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Christian Potschka. Towards a Market in Broadcasting: Communications Policy in the UK and Germany.

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REFERENCES

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Pp.331, xv. ISBN: 978-0-230-29861-3. Hardback.

- 1 Christian Potschka's doctoral dissertation, entitled *Towards a Market in Broadcasting: Communications Policy in the UK and Germany* and published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2012, commences a thorough and vigorous investigation of the broadcasting policies adopted by the UK and Germany, the two leading European countries in telecommunication systems. The book stresses the interconnections between the developments in press and broadcasting technologies. It then tries to cover all the stages from the end of spectrum scarcity to the "communication revolution" in the 1980s after the introduction of cable and satellite technology, followed by the later digital revolution and the hybridization of media production and distribution points at the turn of the twenty-first century. The study, divided into four parts, aims to bring to the fore those societal, political, historical and economic variables which have played a decisive role in the configuration of "media policies," meaning those elements that determine the technical infrastructure, support, control and content of the media in question (6), as well as the "media structures," entailing the means of access, production and distribution that have developed (7). Special focus is placed onto the possibility of the state as a regulatory factor in media developments and its intricate role in the emergent international economic market. By emphasizing the need for a balance between commercial profit and social interest, the

book discusses the gradual privatization and commercialization of broadcasting as it has been affecting the right of the viewer for free public broadcasting. Still, from a social perspective, mass media are seen as cultural products and carriers of mores, ideas and regional tastes. As such, the writer consistently traces each state's efforts to take into consideration the national and regional character of the evolving media formations in their decision-making policies.

- 2 Part I of the volume tries to lay the foundation on which the investigation has been based, clarifying some basic political and legislative specificities of the two nations within the historic and economic background of industrialized Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century. One of the main challenges of the book is to mark out the interdependences between public and private sector which have affected the structuring of both broadcasting systems since their foundation. The British model of the "regulatory" function of the state (11), as it developed from collectivism and led to liberalism, is contrasted to the German model of federal organization. The book also studies the German state's authoritative role over the country's media structures, its gradual shift towards ordoliberalism and a later more moderate form of liberalism. By introducing country-specific historic, economic and political information, the readers can already start comprehending the main ideas proposed in the investigation and the complexities involved in the issues. In laying out the methodological and analytical frameworks adopted for the examination, the writer propounds the necessity for a comprehensive comparative study while media political economy is suggested as the most inclusive and exhaustive approach.
- 3 Despite the extremely large scope of the investigation and the diversity of the issues that are put forward in Part I, the study gains in vigor in the well-researched Part II and III, which study the main historic, political and economic variables and trace the major similarities and differences in the media policies of the two countries. These two sections constitute the core of the investigation and attempt the application of the theoretical foundation that has already been laid out in the first part, while providing an inside-look into the political decisions that have formulated broadcasting and media expansion policies in the UK and Germany. Extensive archival information and elite interviews add weight to the research and keep the readers engaged at all times as they follow the developments towards the creation of a market in broadcasting. Part II tries to historically and politically explain the policies of a traditionally liberal nation, such as Britain, whose centralized organization has provided the blueprint for the configuration of its centralized media system. Its long liberal tradition accounts for the state's sincere interest in the freedom of press. Nonetheless, the book makes it clear that no government has ignored the power of the media in formulating ideologies and public opinion. The investigation maps out the history of media and communications technology from wireless telecommunication to ultra high frequency (UHF) bands, direct broadcast satellite (DBS), and broadband cable in tandem with the developments in the marketization processes. This study of the trajectory of media legislation and expansion marks the gradual movement towards the creation of a licence-fee funded corporation in an effort to promote the benefits of the whole nation. While broadcasting turns into a cultural issue in the 1960s, the answer to London-based, centralized BBC broadcasting comes from the creation of the ITV network, which aimed to cater for regional tastes. Under the umbrella of the existing media structures, the opening of more media channels signals the beginning of a new British industry. In 1990, the Broadcasting Act declares the

relaxation of ownership restrictions and leads to the privatization of the telecommunications market, while a digital perspective enables more free-to-air, licence-fee funded services. As a consequence, increased competition shifts again the interest of the government from cultural to commercial and industrial issues. Interestingly enough, the book suggests that latest developments in new media and digitization have brought about a more general modernization of political strategies, whatever the socio-political and economic consequences might be.

- 4 Part III continues with the investigation of media policies in Germany through a more consistent resort to a comparative analysis that aims to pinpoint the similarities and differences with the British media case. Starting from the discovery of electric waves by Heinrich Hertz in 1888, which led to wireless broadcasting by Gulielm Marconi in Britain, at a time when industrialization facilitated mass media expansion, Germany's long tradition in the press and telecommunications is highlighted. Outlining the country's historic and socio-political specificities contributes to a better understanding of older and more recent developments in broadcasting policies. As the researcher rightly suggests, Germany's lack of a liberal tradition and its federal organization account for the more dispersed media structures that the country has displayed. After WWII, the division of the country in "*Länder*" (147, emphasis in the original) by the Allies worked as the model for the organization of the federal state's broadcasting policy that would evolve under the ARD (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Landesmedienanstalten*) umbrella. The paternalism of the government explains for the lack of freedom in the media and press, acting against the pressures of the *Länder* to curb censorship and governmental control. Although the tensions between public and private sector have been milder in Germany, the creation of the second German channel (ZDF) meant to break the monopoly of the ARD and the regional channels of the *Länder* tried to cater for the regional character of the media content. The research points to a gradual turn towards more liberal politics in the 1960s and a similar trend in the German press, through the example of the Spiegel Affair in 1962, while technological innovation in the 1970s paved the way for more economic profit coming from the new industry. Special focus is directed towards the state's efforts for the privatization of state corporations, yet in a much more moderate fashion than the British. Public and private broadcasts are enabled in a dual system in 1984, when public and private services become intertwined. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, censorship and information control in former Eastern Germany give way to media policies of Western Germany. Finally, latest developments in mergers with international media conglomerates in 2000, bound by international legislation, are regarded as opportunities for a more competitive future in German telecommunications.
- 5 What the last part of the analysis manages to do is recapitulate the general similarities and differences between the two national media policies and structures, organized around the issue of public and private frictions on the road towards the commercialization of broadcasting as well as the centralized versus the federal character of the media structures, determined by the corresponding political structures of the two countries. It becomes evident that since media can help amalgamate and reform cultural and political idiosyncrasies, their control has been a complicated matter of mixed economic and political interests and policies. Despite the historic, political and cultural specificities that distinguish the two neighboring European states, their common future in a non-linear, diverse, democratic, yet, extremely competitive international digital media environment is insinuated.

- 6 In hindsight, this volume is a must-read for the political economy student and the media researcher. Yet, this extremely informative investigation could have really benefitted from a focus onto the technological parameters that have affected economic and political decisions of the two countries. The extremely large temporal, spatial, and socio-political scope of the investigation hinders deeper examination of technological variables, while the study focuses mainly on the legislative frameworks which have enabled media practices. Last but not least, through this close investigation of the two countries' media policies much broader issues are addressed that could act as a springboard for further investigations into the uncharted area of new media formations, broadcasting and telecommunications.
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