concepts of "media logic" and "political logic" are often left undefined or only vaguely described in the mediatisation literature. As much of the previous research focuses on the media side, political logic seems to be particularly problematic. It should also be noted that there is not much discussion on the notion of "logic", either. Strömbäck and Esser (2014a: 14)

define logic in this context as expected behaviour or as the "logic of appropriateness". The notion of a clear dichotomy between political and media logic, first introduced by Mazzoleni (1987), can be called into question as well (Donges & Jarren, 2014; Lundby, 2009). Furthermore, Kunelius and Reunanen (2012a) note that the mere juxtaposition of the two logics fails to explain how and why mediatisation occurs.

Strömbäck and Esser (2014a: 14-16) name three dimensions – *polity*, *policy,* and *politics* – that "together shape political logic". Note, however, that this description still falls short of describing how political logic actually works. Media logic, in turn, is described through the concepts of *professionalism*, *commercialism,* and *media technology* (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 17-19). Asp (2014: 19-20) gives more detailed accounts of how media logic plays out, listing independence and objectivity as professional norms of the media, and audience-centred and efficiency-seeking rules of craft and form as professional standards. A broader definition of media logic is given by Hjarvard: "technological, aesthetical and institutional modus operandi by which they (the media) allocate material and symbolic resources and work through formal and informal rules" (Hjarvard, 2013: 44).

Another problem in the theory of these two logics is a too simplified notion of a single logic guiding all of politics and the media. Donges and Jarren (2014) argue for a more detailed notion of media logic, while Van Aelst and colleagues (2014) seek to refine a closer look on political logic. Strömbäck and Esser (2014a, 2014b) and Asp (2014) choose to focus on *news media logic*, while D'Angelo and colleagues (2014), in a similar fashion, analyse *political campaign logic*. As has been mentioned, the concept of political logic in particular suffers from vague definitions and conceptualisation in previous research. The next paragraph discusses this issue more in depth.

The difficult political logic

The *-isms* of professionalism and commercialism imply that media logic is defined in altogether different terms than political logic. The dimensions of political logic (polity, policy, and politics) do not seem commensurable with the dimensions of media logic (professionalism, commercialism, and media technology). As Strömbäck and Esser (2014a: 7) speak of "media logic as *opposed to* political logic" (our emphasis), it would mean that dimensions D3 and D4 of mediatisation effectively call for dichotomies among polity, policy, and politics, on the one hand, and professionalism, commercialism, and media technology, on the other. Such dichotomies seem difficult to compose. Moreover, the notion of *politics* as a dimension of *politics* adds to the confusion, and is also a sign of the arguable vocabulary issues of politics and political science (Palonen, 1993, 2003). There is also some overlap between the notions of *policy*, which includes "finding enough support for taking political decisions", and *politics*, which "refers to the processes of garnering support for one's candidacy, party or political program" (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 15).

Furthermore, the theory of mediatisation seems to presuppose a parliamentary democratic system. As Strömbäck and Esser (2014a) note that polity is the dimension of politics most likely to be unaffected by mediatisation, it is useful to focus on the other two dimensions: policy and politics. A closer look at how political logic works on these dimensions would call for an analysis looking at the *institutions* in question – the kind of analysis that Asp (2014) carries out for media logic. A general problem with defining political logic through the notions of polity, policy, and politics alone is that the terms *policy* and *politics* are too vague. However, the fact that mediatisation theory subscribes to a parliamentary democratic polity narrows down the possible universe of policy and politics. Thus, to describe political logic in a sense that is commensurable with Strömbäck and Esser's (2014a) definition of media logic would be to note that the expected behaviour and actions of political actors are guided by the institutions of democracy and parliamentarism.

Donges and Jarren (2014: 184) note that an earlier work by Van Aelst and colleagues (2008) takes "a shortcut by describing media logic as absence of party logic". Given the apparent difference in the level of detail between accounts on media logic and political logic, it seems that, in a sense, many studies on mediatisation take a similar shortcut by describing political logic as an absence of media logic. For instance, Haßler and collegues (2014) name the absence of policy issues, personalisation, negativity, topicality and ambiguity as five aspects of media logic that distinguish media logic from political logic. However, they note that politics and the media seem to share the tendencies for personalisation and negativity.

The origins of the term "political logic" also seem unclear. While the notion of media logic can be traced back and attributed to Altheide and Snow (1979), as Haßler and colleagues (2014) do, no similar starting point has been identified for the notion of political logic. Mazzoleni and Schulz's (1999) classic article "Mediatization of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?" is taken to be one of the most important starting points for theories on mediatisation (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014b). While discussing media logic, Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) do not come up with any clear definition of political logic. The earlier Mazzoleni article (1987) spoke of party logic instead of political logic.

