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From praxis to pragmatism: Junior scholars and policy impact

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Buckingham's observation that academic research either has to become public knowledge or its originators must have a high visibility in the public realm before their research can find inclusion into policymaking processes, this article offers a variety of examples of how academics have managed to bridge the gap between media and communication policy scholarship and policymaking. Contrary to the long-standing belief that policy impact is extremely difficult and rare to achieve, we argue that junior scholars have many opportunities to have their work become part of the policymaking process through new forms of conversation, collaboration, coalition-building, changing perceptions of public knowledge, and a more conceptual understanding of impact.

KEYWORDS

Collaboration; impact; media policy; power; praxis

Introduction

Impact has become a recent buzzword for social scientists. It can refer to the credibility among peers in academia, measurable, for instance, in citations, or to making a difference to the “real world” (Bastow, Dunleavy, & Tinkler, 2014a). In this article we are concerned with media and communication policy scholarship, a field which, due to the importance of the media for the functioning of modern democracies, is burdened with a more complex analytical task than other policy areas (Napoli, 1999). Media and communication policy research exemplifies a disparate and incohesive field of study. It lacks knowledge about the effectiveness of policy initiatives and relies on a comparatively weak theoretical basis (Picard, 2016). Similarly diverse are the ideological positions of scholars working in the area and their self-assessment of media and communication policy scholarship as an occupation. In the following discussion, we are concerned with scholars who, in a broadly conceived sense, regard real-world “impact”—meaning the explicit or implicit codetermination of a law, policy or regulatory measure—as a vital part of their profession.

When policymakers or senior civil servants seek advice, they may consult whom they conceive as a high-profile scholar. In many cases this may lead to

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a situation in which the “usual suspects”—academics who have contributed to public knowledge in their area of expertise—are consulted over and over again (see Bastow, Dunleavy, & Tinkler, 2014b). For junior scholars and graduate students who want to make a difference but cannot break into public discourse, such a situation can be frustrating and exemplify a vicious circle. Addressing this dilemma in his article, “Representing audiences: Audience research, public knowledge, and policy” David Buckingham (2013) implicitly refers to a three-step model that starts with the creation of academic knowledge before, in step two, this knowledge is transferred into public knowledge. Public knowledge, or the visibility of academics and their research in the public realm, in many instances, is a prerequisite so that research can have an impact on policymaking (see Figure 1).

How do academic insights become public knowledge? This happens, for example, when academics serve as experts and commentators in news coverage and contribute to public discussions. The transfer of research findings into public knowledge is at the heart of research funding. The impact section of a Marie Skłodowska-Curie proposal, one of the key EU funding instruments for many early career scholars in Europe, for instance, requires in its impact section that applicants outline how their research is made accessible to the public. In its narrow sense accessibility refers to publishing strategies in open-access journals and the use of repositories for research data. Conceived more broadly, however, it can refer to a variety of outreach activities, including the organization of public events.¹

It is within broad conceptualizations that this article finds its argument. Specifically, we argue that early career scholars need to embrace a broader definition of impact when they participate in the policy process (see also Bastow et al., 2014a, 2014b; Braman, 2003c on this point). In the following we expand on Buckingham’s implicit sequence in the context of media and communication policy research. For early career scholars we add the need for conversation and collaboration in order to achieve visibility and policy impact, broadly conceived. We thus adapt Buckingham’s (2013) model based on recent developments in media policy studies to suggest that not only does his original model hold true, but a new one emerges as well (see

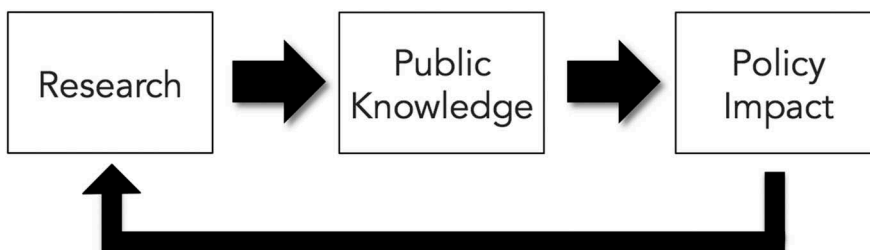


Figure 1. Buckingham’s path to policy impact (derived from Buckingham, 2013).

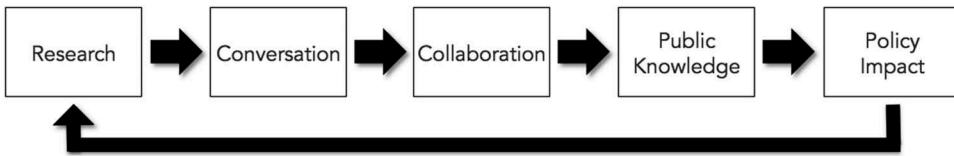


Figure 2. Junior scholar's path to policy impact.

Figure 2). In this regard, the article offers a variety of international best-practice examples from Germany, the UK, Canada, the United States, Israel, and Australia of how academics at different career stages, centers, and programs have managed to bridge the gap between policy scholarship and policymaking.

