

THE MEDITERRANEAN/POLARIZED PLURALIST MEDIA MODEL COUNTRIES

INTRODUCTION

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The Mediterranean Media Model

The media systems of Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Portugal, Turkey, Malta and Cyprus represent what Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini propose as the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralistic model. This is because the media systems in southern Europe share a number of characteristics which distinguish them from the rest of the central, western and northern Europe. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004: 89), the mass media in the southern European countries were intimately involved in the political conflicts that mark the history of this region, and there is a strong tradition of regarding them as means of ideological expression and political mobilization. The location of France with the Mediterranean model is recognized as problematic, according to several key dimensions (p. 90). At the same time, the development of commercial media markets was relatively weak, leaving the media often dependent on the state, political parties, the Church, or wealthy private patrons, and inhibiting professionalization and the development of the media as autonomous institutions.

Cultural and Political Heritage

Political, social and economic conditions, population and cultural traits, physical and geographical characteristics usually influence the development of the media in specific countries, and give their particular characteristics (Gallimore 1983: 53–62; Hiebert, Ungurait and Bohn 1982: 33–55). An additional factor, which may need to be considered for a better understanding of media structures, is that of media consumption and the size of a market. Across Europe there are some significant differences between countries when it comes to the penetration and consumption of the traditional media, such as the press and television. Although some other factors may play a part, it seems that economic conditions, religion, political freedom and culture are the conditions that mainly influence the development and the structure of most media systems.

Industrialism and the market were developed rather late in most southern European countries, while cultural life was dominated by religion and its institutions. As Hallin and Mancini (2004: 128) note “the late, uneven and conflictual development of liberal institutions in Southern Europe is fundamental to understanding the development of the media in this region”.

Moreover, the lack of market development in relation to the counter-Enlightenment tradition discouraged the development of literacy, which affected the development of mass circulation press. On the other hand, most countries have witnessed a political instability and repression in their history.

Another characteristic which these seven countries obviously have in common is a late transition to democracy. Liberal institutions were only consolidated in Italy after World War II, in Greece, Spain and Portugal from about 1975–1985, while Turkey has witnessed three military coups (1960, 1971, 1980). This is of profound importance to understanding the media systems in the region. The transition to democracy is of course a complex process. It involves the transformation of many political institutions – including the mass media – and of the relationships among political, social and economic institutions. These transformations are often slow and uneven and for that reason knowledge of political history is crucial to understanding current institutions. It is not a coincidence that the development of the media in the region has been deeply affected by the political patterns of Polarized Pluralism, and they have historically served and participated in this process of bargaining. Even though the media operate in a market framework, they offer information, analysis and comments produced by a few elite groups, which address other political, cultural and economic elites in order to send messages and start up negotiations. This pattern has been most characteristic of Italy and Greece, but it seems to apply to the other Mediterranean countries too. Last but not least, since the state due to the atrophied civil society has played a central role in most aspects of social and economic aspects of society, it has also affected the development of the printed and electronic media, either through heavy subsidies (in the case of the press) or through tight control and heavy interference (in the case of public/state electronic media).

The Main Characteristics

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004) and Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2000), the media in southern Europe share some major characteristics: low levels of newspaper circulation, a tradition of advocacy reporting, instrumentalization of privately owned media, politicization of public broadcasting and broadcast regulation and limited development of journalism as an autonomous profession.

Low Levels of Newspaper Circulation

The most obvious distinction between the media of the eight Mediterranean countries and those of the rest of Western Europe is their low level of newspaper circulation (and a corresponding importance of electronic media). Mass circulation newspapers

did not develop in any of the countries of southern Europe. In effect, as Hallin and Mancini (2004: 91) note “a true mass circulation press never fully emerged in any of the Mediterranean countries”. On the other hand, the church has played a significant role in development of the media, while tabloid or sensationalist popular newspapers have never really developed in the region. The only true mass media of southern Europe are electronic media, and their importance for the formation of mass public opinion is, therefore, particularly great. A recent development is the advent of several free newspapers in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece posing a new problem for the conventional newspapers.

