

Media and Journalism Research in Small European Countries

Ragne Kõuts-Klemm ¹, Tobias Eberwein ², Zrinjka Peruško ³, Dina Vozab ³,
Anda Rožukalne ⁴, Ilva Skulte ⁴, and Alnis Stakle ⁴

¹ Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia

² Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria

³ Department of Media and Communication, University of Zagreb, Croatia

⁴ Faculty of Communication, Riga Stradiņš University, Latvia

Correspondence: Ragne Kõuts-Klemm (ragne.kouts@ut.ee)

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Abstract

Big and small states all function as comprehensive entities: they require state apparatuses, the ability to provide services for citizens, the capacity to protect themselves, and appropriate media systems to guarantee a deliberative communication space for democratic processes. Investigating media, in turn, is important since it informs us about risks and opportunities for media transformations. To examine the impact of smallness on monitoring and research capabilities in news media and journalism, we have compared four small European countries with contrasting historical backgrounds and different types of media systems: Austria, Croatia, Estonia, and Latvia. While earlier research has mainly focused on Western European countries, the current study broadens the perspective to Central and Eastern European countries. The analysis shows that smallness can influence research capabilities in different ways, with advantages and disadvantages for media and journalism research. Fewer national resources can foster internationalisation, with the side effect of less attention to country-specific problems. In the situation of growing specialisation in media and journalism research, small countries may be less capable of providing sufficient infrastructure for knowledge exchange. The article builds on research performed within the framework of the H2020 project Mediadelcom.

Keywords

Austria; Croatia; Estonia; journalism; Latvia; media; media research; monitoring

1. Introduction

This study aims to compare news media and journalism research in four small European countries in terms of media monitoring capabilities. News media play a central role in the emergence and functioning of a public sphere that enables citizens to participate in democratic processes. The analysis of media monitoring capacity is relevant because it highlights gaps in our knowledge of media transformations. With better knowledge, it is possible for policymakers to develop appropriate, well-informed media policies. We assume that size matters when we ask about the capacity and efficiency of research and monitoring in a country. Size is a multifaceted issue and needs to be examined alongside other contextual factors. For example, Lowe and Nissen (2011), the authors of *Small Among Giants: Television Broadcasting in Smaller Countries*, assess size in relation to a country's territory, population, media market, industry, and economic and cultural dependence on a larger, same-language neighbour. Relative size is sometimes more important than absolute size. On the one hand, it can hinder the performance of some functions in an increasingly complex world due to a lack of resources; on the other hand, it can lead to ingenuity in finding appropriate and flexible, country-specific solutions.

In our study, we examined the capacity of small countries to produce knowledge about media regulation and its effectiveness, patterns of media use and audiences' competences, developments in the field of journalism, agents of knowledge production, and so on. Few such inventories have been carried out. Our aim in this study is to examine the capacity of four small European countries (Austria, Croatia, Estonia, and Latvia) to carry out such inventories. We examined four areas of media and journalism research: legal and ethical regulation, journalism, patterns of media use, and media competences. These four research areas are the focus of the H2020 project Mediadelcom.

The discipline of media and communication (Donsbach, 2006), and journalism studies as a field under this disciplinary umbrella (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009), covers a wide range of topics and draws on a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches (Günther & Domahidi, 2017). There are reports on the disciplinary development of specific subfields, such as science communication (Chang & Tai, 2005; Walter et al., 2018), field logic (Cushion, 2008; Maares & Hanusch, 2022), and trending research topics. Media and communication research is increasingly internationalised (Cushion, 2008; Hanusch & Vos, 2020), although in a global context, only a few countries receive major attention in the most important scientific journals. Smaller countries with their specific problems are hardly visible at the international level (Cushion, 2008; Domahidi & Strippel, 2014; Walter et al., 2018; etc.). Holistic and comparative analyses of the state of news media and journalism research in different countries are rare (Hanusch & Vos, 2020). We are interested in the state of media and journalism research in small countries in Europe.