In terms of methods, we draw from personal experiences—"the consciousness that emerges from personal participation in events" (Foss & Foss, 1994, p. 39)—of the authors and a review of the literature. "[U]se of personal experiences," Foss and Foss (1994) stress, "produces many benefits" such as "providing for a multiplicity of truths and a valuing of diversity not possible with many other kinds of evidence" (p. 41).

We argue that key foci for junior scholars in media and communication policy studies should be on conversation, collaboration, relationship-building, and small interventions as the best tools for policy impact. Though not discounting the ongoing challenges of policy research achieving visibility and impact, we join those who offer a more optimistic view of policy intervention (Braman, 2003a; Just & Puppis, 2011, 2012; Lentz, 2014; Napoli & Gillis, 2006) than earlier scholars writing on these issues (Entman & Wildman, 1992; Freedman, 2006; Mueller, 1995; Noam, 1993). We also address the concept of power and make a case for combining Marx's notion of *praxis* with pragmatism (Habermas, 1985).

Woe in the field

There is no single answer or universal solution to the question of how communication research can find greater inclusion into media policy and law-making processes. In many instances, the arguments, observations, and frustrations voiced decades ago still ring true today. Accordingly, media policy scholarship's lack of impact on the policymaking process, coupled with the tendency for regulators to privilege legal and econometric analyses over qualitative, critical, and normative research, continues to dominate discussions at conferences and workshops (see Braman, 2003a; Just & Puppis, 2012 for more on these arguments).²

Many of these concerns revolve around the question and operationalization of power—a concept underdeveloped in the study of media and

communication policymaking (Ali & Puppis, 2018). When policy impact is defined solely as “policy change”, the power of policymakers to act as gatekeepers may seem insurmountable. Under the paradigm of “impact = change,” policymakers, regulators, and major firms disproportionately hold the power to either maintain the status quo, enact change (often through deregulation), fail to act (what Pickard (2013) calls “policy failure”), or fail to communicate. These dynamics align with Lukes’s (2005) second and third faces of power.³ Lukes’s second face of power, the two-dimensional or “apologetically integrative” view (Good, 1989, p. 56) is best represented by Bachrach and Baratz’s (1962) notion of “non-decision-making,” which from the perspective of powerful actors limits “the scope of actual decision-making to ‘safe’ issues” (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962, p. 952).⁴ Freedman (2014, 2010) calls this “media policy silence.” According to Lukes’s (2005) third face, “communication as social control” (the critical view), the public agenda is manipulated in that a paradigm is presented to society that is portrayed as “natural, inevitable, and unchangeable” (Good, 1989, p. 517). These two views of power represent the basis for most, if not all, “woe in the field” in the previous two decades of impact assessment in communication policy research.

In the early 1990s, Noam (1993) lamented the lack of “real-world” influence on communication policy studies, while Entman and Wildman (1992) argued that market economic and social values schools of thought needed to unite before media policy interventions could become effective. In 1995, Mueller bemoaned that “the closer we get to ideas which have directly shaped public policy, the more communication scholarship recedes from the pictures” (p. 459). He suggests the need for “a political economy of communication and information which could ground a theoretical analysis and critique of public policy” (p. 468).

Ironically, political economy of public policy or at least critical interpretations of policy is exactly the dominant field in media policy studies (Wagman, 2010). Even leaders in the field who follow these schools of thought, however, have at one point or another voiced their frustration. Freedman (2006), for instance, observed that British academics “appear to be increasingly marginalized from contemporary media policy-making” for three reasons. First, the market for advice-giving is becoming increasingly competitive. Second, chances to be heard depend on the methods used. The rigorous application of strict empirical methods has much more chance of finding inclusion than conceptual normative research. Third, policymakers are blinkered in their narrow-minded neoliberal focus on markets and competition, disqualifying alternative paradigms.

While acknowledging these ongoing issues, we depart from these lamentations in this paper and join a small but growing corpus of scholars guardedly optimistic about the role and potential impact of media and communication

policy scholars on policy, law-making, and regulation in the field (Braman, 2003b; Just & Puppis, 2012; Napoli & Gillis, 2006). Napoli and Gillis (2006), for instance, offer hesitant optimism that emergent regulatory interests in issues such as media ownership present new opportunities for critical scholars. More recently, Just and Puppis (2012) gave perhaps the most optimistic reading of policy researchers and policy impact to date:

There is good reason to share a more confident view. Although this does not mean that scholars should overestimate their influence, moving from self-consciousness to self-confidence seems appropriate, as continuing complaining seems counter-productive, hindering more than contributing to any advance. Generally, it seems that there is good reason for communication scholars to be able to join the chorus of disciplines that inform communication policy-making. (Just & Puppis, 2012, p. 20)⁵

