**Proposal to Establish the IAMCR “Media Development in Theory and Practice” Working Group**

Beginning in 2015, a group of scholars and researcher-practitioners interested in the topic of “media development” began organizing around IAMCR’s annual gathering, closely linked to the Participatory Communication Section. The group has organized several IAMCR panels in that time, held two IAMCR pre-conferences—Leicester, UK (2016), and Cartagena, Colombia (2017)—and in fall 2018 members of this group participated in a two-day workshop held simultaneously in London and Washington, DC. These panels, conferences, and workshops have offered space to debate the key issues facing media development and offered an opportunity to reflect, probe, and unpack the history of ideas that have shaped efforts to stimulate media development. Out of these gatherings has emerged a budding network of scholars and applied researchers with a common purpose to co-produce the knowledge that is needed to underpin effective action in response to a crisis in news media. The network, however, has produced more than just ideas and aspirations. An edited volume on the topic of media development is due to be published in the fall by Peter Lang Publishing. Several current and potential research collaborations have emerged from the conversations, positioning members of the group to take advantage of expected growth in research funding to this topic in the coming years, if and when it materializes. We are now proposing that the work of this growing network can sustain a unique IAMCR Working Group, likely to feature two to three panels and other events each year under the title of “Media Development in Theory and Practice.” This working group will have an explicit focus on building a bridge between concepts and action, drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives and co-created knowledge to inform and support advocacy strategies, approaches to international cooperation, policy reforms and other interventions by local, national, and international actors designed to promote media development.

As defined by the Center for International Media Development, “media development refers to evolution and change in the fields of news media and communications. Such change relates to a range of institutions, practices, and behaviors, including the rule of law, freedoms of expression and press, education systems for journalists, business environments, capacities of journalists and managers, as well as support for a diversity of views in society. This evolution can be stimulated by donor support, private investment, or local processes of change led by media owners, managers, journalists, media industry associations, and other collective efforts.” (See: CIMA at <http://www.cima.ned.org/what-is-media-development/>). In essence, media development is focused on support and capacity-building for the growth of all media institutions into vibrant agents of social and political change in democratic and undemocratic contexts (Banda 2008).

This notion of media development is distinct from the fields of media *for* development or communication for development, and is not to be confused with the general topic area of media *and* development (Scott 2014). Whereas media development tends to emphasize changes in the *structure* of a media system, and with a special emphasis on the structure of the news media, media for development places the emphasis on *content*, treating the media as channels for the messages that will change norms and behaviors. By contrast, communication for development, especially when associated with participatory communication, generally focuses on the *process* of communication as a driver of development. Finally, media *and* development can be seen as a much broader umbrella for all of these areas and more, including the role of media in wider processes of social and economic change. This working group will focus, to the extent possible, on the theory and practice of *media development* with its related emphasis on institutional structures and the practice of journalism.

The challenge with *media development* as a research field, however, is that it still lacks distinctive theories and methods that can enable scholars to approach topics from a unique disciplinary viewpoint. The mission statement of the proposed working group explains how the working group will continue the effort, begun by this ad hoc network, of elaborating media development as a research field and engaging with media development as a field of practice. This distinct scholarly challenge, and its direct implications for a programmatic field, sets it apart from the objectives of other working groups and sections, while being broad enough to sustain itself as an independent working group.

**Proposed Chairs**

Co-Chair: Nicholas Benequista, Center for International Media Assistance

Co-Chair: Susan Abbott, University of Westminster

Vice-Chair: Maria Soledad Segura, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba

These three chairs were chosen in a unanimous vote by the twelve participants at a planning meeting of media development researchers held in Eugene on the sidelines IAMCR 2018.

**Mission Statement**

Emily Bell, director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, recently wrote, “How we arbitrate the rights and responsibilities of maintaining a free and fair press function is one of the defining political issues of our age, and we seem to be inadequately prepared for the task.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

The hopes and anxieties created by the spread of digital communication technologies have rekindled debates about media regulation, protections for freedom of expression, privacy, journalistic business models, and the role of the media in sustaining democratic deliberation. At the same time, much of the power to govern the media space itself has shifted to the corporations that control the infrastructure of the internet. In this environment, the debates around development of media in general, and journalism in particular, that serves human rights, democracy, pluralism and that is driven by the needs and interests of citizens will require concerted, strategic action by local activists, reform-minded governments, and their international allies. To be effective, this action must be supported by learning and knowledge.

We are proposing the creation of a working group at IAMCR that can help to assemble a portion of the knowledge required of these efforts. The work that is presented in the media development working group will give attention in *particular to debates and research into how news, information, and public discourse change over time, and to the strategic actions of different actors to ensure those changes serve public interest*. At the heart of these questions is a concern with power: who has the power to shape and sustain media systems, and with what consequences for rights, development, and democracy?

