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## Research plan (excerpt)

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Name of principal investigator (PI): **Kaarle Nordenstreng**

Title of research project: **Media Systems in Flux: The Challenge of the BRICS Countries**

Site of research: **University of Tampere, School of Communication, Media and Theatre**

Duration of project: **48 months**

### 1. Background

The question of a media system is a pivotal issue in studies of media and communication in rapidly changing national economies and cultures faced with globalization. *Comparing Media Systems* by Hallin and Mancini (2004) has become for scholars and students alike one of the most quoted books in the field, at least in Europe. Parallel to this is the perspective opened up by *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Christians et al. 2009) which has precipitated the move of the canonical *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956) from a pervasive framework-building status to the field's history of ideas. A broader context for all this is provided by the tide of internationalization and de-westernization of the field (Curran and Park 2000; Thussu 2009).

However, as shown by a state-of-the-art review by the principal investigator (Nordenstreng 2010a), which contains other relevant references, the concept of media system itself remains unclear and hazy: "A lot of homework remains to be done..." This project is an exercise towards doing that homework.

An important contribution to comparative media studies was made by the late Swedish scholar Jan Ekecrantz (2007) in an article based on a conference at the Moscow State University. He discussed the evolution of media/society models from the traditional quadrant of politics-economics-technology-culture to a post-modernist culture-audience version and proposed an "integrated institutional model" which would accommodate the changing sociopolitical situations (pp. 78-79). And he did this in the context of post-communist Russia, including "the neo-authoritarian state and the clash of media civilizations" (pp. 91-93).

In the same spirit, Nordenstreng (2010b) points out that the old way of viewing Russia as something special is no longer so valid. Also, an overview of the media in contemporary Russia (Nordenstreng and Pietiläinen 2010) shows that, despite setbacks in the movement from autocracy to democracy, the overall picture is not totally gloomy. A collection of contributions from earlier Academy research projects on media in Russia (Rosenholm, Nordenstreng and Trubina 2010) presents quite a varied landscape. Indeed, the Russian media system is in flux – as is the whole country highlighted by the title of the Academy's Russia in Flux Research Programme 2004-2007.

The same flux metaphor is also applicable to the rest of Central and Eastern Europe and indeed to China – a perspective highlighted by Colin Sparks (2010). Actually Ekecrantz (2007) was also led from examining Russia to considering China, as were Nordenstreng and Paasilinna in the anthology from the Academy project on Russian media in the 1990s (Nordenstreng, Vartanova and Zassoursky 2001).

Moreover, Sparks' important essay raises critical questions about the theoretical basis of comparing media systems. Like the concept of a media system, the question of comparison – at a time of global integration also makes nation-states increasingly problematic although by no means obsolete – has also become a vital topic in media and communication studies, as demonstrated by the *Handbook of Comparative Communication Research*, which includes an overview by Sonia Livingstone (2011). Highlighting the same trend is *Comparative Media Systems: European and Global Perspectives* (Dobek-Ostrowska et al. 2010).

The comparative perspective of the global media landscape is no doubt high on the scholarly agenda, but most scholars approach it from a particular national or regional angle. The angle of the present project was originally Russia – with China as a point of comparison. What this project proposes is to widen the angle to three other countries, India, Brazil and South Africa, opening up perspectives on the consolidation of democracy in large developing countries on different continents. This selection of countries follows a new coalition in global politics, which started a few years ago between Brazil, Russia, India and China – known as “BRIC” – and in 2011 was extended to also include South Africa, making it “BRICS”.<sup>1</sup> These countries combine different types of economic and political development, offering more promising prospects for critical analysis of media systems than taking them separately.

The project will not only examine and compare the media systems of the BRICS countries in general but will also focus on a few strategic questions, beginning with the legal foundation of the media system in terms of its constitutional status *de jure*. The *de facto* structure and operation of the media in these big countries would be too ambitious a target of research, which is why their basic profiles are kept as a context provided by existing publications and databases.<sup>2</sup> The project will focus on selected aspects of the media systems in these countries, mainly at a normative level concerning philosophies and doctrines on media and journalism in society – following the line of the award-winning *Normative Theories of the Media* (Christians et al. 2009). The point of departure is Russia with a comparative perspective provided by the rest of the BRICS countries. This approach aims at deconstructing conventional concepts of media and journalism.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.southafrica.info/global/brics/brics-080411.htm>  
<http://www.saiia.org.za/press-room/media-alert-what-will-south-africa-bring-to-the-third-annual-brics-summit-14-april-2011.html>  
<http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/brics-summit-a-paradigm-shift-3355.html>  
<http://www.experian.com/blogs/marketing-forward/2011/05/06/growth-markets-why-the-brics-are-so-important/>