From a political science perspective, the notion of a political logic seems somewhat slippery. Marcinkowski (2014: 15) notes that this is most notably because of the political science concept of *governance,* which implies a complex set of mechanisms that coordinate action in society instead of a clear political logic. Indeed, if there are any approaches to political logic within political science, these are found in systems theoretical approaches such as that of Easton (1965). Mediatisation, then, would have to be about the framing of reality, that is, who gets to decide what counts as outputs and inputs in the political system. Interestingly, Vos and Van Aelst (2018) label the polity aspect of Esser's political logic as "political system logic" in their analysis of politicians' media visibility.

Esser (2013: 164) maintains that "politics cannot be reduced to one dimension only", and moves on to discuss political logic through the central triad of *politics, policy,*

and *polity*. In addition to analysing what is political and what is not – a fundamental theme in political science – Esser claims that the triad has also been developed "to distinguish political logic from the logics of other societal spheres like economics, sports, or the media" (ibid). Here, Esser cites a study by Pennings, Keman, and Klein-nijenhuis (2006: 23-26), which is not primarily a discussion of what mediatisation theorists call political logic, either. To sum up, it seems that an exegesis of the concept of political logic cannot provide a clear definition of it.

Instead, a discussion on political logic quickly boils down to a discussion on the nature of politics itself, as happens with Strömbäck and Esser (2014a: 14-15). They find their conception of politics in Lasswell's (1958) classical notion of "who gets what, when, and how". Despite this general approach, in practice, the theory and studies of mediatisation are based on a rather narrow conception of politics, as they focus on politics as an activity within the institutions of a parliamentary democratic system. Another broad understanding of politics is found in Lasswell and Kaplan's (1950: xiv) conception of political science as "the study of the shaping and sharing of power", where the corresponding conception of politics as shaping and distributing power arises.

The very core of politics is to define it. This is why political scientists are very aware that they might have to wait forever to agree on the topic (Leftwich, 2004). As noted outright by political theorist Carl Schmitt (1976 [1932]: 20) in the beginning of his classic essay "The Concept of the Political", "One seldom finds a clear definition of the political". Indeed, it is important to note that there is a risk that getting bogged down in a debate on the nature of politics will even further diminish the ability to operationalise political logic.

In this chapter, we propose that the dichotomy between media logic and political logic, in the way it is construed in theories of mediatisation, might be misleading. Instead, if one turns to the more abstract definition of political logic as shaping and (re)distributing power, it can be noted that the logic of politics as power operates on a higher level than media logic. That is, politics, even when it seemingly appropriates itself to the calculi of (news) media, still does so to its own ends (Van Aelst et al., 2014).

Beyond the dichotomy

Several researchers question the dichotomy between the two distinct logics of politics and media. Esmark and Mayerhöffer study agenda setting and write that political use of media logic for agenda-setting purposes does not necessarily mean subjugation. Even if political actors adapt to media standards, this may be due to a preservation of political rationality in the context of media formats. Tailoring strategies of agenda setting to media logic might equally imply a reassertion of political authority (Esmark & Mayerhöffer, 2014: 221, also Bjerling, 2012). As Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015: 8) note, it is "important for strategic communicators to *understand* and *utilize* 'mediatization'" (our emphasis). In a Finnish study, Kunelius and Reunanen also conclude

that it is necessary to go beyond the dichotomy of media logic vs. political logic. By analysing power as a relationship between actors, they look at the media as a part of the construction of political power inside the political system.

On a general level, political power adapts to media logic as described by theories on mediatisation. However, this is done to communicate power, making the impact of the media on the actual decision making less predictable. Mediatisation also seems to correlate with other power resources, as for example those actively involved in policy networks also make use of media resources (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012b: 71-72).

The notion of politics as power, and the seeking and usage of power as an underlying premise of all political logic, is important for understanding the implications of the mediatisation of politics for politics and democracy. Asp (2014) notes that the mediatisation of politics does not necessarily equal a weakened democracy. Furthermore, as Van Aelst and collegues put it,

> even when political actors take over media issues, they do this often on their own terms and with clear strategic goals. In a sense, rather than to a general decline of power of political actors, mediatization probably leads to a *redistribution* of power in politics, with some actors profiting and other paying a higher price ... close interactions between media and politics take place as a result of *overlapping logics*, rather than one logic dominating the other. (Van Aelst et al., 2014: 214)

In fact, the whole idea of mediatisation as a process that represents an increase of the power of the media without consent from political actors may well be called into question. As the German researchers Marcinkowski and Steiner (our emphasis) put it:

> Therefore, the mediatization of the political sphere is not to be interpreted as a sign of a declining political culture nor of the pathological colonization of politics by media; rather, it serves first and foremost to *make politics possible* under conditions of *increased interdependencies*, high political complexity and inclusivity. (Marcinkowski & Steiner, 2014: 88)

Marcinkowski and Steiner have a broader perspective than many media researchers, starting with the functional differentiation of modern societies. Different systems in society – the economy, juridical system, science, politics, the media, etc. – have their own perspectives but influence each other and are interdependent. The special function of the media is to create attention for issues in the greater social communication, and other systems want to use this for their own needs.