2. Smallness as a Research Concept

The concept of smallness has not often been the focus of media research (see Puppis, 2009). Media systems research does not distinguish between large and small. Media systems and their contributions to democracy are considered equally important for large and small countries. For example, Peruško et al. (2015) clustered the media systems in European countries based on democratic, social, economic, and cultural factors. Austria, for instance, was grouped in the same cluster as the significantly larger UK; Croatia was grouped in the same cluster as the significantly larger Poland (Peruško et al., 2015, p. 353). However, other findings show that

the size of a country's media system does have an impact on media performance. Puppis (2009), for example, points to the structural peculiarities of small countries and their media with limited resources to produce good journalism. From a media policy perspective, competition in small media markets tends not to work without state intervention and "small states tend to adopt an interventionist regulatory approach" (Puppis et al., 2009, p. 105). As a result, small countries can make the media more vulnerable and threaten editorial independence (Ravn-Højgaard et al., 2021).

There are many definitions of small. Attempts have been made to define it by the size of the population or the economy of a country (Katzenstein, 1985). In the early 1960s, analyses set the population threshold of a small country at 10 million, but this threshold is arbitrary (Shareef & Hoti, 2005). Smallness has also been defined in terms of language, in cases where a small country has a much larger same-language neighbour (e.g., Meier & Trappel, 1992). The label "small" was also used to describe countries not close or connected to centres of global economics and power (Rahkonen, 2007). Some authors connect smallness to a perceived lack of power, suggesting that smallness manifests itself negatively in terms of not only possessing low power but also in the lack of opportunity to exercise power (Kurecic et al., 2017; Mouritzen & Wivel, 2005). Puppis et al. (2009, p. 106) suggest using relational and attributive features of smallness and, according to them, in the EU only seven countries can be defined as big: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, and the UK. However, taking into account global trends in the media industry, it can be argued that even these countries are small in the era of platformisation. The emergence of global platforms has created new asymmetries in the media market (Ihlebaek & Sundet, 2023; Lordache & Livémont, 2018). To counterbalance the uneven competitive environment for tech giants and local publishers, small states often implement protective media policies (Lordache & Livémont, 2018). Research shows that "small states with giant neighbours sharing a language might sacrifice media diversity in order to preserve a domestic media landscape of their own" (Puppis et al., 2009, p. 105).

Moreover, small size may affect a country's ability to monitor media. Limited R&D funds are spread thinly over many topics (Amanatidou & Cox, 2022) or a more precise selection for funding is made on the basis of agreed-on research policy priorities. This means that not every media-related topic can be researched. Another option, international funding, can mean that researchers work on topics that are globally trendy but irrelevant to their own media systems. Many calls for proposals specify research problems and there is a trend towards research that has practical value for societies (Bührer et al., 2023). A project is expected to find solutions to societal problems. A comparable research design is expected to fit many national contexts. This is another argument against the sustainability of research at the national level. In the case of a small research community, the exchange of ideas and knowledge is limited (Vanderstraeten, 2010). Research is a collaborative endeavour with procedures and a quality assurance system that only works with the effort of many researchers.

In addition to the above conceptualisations, which highlight disadvantages, smallness can also have some advantages. Innovation studies have shown that small countries are more dynamic and able to respond quickly to the changes taking place in the world (Edquist & Hommen, 2009). Especially in economic studies, there is a great deal of discussion about small open economies that are highly flexible (Puppis, 2009, p. 9). Small does not necessarily mean powerless; small industries can find their own ways to respond to global asymmetries, developing specific action logics (Ihlebaek & Sundet, 2023, p. 2197). In research, the advantage of a small media market can be that a small number of objects are sufficient to gain an overview of the research problem and to make generalisations.