Political Parallelism

As Hallin and Mancini point out,

the media in the Southern European countries are relatively strongly politicized, and political parallelism is relatively high. The style of journalism tends to give substantial emphasis to commentary. Newspapers tend to represent distinct political tendencies, and this is reflected in the differing political attitudes of their readerships; at times they play an activist role, mobilizing those readers to support political causes. Public broadcasting tends to be party-politicized. Both journalists and media owners often have political ties or alliances (2004: 98).

In effect, most of the countries covered have traditions of advocacy journalism. In contrast with the Anglo-American model of professional neutrality, journalism in Southern Europe tends to emphasize commentary from a distinct political perspective. There is some variation in this characteristic. It is stronger in Greece and in Italy, for example, where strong and highly polarized political parties have existed for all or much of the post-World War II period, than in countries like Spain, Portugal, where long periods of dictatorship suppressed the development of political parties.

Advocacy traditions have been modified both by diffusion of the Anglo-American model of journalism and by traditions of passive reporting that developed during periods of dictatorship. But, in general, journalism in these countries tends to emphasize opinion and commentary and newspapers to represent distinct political tendencies. This characteristic, however, is not distinct to southern Europe, but is also characteristic of most of continental Europe, though over the last decade or so the movement away from advocacy journalism has probably been faster in northern than southern Europe.

On the other hand, the paternalism of the state in most Mediterranean European countries has remained one of the most important features of the state electronic media. Public broadcasting systems in the Mediterranean countries present a symbiotic relationship with the political controversies of their countries. Both radio and television have been regarded as “arms of the state” and in many cases the debate about the electronic state media was focused on governmental control and interference in television TV, principally news, programmes. This condition became part of post-war ritualized

politics in France during the De Gaulle administrations as well as in Greece, Portugal and Spain after the restoration of their democracies. The case of RAI's *lottizzazione* by the Italian leading political parties is another manifestation of the heavy use of the media by the political parties. In Turkey, TRT has heavily been used by the military and the government of the day.

Instrumentalization of Media

There is a strong tendency in all countries for media to be controlled by private interests with political alliances and ambitions who seek to use their media properties for political ends. In Italy, for example, the old media companies such as Mondadori, Rizzoli and Rusconi are now controlled by non-media businesses, such as Berlusconi (soccer, insurance, commercial television) and Fiat (automobile). Carlo DeBenedetti of Olivetti controls *La Repubblica* and *L'Espresso*; Agnelli family of Fiat controls *La Stampa* and, though RCS, with Benetton (apparel) and Dealla Valle (shoes), the largest Italian daily, *Corriere della Sera*; the Caltagirone Group (construction) daily, *Il Messaggero*; while *Il Giornale* is owned by Paolo Berlusconi, brother of Silvio Berlusconi, and the Italian Manufacturers' Association (Confindustria) publishes the best-selling financial newspaper, *Il Sole 24 Ore*. Private television, meanwhile, is dominated by Silvio Berlusconi, who is also a party leader and former prime minister.

In Turkey, all the major media groups, Doğan, Merkez, Çukurova, İhlas, Doğuş, etc., are large conglomerates and their activities expand to other sectors of the economy (tourism, finance, car industry, construction and banking). And it seems that they use their media outlets to protect their interests in the other sectors of the economy, while there seems to be no efficient way to control the concentration of the media ownership.

In Greece industrialists with interests in shipping, travel, construction, telecommunication and oil industries dominate media ownership, and a long tradition of using media as a means of pressure on politicians continues. In Spain the media are increasingly dominated, not by industrialists with their primary interests outside the media but, by two broad multimedia conglomerates which, however, do have strong political alliances. For many years the dominant company was PRISA, whose interests include *El País*, SER radio and cable and satellite television, and whose owner was close to socialist President Felipe González. A rival media empire is now emerging around the former state telecommunications monopoly, Telefónica de España, which was privatized under the conservative Partido Popular government. This conglomerate includes the private television company Antena 3, the newspaper *El Mundo*, which made its name breaking the news of a number of major scandals involving the PSOE government, the radio network Onda Zero and a satellite television platform. The two media empires have become intense rivals, as much in the political as in the commercial world. The conservative newspaper ABC and the Catholic Church's radio network, COPE, were also aligned with Telefónica in this conflict. Major banks also have ties to these conglomerates, and Spanish journalists and media analysts often describe them as major powers behind the scenes, though their role is very difficult to document.