Following this perspective, the reasons for mediatisation of politics are not to be found in the media but in politics itself. Modern and complex politics, where citizens are more demanding and more volatile as voters, has increased the political need for attention and acceptance. In a society where the basic condition is an abundance of information and a deficiency of attention, the struggle for attention is becoming more important for the political system. Politicians must obtain the consent of the population, and there is a greater need for confirmation and legitimation of political decisions.

This is especially true in times of political campaigning. As stated by Marcinkowski and Steiner (2014: 86), "It is politics itself that realizes its dependency on media more than ever and therefore is reprogramming itself to appear more attractive".

From this perspective, there is no basic contradiction between political logic and media logic. For the political system, media logic is a means to achieve the public attention necessary in the political struggle for power (or to shield political actors from unwanted publicity). Marcinkowski goes as far as questioning the whole notion of mediatisation:

> We may therefore wonder whether the process described here really can be called the mediatisation of politics, when it is actually about intended publicity, which, in turn, is used as a means to the end of managing assent, ensuring legitimacy, maintaining or gaining power – that is for genuinely political ends. (Marcinkowski, 2014: 19)

In his analysis, Marcinkowski changes perspective from a media-centric one to one that centres on political actors. Similarly, Van Aelst and Walgrave (2017) propose a functional model for studying the relationships between politics and media that takes the political actors as a starting point. Asking why and how political actors are using the media to reach political goals, they distinguish two main functions of the media for political actors (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2017: 5-10):

- Information function: to get information about problems in society, public opinion and other political actors. Both in a passive role as consumers and in an active role in using information in their political agenda.

- Arena function: to reach out with their message and be visible themselves.

To use these functions, politicians must learn and incorporate media rules into their daily work. This is not equally important for all politicians and in all situations; for example, a minority needs more public attention to balance the governing majority than the majority does. The competitors of politicians in this work are not journalists but other politicians. The functional perspective hence examines whether and how media affects the balance of power among politicians.

Brants and Van Praag also take the analysis beyond the dichotomy of media logic and political logic (2014). They identify a more powerful logic of the public – *vox populi* – dominated by anti-establishment rhetoric against both mainstream media and the political system. This logic is visible in online platforms and changes the logics of media based on the market or, at least, on assumptions about what the market wants. This logic driven by the public is however too fragmented and contradictory to speak of one certain, specific logic. They conclude:

> The inevitable conclusion will have to be that there is not one structural power, not one single dominating logic, but an often unpredictable interaction between public, media and politics with mutual influence and changing positions of power. With political logic passé and ambiguous proof of media logic, it is better to stop talking

about logics in political communication all together. Except maybe, as a historical category. (Brants & Van Praag, 2017: 11)

Relationships between media and politics

The area of the media and politics is one of the most studied areas in media research. Michael Schudson describes political institutions and media institutions as deeply intertwined "in a complex dance with each other, that it is not easy to distinguish where one begins and the other leaves off" (Schudson, 2003: 154). He concludes that the media does not define politics more than political structures define the media. According to Schudson, there have been many changes in the broad political culture, creating a system where the role of the media is central – not supreme but indispensable. He also warns against generalising too much about the relationship between the media and politics as differences are large between countries and over time. Variations in laws, political institutions, and political culture have to be considered. The central idea is the basic understanding that journalism does not stand outside politics looking in; journalism is an element of politics (Schudson, 2003: 166).

In recent years, a number of comparative studies on political journalism have been conducted in Western Europe. A study of five countries concludes that historical heritage and social/political/economical differences are keys to understanding political journalism in Europe (Nielsen, 2014). There is no clear "Americanisation" found in Europe; some trends are similar, such as fragmentation of audiences and an accelerated news cycle. Other trends in US political journalism are not really found in Europe (so far), for example the increased partisan polarisation in media and decreasing trust in legacy media (Nielsen, 2014: 191).

Nielsen and Kuhn (2014) do not use the notion of mediatisation but give a nuanced picture of the complex relationship between media and politics. The authors find continuity in terms of national differences and in the relationship between the political and journalistic elites, the closeness between journalism and the political system, and being part of "the same bubble" of intimate relations. The study asks for more research on the informal and formal ties binding actors together in relationships that are both adversarial and symbiotic. The authors also note a technological shift in media systems and a professionalisation of political sources.

Yet another study compares political journalism in four Western European countries and finds clear differences between Northern and Southern Europe (Albaek et al., 2014). The authors conclude that even if politics becomes more dependent on the media, this does not mean that journalism becomes more independent of political pressure. On the contrary, political pressure from sources and the political interests of media owners are still strong. Political spin doctors help politicians accommodate the media, and the power balance does not tip in favour of the media. The development

of mediatisation varies widely between the four countries, and there is no evident one-directional shift from political logic to media logic (Albaek et al., 2014: 175). On the contrary, an increased importance of the media may give political sources a stronger position in relation to journalists, according to a Danish study. More competition among media outlets gives political sources more power and influence over the public image (Elmelund-Praestkaer et al., 2011).

