The reviewed book is a part in the series “Concepts in Critical Media Studies” in “Global Media Governance” the authors Sean O Siochru, Bruce Girard and Amy Mahan examine the tendency towards profit creation, concentration of ownership and commodification of media and how these trends often come into conflict with social, cultural, and political dimensions of media and communications.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I introduces the concept of governance in the context of media industry, including the topics of convergence and globalization. With the introduction of media regulation and the forms it takes at the national level, and governance at an international level the authors set the scene for the rest of the book. The first part concludes with a description of the main trends and dynamics driving the media industry.

At a national level, media is regulated as a part of the economy. It’s regulatory measures aim to limit concentration of ownership to prevent sectoral control (trusts) and to support competition. Other important issues are the allocation of radio spectrum (a scarce resource), the extension of universal access to telecommunications services and the securing of intellectual property rights. The authors highlight the measures of societal regulation aiming to sustain and strengthen the social, cultural and political role of media in society and enlargement of the public sphere. The most visible forms of regulation are agencies like the FCC in the United States. There is also the issue of self-regulation, which the authors consider a subject of growing importance.

Global governance is imperative and led to the rise of the United Nations. Chapter 2 introduces history of this organization and workflow. Also, new actors in global governance affairs are listed. The last section of the introductory part is comprised of a discussion of privatization, market liberalization, convergence and consolidation of ownership. The authors emphasize the globalization of media markets as recent trend in media.

Part II provides an overview of the existing key institutions of global media governance. This section reviews the history and outlines the functions and structures as well as it analyzes very comprehensively their central dynamics as they relate to media and how its governed. The introduction of the actors is descriptive as well as judgmental. “Global Media Governance” discusses past and current issues of different organizations concisely and emphasizes the distribution of formal and informal power inside of these organizations.

Part III starts with a cross-cutting look at the introduced governance institutions and raises the following four questions: 1. From a historical perspective, what has been the main rationale behind the emergence of media regulation on the world stage? 2. What is the current scope of international regulation?

Global Media Governance – A Beginner’s Guide

by Sean O Siochru, Bruce Girard and Amy Mahan

reviewed by Dominik Büttiker

3. Who are the main actors governing, and how do they exert influence inside and outside the institutions? 4. What are the main instruments used for regulation of media at the global level?

The authors draw the conclusion that the media industry is increasingly global. Further, the means to enforce key aspects of private media industry rights especially Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) are far more powerful than ever seen before, with the global level now driving national-level regimes. Meanwhile, media ownership is increasingly private and driven by market considerations, which leads to a highly centralized industry at the global level.

The main actors are governments, secretariats of international organizations, private sector corporations and associations and civil society such as nongovernmental organizations. The authors consider the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the most influential player in Media Governance, especially in the realm of IPR. The publication asserts that there is a declining role in media and communications governance of most governments and UN organizations, namely the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UNESCO and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

The International Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), of a technical background is criticized for its lack of transparency and legitimacy on the global scale. The authors assert “that it’s ever shifting structures make it difficult to determine its power structure”.

The emergence of civil society and the growth of people’s media are a force the authors reckon with. They claim that ICANN’s capacity to influence the intergovernmental system and the actions of governments and corporations “is not unrelated to the rise transnational corporations and of the market paradigm in general”. “Global Media Governance” explores finally the potential of less industrialized countries. Their recently low level of influence in relation to media and communications governance issues is subject to change. However, according to O Siochru et al. “it would be a mistake to discount the possibility that some combination of less industrialized countries may become a force in this respect.”

Having outlined the major players in global governance and their role in this respect. “Global Media Governance” focusses in Part III on two contrasting scenarios for the future of media governance. The first scenario sees trade as the dominant factor. The commercialization of the media and communication sphere will largely take place at the expense of social, cultural and political dimensions of the media. The number of media channels is predicted to grow, but diversity and quality will decline. The scenario postulates also the disappearing of public media. The second scenario represents a shift in the other direction, with a rejuvenated UN system as the main player. Two of its core objectives will be the support for global public service and development-oriented media. The book concludes that the “reality will fall somewhere in between this two polar possibilities”.

As the subtitle of “Global Media Governance – A Beginner’s Guide” suggests that the book gives the big picture and delivers an comprehensive introduction to actual issues. The clarity of the style of writing serves this objective well. The book is targeted to students with limited time capacity, especially given its short length.

Rating

Theoretical Approach / Methodology +++
Structure +++
Depth of the Analysis ++
Contribution of new Knowledge ++
Applicability +++
Clarity and Style of Writing +++

Rating Points: excellent: ++++ poor: +

2002
163 pages
ISBN 0-7425-1565-6
www.rowmanlittlefield.com

Review Author
Dominik Büttiker
University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, dominik.buettiker@student.unisg.ch