At present, research on the topic of media development is underdeveloped. There is blurring of distinctions between communication for development, and media development. The former field aligns more to strategic communications and communications for social change; the latter relates to sector wide and institutional development of media organizations, and to the enabling environment that needs to be put in place for this objective. A further complication in research into media development is that the organizations associated with international assistance to media development have frequently treated media development as something that is done to other countries, with studies confined to closed donor circles rather than placed in the public sphere. This cloistering of media development has become its Achilles heel, alienating and disempowering some of the actors essential to the media’s development. And while there is a growing critique that demonstrates how media development assistance has pushed Western blueprints for media and news journalism that may not be appropriate for a given context, these critical perspectives seldom offer constructive insight into how media development can be supported through bottom-up, demand-driven processes. The implications of digitalization for media have also been poorly understood, which has been reflected in a fracturing of social movements and civil society organizations between those who work to protect independent media and freedom of expression and those who work to strengthen internet governance and digital rights.

By providing an important annual gathering point to share ideas, debate, and plan, the IAMCR Working Group on Media Development will provide an opportunity to help build the research and knowledge community that media development needs. Theoretical and empirical papers will fit into this working group that address the following topics:

**1. Understanding the nature of international and national support to media development in a digital age: the field of assistance to media development—its concepts, strategies of support, objectives, and measures of success—must be reconceptualized for the current challenges.**

**2. Understanding struggles to reform, democratize, and strengthen the public service function of media systems: the media development perspective calls for special attention to understanding in theory and in practice how deliberate actions by many actors—be it by media and digital rights activists, regulators, media owners, journalists, social entrepreneurs, or others—can collectively shape media systems to serve the interests of citizens.**

**3. Improving methodologies for measuring media development, discerning media’s role in broader processes of development and democratization, and evaluating the contribution of policies and international support, among other interventions that seek to promote media development.**

**4. Reviewing, critiquing, and contributing concepts that underpin the ideas and practices associated with media development. The ideas at the core of media development have come from various streams in communication studies, providing a point of reflection on theories and concepts from diverse research areas and analytical perspectives. This eclecticism makes for a vibrant, but chaotic conversation, which would be aided by more rigorous and critical theorizing from the perspective of the media development field itself.**

The creation of a new Working Group on Media Development in Theory and Practice at IAMCR is warranted because the field lacks an intellectual home and scholarly orientation of its own. While there are many active scholars working on media development issues, many of whom are IAMCR members, there is not yet an organized space for media development scholars to meet, debate, and discuss their research. While there will continue to be shared interests between this working group and the Participatory Communication Research Section; International Communication Section; Crisis, Security, and Conflict Communication Working Group; Political Economy; Global Media Policy Working Group; and others, the Working Group’s focus on the agenda above, along with its connection to a distinct field of international development assistance and practice, will ensure that it makes a distinct contribution to IAMCR.

In the past two years, the work of this informal group has been largely conducted under the auspices of the Participatory Communication Research (PCR) Section. While the PCR section has had a strong interest in development issues, that section has tended to focus on *communication for development*, which is distinct from media development (communication for development tends to look at communication as an instrument of development and social change, while media development tends to focus on the development of media systems). While the PCR section favors participatory methods and qualitative research, media development research, because of its multidisciplinary nature, requires greater methodological eclecticism (consider, for instance, the debates around quantitative indicators in the field). For a similar assortment of reasons, media development is not a perfect fit as a strand in any single working groups or section. Media development touches upon law, policies, social movements, journalistic practices, education, and media ownership, among other issues. Despite areas of overlap, our topic also is set apart and circumscribed by its developmental focus—which places a special emphasis on building a theory of change that can inform action.

One can find important research related to media development at academic conferences for communications, political science, anthropology, and many more. Giving the keynote address at the last pre-conference on Media Development held before the 2017 IAMCR conference in Bogota, Professor Silvio Waisbord of George Washington University described the challenge as “bringing order to the chaos,” calling for media development to be seen as a distinct field of research specialization.

Much work remains to be done in terms of identifying central theoretical questions for media development as a research field; the Working Group will help to facilitate alternatives to Western theory and to nurture a new generation of thinking (and hopefully scholars) on what media development means in the digital age. A vibrant debate over the reconceptualization of media development is beginning to emerge from the contrasting approaches of scholars who have worked on this topic, including Monroe Price (1994), Linje Manyozo (2016), Nicole Stremlau (Forthcoming), Martin Scott (2014), Maria Segura Soledad and Silvio Waisbord (2016), Tom Jacobson (Forthcoming), Winston Mano (Forthcoming), Carolyn Byerly (Forthcoming), Pippa Norris (2009) and many of the signatories below.

