

introduction

Entangling and disentangling governance and the media

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The issue

Over the past decades, governments in most developed countries have for a variety of reasons reformed the ways in which public policy is designed and delivered (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Levi-Faur, 2012). Although the trajectories of change diverge across countries and over time, one recurring element is that many governments have systematically, although generally not programmatically, shifted executive powers and responsibilities away from the congested political-administrative centres of the state toward a host of third parties: nonprofit organisations, privatised state enterprises, networks, trans- and international organisations, semi-autonomous agencies and local governments. This strategy has enabled governments to increase their points of contact with societal actors and stakeholders and to develop networks for service delivery and governance (Peters and Pierre, 1998; Torfing and Sørensen, 2014). It has also meant that more actors – and different kinds of actors – now bear at least some responsibility for public policies. This endows them with a strategic interest in the news media as an arena where their interests can be served and where the credits for success and the blame for failures are distributed (Schillemans, 2012; Hood, 2002).

Alongside these developments in democratic governance, the media sector has undergone at least as significant changes as governance. The 24-hour news cycle, the rise of the social media, and a more competitive and more vulnerable economy of news production and delivery have changed the landscape of journalism (Krause, 2011; Djerf-Pierre, 2000). In addition, the practice of journalism has increasingly emphasised critical scrutiny and the imposition of a mediatised format on politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Esser and Strömbäck, 2014). Meanwhile, the need – or the perceived need – to spin political messages and the ability to manage the blame game has added a new dimension to governing. These parallel, but at least in their early stages not closely integrated processes, have had the joint outcome of producing a new hybrid media system where public actors engage, and are engaged by, the media (Chadwick, 2013).

Thus, the past few decades have seen rather profound changes both in the sphere of government, the media, and how these two fields engage each other. Yet, we know surprisingly little about the nature of this interaction and how it shapes government, public policy, governance or the media industry and social media. We only have

scattered accounts of bureaucracies' strategies to deal with the news media or the increasing number of communications experts in government (Thorbjørnsrud et al, 2014; Maggetti, 2012). For example, it appears clear that changes in publicity laws have provided the media with new avenues into government (Roberts 2005), and we 'know' a fair amount about how the rise of the social media affects the works of politicians, civil servants and public officials (Ross et al, 2015; Meijer and Torenvlied, 2014) but, again, we only have rather scant evidence about the nature or consequences of these processes.

This theme issue is devoted to defining and inserting information and data into this void in our understanding of both governance and media behaviour. We investigate the effects of media on governance, which has not been done before. It is highly relevant: research suggests that unelected political actors occupy a substantial niche in the daily news (30–40 per cent) (Schillemans, 2012), and unelected and elected policy actors alike claim that the media are a highly important external contingency in their daily work (Cook, 2005). Yet, despite the fact that practitioners and observers seem to agree that the media is indeed a critical arena and actor in contemporary governance, systematic empirical research is scarce and hard to come by.

This theme issue is an extremely rare, if not unique, collection of empirically based studies on the impact of media-related factors on political actors and processes in contemporary distributed systems of governance. Our research is situated at the intersection of academic disciplines which allows us to fill in blind spots and to address intersectional concerns. From a governance perspective, many have said that the media are 'important'; this theme issue opens up this black box of media importance. We also open up the black box of unelected politics (Vibert, 2007), by looking at how new types of organisations, governance networks and disaggregated public bodies inform governance. In addition, we look at different elected *and* unelected officials within those bodies and organisations. And, inevitably, we address the many non-linear and, to be sure, often normatively ambiguous, effects of media on governance.

One apparent reason why the governance-media juncture has been so relatively ignored is that it falls between the stools of academic disciplines. Governance scholars acknowledge that the media is a powerful and uncontrollable actor imposing its format on politics and administration but their field lacks the analytical instruments to conceptualise its significance. At the same time, media and journalism experts observe the process of mediatisation but are, for the most part, not concerned with unelected policy actors as an object of study.