Joining this chorus, we suggest that the contemporary situation is particularly amenable to junior and earlier career scholars who have in fact many opportunities to engage in the policymaking process. One requirement for this to happen is to change focus. By only focusing on policy output—the product—scholars miss important opportunities to engage with the processes of policymaking (Braman, 2003b). Policy scholars, Braman (2003c) observes, have developed the bad habit of inserting themselves into the policymaking process “precisely at the moments when they are least likely to be effective” (Braman, 2003c, p. 575). One solution to this problem is the building of relationships, which according to Braman (2003c), is a neglected aspect of achieving policy impact. The same applies to activities such as networking, coalition-building, and engaging in collaborations. German media politician/senior civil servant Carsten Brosda (2016) even goes so far as to note that scholars must move from their role as observers to participants. Only via participation, by playing “active roles in domestic processes of media governance and regulation” (Herzog, Novy, Hilker, & Torun, 2017, p. 8), can they develop an understanding of processes of policymaking which, in turn, is the basis for advancing the state of scientific knowledge. Participation, we argue, takes many shapes and forms.

Examples of participation do exist with sometimes notable success as academics, with different backgrounds in various national contexts, employ diverse strategies to put a public face on policy studies. Highlighting the field’s successes rather than failures and frustrations is our contribution to inspire early career researchers that their research can find a wider audience and ultimately have real-world impact. We begin with a discussion of *praxis* and impact, highlighting the need to broaden our understandings of both. Next we turn to examples of successful policy interventions by a range of scholars, centers, and programs in a variety of different national contexts. We conclude with thoughts for junior scholars wanting to be part of this conversation.

Praxis and impact

For critical scholars, scholarly involvement in media policy activism is grounded in Marx's (1844) notion of *praxis*—defined briefly as the “union of research and action,” or the practical application of theory (Herzog & Ali, 2015; p. 41; Feenberg, 2014; Mosco, 2009;). Marx (1888), of course, detested the proclivity of academics, theologians, and theorists to believe that ideas alone would achieve human emancipation. Instead, material action is needed to achieve real-world change. For media policy scholars vested in political economy and critical media policy studies, *praxis* “urges the researcher to be an active participant within socio-economic” and political processes and, crucially, to contribute to acts of social transformation (Herzog & Ali, 2015, p. 41). Communication scholars, notably those working in the tradition of critical political economy, have taken this call up with gusto (e.g., Robert Babe, Christian Fuchs, Peter Golding, Robert McChesney, Robin Mansell, Graham Murdock, Victor Pickard, Amit Schejter, Dallas Smythe, and Dwayne Winseck, to name but a few). Even those not following a decidedly Marxist framework through political economy see the need for their research to have real-world impact (e.g., Monroe Price, C. Edwin Baker, and Joseph Turow).

Human emancipation as proclaimed by Marxian *praxis*, however, is a lofty goal for scholars, let alone junior scholars. Recent research into the concept of scholarly impact accordingly stresses the need for more realistic goals and assessments (Bastow et al., 2014a, 2014b). Understanding the impact of the social sciences on the social world more generally, and the policymaking process, more specifically, has been of interest to scholars for decades (Meagher, Lyall, & Nutley, 2008; Weiss, 1995). Recently, the discussion has taken a heated turn in the UK, where a top-down evaluation system has been in place that seeks to quantify scholarly impact and favors STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) at the expense of the arts, humanities, and social sciences (Potschka, 2012; p. 846, see also Ladyman, 2009; Pettigrew, 2011). Many agree that such efforts are discouraging and imprecise at best, and inappropriate and damaging at worst.

Indeed, a rich vein of literature illustrates the inherent complexity and “messiness” in the relationship between research and policy (Bastow et al., 2014b, p. 3). To define “policy impact” solely in terms of a causal, linear progression from research to policy change implies a Platonic idealism that is impossible to achieve (Bastow et al., 2014b). Meagher et al. (2008) call this linear form of policy impact “instrumental use or impact” which “refers to the direct impact of research on policy and practice decisions where a specific piece of research is used in making a specific decision or in defining the solution to a specific problem” (p. 165). This is in contrast to “conceptual use or impact,” which is “a more wide-ranging definition of research use, comprising the complex and often indirect ways in which

research can have an impact on the knowledge, understanding and attitudes of policy-makers and practitioners” (p. 165). It is this second iteration—a broader understanding of impact that includes the processual dimension—where most critical assessments of policy impact and the social sciences seem to land.

Interestingly, just like with the concept of power (Ali & Puppis, 2018), the question of policy impact specifically in the fields of media and communication policy has been relatively underexplored (Braman, 2003a and Just & Puppis, 2012 are exceptions). Most of our literature review, for instance, is drawn from management theory. Here, Bastow et al. (2014b) argue that we need to reject “mini-leaderism.” This is the naive belief that all scholars can achieve the transformational change that organizations and political leaders themselves struggle to achieve. They contend that this rejection

... does not in any way mean abandoning a quest for a closer woven and more plausible account of policy-making and of evidence-based and cognitive processes within that. Instead it means rejecting a completely disabling and counterproductive set of expectations and criteria, that cannot even be stood up unambiguously for the most powerful leaders exercising the most direct and final influence upon policy-making. Rejecting mini-leaderism as a relevant template means turning our backs only on the most “impossibilist,” ineffective and irrelevant of criteria for assessing research influence—and doing so for an approach that is far better, more relevant and systematically applicable. (p. 10)

In place of these unachievable expectations, Bastow et al. (2014b) argue that policy impact should be relative, replicable, and realistic. Taking this perspective suggests a more tempered understanding of impact, a lesson that we argue early career scholars should take to heart.