A limitation in the theory of mediatisation is the empirical basis: it is based on research in liberal democracies with independent media organisations. It remains to be seen if the theory can be used in other kinds of media systems as well, for example semi-authoritarian systems with a strong political influence on the media. For example, many hybrid media systems have a long tradition of political influence on the media through ownership and censorship. Outside the Western world, it might therefore be difficult to apply theories on media systems (Voltmer, 2012).

The relationship between politics and the media in Central and Eastern Europe is often described in terms of party colonisation and clientelism. An analysis of five countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia) finds different kinds of patterns in the relationships between parties and the media, but all of them include some kind of party colonisation of the media. Such a system, with many parties and no dominant party, allows for a high degree of press freedom. With a one-party colonisation of the media, like in Hungary and Poland under Kaczyński, the degree of press freedom is low (Bajomi-Lazar, 2015). Another study of five Central European countries analyses clientelistic links between political and media elites. Clientelist networks, characterised by the exchange of favours and resources between politicians and media owners or in the form of media owners who themselves are politicians, are found in all five countries. Advertorials and kompromat (negative news about opponents) are used to influence public opinion (Örnebring, 2012).

The political systems in Central and Eastern Europe are operating in a borderland between semi-authoritarian regimes and multiparty systems close to the liberal model. Mediatisation, supposed to be found only in Western democracies, is also found in these countries in Central Europe. A study from Slovenia, one of the most stable democracies in the region, shows a strong political use of the media (following a *commodity logic* where politics and politicians imitate commodities that can be "sold" to the "consumer") by adapting messages to the media logic (Amon-Prodnik, 2016).

To summarise, theoretical perspectives of European research on the media and politics offer a lot of arguments against a simple model of mediatisation as media logic replacing a political logic in political processes. It is difficult to define any special political logic interchangeable with the logics governing media production – professional standards, commercialism, and technological conditions. The relationship is much more complicated, and the logic of politics operates on a different level than what is defined as media logic.

Power relationships in four countries

All relationships contain a question of power – whether one side in the relationship has the power to influence the other to do something. There are also questions about mutual and diverging interests in a relationship – what are the common interests and what is in the interest of one part in the relationship but not of the other. A relationship also entails questions about the degree of closeness and distance (the theme of the present volume). A relationship contains both, but to a varying degree depending on the time and situation.

When it comes to the actors in our study – the media and political actors – the question of power concerns the influence over media coverage. How can the two groups of actors use closeness and distance to gain power over the media content? The struggle is about control over information flows and agenda setting – who decides what news is to be told and what issues are to be covered (McCombs, 2014). The struggle is also about framing – how the actors can influence how news stories are told and what impression they give to the audience, an audience both defined as citizens in a democracy and customers on a market of media systems and political parties (Nord & Strömbäck, 2003).

The full empirical findings from each country are reported in other chapters in this volume. In this chapter, we look at the results from a comparative perspective, focusing on the power relationship on three different levels:

- *Micro level*: personal history of the actors and personal relationships between actors; informal relations and networks (see also Chapter 8) on a personal level; social background and social values.

- *Meso level*: relationships between organisations in daily work; professional interaction between newsrooms and government communication.

- *Macro level*: ownership and control over media organisations; laws and other frames put up by the political sphere; media structures and technological changes as new platforms for communication.

In the final part, we discuss to what extent theories of mediatisation can explain the distribution of power among the groups of actors on these three levels.

Micro-level relations

On a personal level, journalists in all four countries talked about a long-term development of more distance towards political actors. Finland has a tradition of political consensus, and journalists described two schools of attitudes in the relationship between the media and politics: the old school of close relationships, where journalists and politicians even went out drinking together, and the new school of keeping

a distance from such activities. Journalists in Sweden, with an old tradition of party press, also described more distance today when political journalists no longer have a background in politics. The professionalisation of journalism is behind this change, as it separates the media from the political system on an institutional level. In Poland and Lithuania, more experienced journalists talked about the struggle for democracy in the 1980s-1990s and how this struggle for a common goal united journalists and politicians. The following quote from a Lithuanian journalist illustrates this experience.

> Right after the independence, the media had to redefine itself. It had to change. The same applies to the politicians. All of them (journalists and politicians) were friends. All of them were "pro-Lithuania" ... Politicians were visiting the house of my parents, who were also journalists. They all were striving for the same goal. And the media at that time was not critical, around 1990-1991. It began later on: politics, scandals, intrigues. (Lithuanian journalist 1)

The same story is told by Polish journalists looking back at the time of Solidarity [trade union] when everyone (journalists and political actors) were parts of the same movement, "when different political-journalistic events were a daily routine and when the two worlds were younger and less separated from each other" (Polish journalist 1).