The present theme issue puts this field of research on the social science agenda. There are any number of approaches into this set of issues which should be of interest to both governance and journalism and media experts. The shift of executive governance from the centre of the state towards more peripheral local, bureaucratic, quasi-nongovernmental or proto-political institutions, raises a number of questions that relate to the role of the media. Governance reforms basically rearrange the politico-strategic environment in which public policies are delivered. In this environment, public sector organisations and quangos may become *more exposed* to the media, may become *more dependent* on media for their vulnerable reputations and may make *more investments* in media management, as they (are supposed to be) *more independent* from central government (Fredriksson et al, 2015; Maggetti, 2012).

Commonalities and questions

There are several commonalities among the papers in this theme issue. First, they all focus on *unelected actors* in governance (although a couple of them also include elected officials in their analyses). Previous research on the relationship between politics and the media has often focused on elected officials and election campaigns. Our objective is to avoid the extraordinary, spectacular nature of election campaigns and instead explore the everyday, routinised interactions between public actors and the media sector.

Second, all the papers in this theme issue display the role of the media in *governance reform*, that is, the emergence of new fields of interactive and reflective behaviour between public actors and the media. One of the many paradoxes surrounding the media's role in governance is that although there appears to be consensus that the media are indeed influential, they do not have access to the processes where governance objectives and means are defined. Therefore, other fields of interaction – virtual or real, ad hoc or institutionalised, formal or informal – have evolved. These fields of interaction do not replace other arenas of governance but they do provide the media with a gateway into the sphere of politics and administration.

Third, all the papers focus on the *effects of media* on some governance issue such as accountability, media management, organisational performance and organisational structure. The role of the media in governance can only be understood with regard to specific aspects of such governance or to specific governance issues. Again, the media is not a player in conventional governance processes and there is no general, conventional role of the media from which our studies can depart. Our research has therefore, by necessity, been designed so that it concentrates on some specific issue.

Finally, all papers focus on different *levels of governance*: central state, national policies, the local level, networks, unspecified sets of organisations, or some specific type of organisation such as universities. Together the papers provide a comprehensive overview of different levels and aspects of contemporary systems of governance and the role of the media in that governance.

The 'governance and the media' theme invokes at least two sets of questions. The first set of questions focuses on the meso-level of unelected political entities and their connections to the media. Important questions relate to the 'uses' and 'practices' of media for public sector organisations. The issues here are largely descriptive and comparative, are aimed to gauge just how unelected organisations incorporate the media in their general strategies, and the barriers and risks involved in the process.

On the aggregated level of public sector governance, important questions arise on the role of the media as agents of public sector accountability and public sector change. Issues here are both empirical and theoretical. Empirical and comparative analyses have been made of the role of the media in holding executive powers accountable, both in routine cases as for misconduct and crises. The theoretical questions emanating from this approach focus on the role of the media in democratic governance, relating the critical scrutiny by the media to the role of formal institutions of accountability (parliaments, the courts, independent regulators) and the citizenry in democracies.

The themes

The theme issue is organised in four section of two connected papers. It starts with two more generic, theoretical papers and then proceeds to discuss three spheres of governance: the state, policy implementation and governance networks.

Media, governance and accountability

The theme issue starts with two papers exploring the *theoretical* connections between media and governance. The first paper, ‘Governance and the media: exploring the linkages’ by Guy Peters (Peters, 2016), links the governance debate to the role of the media and analyses how the media have evolved into powerful but academically somewhat neglected agents in the governance debate over the past couple of decades. Peters disentangles the governance process in four consecutive phases and discusses how the media affects those processes in a variety of ways.

Among the many theoretical issues involved, ‘accountability’ may be the most important, as both governance reforms and the expansion of the role of the media strongly affect accountability (Djerf-Pierre et al, 2013). The second paper, ‘Media and public accountability: typology and exploration’ by Sandra Jacobs and Thomas Schillemans (Jacobs and Schillemans, 2016) develops a typology of the various roles news media may fulfil in public accountability. The paper is based on content analyses of media reporting and parliamentary questions in the Netherlands. The paper develops four roles of the media in public accountability and concludes that the *indirect* roles of the media – where they trigger responses in organisations and from parliament – is empirically more important than the *direct* role of media as critical scrutinisers of public organisations.