To be sure, this is by no means meant to denigrate or dilute the emancipatory aims of *praxis* or the normative idealism of policy impact. We should always strive toward instrumental impact. But, we should not feel defeated at conceptual impact. To do otherwise is to define impact solely by the final product and miss the important contributions that occur during the process. As Braman (2003c) notes:

Almost all communications policy research aims at legislation once proposed or put in place—precisely the points at which it is least likely to have impact. While it may be easiest to see the target at this stage, those who want to have effect need to enter the process both much earlier (when the range of possible policy alternatives is being determined) and much later (when the effects of the implementation of policies are being evaluated). (pp. 583–584)

Rather than aligning impact solely with policy change, Bastow et al. (2014b) use a more modest definition. They refer to impact as: “a recorded or otherwise audible occasion of influence from university research upon another actor or organization” (p. 11). Using this definition opens us up to a variety of success

stories among media and communication policy scholars and allows us to mitigate the woe in the field noted earlier. Agreeing with Braman (2003a, 2003b, 2003d) about media policy impact and with Bastow et al. (2014a, 2014b) about the need for realistic assessment, we argue that *praxis* and impact need to be assessed through this more modest lens. In essence, they need to be thought of in conversation with pragmatism, something Habermas seems to agree with as well (Habermas, 1985; Zanetti, 1997).⁶

To illustrate this, we looked for examples of both instrumental and conceptual impact from media and communication policy scholars, and found notable examples of success from senior scholars, academic centers, and mid- and early-career scholars alike. We highlight a selection of these successes to demonstrate the range of what we consider to be successful policy impact scenarios and to argue that early-career scholars can impact the policy process through collaboration and dialogue.

Senior scholars and instrumental impact

As noted above, senior scholars seem to have the most impact on the policy-making process. This should not be surprising, as they often have the most visibility both in the social world and in academia (Bastow et al., 2014b, p. 14). Still, it is important to highlight some of these successful interventions.

In Germany, where media and communication policy is a field shaped first and foremost by legal rules, the Hans Bredow Institute (HBI) for Media Research at the University of Hamburg has an unprecedented domestic track record in bridging media analysis and codetermining media regulation (Brosda, 2016). Former HBI president Wolfgang Hoffmann-Riem decisively determined the development of the public service broadcasting system in his role, over several decades, as a judge of the Federal Constitutional Court. One of his successors as HBI director, legal scholar Wolfgang Schulz,⁷ has taken over this role. Schulz's legal expertise served as the basis for the German variant of the public value test and he exerted a major influence on several amendments to the Interstate Broadcasting Treaty, the key legal document in which the federal German *Länder* agree on a common proceeding with regard to media policy issues. In 2011 Schulz cofounded the Berlin-based Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society, dubbed after its key financier Google Institute.

In the UK, media policymaking has, at times, been open to media and communication scholars with more diverse social science and humanities backgrounds. For example, the Media Policy Project (led by Damian Tambini) plays a crucial role in connecting academic and policymaking communities (see Mansell, 2016, p. 3) while the University of Westminster has, since the mid-1980s, institutionalized close links with the civil society interest group Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV). Under the umbrella

of the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), many academics, including Vincent Porter, Jean Seaton, Steven Barnett, and Jeanette Steemers, play or have played leading roles in the VLV, set the group's agenda and helped to develop campaign strategies that have influenced the policymaking process.

The VLV, for example, was instrumental in changing the government's mind so that, in 1995/1996, when the BBC was forced to sell its transmitter network, £200m went to the BBC instead of to the Treasury. Beyond this, the VLV has been a founding member of Public Voice, a coalition of voluntary organizations formed in 2000 to lobby on the upcoming Communications Act 2003. Public Voice ensured that the Act included provisions that a "public interest test" must precede major media mergers (see Communications Act, 2003, para 375). Third, after the VLV for several years made a case for the free-to-air satellite platform FreeSat, in 2008 the BBC and ITV followed these demands. FreeSat was opened in 2008, offering an alternative to Freeview (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005; ev. 32; VLV, 2008; p. 3; see Herzog & Zetti, 2017). In the recent BBC Charter Review process (2015–2016) the VLV proposed to set up an independent body, modeled after the German regulator Commission for Ascertaining the Financial Needs of the Public Broadcasting Corporations (KEF) to decide on the BBC licence fee (VLV, 2015). Although the license fee body was not implemented, a medium-term shift from the UK license fee to a German-style household levy is still a policy option that may reopen a policy window for the establishment of a license fee body in the near future (Ramsey & Herzog, 2018).