We aim to show the ability of small countries to produce relevant knowledge about news media and journalism to assess the risks and opportunities for media development. The study is guided by three research questions:

RQ1: What similarities can be observed in the sub-fields of media and journalism research in small countries that can be applied to assess risks and opportunities for news media and journalism?

RQ2: Who are the main actors in these fields of research?

RQ3: What is the balance between national and international research?

Answers to these and similar questions are provided after a discussion of the methodological approach developed for our study.

3. Research Approach

The study presented in this article is based on the broader work of the Mediadelcom research project (<http://mediadelcom.eu>). The guiding question of Mediadelcom has been: “In which domains and in which ways do existing research projects depict the risks and opportunities regarding the agency of news media” (Mediadelcom, 2020). Fourteen country teams from new and old EU members participated in the project, which included several research stages. In addition to the development of the theoretical framework for the analysis of the four risk and opportunity areas, this article draws on national case studies on research capacity and institutionalisation. The case studies were accompanied by a collection of country-specific research (from domestic and international sources) corresponding to the four domains mentioned above.

Of the 14 participating countries, we selected four to analyse the state of research in more detail: Austria, Croatia, Estonia, and Latvia, all of which can be labelled as small countries (see Puppis et al., 2009, p. 106). Following our selection criteria, the countries differ historically, culturally, and economically. Austria and Croatia both belonged to the Habsburg empire, while Estonia and Latvia share a Soviet and Russian empire legacy. Croatia and both Baltic countries went through the socialist experiment in the 20th century and all three regained independence and started their democratic development during the early 1990s. Croatia differs from the latter two because it was not a part of the Soviet space, but of the self-managed socialist Yugoslavia, in which it maintained its status as a federal republic with a degree of autonomy, especially in regard to media (Peruško et al., 2020). Austria, on the other hand, is grouped with old European democracies and is the wealthiest of the four countries studied, as well as having a population that is several times larger than the other three; the German language links it strongly to its giant same-language neighbour. Estonia and Latvia are located on the eastern border of the EU, distant from European economic and power centres and with significant Russian-speaking minorities that have strong connections to neighbouring Russia. The selection of the countries was thus exploratory, guided by the aim of looking for similarities and differences that might be related to their smallness and *longue durée* histories.

Table 1, which presents key statistics of the selected countries and their media markets, shows that smallness involves both similarities and differences. Latvia and Estonia have significantly smaller populations than Austria and Croatia; the characteristics of Latvia’s and Estonia’s media audiences are also influenced by the fact that both countries have large Russian minorities (24%), who, as a Soviet legacy, live in foreign-language media spaces. According to the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), the risks for media

pluralism are highest in Croatia (43%), despite having a larger audience and a better economic situation than Latvia and Estonia. The Austrian purchasing power parity is 10 times higher than in Estonia, and the gross domestic product even greater. The Latvian gross domestic expenditure on R&D is only half of the Estonian one, and one-third of the Croatian; the Austrian research budget is considerably larger than in the other three countries.

Table 1. Characteristics of selected countries and their media markets/systems.

	Austria	Croatia	Estonia	Latvia
Population size ^a	8,979 million (↑)	3,879 million (↓)	1,332 million (↑)	1,876 million (↓)
Largest minority	Germans (2.4%)	Serbs (4.5%)	Russians (24%)	Russians (24%)
GDP per capita (EUR) ^b	406,148.7	57,199.5	31,444.9	32,866.5
Purchasing power parity (PPP) ^c	216,392	59,477	21,976	28,221
Human Development Index value ^d	0.916	0.858	0.890	0.863
Gross domestic expenditures on R&D (EUR) ^e	12,143 million	626 million	481 million	208 million
Number of journalists ^f	5,350	2,800	1,200	1,150
Media pluralism monitor risk level ^g	31% (low)	43% (medium)	28% (low)	27% (low)