Still, journalists and political actors in all four countries emphasised that personal contacts and informal networks remain a basic condition for their daily work. They described how they build and nurture these networks whenever they interact: At press conferences, in parliament, at political events, and during election campaigns during long trips together in buses and planes. Off-the-record lunches are a daily part of the work, and during years of close contact journalists and political sources build personal relationships. Through these networks, journalists get a picture of political developments and avoid being only reactive and dependent on sources. Politicians, in turn, are able to use stable relationships with specific journalists for leaks and other similar methods. Thus, the relationships are beneficial for both sides; "both sides are in contact with each other for beneficial purposes and both sides are aware of this ... they are relationships of utility" (Finnish journalist 2).

There are structures keeping these networks together. In Sweden and Finland, there are special associations for political reporters where they can meet politicians informally, and in some of the countries the political side arranges informal briefings for journalists. In addition, technological development provides new tools to maintain and develop the networks; these include both public tools like Twitter and other social media and closed channels like mobile phones.

There is a clear social closeness between the two groups of actors; they are both part of a political communication elite. In Poland and Lithuania, all the press advisors are former journalists. In Finland, this is sometimes the case as well, while it is rarer in Sweden. Nonetheless, the two elite groups in the two Scandinavian societies, usually labelled consensus-oriented (Lijphart, 2012; Arter, 2016), often share the same values. In three of the countries (Finland, Lithuania, and Sweden), the political communication

elite of journalists and political actors is quite small and has many connections from social and professional life, schools, and personal history. At the same time, journalists and press advisors in Sweden and Finland clearly distinguish between personal and private relationships. Even if the relationship is personal, journalists emphasise that it is still fundamentally professional. Journalists in Poland are also aware of the danger of having relationships that are too close, as the following quote emphasises: "Too much fraternization with politicians or with their surroundings can bring ruin to journalists" (Polish journalist 1).

Press advisors mostly describe informality and personal relationships with journalists as non-controversial. A typical quote from an experienced Swedish press advisor states that

> It is about selling things the right way, also talking things down if they are not so serious ... often it is some kind of misunderstanding that leads to something bad ... then it is time for background conversations when I phone journalists to tell what is happening and to explain this is not a big deal bla bla bla ... (Swedish press advisor 3)

The relationship is often described as cooperation, especially in the Nordic countries with a political culture of consensus and corporatism. It can be described as a game in which the actors share the same rules of mutual trust and informal agreement. One Finnish journalist describes it as "a fairly functional relationship, because it is kind of symbiotic in the sense that both sides need each other". (Finnish journalist 7)

For journalists, this closeness comes at a price; a basic part of their professional role is to be an independent watchdog. Being too close to the sources might bring this independence into question. In Sweden, journalists talked about publishing stories from their sources just to keep them happy – a kind of yielding to pressure to keep relationships good for the future. The same pressure is found in Lithuania, where journalists experienced being excluded from the informal briefings of the president if they were too critical (although this, of course, has not been confirmed by press secretaries of the president). In Finland, journalists generally maintained that they are able to balance closeness with journalistic values.

Meso-level relations

On the meso level, there has been a clear development towards professionalisation on both sides of the political communication relationships in all four countries. However, the development is uneven and differs among the countries with regards to both time and strength.

Professionalisation in journalism has been very strong in Sweden and Finland since the 1970s. The party-press system was abandoned, and public service values of objectivity and autonomy from both owners and sources became dominant among journalists. Professional education and organisations became guards of those profes-

sional values and ethics (Djerf-Pierre & Weibull, 2001). In Poland and Lithuania, this development became possible only after the fall of communism in 1989-1991, and the level of professionalisation is still weaker than in many Western countries, according to earlier research. Poland has a strong tradition of politicised media, and Polish journalists experienced strong political pressure from both owners and political actors (Nygren & Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015). In Lithuania, the journalistic traditions are weak, and there is hidden pressure from politicians and business interests to buy influence in the media (Balčytienė, 2012).

The different degrees of professionalisation in journalism were reflected in the interviews with journalists. In Sweden, experienced political reporters reacted against strong news management, and in Poland journalists tried to avoid communication officials. Professional integrity and autonomy are evidently an important part of journalists' self-understanding.

Professional norms in journalism are under pressure in today's processes of media production. This pressure is sometimes labelled as a "de-professionalization" of journalism (Witschge & Nygren, 2009); newsrooms are being downsized, and resources for political coverage are diminishing. Journalists have less time while also being expected to produce content for more platforms in their daily work. New platforms such as social media increase the speed and amount of developing news. These trends allow less time for meeting sources, spending time in the parliament building, and searching for stories in background conversations. Many interviews revealed a strong frustration about this, with journalists reluctantly taking the "information subsidies" produced by government communication to meet the quantitative demands of production.