Israel offers another country case study where a critical policy scholar has been directly involved in media and communication policy. Amit Schejter, co-director of the Institute for Information Policy at Penn State University in the United States and head of the department of communication studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, was tapped to lead Israel's Communications Ministry Committee in 2014. The Committee addressed the future regulation of audiovisual services in Israel. In its report delivered to Prime Minister and Intermittent Minister of Communications Benjamin Netanyahu, the Schejter Committee recommended the establishment of a new independent regulatory body for communications to replace the existing ministry (see Schejter & Tirosh, 2016).⁸ In addition to this report, Schejter communicated back to the academic community through a peer-reviewed article that chronicled the process (Schejter & Tirosh, 2016). Finding inspiration in Katz's (1971) chapter "Television comes to the people of the book," Schejter and Tirosh (2016) frame their article as one "in which a social scientist reflects upon his involvement in media policy development" (p. 40). Auto-ethnography by scholars involved in the policymaking process is a particularly underdeveloped area of media and communication policy

studies (see Herzog & Ali, 2015), and more attention to this area would no doubt help junior scholars understand how more senior scholars are involved in crafting media policies around the world.

In the United States, pockets of communication policy scholars continue to submit evidence to the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, and Congress. Among the most prolific scholars in this area has been Joseph Turow of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania who, in January 2016, gave a presentation to the FTC about online privacy. Phil Napoli, now at Duke University, is often called to help the FCC and FTC on issues related to broadcast regulation. In 2012, for instance, he completed a *Review of the Literature Regarding Critical Information Needs of the American Public* (Communications Policy Research Network (CPRN), 2012). Meanwhile, Matthew Hindman, at George Washington University in Washington, DC, delivered one of the only 11 commissioned studies of media ownership for the FCC's 2010 review of media ownership regulations. This report—*Less of the Same: The Lack of Local News on the Internet* (Hindman, 2011)—along with Hindman's (2008) book *The Myth of Digital Democracy* has been cited repeatedly by the Commission, and by outside policy stakeholders in their own interventions to the FCC.

The copyright debate in the U.S. Congress serves as another key example. Between 1998 and 2010, media conglomerates and corporate interests that own most copyrights spent \$1.3 billion on public relation campaigns and lobbying Congress in order to implement legislation they regard as advantageous. On the other hand, voices arguing in favor of fair use and the protection of the public domain spent \$1 million in the same period (McChesney, 2013, pp. 92–95). Chances to be heard and, eventually, to make an impact are far from equal. But even in this bleak environment filled with lobbyists and regulatory capture by billion dollar companies, a certain degree of success was achieved when Peter Decherney, Michael Delli Carpini, and Katherine Sender, all of the University of Pennsylvania, succeeded in securing a copyright exemption to the recent Digital Millennium Copyright Act (the DMCA) for academics wishing to screen films in class (Decherney, 2013; Herman, 2013).

In Canada, policy research is so prevalent that some have argued that the entire paradigm of Canadian communication studies is defined by a critical approach that often incorporates policy (Babe, 2000; Wagman, 2010).⁹ Unlike many of their Western counterparts, Canadian scholars have had consistent success in bringing regulatory attention to their research. The 1986 *Task Force on Broadcasting Policy* was headed by a professor from the Université Laval (Florian Sauvageau), while McGill University professor Marc Raboy and University of Calgary professor David Taras were expert advisors to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage of the Canadian

House of Common's investigation into Canadian broadcasting in 2001. Its 2003 House of Commons Committee Our Cultural Sovereignty is the most comprehensive evaluation of Canadian broadcasting to date (Ali, 2017). Michael Geist, Canada Research Chair in Internet and E-Commerce Law at the University of Ottawa, is almost a household name among many Canadians, with regular columns in several major newspapers. He has repeatedly testified to the Canadian government on issues related to intellectual property, copyright, and privacy. Most recently, Geist testified to the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade to present his views on the renegotiation of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (Canada, 2017).

Mid- and early-career scholars

Canadian senior academics have had noted success in both instrumental and conceptual definitions of impact. Often times, this is done through important partnerships with their junior colleagues, highlighting the importance of collaboration and dialogue. For instance, some junior Canadian scholars have the opportunity to be part of Dwayne Winseck's Canadian Media Concentration Research Project, which aims to deliver high-impact research to the CRTC and the broader Canadian public. Recent publications have included an analysis of common carriage submitted to the CRTC review of differential pricing practices (Klass, Winseck, Nanni, & McKelvey, 2016) and an analysis of a recently proposed telecommunications merger between Bell Canada Enterprises and Manitoba Telephone Systems (Klass & Winseck, 2016) that was delivered to the Canadian Competition Bureau in May 2016. One early-career scholar, Ben Klass, in particular has amassed numerous interventions to the CRTC including those noted earlier.