The state, change and the media

The second set of papers focuses on the level of the state and gauges state-interactions with the media in two highly disparate time-frames: a momentous and unprecedented event (Alon Barkat and Gilad) and a 30-year time-span (Djerf-Pierre and Pierre).

The third paper ‘Political control or legitimacy deficit? Bureaucracies’ symbolic response to bottom-up public pressures’ by Saar Alon Barkat and Sharon Gilad (Alon Barkat and Gilad, 2016), explores how some 30 Israeli bureaucracies responded to the 2011 mass-protests (related to ‘Occupy’). More specifically, the paper analyses changes in expenditures on advertising and campaigns for the various bureaucracies. The analysis suggests that more tightly politically controlled bureaucracies are more responsive to the social protests, that is, that those bureaucracies are more inclined to advertise themselves in response to the social protests. In that sense, the traditional bureaucracies (directly managed and financed by politically elected leaders) respond more readily and strongly to bottom-up public pressures than their more autonomous cousins.

The fourth paper, ‘Mediatized local government: social media activity and media strategies among local government officials 1989–2010’ by Monika Djerf-Pierre and Jon Pierre (Djerf-Pierre and Pierre, 2016), adopts a radically different temporal perspective. Their paper reports a study on how elected and unelected local officials in Sweden attune to the media over time; how they use the media, rate the media and cooperate (or not) with the media. Their paper draws on a survey with an almost

unique longitudinal comparison of over 31 years, which allows the authors to assess how social media feed into existing patterns of media-relations. Their results clearly show that the social media are presently not a game-changer. Social media intensify the mediatisation of local governance rather than replace conventional patterns of media-communication.

Policy implementation, NPM and mediatisation

New public management (NPM) has been the somewhat ambiguous name of the game in policy implementation in the past decades (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). NPM-proponents have taught us to disaggregate policy implementation from policy design and to use incentives, transparency and competition in order to increase the value for money. These four key NPM-themes – disaggregation, incentives, transparency and competition – have immediate consequences for strategic media management and media impacts in organisations implementing public policies. These consequences are explored in a comparative paper of government agencies (Schillemans) and an explorative paper of public universities (Friedrichsmeier and Marcinkowski).

In the fifth paper, ‘Fighting or fumbling with the beast? The mediatisation of public sector agencies in Australia and the Netherlands’ (Schillemans, 2016), Thomas Schillemans compares how agencies in both countries have adapted to their media environments. The paper is based on a small-N survey distributed among executives and senior strategic staff in public agencies in the Netherlands and Australia. The empirical material also includes interviews and focus group meetings. The point of the paper is alluded to in its title: in both countries government agencies have made substantial changes to their internal organisation that allow them to get along with the ‘media beast’ (Mathis, 2005). The Australian agencies have done so more proactively, almost aggressively (‘Fighting the beast’) than their more hesitant Dutch counterparts (‘Fumbling with the beast’). Irrespective of these differences, however, everyday policy practices within these agencies have become directly and thoroughly affected by the news.

The sixth paper by Andres Friedrichsmeier and Frank Marcinkowski, ‘The mediatisation of university governance: a theoretical and empirical exploration of some side-effects’ (Friedrichsmeier and Marcinkowski, 2016) pierces more methodically into some of the negative side-effects of the media on public organisations. This paper relates the role of the media to the typically NPM performance-oriented policy changes in German higher education and some of the negative effects of these changes to core functions of universities. This paper, thus, assesses some negative effects of the role of the media in governance. The analysis draws on contents analyses of media reporting and some case studies. The results bear testimony to the supposition that NPM-recipes such as transparency, league-tabling, competition and performance management may be hazardous for professional public services (for example, Bevan and Hamblin, 2009).