On the other side of the relationship, there is a similarly clear and strong trend towards professionalisation of political communication and increasing government control over information flows (see also Chapter 6). This process came later than the professionalisation of journalism and at present seems to be strong in all four countries. In Sweden and Finland, government communication resources have increased, and centralised control seems to be on its way. Communication is regarded to be at the very heart of the political processes. As explained by a former head of information at the PMO in Sweden,

> All politics becomes media, because all politics is communication ... There is no one working with politics not dealing with media. Do you understand? It is not like a company where the CEO goes to the information director and then a press secretary sends out a bulletin ... [In politics] everybody is in the discussion ... [A press secretary] has to be somebody interested in politics, who knows politics and the culture of the party ... (Swedish press advisor 2)

Press advisors in Sweden often have a background in politics or corporate PR. They are part of an expanding group of professionals working in politics without being elected politicians (Garsten et al., 2015). They work actively to promote good news in

important channels and to downplay news that is not in favour of the government. With their many personal contacts among political journalists and in leading newsrooms, it is possible to plan communication activities in favour of the government. This also makes it possible to handle leaks, both those in favour of the government and those that result from internal struggles within the government and the parties. Much of this is also evident in Finland, where journalists regard ministers' press advisors as key players in the scheme of government communications. Generally speaking, journalists seem happy with the level of access to political sources.

Poland and Lithuania have seen an increase in the resources used in government communication. Former journalists have been hired as press advisors, but the communication seems to be less centralised than in Sweden and Finland, and political journalists regard these press advisors as less important. Instead, journalists have their own direct channels to the ministers. Government communication seems to be less coordinated and more dependent on personal connections. Both sides, journalists and press advisors, emphasised the need for personal contacts and mutual understanding.

Government communication is also about controlling the political side of the interaction. Press advisors talked about how they try to discipline politicians into not talking too freely with journalists, and journalists talked about press advisors acting like shields for politicians. One part of this increased control over information is restricted access to government and parliament buildings. In Sweden, access has been restricted for security reasons, and seasoned journalists miss the old days when it was possible to walk freely in and out of ministries to meet sources and get all the off the record talk. In Poland, too, access to the parliament building has been restricted by the former liberal and the present right-wing government. The arguments put forward have been to not disturb the work of parliament, but journalists describe it as an obstacle in their daily work. Some doors are closed today in Lithuania as well, making direct contact more difficult. The Finnish parliament, however, remains remarkably open for journalists – a feature of the Finnish system that was hailed as useful and unique in international comparison by most interviewees.

Professionalised government communication is ultimately about news management – how to promote good news and how to play down bad news. The toolbox for doing so includes everything from official press conferences and leaks to targeting journalists and informal contacts. However, communication officials and politicians are also worried about decreasing resources and coverage in the mainstream media. In Finland, interviewees from both sides described the growing influence of "reckless" communication behaviour in social media and other online platforms and expressed a concern over the weakened state of serious media. In Lithuania, the political side seemed even more concerned than the journalists. According to the interviews, both sources and journalists have a mutual interest in preserving the political communication elite.

It is important to clarify that professional government communication is not necessarily negative for democracy. In the struggle for attention in today's society, the political system has to use communication strategies based on media logics to produce politics. At the same time, resources in newsrooms are diminishing, resulting in a changed power balance between the media and political power. This influences the role of the media in democracy, for example the ability to provide critical coverage on a daily basis to fulfil the role as a watchdog over political power.

Macro-level relations

Relationships between government and political journalists on the macro level are about structural factors: the role of public service, commercialisation, and new technical platforms outside traditional media. All of these factors influence the relationships in political communication.

Public service TV and radio are the most important part of the media structure that is under some kind of societal and political control. Public service media can be a relatively independent construction, as in Sweden and Finland, or under direct political control through the appointments of public service managers and director, as in Poland. In all four countries, however, the political system ultimately sets the framework and decides how public service should be financed.

In Sweden, this is a sensitive issue. When a public inquiry suggested a new tax to replace the old licence fee, critics warned about the increased political influence in public service.

In Finland, the public broadcaster Yle has been funded by a special tax since 2013, the board is semi-political, and the ties to the political system are not as close as they once were. Still, there have been cases of political pressure towards Yle related to the coverage of a scandal close to the prime minister (see Chapter 2). The prime minister has also been able to use prime-time TV for a live political speech. This shows that even an independent public service construction can leave room for political pressure on media content.

Poland is a typical TV country, and newspapers have a very limited audience (see Chapter 4). There is also a strong tradition of politicised media, and when the Law and Justice government took power after the elections in 2015, hundreds of journalists had to leave public service TV and radio. New, politically appointed editors were installed by the new government, and the state channel broadcasts clearly pro-government content. Other media was politicised too, as commercial media companies became channels for criticising the government.