Like Winseck in Ottawa, Catherine Middleton's team at Ryerson University in Toronto—the Canadian Spectrum Policy Research group—has been instrumental in bringing academic research to the attention of the CRTC in the area of spectrum policy, which included seven submissions or presentations to the CRTC and Industry Canada between 2010 and 2015 (Canadian Spectrum Policy Research (CSPR), 2016). Gregory Taylor, an assistant professor at the University of Calgary, has been a strong voice in this regard. His book *Shut Off: The Canadian Digital Television Transition* (Taylor, 2013) was short-listed for the Donner Prize, which is an annual award for the best public policy book by a Canadian. Nominated books are meant to “make an original and meaningful contribution to policy discourse” (Donner Prize, 2014).

Early career scholars would also be wise to look at the example set by Stefania Milan at the University of Amsterdam, who is a GNSO Councilor (Generic Names Supporting Organization) of the Internet Corporation for

Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), and is heavily involved with the Working Group 1 “Internet free and secure” of the Freedom Online Coalition. According to Milan, participating in policymaking and governance organizations such as ICANN and the Internet Engineering Task Force allows her to be “strategically well positioned to contribute to creating critical, transformative policies” (Milan, 2016).

For those interested in making an instrumental impact at the regulatory level, a specific format, targeted research design, and vernacular is required (see, e.g., Bogenschneider & Corbett, 2010). All too often, as the section “woe in the field” attests, this level of impact has been unachievable for critical, humanities-influenced, and even qualitative scholars, whose work is deemed overly interpretive by regulators and policymakers.¹⁰ This is a perception the Internet Policy Observatory housed at the University of Pennsylvania seeks to change. Noting that regulators and lawmakers still control the formal mechanisms of policy power, IPS has convened a series of workshops in developing nations (Turkey, India, Argentina, Uganda) for graduate students, early career scholars, lawyers, journalists, activists, and researchers on the subject of research methods for Internet policy and advocacy. Accordingly:

The workshop seeks to provide a venue for stakeholders in the region to build collaborative possibilities across sectors, expand research capacity within practitioner and digital rights advocacy communities, and provide the skills and know-how to more strategically use research and data to advance advocacy efforts. Sessions will cover both qualitative and quantitative methods and will provide the space for hands-on activities and the development of individual and group research interests. (Observatory, 2018)

Inviting early-career scholars and researchers to facilitate these workshops, the IPO brings each of these mechanisms—collaboration, participation, research design—together for discussions of strategies, tactics, and best practices for both instrumental and conceptual impact. What links these examples together is the emphasis on participation and collaboration as markers of policy impact. While Milan is not a junior scholar, her participation mirrors her research interests and thus serves as an example of how to translate research into action (Milan, 2017). In this case, action is not defined by immediate policy transformation, but rather by sitting on a task force so that she may contribute her deep understanding of the issues. Similarly, contributing to CRTC debates is a way that scholars such as Taylor and Klass, and the research centers to which they are affiliated, achieve policy impact. Implicitly, these aforementioned junior and mid-career scholars and researchers have found work-arounds for the assumed hegemony of policymakers and power of status quo actors, all the while privileging a broader understanding of impact and praxis.

Centers and programs

One celebrated center in our field was Lazarsfeld's Institute of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, but modern-day iterations dedicated to enacting change in health communication, children and media, political rhetoric, public opinion, and journalism, among a number of different fields, have answered the siren call. Centers dedicated to media and communication policy writ large—such as the Center for Global Communication Studies (now the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication; Philadelphia, PA), the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University (Cambridge, MA), the Information Society Project at the Yale Law School (New Haven, CT), the Centre for Internet and Society (Bangalore) and the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (Berlin) also work to bring policy researchers into conversation with the larger world of policymaking.

Outside of the formal policy setting, there are also a number of academics active in organizing or running advocacy campaigns, such as Free Press in the United States (founded in part by Robert McChesney, University of Illinois), the Media Mobilizing Project in Philadelphia (cofounded by Rutgers Professor Todd Wolfson), and the Media Reform Coalition (founded by academics at Goldsmiths, University of London). Free Press has been particularly active and indeed successful in campaigning for stricter media ownership regulations and network neutrality, while the Media Reform Coalition, which was founded in the wake of the phone hacking scandal in the UK, has campaigned energetically for measures to increase media plurality and to address the anti-democratic impact of ownership concentration (Brevini & Schlosberg, 2016). In late 2015, it organized a Media Democracy Festival in association with a range of independent media and community groups that took its inspiration from the Canadian activist academics—many of whom are based at Simon Fraser University—who hold their own annual Media Democracy Day.

A number of successful networking and collaboration events have helped bridge the relationship gaps between activists, policy scholars, and policymakers. Intensive workshops that bring policymakers together with academics, students, and activists, such as the Consortium on Media Policy Studies (COMPASS) program and the Annenberg-Oxford Media Policy Institute, are invaluable and, more important, *accessible* spaces for junior academics to network and gain face time with policymakers and activists. The COMPASS program places graduate students as interns in “congressional offices, the State Department, the Federal Communications Commission and a variety of research and advocacy organizations such as Common Cause, Free Press, and the New America Foundation.” Its purpose is “to build bridges between the academic study of legacy and emerging

media and the needs of policy-makers” with the ultimate aim of “making the academic study of the mass media and communication systems more relevant to and informing of national and international policy planning and regulatory proposals” (Consortium on Media Policy Studies (COMPASS), 2016; see Lentz, 2014; Popiel, Pickard, & Lloyd, 2017). Similarly, the Annenberg-Oxford Media Policy Summer Institute “brings together young scholars and regulators from around the world to discuss important recent trends in technology and its influence on information policy” (Annenberg-Oxford Media Policy Summer Institute (AnOx), 2016).

