

POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

Časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá / Journal for Political Sciences, Modern History, International Relations, security studies

URL časopisu / URL of the journal: <http://www.fpvmv.umb.sk/politickevedy>

Autor(i) / Author(s): Chudovský Maroš
Článok / Article: „Media and Democracy“ by James Curran
Vydavateľ / Publisher: Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov –
UMB Banská Bystrica / Faculty of Political Sciences
and International Relations – UMB Banská Bystrica

Odporúčaná forma citácie článku / Recommended form for quotation of the article:

CHUDOVSÝ, M. 2012. „Media and Democracy“ by James Curran. In *Politické vedy*. [online]. Roč. 15, č. 4, 2012. ISSN 1335 – 2741, s. 135 – 139. Dostupné na internete: <http://www.fpvmv.umb.sk/userfiles/file/4_2012/CHUDOVSKY.pdf>.

Poskytnutím svojho príspevku autor(i) súhlasil(i) so zverejnením článku na internetovej stránke časopisu Politické vedy. Vydavateľ získal súhlas autora / autorov s publikovaním a distribúciou príspevku v tlačenej i online verzii. V prípade záujmu publikovať článok alebo jeho časť v online i tlačenej podobe, kontaktujte redakčnú radu časopisu: politicke.vedy@umb.sk.

By submitting their contribution the author(s) agreed with the publication of the article on the online page of the journal. The publisher was given the author's / authors' permission to publish and distribute the contribution both in printed and online form. Regarding the interest to publish the article or its part in online or printed form, please contact the editorial board of the journal: politicke.vedy@umb.sk.

“MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY” BY JAMES CURRAN

Maroš Chudovský*

CURRAN, J.: *Media and Democracy*. New York: Routledge, 2011. 272 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-31707-8.

Mass media, without any doubts, play their important and irreplaceable role in the society as a whole, and in a political system of every country in the world. They supply all kind of information to people, including political ones to voters, so they can decide more responsibly and reasonably. Moreover, by providing platform for debates across the whole spectrum of opinions and serving as the watchdog to those who hold the power they contribute to the health of democracy in an unprecedented way. Relations between mass media, development of new technologies and democracy has been broadly analysed in many books so far. One of those with an ambition to describe this intricate nexus is also the book reviewed in this contribution, entitled *Media and Democracy* and authored by professor **James Curran**.

James Curran is a Professor of Communication at Goldsmiths University of London and works as a Director of the Goldsmiths Leverhume Media Research Centre. In his numerous books and publications the major attention is paid to two areas, namely media history and media political economy. He mainly seeks to describe relation between development of new technologies, media and changes in society. As a result of his research efforts in 2011 he was awarded the C. Edwin Baker Award for his lifetime contribution to scholarship on Media, Markets and Democracy by the International Communication Association's Philosophy, Policy and Law Divisions.

Author **James Curran** profited by his huge previous experience of studying relation between democracy and media and propose more than just theoretical description or analysis focused on environment of one nation. The objective of

* Mgr. Maroš Chudovský is an internal Ph.D candidate at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, e-mail: maros.chudovsky@umb.sk.

this book is to look at democratic functioning of media in many various contexts, so the reader of this book can enjoy a different approach to this issue. This title comprises of five parts, each of them further divided into twelve chapters, each made up by a separate essay. In the introduction author defines four main themes. The first one encompasses first four chapters. It is not exactly named, but could be formulated equally to the title of the book, media and democracy. The second theme of the book is concerned with media and technology including chapters five, six and seven. The third theme is articulated by the author as media history and is further analysed in next three essays. Finally, the last theme present in last two chapters links together media and culture.

To begin with, the opening chapter called *Shining city on a hill* looks closer on the American news media system. It argues that this system is based on two main principles. Firstly, if media are to be free from authorities, their structure has to be organised as market system. On the other hand, if they are to contribute to democratic establishment and not get damaged by the market arrangement, they have to be staffed by skilled, unbiased, professional journalists. Ideals and achievements of this system of American journalism is put in contrast with journalism in many authoritarian states, with interconnection of Italian media and government of this country, with irresponsible methods of tabloid journalism in Great Britain. In the following chapter, *Questioning the new orthodoxy*, author's effort is directed on more detailed investigation of the American news media. He argues that news media is not fully independent on government. More specifically, by accepting rules of costly and unregulated political advertising they assist permanent social inequality and maintain the status of finance-driven basis of politics in the United States. Both of these chapters visibly criticise current situation and character of American journalism. The third chapter entitled *Media system, public knowledge and democracy: a comparative study* was written by the author in cooperation with **Shanto Iyengar, Anker Brink Lund and Inka Salovaara-Moring**. Central argument of this essay is that world's news media focus ever more on market and are becoming much more entertainment-oriented than they used to be in the past. Comparing the democratic standards of news media in America, Great Britain, Denmark and Finland they examine the consequences of this shift towards market system for people and their access to accurate information. The outcome of this comparison is a n assertion that news media in Europe serve their informative role better than those in America and so Europeans are more aware of inner politics and international issues.