Outside public service, commercialisation has been strong in all four countries. There are still some local links between political parties and newspapers in Sweden and Finland, but in general, commercial interests have replaced the party press. In Poland, newspaper coverage is defined in political terms as either for or against the

government. Many newspapers have foreign owners, mostly German companies, that have commercial motives and lack political connections. These newspapers have more freedom to criticise political actors. In Lithuania, media ownership is less transparent, and political and business interests can buy influence or pressure journalists and in that way influence media content.

Commercialisation is a double-edged sword in relation to political journalism. On the one hand, commercialisation gives media organisations a more independent role in relation to politics, i.e., more space for critical coverage. On the other hand, political journalism is often not given a high priority in the commercial media. In Sweden, only one of the commercial TV channels (TV4) produces daily news, and these broadcasts have been downsized dramatically: in 2014, all regional coverage was closed down and the channel only produces national news. In the commercial media, other areas, such as sports, lifestyle, and entertainment, are expanding. Furthermore, some interviewees mentioned that the element of entertainmentalisation is visible even in some of the news reporting usually regarded as serious. However, there is no consensus as to whether this trend is caused by the politicians or the media, or both.

The third macro area identified in the interviews is the changing media system. New online communication is expanding in all countries: social media, blogs, and websites. Politicians and government communication put a lot of effort into these new kinds of direct communication with other actors and citizens, bypassing the traditional media (see also Chapter 7). In Poland and Lithuania, online news is the most important source of information for citizens. Interviews in these two countries show that political sources prefer communication on platforms they control, such as social media.

In Sweden and Finland, attitudes among communication officials are more ambivalent. Governments naturally use their own websites as well as social media, predominantly Twitter, to disseminate news and press releases. Press advisors use social media mostly to follow the flow of discussions and news, but emphasise traditional media with a larger reach in their own communication efforts. Government communication is focused on traditional media, and political reporters they know very well are considered to be safe partners in communication. In contrast, populist parties distrust legacy media and rely on social media and their own online platforms.

Although developments in the media are changing patterns of media use and political communication, political journalists and government officials in this study still seem to be focused on traditional media. Direct online communication is still a minor issue for the political system as a whole, and social media is seen mostly as an additional aspect of the communication landscape. Twitter, in particular, is often regarded as communication among the elite (see also Chapter 7).

Conclusions

In our conclusions, we take stock of our findings. First, we assess our findings in the light of the four dimensions of mediatisation and connect this discussion with national political cultures in the four countries examined. Finally, we bring the discussion back to the debate about political logic and media logic, as depicted in the beginning of this chapter.

Four dimensions of mediatisation with other perspectives

In their analysis of the mediatisation of politics, Strömbäck and Esser define four dimensions of mediatisation (2014a). These dimensions are present in the interaction between journalists and political sources in the four countries in the study. In a broader perspective, however, these dimensions give a more complicated picture of the power relationships between politics and the media.

The first dimension concerns the degree to which the media is an important information source for the audience. This is not the subject of research in this volume, but previous research in all four countries shows that citizens are dependent on the media for information about politics. For instance, Finnish voters report traditional media channels such as television and the press as major sources of information regarding parliamentary elections, and traditional media outlets also enjoy strong positions among internet sources that Finns follow (Grönlund, 2016: 67-73; Moring & Mykkänen, 2009: 47-48). Our research shows another kind of increasing dependency: The government and leading politicians are dependent on the media to communicate politics, even in the social media age. The interviews with political press advisors and politicians show a high awareness of this "Politics is communication", as one leading press advisor in Sweden said. In today's abundance of information, news management is necessary to attract public attention. The increase in communication resources in all four countries shows how important it is for the political system to control information flows and the image of politics in the public sphere.

The second dimension concerns the degree to which media institutions are independent from the political system. In some aspects, the results show an increasing distance between the media and the political system. There is less personal affiliation between the two and less political ownership in the media. But the two spheres are still closely connected both by structures and daily social interaction. Political journalists, political advisors, and top politicians belong to the same political communication elite. They have the same kind of social position, and the mutual dependency in daily work deeply intertwines media institutions and government/political communication in a common political communication culture (Pfetsch, 2014; Schudson, 2003). The results show close informal relations between political sources and journalists based on mutual dependency and trust.

There is also a structural closeness mainly through public service in radio and TV. In Poland, state control has been used in recent years to politicise public service TV

and radio in support of the government. Hundreds of journalists have been forced to leave their jobs. There has also been an intense discussion in Finland about how the prime minister tried to influence the coverage of news connected to a relative. In Lithuania, media ownership is not transparent, and financial and political interests influence coverage. In total, the degree of independence of the media in relation to politics differs among the four countries and also among various kinds of media.