In Portugal the transition to democracy began with a two-year period of revolutionary upheaval during which the media were, for the most part, taken over by radicalized journalists who conceived them as instruments of class struggle. Ownership of much of the media passed to the state when the banks were nationalized, and by the early 80s, effective control had, to a significant extent, passed to the political parties. In the late 80s state-owned media were privatized. One of the principal media conglomerates, Impresa, is owned by F. Pinto Balsamão, a former prime minister and leader of the (conservative) Social Democratic Party, though instrumentalization of the media in Portugal is perhaps less intense today than in the other countries of southern Europe.

Politicization of Public Broadcasting and Broadcast Regulation

All public broadcasting systems are to some degree subject to political influence and manipulation, and disputes over the independence of public broadcasting are common to the history of European media. Most countries in Western Europe, however, have succeeded in developing institutions which separate public broadcasting from the direct control of the political majority. The countries of southern Europe, however, have not moved as far in this direction. Italy has moved the furthest. The Italian public broadcasting company RAI was essentially under the control of the ruling Christian Democratic Party in the 1950s and 60s, but in the 70s, when a broader coalition was formed and the “historic compromise” allowed the Partido Comunista to share in the *lottizzazione* – the division of political power and benefits – control of RAI was divided among the parties, with the Christian Democrats retaining control of one channel, the “secular parties” the second and the Communists the third. In recent years the board of directors of RAI has been reduced in size, making proportional representation impossible, a move which is likely to require a degree of depoliticization of appointments to the board. In Malta, the state, the political parties, the Church and the university own radio and TV stations. TRT in Turkey has been always under tight state control, and its audience fell dramatically after the advent of private channels.

Spain and Greece, meanwhile, are the two countries remaining in Western Europe in which the ruling party directly controls public broadcasting. In both countries the management of the news divisions of public television changes with a change in government, and the news is at important moments mobilized to support the government politically. In Greece, news and editorial judgments are expected to be in close agreement with, if not identical to, government announcements across a whole range of policies and decisions. It should be noted that Spain and Greece are essentially majoritarian systems, unlike Italy which is a consensus system. A governing board appointed by parliament according to proportional representation therefore results in government control in the former, while it results in power-sharing in the latter. Portugal similarly has had a public broadcasting system in which the government majority had effective control.

In most countries politicization of regulatory bodies coexists with relatively weak regulation of private broadcasters in the sense that few public service obligations and few restrictions on commercialism are imposed, and many regulations are laxly enforced.

“Savage Deregulation”

Across Europe, broadcasting has been in ferment, as governments of every political persuasion try to cope with the stress and upheavals caused by the deregulation. However, in Mediterranean countries, broadcasting and politics seem to form an inextricable relationship. The imminent deregulation of broadcasting in most southern European countries has been associated with politics and eventually led by a haphazard reaction of the politics of the time, rather than a coherent plan. In short, the deregulation of southern European broadcasting systems has led to an unregulated environment as market logic has in recent years been allowed to develop essentially unchecked. The dominance of private television as well as the downgrading of public broadcasters has increasingly forced politicians to have good relations with the media owners. In Italy commercial television monopolies were allowed to develop without government intervention. In Greece, meanwhile, licence applications are not adjudicated and large numbers of radio and TV stations continue for years in legal limbo. In Spain, as in Greece and Portugal, it could be said that public service broadcasting in the full sense of the word never really existed. As Hallin and Mancini (2004: 126) note, “It is probably significant that democracy was restored in Spain, Portugal and Greece at a time when the welfare state was on the defensive in Europe, and global forces of neoliberalism were strong; these countries missed the historical period when social democracy was at its strongest”.