The second part of the book, *Media and democracy theory*, starts off with fourth chapter *Entertaining democracy*. This essay recognizes the fact that media entertainment has a huge effect on democracy and democratic functioning of any country. TV broadcasting fosters public discussion about social values, about how they are and how they should be. In this way also entertainment facilitates democratic principles, but on the other hand still it is important to make strong distinction between fiction and real journalism to avoid information shortage. As one of examples author shows lack of information about Iraqi invasion. In 2006 still more than one third of American citizens believed that Iraq had or had been developing weapons of mass destruction at the time of American invasion in 2003. The second topic of this chapter is relation between democracy and media in new globalised era. In consequence of deepened economic interdependence nation governments are losing power constantly. This has led to some attempts to rebuild democratic governance on the global level. On the opposite side, media remain oriented on nation, which makes this global democratic repair and transition much more problematic. Moreover, society is made up not just of individuals, but of many organisations and interest groups as well. Media have to be aware of that fact and try to use various instruments in order to support this complex structure of society, because different types of journalism may facilitate different aspects of democracy. The fifth chapter, *Liberal dreams and the Internet*, is co-authored by **Tamara Witschge**. It argues that because of globalisation, above all in the realm of communication and IT technologies, the existence of the international public sphere cannot be impugnable. In fact, the existence of international public sphere and international public opinion constitute some kind of world citizenry. The character of global public sphere is explored on instance of e-zine *openDemocracy*. This e-zine has been very successful and may serve as an example of innovative journalism. Authors describe also some negative features of *openDemocracy*, such as gender, social or geographic attributes of contributors or inability to produce any significant revenue which is limiting the progress of independent international web-journalism.

In respect to the topic of chapter five, sixth chapter titled *Technology foretold* examines the same attributes in relation to digital and cable television, local community television and dotcom bubble in Great Britain. The case study investigates the predictions of development compared to what really happened in last thirty years in these four „new media“. Within this analysis it bears witness to the fact that some unfeasible future media predictions were

sometimes used to justify media deregulation. The arguments introduced in previous chapters are further examined in chapter seven, *The future of journalism*, that takes a closer look on actual forecasts. Author questions the four main prognosis of future media's development. In his opinion, nor continuity in a well-guided process of transition, a crisis of journalism threatening democratic principles, a liberating Schumpeterian purge, or reinvention-based renaissance of journalism is likely to happen. Instead of these eventualities he sees the Internet to be the decisive factor that contributes to degeneration and uniformity of old journalism.

The fourth part of the book begins with the eighth chapter called *Narratives of media history revisited* in which the historical approach is used. Author enlightens how history of the British media has shaped the present and analyses their role in formation of modern society in the United Kingdom. He illuminates the recent research in major interpretations of media history, formulates critical points and defines challenges for liberal, feminist, populist, radical, libertarian, and anthropological and technological determinist interpretations. The next two chapters go back to history again concentrating on particular features of press history in the Great Britain. The chapter nine entitled *Press as an agency of social control* is focused on the liberating process of British press that took place in the mid-nineteenth Century. The crucial moment of liberation was the cessation of the media from punitive taxation. This generally recognized fact is questioned by specifying the real steps and words of „press freedom fighters“. In the next chapter, *Advertising as a bounty system*, it is shown what effect had advertising on the media in first two thirds of the twentieth Century. It is said that determinants of that period such as rise of advertising agencies, existence of evidence-based selection of advertising or rising incomes gave chance to radical journalism to muddle through. In other words, some individuals had more money to spend on advertisement than others, so they were much more attractive to publishers to cooperate with. This approach harmed the whole press structure and distorted publishing strategies. Still, it is yet to say, that this phenomenon was not result of political discrimination, but more of economic processes.

The last, fifth part of the book has title *Media and culture* and encompasses two chapters. In the eleventh essay with the title *Media as custodians of cultural tradition* author unmask the feature that most of book reviews in United Kingdom national press focus on history, biography, literary studies and fiction and politics. This suggests that such a specific selection is influenced by the

educational background of authors of these reviews. Moreover, their preferences and opinions expressed in reviews are rarely challenged by publishing executives. The main goal of this chapter is to describe how reviewers do their work and how it influences the public knowledge level. It is believed that the reviewed object should not be chosen on the basis of sales of particular title, but more on what "informed" people should know about. The very last chapter entitled *Media and cultural theory in the age of market liberalism* describes the situation in media and cultural studies in Britain during previous twenty-five years. Four major influences on the latter development are articulated. Firstly, it is the victory of capitalist democracy in 1989 that consolidated the neo-liberal hegemony; secondly, the assertion of individualism which became more apparent in politics in 1980s and 1990s; thirdly, the rise of women and, finally; the intensification of globalisation. Furthermore, it is argued that prestigious researchers periodically proclaim that a new orientation towards better functioning of the field is needed and persuade readers to join this new paradigm. Author assumes that intellectual development is not powered exclusively by the inner logic of ideas, but more as a response to awareness of general flaw in that field.

To sum up, the reviewed book *Media and democracy* written by **James Curran** represents a highly valuable contribution to the literature dealing with the relationship between media, technological development and democracy and provides undoubtedly an innovative analysis on the issue. Although the book provides clear and understandable answers on questions like how media influence modern society, what is the future of journalism or how new communications technology change understanding of democracy, still the book is recommended to the readers who already have some knowledge about submitted problem. It can be recommended also for students, academicians and analysts studying media and thanks to its contribution to examining influence of media on democracy the book might be of considerable interest also for the political scientists.