

# Understanding Media in Europe: Authors, Theories, and Current Affairs

Lecturer: Mgr. Karolína Šimková

## Course Description:

This course offers a comprehensive, comparative analysis of European media landscapes while introducing students to influential theories and scholars that shape contemporary digital culture. The course contrasts the commercialized, First Amendment-centric US model with Europe's public service broadcasting tradition. Students will engage directly with the historical and post-communist media transitions of Central and Eastern Europe. Through interactive lectures, field trips, screenings of pop culture phenomena such as Black Mirror, and hands-on content production, students learn to critically apply media theory to current affairs, generative AI, and evolving creative industries.

## Course Prerequisites:

None.

## Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Comprehend and contrast the structural differences between US commercial media and European public service media systems.
- Trace the post-communist media evolution in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Explain foundational media concepts, including political economy, transmedia storytelling, the network society, and surveillance capitalism.
- Analyze how emerging technologies like generative AI impact the global creative industries and individuals.
- Critically examine their personal data footprint and evaluate the practical impact of international regulatory frameworks like the EU's GDPR.

- Record and produce a structured audio podcast that synthesizes academic theory with real-world observations.
- Formulate an analytical reflection evaluating an individual digital art piece and its broader societal implications.

#### Course Requirements:

- **Active Engagement (15%):** Demonstrating preparation and active participation during in-class discussions and debates.
- **Media Podcast (30%):** Completed individually or in pairs. Students produce an original 7–10 minute podcast exploring a localized media phenomenon, blending theory with creative audio storytelling.
- **Excursion Reflection Paper (20%):** A 600–800 word reflection essay following the visit to the gallery.
- **Final Colloquium (35%):** A collaborative oral final exam where students sit in a circle format, summarizing and linking assigned core media concepts to real-world examples.

#### Grading Policy:

##### **Mandatory Completion Policy**

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

| Letter Grade | Percentage | Description                                                          |
|--------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A+           | 97-100     | Excellent Work                                                       |
| A            | 93-97      | Outstanding Work                                                     |
| A-           | 90-92      |                                                                      |
| B+           | 87-89      | Good work                                                            |
| B            | 83-86      |                                                                      |
| B-           | 80-82      |                                                                      |
| C+           | 77-79      | Acceptable Work                                                      |
| C            | 73-76      |                                                                      |
| C-           | 70-72      |                                                                      |
| D+           | 67-69      | Work that is significantly below average                             |
| D            | 63-66      |                                                                      |
| D-           | 60-62      |                                                                      |
| F            | 0-59       | Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course |

#### **AEP Academic Integrity Policy**

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

#### **AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy**

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

#### **AEP Diversity Policy**

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

## Weekly Schedule

### Week 1

*CEE Introductory Lecture Series*

AEP Introductory Lecture Series

### Week 2

*Introduction to Media Systems: US vs. EU Models*

This session begins with a comprehensive introduction to the course expectations, requirements and the podcast project. Following this orientation, Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini's classic media systems typologies are introduced to map the structural differences between the market-driven, commercial US "Liberal Model" and European public service frameworks. Through a hands-on activity, students will evaluate how information operates as a commercial commodity versus a public infrastructure.

#### Readings

- None

### Week 3

*Public Service Media & What is The "Message"*

Moving deeper into Hallin and Mancini's European models, we evaluate the cultural and democratic necessity of Public Service Media (PSM) in Europe. Applying Marshall McLuhan's foundational theory, we examine how media formats and digital infrastructures shape societal attention spans, regardless of the actual content being consumed.

#### Readings

- Marshall McLuhan – Understanding Media, Chapter 1

### Week 4

*Field Trip: Inside the Newsroom*

This session takes students outside the classroom for a site visit to a major Prague media institution (e.g., Czech Radio or Czech Television – to be specified) to observe how international and local news is selected, framed, and prioritized. Gatekeeping and Agenda-Setting theories are introduced to analyze why certain global issues make the front page while others are filtered out.