Meanwhile, there are indications that the programmatic agenda around media development is growing and consolidating, in part because of a growing sense of concern about the integrity of the information space. A distinct working group will provide a platform for research at the IAMCR to engage—critically, one hopes—with the programmatic agenda. Indeed, all of the papers presented at this Working Group will be expected to draw out the practical or programmatic applications of the findings. Conversely, any practioner-led research submitted to the group will be expected to engage in critical reflection informed by scholarly concepts.

In summary, the Working Group no doubt includes elements of citizen participation, political communication, political economy, security and conflict, and other themes present elsewhere at the IAMCR, but the research included in this Working Group has a distinct theoretical and programmatic orientation that separates it. And yet, the topic itself is broad enough to attract a sufficient diversity to sustain itself independently. In the upcoming edited volume on the topic of media development, there are chapters on media reform movements, markets for loyalty, methodological questions on measurement, the international relations implications of China’s investments in “media development,” solutions journalism, governance of media systems, gender and media, among others—all with a focus on the three topic areas above that distinguish them as belonging to the field of media development studies. This work will be given an opportunity to flourish with the creation of a new working group.

**The Working Group’s Plan for Future Activities**

Over the next two years, members of the Working Group will carry out the following activities:

* Organize at least two sessions with peer-reviewed papers at each IAMCR main conference.
* Develop partnerships with one or two key journals willing to become the key platforms for papers produced by members of the working group.
* Conduct outreach to current and future research consortiums and major practitioner-research initiatives, including the Media at Risk Center and Media and Power Research Consortium, to encourage them to present findings at the working group.
* Every year continue to host a parallel meeting of researchers and practitioners to stimulate action-oriented research in the field.
* Support a working group mailing list to encourage sharing of research findings and engagement between researchers and practitioners interested in media development.

**Endorsement of 20 IAMCR Members on Three Continents**

1. Monroe E. Price, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania
2. Nicholas Benequista, Center for International Media Assistance
3. Susan Abbott, University of Westminster
4. Carolyn M. Byerly, Howard University
5. Marc Raboy, McGill University
6. Iginio Gagliardone, University of the Witwatersrand
7. Herman Wasserman, University of Cape Town
8. Jad Melki, Lebanese American University
9. Martin Scott, University of East Anglia
10. Naomi Sakr, University of Westminster
11. Chris Paterson, University of Leeds (former IC member)
12. Karin Wilkins, University of Texas at Austin, US
13. Lauren Kogen, Temple University, US
14. Minna Aslama Horowitz, St. John’s University, US, and University of Helsinki, Finland
15. Winston Mano, University of Westminster
16. Nicole Stremlau, University of Oxford and University of Johannesburg
17. Hawley Johnson, Columbia University
18. María Soledad Segura, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba
19. Dr. Padma Rani, School of Communication, MAHE, Manipal, India
20. Silvio Waisbord, George Washington University
21. Joe F. Khalil, Northwestern University in Qatar

**Endorsement Signatures of Five Council Members from Three Continents**

1. Dr. Guillermo Mastrini, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, Argentina
2. Claudia Padovani, University of Padova, Italy
3. Philippe J. Maarek, University Paris Est - UPEC
4. Sandra Ristovska, Assistant Professor, Media Studies, College of Media, Communication and Information, University of Colorado Boulder, USA
5. Peter Lunt, University of Leicester, UK

**Supporting Organizations**

UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). Guy Berger (secretary of IPDC).

The Center for International Media Assistance, Mark Nelson (Senior Director).

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Jacobson, Tom. *Forthcoming.* “Solutions Journalism and a Normative Model for Media and Development” in Benequista, N. et al., eds., “International Media Development: Historical Perspectives and New Frontiers” (New York: Peter Lang)

Mano, Winston. *Forthcoming*. “Refocusing Media Development in Africa,” in Benequista, N. et al., eds., “International Media Development: Historical Perspectives and New Frontiers” (New York: Peter Lang)

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1. https://www.theguardian.com/media/commentisfree/2018/may/13/keeping-a-free-and-fair-press-is-one-of-the-defining-political-issues-of-our-age?\_cldee=bmlja2JAbmVkLm9yZw%3d%3d&recipientid=contact-656b37a231b8e71180e4005056a456ce-3525b0a5691248c7801f24db5373a0c6&esid=87d51ea8-8f57-e811-80f1-005056a456ce [↑](#endnote-ref-1)