Challenges and opportunities

There are of course numerous challenges facing early-career (and non-early career) scholars who wish to participate in the policy process in a meaningful capacity. In addition to the structural concern for the power of regulators and lawmakers to set the agenda and to over-privilege status quo actors we highlight two challenges here: the concern about research dilution and the tenure-track process.

For policy scholars embracing a critical or Marxist epistemology, *praxis* is essential to their scholarship (or should be) (Freedman, 2014). The concern here comes not in the act of participating, but when such participation dilutes their critical approach. Loughborough University’s launch of the Institute of Media and Creative Industries as part of its new London branch is a recent sign of an intensification of academic/industry collaboration. Although at first sight the shift in focus from media towards creative industries is likely to involve a potentially difficult relationship between critical frameworks and “a more pragmatic selection of subjects and approaches in order to meet the perceived needs of policy-makers” (Puppis, Simpson, & Van den Bulck, 2016, p. 11), in the long run it may turn out to be a fruitful strategy. Learning to speak the language of industry, as occurs at Loughborough and at other centers around the world such as the University of Queensland Creative Industries Faculty, may be more of an asset than a hindrance. As Cunningham, Flew, and Swift argue (Cunningham, Flew, & Swift, 2015, p. 25), “the key challenge for media reformers [is] to speak the language of market economics, in order to better present arguments grounded in ‘social value’ norms and assumptions.” Here, *praxis*, is understood as “the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing or practicing ideas” (in Cunningham, 2014, p. 175). This aligns with our call for a more Habermasian form of *praxis*, which is mixed with pragmatism. We join the scholars who take the view that benefits of creative industries research outnumber possible compromises. Relationships built by creative industry departments such as those in the UK and Australia may indeed help policy scholars learn the

vernacular of industry which, in turn, enables them to make an impact on policymaking and regulation.¹¹

A second concern is the tenure-track process, which does not recognize policy interventions in its evaluations (Braman, 2003c). Indeed, for tenure-track academics, the pressure to publish and concerns over how much a potential intervention will count toward tenure represent structural hurdles to sustained (and especially critical) policy intervention. This, however represents the narrow interpretation of policy impact noted earlier. Junior scholars need to take a more expansive approach to policy impact and intervention. This often starts with relationship-building with both senior scholars, policy influencers, and policymakers. Braman (2003c) agrees, noting that:

... participation in oral conversation is important. Doing so also contributes to the building of the personal relationships with policymakers that goes far in developing the kind of trust and credibility required for one's work to be taken into account in the course of policy-making. (p. 586)

In addition to the benefits of coalition-building noted above, a pragmatic benefit is that of work flow management. The political economy of higher education does not permit a junior scholar the flexibility to spend much time preparing reports, testimonies, or interventions to policy decisions. While some exceptions do exist, until such time as policy activism and intervention is recognized alongside peer reviewed articles and books, collaboration with colleagues in and outside of the academe is the best way for a junior scholar to see her work get in front of policy makers and actors such as media industry representatives.

Other options include public-facing writing for outlets such as *The Conversation*, the LSE *Media Policy Project blog* or German media policy blog *Carta.info*, all outlets that seek to bring academics into conversation with the “outside world.”¹² Blog posts and podcasts represent other low-time intensive outlets for policy conversation. Braman (2003a) also suggests simple acts such as sending working papers to policymakers, and contacting reporters interested in media policy issues (as few as they are). Writing direct interventions to public comment calls are of course another way that early-career scholars can put their ideas in front of policymakers, but this is often significantly more resource-intensive than those noted above.¹³

What is key here is that all of these activities expand our notion of impact beyond the “impossibilist” belief of linear causality. As Bastow, Dunleavy, and Tinkler conclude:

It is highly unlikely that any one piece of research, or even a whole connected stream of research, will be strong and influential enough to reshape an entire policy and decision-making system from the outside. But in the social sciences as a discipline group, cumulative effects often operate—this piece of research will lead

to another, and the massing of evidence across many studies and research teams (and perhaps across many contexts or countries also) will sometimes have the effect of generating an opportunity to “open a door” or contrive a “serendipitous” meeting, and so on. (Bastow et al., 2014b, p. 27)

Returning to our introduction, and thinking through the earlier examples focusing on collaboration and dialogue, we amend Buckingham’s (2013) tripartite model of impact to include stages of conversation and collaboration (see Figure 2). This acknowledges the messy process that is policymaking, a broader approach to impact, the importance of relationship-building, and the political economic realities of early-career scholars. It also acknowledges the importance of generating ideas and alternatives—the hallmarks of academic life.