Limited Professionalization

The instrumentalization of the news media by oligarchs, industrialists, parties or the state implies that journalistic autonomy will be limited. Journalists will at times have to defer to their political masters. As Hallin and Mancini (2004: 110) note, “journalism originated in the Southern European countries as an extension of the worlds of literature and politics”. However, as they argue, “this history of journalistic professionalisation is closely parallel to what occurred in the Liberal and Democratic Corporatist countries” (p. 111). The process did not develop as strongly in the Mediterranean countries, however, as in the north. The political and literary roots of journalism were deeper, and the political connections persisted much longer. Limited development of media markets meant that newspapers were smaller and less likely to be self-sustaining. And state intervention, particularly in periods of dictatorship, interrupted the development of journalism as a profession. The level of professionalization thus “remains lower in the Mediterranean countries, though it increased in important ways in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century”.

This, however, does not mean that the level of professionalization is lower. For example, journalists in the Mediterranean countries are not less educated than elsewhere – in Italy and Greece, for example, famous writers and intellectuals have often been journalists. On the other hand, the close connection of journalism with the political and literary worlds and the orientation of newspapers to educated elites have meant that journalism has in some sense been a more elite occupation in southern Europe than in other regions. Limited professionalization is also manifested in a limited development of institutions of journalistic self-regulation, like the press councils which exist in much of northern Europe (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 112).

The Media and the State

The interplay between the state and the media has largely arisen from the tensions in most southern European societies. These tensions, combined with the absence of a strong civil society, have made the state an autonomous and dominant factor. The over-extended character of the state has coincided, as noted above, with the underdevelopment of capitalism. This makes the southern European systems less self-regulatory than developed capitalist systems such as in Liberal model. The lack of self-regulation is also noticeable at the level of politico-ideological superstructure, because with a weak civil society, even the economically dominant classes do not manage to form well-organized and cohesive pressure groups. As Hallin and Mancini (2004//) note: “the state’s grasp often exceeds its reach: the capacity of the state to intervene effectively is often limited by lack of resources, lack of political consensus, and clientelist relationships which diminish the capacity of the state for unified action”.

In the case of the media, the state’s intervention can be seen in various aspects (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 119–121). First, the state has played the role of censor. The direct authoritarian control of the years of dictatorship is presumably a thing of the past, but some remnants have carried over into the democratic period. Second, the state has also played an important role as an owner of media enterprises. The electronic media have traditionally been under the total and tight control of the state, but apart from the state-owned electronic media, the state has also had significant ownership in commercial media in the Mediterranean countries, including in the print press (for example, the Franco regime in Spain often had state-owned newspapers) and, of course, in news agencies (Agence France Presse, the Italian Agency AGI, EFE in Spain, ANA in Greece, Anadolu Ajansi in Turkey, Agência Lusa in Portugal). Publicly funded news agencies function both to maintain the presence of the national press on the world scene and as a subsidy to domestic news media which use the service. Thirdly, in a more indirect but more effective way, the state acts to support its policies on ownership as well as to enforce the unwritten rules of power politics by using a wide range of means of intervention which are at its disposal. These means include sizable financial aid to the press, on which individual enterprises become dependent because they cannot cover their production costs. For example, as Hallin and Mancini (2004: 121) note, extensive indirect subsidies have been provided to the press as a whole in the form of tax breaks, reduced utility rates and the like. For example, in France direct subsidies in 2005 amounted to 249,2 millions euro, while the non-direct subsidies were far higher.

By and large, state subsidies to the media, especially the press take the form of “soft” loans, subsidies both overt and covert, and state jobs and other subsidies offered to many journalists. Finally, the central role of the state in Mediterranean media systems has no doubt limited the tendency of the media to play the “watchdog” role so widely valued in the prevailing liberal media theory. The financial dependence of media on the state and the persistence of restrictive rules on privacy and the publication of official information have combined with the intertwining of media and political elites and – especially in the French case – with a highly centralized state not prone to the kind of

“leaks” of information that characterize the American system, to produce a journalistic culture which has historically been cautious about reporting information which would be embarrassing to state officials.

