

MICHALIS, M. *Governing European Communications. From unification to coordination*. 1st ed. Plymouth: Lexington Books (Critical Media Studies), 2007, 353 pages. ISBN: 978-0-7391-1735-4.

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**Governing European communications. A political economy approach**

Dr. Maria Michalis is a lecturer at the University of Westminster. Her career in communication policy research is extensive and she has dealt with issues related to policies for competition, public service, digital television and universal service. She has actively contributed to various international scientific journals and has published several chapters in books. Moreover, she is vice-chair of the Communication Policy and Technology Section of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR).

In this book, Dr. Michalis exhaustively documents and thoroughly analyses the emergence and development of the European governing of communications. This concept, of polyhedral nature, has been studied and defined from several theoretical perspectives of the Political Studies, it's approached with regard to the organizational and leadership capacity of the political system (Gamble 2000:110). The text is the result of a far-reaching empirical study based on primary sources of information, observation of the consultation processes concerning community public policies and 25 semi-structured interviews. Moreover, the author considers and interconnects the contributions of prior research that has tackled the object of study that is the focus of the book (Collins 1994; Humphreys 1996; Levy 1999; Krebber 2001; Ward 2002 & Harcourt 2005, among others). Starting from this basis, Michalis carries out an innovative analysis based on three pillars.

Firstly, Michalis goes over the theoretical perspective offered by the political economy of communication to overcome the dichotomy that has characterised previous studies. Her analysis of governance therefore goes beyond the study of different styles of public policies, of the different administrative cultures or different interests in the European Union and its member states. Her research focuses on the critical observation of the influence played on governance by factors such as the evolution of capitalism, the redefinition of the role of state, of the internationalisation and globalisation process and various fac-

tors from the economic, industrial and technological spheres.

Secondly, Michalis makes an effort to jointly deal with telecommunications and the media. Frequently the study of the two sectors is carried out separately, tackling very specific issues. This text aims for a broader view of both sectors to fully explore the relations between these two and how public policies affect these relations.

The third innovation that characterises this book is that it tackles the issue of governance without anchoring itself in an excessively regulatory or traditional view centred exclusively on studying public and regulatory institutions. Michalis goes beyond this and analyses to what extent and how the participation of a larger number of actors – not only new public institutions but also interest groups, private firms and civil associations – contribute towards the evolution of EU governance over telecommunications and the media.

The introductory chapter defines governance based on concepts from different theoretical perspectives, paying particular attention to prior work in the area of political science and European studies. It also details and interrelates the elements from the political economy that will be the key instruments for analysis in the subsequent chapters.

The book is then ordered chronologically. Each of the five chapters covers approximately one decade, from the end of the 1940s to today, 2007. However, this time-based segmentation is approximate and what takes priority is the identification of key issues that distinguish each period.

In chapters two and three, which cover 1940 to 1960, the book explores the roots of cooperation between European states in the area of telecommunications and postal services. It also provides an extensive review of the historical and political events leading to and affecting the emergence of the first supra-national public institutions and professional organisations to influence communications (International Telecommunication Union, European Broadcasting Union, European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations, European Economic Community, Council of Europe, among others). Michalis analyses the birth of community industrial

policy aimed at this sector and identifies as the main cause the fear of being technologically dependent on the United States. The text also highlights the difficulties of European governance in this period. Community institutions were incapacitated both by their lack of legitimacy and also by the particular and uncoordinated actions of national administrations. However, the lack of results from intergovernmental cooperation would lead to the creation of a common European market and to a more important role being played by community governance.

The fourth chapter (1980s) analyses the process that Michalis has called "defensive Europeanization", caused by the realisation that the international situation required a joint European response. This is the time when community institutions focused on planning policies for infrastructures and technological standardisation and implemented protectionist measures regarding the trade of products and services. Moreover, the research and development plans attempted to favour the emergence of "European champions". In the area of the media, particular attention is paid to the negotiation process of the Television Without Frontiers Directive, especially to its evolution, from an initial argument focusing on democratic values to its specific form in a text centring on industrial issues.

The fifth chapter (1990s) tackles the liberalisation and internationalisation of telecommunications and the media. Michalis thoroughly examines the causes behind the evolution of European institutions and their style of intervention. The failure of certain initiatives to control industrial policy and the consolidation of neoliberalism meant that governance focused on issues such as competition and competitiveness. European institutions and national administrations went from being managers or regulators to mere enablers of the market. For their part, market actors acquired more influence over the political agenda and their support became vital for the implementation of public policies. The result was, on the one hand, the emergence of more complex decision-making networks and, on the other, a more frequent use of less interventionist instruments of action.

The project of the information society is the nexus between the 1990s and the period 2000-2007, analysed in the sixth chapter. In her analysis, Michalis states that convergence and globalisation have reinforced telecommunications' own logic, influencing the style and objectives of public policies. Although public discourse has not disappeared, the cultural or social issues of the media have taken second place to the achievement of industrial and economic goals. In this chapter, particular attention is paid to the processes to revise policies, both media and telecommunications, and to the effort to coordinate them, revealing the supremacy of the concept of competitiveness as a current leitmotiv in governing European communications.

The final conclusions review those given in each chapter. A view across the board is therefore missing, concerning the elements that condition European governance, which should reinforce the research perspective focused on the political economy of communication.

Maria Michalis's book is a must for researchers and experts in the field of European communication policy, although it also brings elements for a better comprehension of the world trends. The historical review and exhaustive analysis of the evolution of public intervention and its actors make it an essential instrument in understanding the wide range of factors that condition European telecommunication and media policy, as well as the links between the two sectors. This book does not necessarily need to be read from page one onwards and the text is well organised so that it can be "dipped into" and consulted on specific points.

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