<sup>2</sup> For publications, see e.g. Vartanova and Smirnov in Rosenholm et al. (2010). For databases, see [http://www.datamonitor.com/store/Product/media\\_bric\\_brazil\\_russia\\_india\\_china\\_industry\\_guide?productid=6D4988E0-0678-4C81-9C4B-8CAB897DA85E](http://www.datamonitor.com/store/Product/media_bric_brazil_russia_india_china_industry_guide?productid=6D4988E0-0678-4C81-9C4B-8CAB897DA85E)

## 2. Objectives

From this background, the research objectives of the project are given as follows:

First, the project will critically examine the *theoretical concepts* of

- a) media system
- b) role of media and journalists in democracies
- c) freedom and independence of media

by placing the BRICS countries within a global context.

This analytical investigation follows the line of the PI's earlier work (Nordenstreng 2000; 2007; 2010c; 2011).

Second, the project will investigate the *empirical situation* of

- a) citizen participation in and through media
- b) professional orientation of journalists
- c) education of journalists

in the BRICS countries in a comparative context.

The participation of citizens as non-professionals in and through media is a central issue in the field as demonstrated by Carpentier (2011) and Dahlgren (2009). It is high on the agenda in the Western industrialized countries, both in the practice of civic journalism and in the theory of democratic media. However, it is also emerging as a hot topic in the BRICS countries along with the gradual awakening of the civil society and increasing tension between the market and the party/state interests as highlighted in the case of China by Zhao (1998; 2008). This topic will be pursued in the research team by Leonardo Custodio from the Brazilian perspective, Svetlana Pasti from the Russian perspective and Peixi Xu from the Chinese perspective. India as an established democracy and South Africa as a new democracy constitute important points of comparison.

The professional orientation of journalists is a topical issue particularly under conditions of development and socio-economic transition as shown by Ramaprasad (2003) and Pasti (2007). This topic will be pursued in the research team first and foremost by Svetlana Pasti with a focus on Russian journalists (see Pasti, Chernysh and Svitich, forthcoming). Comparative research will be carried out in the other BRICS countries. In South Africa, for example, debates are currently raging about what the professional orientation of journalists should be in relation to the state and the developmental project (see Wasserman 2010).

The education of journalists is an issue which attracts relatively much public and political attention in most countries but has not been widely studied, except in Europe (Terzis 2009). UNESCO (2007) has also promoted model curricula for the developing countries, and the 2nd World Journalism Education Congress in South Africa in 2010 presented an update showing the way ahead.<sup>3</sup> The BRICS countries offer a challenging case for comparative

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<sup>3</sup> <http://wjec.ru.ac.za/>  
[http://wjec.ru.ac.za/index.php?option=com\\_rubberdoc&view=category&id=18%3Acurriculum-panel-proceedings&Itemid=45](http://wjec.ru.ac.za/index.php?option=com_rubberdoc&view=category&id=18%3Acurriculum-panel-proceedings&Itemid=45)

analysis in this topic, too, as was shown by the example of comparisons between journalism education in South Africa and Brazil (Wasserman and De Beer 2010).

An overall hypothesis of the project suggests that the group of BRICS countries provides an intriguing platform for studying media systems, with both differences and similarities in their socio-economic development and political structures. The urgent challenge they present concerns democracy in general and the role of media and journalism in democracy in particular. Given the exploratory nature of the project it would be premature to venture more detailed hypotheses.

The first objective regarding the three conceptual aspects is typical desk research based on critical reading of the literature and joint reflection by the research team. The topics of a media system, media and journalists in democracies as well as freedom and independence of the media will be jointly covered by the research team under the coordination of the principal investigator, leading to two edited volumes.

The second objective with three components will be studied using conventional methods in related research. Each topic will be examined with reference to empirical material gathered in the five countries and analyzed comparatively. Special emphasis in analysis will be placed on conceptual-theoretical work with the support of the international research team in an attempt to avoid the empiricist's dilemma of concrete material determining the paradigm followed. On the other hand, each topic will use empirical material partly drawn from existing research in the countries concerned and partly based on new empirical data gathered from selected samples in a comparable way.

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