Clientelism and Rational/Legal Authority

Clientelism refers to a pattern of social organization in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various kinds of support. It is a particularistic and asymmetrical form of social organization and is typically contrasted with forms of citizenship in which access to resources is based on universalistic criteria and formal equality before the law. Clientelistic relationships have been central to the social and political organization in most southern European countries (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos 2000). The greater prevalence of clientelism in southern than northern Europe is intimately connected with the late development of democracy. Both are rooted historically in the fact that autocratic, patrimonial institutions were strongest in the south. The emergence of clientelism represented not simply a persistence of traditional hierarchical social structures, but a response to their breakdown, in a social context in which individuals were isolated, without independent access to the political and economic centre, e.g. through markets, representative political institutions or a universalistic legal system, and in which “social capital” was lacking (see also Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984; Gellner and Waterbury 1977; Kourvetaris and Dobratz 1999; Mouzelis 1980; Roniger and Günes-Ayata 1994; Putnam 1993; Katzenstein 1985). Clientelism affects the development of the news media in many ways.

First, it encourages the instrumentalization of the news media. The politicization of business is a result not only of the important role the state plays in the economy, but of the nature of the political process. In northern Europe clientelist relationships have been displaced to a large extent by rational-legal forms of authority and, especially in the smaller continental European countries, by democratic corporatist politics, both of which decrease the need for economic elites to exert particularistic pressures and form partisan alliances. In countries with a history of clientelism, rational-legal authority is less strongly developed. The judiciary and administrative apparatus are more party-politicized and there is often a tradition of evasion of the law. The persistence of a culture in which evasion of the law is relatively common means that opportunities for particularistic pressures also are common: governments can exercise pressure by enforcing the law selectively, and news media can do so by threatening selectively to expose wrongdoing. Legal proceedings against media owners are fairly common in many southern European countries.

Second, it makes the media systems less self-regulatory and the regulatory bodies less independent compared to their counterparts in liberal countries like the US and Britain and in democratic corporatist countries. In southern Europe, the regulatory institutions tend to be more party-politicized and weaker in their ability to enforce regulations.

Third, clientelism has also affected the content of the media, especially newspapers, as means of negotiation among conflicting elites rather than means for the information of the public and, therefore, mass circulation. It forces the logic of journalism to merge with other social logics – of party politics and family privilege, for instance. And it breaks down the horizontal solidarity of journalists as it does of other social groups. Thus, the journalistic culture of the northern, corporatist countries which is manifested both in relatively strong journalistic autonomy and in highly developed systems of ethical self-regulation is absent in countries with a stronger history of clientelism because of the overriding importance of political interests. A sense of a public interest transcending particular interests has been more difficult to achieve in societies where political clientelism is historically strong, and this contributes to the difficulty of developing a culture of journalistic professionalism.

Development Trends

In the eight countries covered in this section, significant social forces have undermined the development of the media similar to North America or Western Europe. Although the developments in the media sector may not entirely respond to the needs of their industry, yet, their media systems have been surprisingly adaptable and flexible in the face of new developments. To understand this, one must remember that most of the media systems of southern Europe have worked under western democratic rule for only 30 years now, and this has had suddenly to face all the upheavals that other western media systems have taken years to deal with.

The commercialization of their media systems may have led to a de-politicization of their content, the political affiliation of the media, especially newspapers, is always manifest in periods of intense political contention. This is also due to the fact that political parties still play an important role in most southern European countries. It is, therefore, as Hallin and Mancini (2004: 140) note: “not surprising either that parties would have considerable influence on the media, nor that the media should focus to a significant degree on their activities”.

However, the logic of media markets may under certain circumstances undermine these relationships. It can make media organizations less dependent on political subsidies, substitute marketing for political criteria in the making of news decisions and discourage identification with particular political positions. It may also make media enterprises too expensive for most politicians to afford or even for most industrialists to buy purely for political motives.

Finally “globalization” may under certain circumstances undermine the close relationship between media and the political world. One particularly obvious instance is the effect of the common legal framework of the European Union. The “Europeanization” of the EU countries could be seen as an incremental process that re-orientates the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EU political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of domestic politics and policymaking (Harcourt 2002; Radaelli

1997). The EU “Europeanization” process will certainly affect their media systems as well. At present, however, we believe that in order to understand the complexities and particularities of media systems in southern Europe, the concept of Hallin and Mancini’s model remains crucial.

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