MAPPING THE MEDIA WORLD,
fraught but fertile

By Gerard Goggin

Athreshold issue for many people interested in understanding the state of play in contemporary media is sheer complexity. It is a cliché – but true nonetheless – that media are dramatically and rapidly transforming, especially with the "digital disruptions" widely discussed and featuring prominently in recent issues of Rhodes Journalism Review. There are different social, political, and economic dynamics woven into new technologies and digital cultures that require deciphering and response – as much as they offer new opportunities.

A central development heightened with the advent of digital technologies revolves around the new kind of global settings and frameworks. Such new forms of governance have a heightened influence on new and old media forms, industries, professions, and policy. However, we lack a good understanding of how policy, in particular, works in the altered new worlds of media.

For sure, there has been substantial research on the role of overarching supra-national forums, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), and how these now jostle with the likes of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), World Broadcasting Union (WBU), or the internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and other international bodies that deal with specific aspects of media. However, the new forces yet to receive proper reckoning are the new titans of digital media: the likes of Vodafone, Google, Baidu, Apple, Facebook, Twitter, Alibaba, and others. Add to which, global media policy has seen the emergence of new policy and governance arrangements: from company policy on how they moderate and regulate

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their social media platforms (dealing with the public's online commenting), through industry self- and co-regulation, to multistakeholder governance of the internet world.

Just to rachet up the challenges, how such global media dynamics play out very much depend on regional dynamics. So older theories of how cultural and media imperialism work, based on power, influence, and information radiating outwards from the former colonial and imperial metropoles have been considerably revised – to cope with the emergence of new groupings, such as new powers (for instance, those like BRICS) or ascendant regions – from Africa, to Asia, to Latin America. Into the bargain, it turns out that national, and local, media habits, preferences, practices, cultures – but especially industries, laws, and policies – often still are decisive. Amid this babel of global media, it is no surprise that 'mapping' is turning out to be one of the most fertile and interesting ways to come to grips with the unfolding scene of policy.

This is especially evident in the area of internet governance – one of the most contentious media issues today. Strong interest in mapping internet governance has been shown, especially by those associated with the NETMundial Initiative. Within the context of the initiative, the GovLab group at New York University – in conjunction with key internet policy body ICANN (internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) – have produced a handy "map of internet governance maps" <http://thegovlab.org/toward-a-netmundial-solutions-map-mapping-internet-governance-maps/>. Here mapping spans to include efforts such as clearing houses and observatories, as well as a number of initiatives explicitly revolving around mapping.

A relatively early mover in the world of mapping projects using online platforms and tools

is the International Association of Media and Communications Research (IAMCR)'s Global Media Policy (GMP) Working Group. With heightened scholarly, policy, and civil society interest global media policy – especially evident in the strong interest in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) – the group established the Mapping Global Media Policy project in 2007 based at Media @McGill, and led by Marc Raboy (McGill University), and Claudia Padovani (Padua). The project serves to monitor, categorise and analyse key issues, significant developments and recent trends in the governance of media, information and communication on a global level.

Through a database platform, GMP <http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/> aims to build and share knowledge on the complex field of global media policy, especially relating to actors and processes. The project also aims to enhance actors' capacity to effectively intervene in relevant policy settings and thus reduce barriers to meaningful participation, as well as stimulate collaboration between scholars and stakeholders worldwide <http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/node/20>. The GMP platform is open to researchers to establish sections on areas of their own interest. To date, there are resources on a range of topics, including gender and media, internet governance and policy, mobile internet policy, public service broadcasting, media literacy and education. The newest section is on disability and media policy, drawing on my own work.

As well as documenting and making resources available, the platform makes in-built tools available for visualization and analysis <http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/node/26>. So, for instance, the GMP platform allows the immediate transformation of the explored datasets on areas

of policy into visual representations. Investigating global media policy through visual mapping can help trace the development of policy debates and arrangements, explore the interconnectedness of themes that compose policy discourses, and investigate networks of interaction among people, organisations and controversial issues. Of course, theories, approaches and methods of how to design and deploy such digital tools are now widely discussed with the rise of digital humanities and social sciences, and associated 'e-research'. Such lively debates add further insights and provocations to the long-standing acknowledgement of mapping as a fraught as well as fertile endeavour, very much involving powerful ambitions as much as imaginative attempts to find new knowledge.

So, at the annual conference of the IAMCR held in Montréal in July 2015, this mapping turn in media research was put under the microscope. Organised by the GMP Working Group, a dedicated session on "Mapping as Relevant Knowledge" discussed the various projects around the world attempting to map aspects of media. Participants included Arne Hintz (Cardiff University). Samantha Grassle (Govlab, New York University), Annabelle Sreberny (SOAS, University of London), Francesca Musiani (French National Centre for Scientific Research), Marjan de Bruin (University of West Indies), and Robin Mansell (London School of Economics). Discussion

centred on two main themes: how relevant is all this mapping to policy and advocacy engagement? To what extent, and in what conditions, do these initiatives actually contribute to more participatory practices, better informed policy decisions, and better media (typically the common goals of different mapping initiatives)? And what of the practical challenges in the establishment and development of these initiatives: platform population, content generation and sharing, sustainability of projects (expert knowledge, skills, human and financial resources), language diversity and accessibility, comprehensiveness or gaps in policy information and analysis?

Given the variety of mapping projects, and their range in scope, approach, duration, and viability, this kind of wide-ranging, critical discussion of mapping is more important than ever. In many ways, media mapping is at a crossroads. We need it more than ever – to understand the rich and complex state of play of global media policy, and how goals of democratic participation, more effective policy, and, in the end, better media, can be achieved. Yet mapping, like everything, takes time and dedication, and is difficult to do at scale, with comprehensiveness, and rigour. This is no more so, if we really care about genuinely international mapping of media – where everyone's media is put on the map, in service of shaping better and fairer futures.

Further reading

Goggin, Gerard. 2015. Mobile Communication Law and Regulation. International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society, vol. 4, Law and Policy, ed. Sandra Braman. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

Mansell, Robin, and Raboy, Marc (eds). 2011. Handbook of Global Media and Communication Policy. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Raboy, Marc, and Padovani, Claudia. 2010. Mapping Global Media Policy: Concepts, Frameworks, Methods. Mapping Global Media Policy platform, http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/sites/default/files/ Raboy&Padovani%202010_long%20version_final.pdf

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