#### Readings

- Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw – The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media

## Week 5

### *From Total Censorship to Wild Capitalism: CEE Media Transitions*

An analytical deep dive into Central and Eastern European (CEE) media system transitions. We explore the rapid shock privatization of the 1990s media market following decades of totalitarian state censorship. By reviewing archive footage and post-socialist advertising, students will evaluate how local audiences adapted to competitive, market-driven information delivery formats.

## Readings

- Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd – Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective, Chapter 1

## Week 6

### *Who Owns the News? Networks, Power, and Media Oligarchs*

Introducing the political economy of modern communication platforms through the lens of Manuel Castells' network theory. We examine how traditional national structures have shifted to modern oligarchic "media capture" across Central and Eastern Europe. Students will apply system typologies to discuss what happens when local billionaires buy up core communication networks to secure political influence.

## Readings

- Manuel Castells – The Network Society, Chapter 1

## Week 7

### *Consumer Culture: Reclaiming Meaning in Platform Spaces*

Investigating the complex relationship between commercial culture networks, corporate media co-optation, and audience agency. Guided by John Fiske's theory of semiotic democracy, we examine how youth subcultures repurpose corporate digital trends and algorithms to create alternative spaces and resistant meanings.

## Readings

- John Fiske – Reading the Popular, Chapter 5a

## Week 8

### *Podcast Production Lab & Guest Lecture*

The first half of the session features an interactive presentation from an invited guest speaker: either an active media practitioner or a media scholar, focusing on contemporary research, production ethics, or field insights. The second half functions as an applied audio laboratory where students mix and edit their audio files.

## Readings

- None

## Week 9

### *EU Regulations and Surveillance Capitalism*

We investigate how the European Union operates as the world's primary digital regulator via the GDPR and other actions. Using Shoshana Zuboff's theory of Surveillance Capitalism and David Lyon's surveillance frameworks alongside a screening of Black Mirror, we analyze how tech platforms extract user behavior as data profit. Students will audit their own smartphone privacy settings, evaluating how effectively EU laws shield them compared to the looser regulations of the US market.

### Readings

- David Lyon (2022) – Surveillance
- Shoshana Zuboff (2019) – The Age of Surveillance Capitalism (Excerpt).

## Week 10

### *Generative AI, Actor-Networks, and Automated Creativity*

Evaluating how generative AI models reshape the baseline economics of creative industries, marketing sectors, and artistic authorship. Using Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), we treat AI algorithms not merely as neutral tools, but as active, non-human "actants" that redefine human agency and creative collaboration. We contrast Henry Jenkins' celebration of human transmedia world-building with generative AI technologies.

### Readings

- Henry Jenkins – Convergence Culture (Selected chapters on Transmedia Storytelling).

## Week 11

### *Living In Media & Algorithmic Echo Chambers*

This session evaluates how algorithmic systems deepen the digital divide, leading to profound structural and informational fragmentation. Using Mark Deuze's "media life" framework and an integrated screening of Black Mirror, we explore environments where deepfakes and custom feeds alter shared social realities.

### Readings

- Jan van Dijk – The Digital Divide, Chapter 1

## Week 12

### *Field Trip: Exhibition on Digital Media*

A local field trip to a Prague gallery exhibition focusing on digital art, new media installations, or technological culture. Students will select a specific artwork on-site and write an analytical reflection paper.

### Readings

- None

## Week 13

### *Class Conclusion & Oral Colloquium*

The final evaluation session of the course. The semester concludes with a peer-led oral colloquium, where students collaboratively synthesize the core theories and texts using real-world insights from their study abroad experience.

### Readings

- None

### Readings:

Castells, M., & Cardoso, G. (Eds.). (2005). The network society: From knowledge to policy. Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations.

Fiske, J. (2011). Reading the Popular (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jakubowicz, K., & Sükösd, M. (eds.) (2008). Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective. Bristol: Intellect Books.

Jenkins, H. (2006). Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide. New York: New York University Press.

Lyon, D. (2022). "Surveillance". Internet Policy Review, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2022.4.1673>.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. The Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(2), 176–187. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2747787>

McLuhan, M. (1964). Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. New York: McGraw-Hill.

van Dijk, J. A. G. M. (2020). The Digital Divide. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Zuboff, Shoshana. (2019). The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power. New York: Public Affairs.