The third dimension concerns media logic and to what degree the media is guided by media logic. We did not study media content in our project, but previous research has shown a strong influence of mechanisms of media logic in political coverage (Strömbäck, 2015). According to the interviews in the project, media logic guides the selection and framing of content among journalists as well as press advisors. Mechanisms of media logic are so internalised in political work that media logic seems natural and becomes invisible. However, there is not only *one* media logic; each platform or media type has its own internal logic. Public service has a strong democratic mission and role within the corporate culture of public service companies. In contrast, the commercial media is more guided by market thinking, audience ratings, and costs of production. In the commercial media, the public service orientation of professional journalism is mixed with commercialism. In social media, new logics are developed (Chapter 7). Here, the logics differ more clearly according to spreadability and the need to be simplified and short. In conclusion, there is not one single media logic. Political sources know how to combine different media logics to achieve wide public attention for their political interests.

The fourth dimension concerns the political actors and to what degree they are guided by media logic. This is the basis for the growth of communication resources in all four countries. The political system needs communication specialists to control the daily flow of information and gain access to the public sphere. Media logic is integrated into political processes, and press advisors are close to ministers and the PMO. This is called self-mediatisation (Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a: 21), and the result is an increased influence of political actors in the news media and political processes adapted to different kinds of media logic. The interviews with political advisors and politicians show a strong awareness of the rules put up by media logics. These logics are used in the political game, by promoting positive information and by leaking negative information about political rivals. To what extent political advisors succeed in this work depends on the strength of their informal networks and the development of news management strategies.

This fourth dimension is the key to understanding political communication from the perspective of the political system. This brings the analysis close to the functional perspective raised by Marcinkowski and Steiner (2014) and Van Aelst and Walgrave (2017). Leaving the media-centric perspective, political sources need journalism to access information and the public arena. The rules for this access are written by media logics, i.e., the rules for gaining public attention, but the purpose behind these functional needs is political.

National political cultures

The general trends are the same in the four countries studied in this project: professionalisation on both sides and integration of media logics into political processes. However, the levels and shape vary according to the political communication cultures of each country.

In Sweden and Finland, the mediatisation of politics is strong in all aspects: strong professionalisation and the development of strategic news management in government communication put media in the centre of political processes. At the same time, a political culture of consensus and cooperation supports a close cooperation between actors in spite of journalistic standards of detachment and integrity. There is an increased distance between journalists and political actors. At the same time, the media is more dependent on sources and information subsidies when newsrooms are downsized while the demand for content is the same or increasing.

In Poland and Lithuania, old structures of political influence, through ownership and clientelism, are still visible, and there are strong trends towards a professionalisation of government communication. For example, politicians bypass legacy media by using new online platforms. The traditions of political instrumentalisation are still strong in the media, especially in state-owned radio and TV. Traditions of partisan journalism are also strong in journalistic cultures in Poland and Lithuania, despite close to 30 years of Western "liberal" influence.

The results confirm the existence of the four dimensions of mediatisation and show how political systems and structures are adapted to the media logic in a daily struggle for attention. The consequence of this, however, is not a transfer of power from political institutions to media institutions. On the contrary, professionalised government communication is learning how to play the game with the media according to media logic. By transforming the political system and integrating media logic into political processes, a political instrumentalisation of the media is developing.

This brings the analysis close to other theoretical perspectives on contemporary political communication, namely functional analysis from a political perspective. The key question is perhaps not how the media is changing politics, but how the political system uses the media according to the basic political logic still in place.

Two coexisting logics

The theme of this chapter has been mediatisation and the different kind of logics behind daily political communication processes. A key question is the relationship between media logics and the logics of political processes. The results show that these two logics are not operating at the same level. It is more accurate to describe media logic and political logics as overlapping, not mutually exclusive (Van Aelst et al., 2014). The political communication process is based on media logic, and the political system uses media logic to reach political goals. Media content is produced according to log-

ics of professionalisation and logics of the commercial demands and technological possibilities of different platforms. To exist in the public sphere created by the media, the political system has to adapt to the logics of media. However, the motives for influencing the media coverage remain political: influence the public agenda and the framing of issues discussed in political debate.

The use of media logics does not replace political logics. Instead, the media is used in politics to create support and increase influence over decision processes in the political system. Politics is about power: how to gather support, reach political power, and realise political goals. In these political processes, media logics can be used as a tool (or be an obstacle). Mediatised politics in this perspective is still ruled by the basic political logic of gaining power to reach political goals.

This development is in one sense a paradox: by adapting to media logic, the political system can develop a new kind of political instrumentalisation of the media. Instead of old structures of state propaganda in authoritarian societies with hard methods (ownership, censorship, and legal means), the mediatised political system can control the information flow with soft methods (news management strategies).

The two logics create a common frame for the daily exchange between journalists and political sources. Journalists need information that fits the logics of media production (news value, personalisation, conflict and so on). The political sources need attention and space in the public sphere in daily political processes that in turn follow political logics. The currency in this trade is news. News is hence produced within a system of mutual exchange and interest. Media logics set the rules of the game, and political sources can play the game to reach their goals according to political logics. They are two separate logics, which do not replace one another but exist in healthy professional symbiosis.

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