Conclusion: Strength in numbers

Communication policy research holds tremendous benefit for policymakers and the policymaking process (Braman, 2003a; Just & Puppis, 2012). But when scholars feel disenchanting by the process or uninvited to the conversation, or believe that their work will not have impact, they may be inclined to abandon this research agenda in search of greener pastures. The number of failed attempts to achieve policy impact—narrowly conceived—is certainly larger than scholar’s successes in this regard. Much of this is due to the power of policymakers and regulators to privilege certain voices and interventions while dismissing alternatives (Freedman, 2014). As a corrective we have stressed the need to focus more on the actual process than the outcome and called for a broader conceptualization of impact. For those invested in critical approaches, taking up our suggestions, which to a fair extent are driven by pragmatic concerns, may require a (slightly) modified understanding of *praxis*. It is our view that pragmatism and praxis can successfully be combined and that this may trigger fruitful outcomes in relation to impact.

We have introduced a variety of case studies that may inspire “best practice.” The examples we have referred to are all drawn from liberal Western democracies that feature independent regulatory agencies. Governments, policymakers and regulators regularly commission and rely on external expertise in these countries. We are aware that in other countries that are more “closed” in this regard and in which the characteristics of political systems, policymaking, and regulatory processes are entirely different, Buckingham’s (2013) model and our addition to it may not be applicable. Further elaboration—possibly tied to single countries with unique idiosyncracies—is required in this regard. Last, the concept of power in media and communication policymaking requires further analysis (Ali & Puppis, 2018; Freedman, 2014). A lack of understanding of the dynamics and enactment of power may be contributing to the aforementioned feeling of failure among academics to achieve policy impact.

Ultimately, what our examples point to is the need for further collaboration among junior scholars, between junior scholars and senior colleagues, and between academics and policymakers writ large (Braman, 2003a). This is not a unique suggestion, but one that deserves repeating in the same breath as the lamentations of media policy scholars' lack of impact.

Notes

1. Among the most advanced countries in Europe with regard to knowledge utilization are the Netherlands. Applicants for early career Veni and mid-term career Vidi grants are required to outline in detail their knowledge utilization plans. Together with "quality of the researcher," and "quality, innovative character and scientific impact of the research proposal," "knowledge utilization" is one of the three criteria in the evaluation of proposals (see The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research [NWO], 2017).
2. This is a recurring theme in the ICA, IAMCR, and ECREA sections dealing with communication law and policy issues. During its conference in Fukuoka, for instance, the ICA Communication Law & Policy section held an extended session titled "Communicating with Power in Communication Law and Policy Scholarship." To give two more examples of recent conferences addressing the theme of this article: In September 2015 the 43rd Research Conference on Communications, Information and Internet Policy (Telecommunications Policy Research Conference) hosted by George Mason University School of Law included a plenary panel titled "Industry as an Audience for Academic Policy Research." Furthermore, during the 41st European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) meeting in May 2015 in Berne, the Ad Hoc Working Group 3 "Research and Regulators: Towards an Evidence-Based Approach" addressed the growing dependency of regulatory authorities on a robust knowledge base to fulfill their missions in the increasingly complex media environment.
3. Key to Lukes's (2005) first model, or one-dimensional view, is the existence of "overt decision-making behavior as the principle manifestation of power" (Good, 1989, p. 54). This involves the ideal of a free "marketplace of ideas."
4. See also the highly interesting symposium "Theories of power, poverty, and law: In commemoration of the contributions of Peter Bachrach" in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 43(1), 83–94.
5. It needs to be noted, however, that Just and Puppis (2012) caveat this optimism by noting that "convenient ideas will attract more interest than threatening ones" thus limiting a critical policy scholar's chances for impact (p. 20).
6. Habermas (1985) argued that Marxian *praxis* needed to be tempered with American pragmatism to achieve optimal impact (see Zanetti, 1997).
7. Together with social scientist Uwe Hasebrink, Schulz acts as HBI director.
8. It should be noted that Schejter does much of his research and policy interventions with his former graduate student and early-career scholar Noam Tirosh, thus highlighting the importance of collaboration.
9. This has lead Wagman (2010) to worry that policy analysis is becoming a default field for younger Canadian media scholars, which may in turn blind researchers to other important topics.

10. The chances of empirical qualitative work to have instrumental impact can be increased by striving for research transparency that allows for a better understanding of the validity of the results and limitations of the research (Herzog, Handke, & Hitters, 2019, forthcoming).
11. This may become even more important in the future as creative-industries funding in Australia is increasingly being linked with measurable impact (Cunningham, 2018).
12. The edited volume *Transparency and Funding of Public Service Media* emerged from an article series which was first published on carta.info. The book brings together media policy practitioners with practice-oriented academics (Herzog et al., 2017, p. 8).
13. One recent example is Phil Ramsey's (2016) submission to the consultation of the inquiry "A Future for Public Service Television."

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