Networks, media and attribution

The last set of two papers focuses on one of the more prevalent, promising *and* problematic features of modern governance, particularly in Europe: governance networks (Peters and Pierre, 1998; Klijn, 2008). The first paper analyses how

perceptions of media negativity affect the performance of governance networks (Klijn) while, conversely, the second paper analyses how the media attribute responsibility and blame for policy outcomes to the various participants in complex governance networks (Hasler et al).

Erik Hans Klijn's paper 'Managing commercialised media attention in complex governance networks: positive and negative effects on network performance' (Klijn, 2016), analyses how managers of complex governance networks 'manage' the media, that is, how they influence the media, but also, conversely, how the media affect their policies. The paper draws on a survey of managers of large governance networks, mainly in complex infrastructure projects. The paper finds evidence that perceptions of media negativity (or, 'commercialised media attention', as it is operationalised in the paper), negatively affect network performance. Network management, however, can be helpful to alleviate some of the pressure and to enhance the cohesion, trust and, ultimately, the performance of the network.

Karin Hasler, Daniel Kübler, Anna Christmann and Frank Marcinkowski have written the last contribution to the theme issue, entitled: 'Over-responsibilised and over-blamed: elected actors in media reporting on network governance. A comparative analysis in eight European metropolitan areas' (Hasler et al, 2016). In this paper, they explore whether the media manage to keep track of the effects of governance reforms in which responsibilities are shared with unelected actors. They have first studied the distribution of responsibilities in eight cities in four countries (Germany, Switzerland, the UK and France) among network participants and have subsequently analysed the extent to which all participants are attributed responsibility and blame for policy outcomes by the media. They show that 'elected actors are clearly in the focus of the media when it comes to attributing responsibility for policy success or failure'.

To conclude

It would be impossible, and probably somewhat deflating, to summarise the findings from the various papers. The collection of papers has clarified and described, compared and explained how governance and media connect and interact. All papers suggest that the impact of media on governance is substantial indeed, and that all policy actors, each in their own ways, now need to 'govern with the news' (Cook, 2005). As a consequence, it is fair to say that contemporary governance has become thoroughly, although not necessarily fundamentally, mediatised. Mediatisation is the process in which organisations and institutions adapt themselves to some extent to the rules, norms and values of the media (Hjarvard, 2013). Actors in modern governance respond to media pressures and have altered their routines and practices in order to be able to operate effectively.

Mediatisation has profound effects on governance, as the authors in this theme issue document. Those effects are, however, often normatively ambiguous. On the one hand it is found that the media environment may have negative effects on performance (Klijn) and may also induce perverse side-effects (Friedrichsmeier and Marcinkowski). Simultaneously, however, do the media also help to sort out complex issues of responsibility in governance settings (Hasler et al) and do the media also assist the traditional democratic power centres, such as parliament (Jacobs and Schillemans)? The effects, thus are manifold and do not fit easily in a simple black-and-white normative framework.

Furthermore, this theme issue is set in a governance context of transformation, where all sorts of unelected agents have become integrated in policy processes. The theme issue is set in a media-context of profound change, with shifting economies, professional styles, news formats and types of media. The papers document and describe many of those changes and they go in many directions. But, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, a common thread running through most papers is that those changes in governance and media also confirm and reconfigure traditional patterns and roles. It is, for example, found that the traditionally most media-attuned local government officials are also those who take up social media most readily (Djerf-Pierre and Pierre). Bureaucracies operating closer to the political power centre are more responsive to public pressures than those with more autonomy (Alon Barkat and Gilad).

All in all, then, the undercurrents in this theme issue are confirmatory. At the surface level, the papers sketch a vivid empirical portrait of media and governance in nine western democracies. The papers connect the somewhat disconnected academic worlds of media and governance studies and produce a rare collection of comparative papers at the intersection of academic communities. The undercurrent confirms the relevance of the transformations of media and governance and, thus, the mediatization of governance. But the undercurrent is also confirmatory in the sense that while traditional forms of governance and media are indeed changing, traditional power centres, relationships and practices are reconstituted *and* reconfirmed.

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