Sources: ^a = Eurostat (n.d.) database, January 2022, online data code—TPS00001 (in brackets the tendency toward growth or decline in the last five years); ^b = Eurostat (n.d.) database, 2021, online data code—NAMA_10_GDP; ^c = Eurostat (n.d.) database, 2021, online data code—PRC_PPP_IND; ^d = United Nations Development Programme (2022), Human Development Index value, the higher the score, the more developed the country; ^e = Eurostat (n.d.) database, 2020, online data code—RD_E_GERDSC; ^f = Kaltenbrunner et al. (2020), Peruško et al. (2016), Kõuts-Klemm et al. (2019), Šulmane and Uzule (2018); ^g = Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (2022), Media Pluralism Monitor data, based on the estimation of risks in four categories—fundamental protection, market plurality, political independence, and social inclusiveness.

The countries selected for comparisons are small, although this is not usually emphasised in their analysis. The research investigating the development of media and journalism studies as a field in Austria has critically discussed its relationship to international studies, suggesting that a common identity of the academic discipline within the country does not yet exist, although the institutionalisation of the field started as early as 1939, with the foundation of the first department of communication at the University of Vienna (e.g., Karmasin & Krainer, 2013; Meliscek & Seethaler, 2017; Thiele, 2017). Croatian media and journalism research has not focused on the issue of smallness. Studies show growing variety and quality over the whole gamut of the discipline, although with a prevalence of some topics over others (Peruško & Vozab, 2016, 2017). Analysing Estonian studies, the notion of smallness is also usually disregarded, although it has sometimes been mentioned as a reason for some disadvantages in the development of the field (Herkman, 2008; Loit, 2018; Salovaara-Moring & Kallas, 2007). Similarly, there have been no studies on the scope and scale of media and journalism research in Latvia. Only a few studies have included research capability and influence on the professional sphere regarding certain aspects, for example, media diversity, claiming low quality and a lack of financial support as a result of no priority being given to media-related issues in the science policy of Latvia (Zelče, 2018).

This article is based on national case studies of Austria (Eberwein et al., 2022), Croatia (Peruško & Vozab, 2022), Estonia (Harro-Loit et al., 2022), and Latvia (Rožukalne et al., 2022), which assessed the monitoring

capability of media developments in the respective countries. The case study reports were structured according to the four domains of news media and journalism research: legal and ethical regulation of the media, journalism, media usage, and media-related competences. According to the conceptual framework of the project, these domains most clearly indicate the risks and opportunities related to media's role in democratic societies (Mediadelcom, 2020; see also Harro-Loit & Eberwein, 2024). In the legal and ethical regulation domain, the research deals with the legislative context and accountability mechanisms for media; in the journalism domain, the research concentrates on the characteristics of the profession and its relations to other sub-systems of society; in the media usage domain, the studies analyse the habits and behaviour of media audiences; and in the media-related competences domain, the ability to use media and to produce media receive attention on the very micro level of research.

The country case studies were based on academic publications and other research reports, and also incorporated the expert knowledge of media scholars and professionals gathered through semi-structured interviews. The data cover the period 2000–2020 and follow a common matrix for all participating countries. Although a common matrix of keywords was used to identify the publications, the selection in each country is not representative in a statistical sense, as only those texts were selected that were considered by the national researchers to be relevant to the research questions. For the same reason, the data are not comparable between countries, except in a broad sense to indicate trends in the topics and publishers. Data are also summarised in a bibliographic database, which provides a systematic overview of topics, languages, availability and types of publications, as well as other relevant characteristics (Mediadelcom, 2023). All sources have been evaluated to indicate different degrees of usefulness for the purpose of monitoring the risks and opportunities of recent media transformations, according to a conceptual differentiation between data, information, knowledge, and wisdom (see Harro-Loit & Eberwein, 2024).

In summary, the four selected cases (the most common sample size for comparative journalism studies, according to Hanusch & Vos, 2020) provide rich material for a qualitative analysis of the main topics, institutionalisation, and the scope of research in monitoring the media's role in society. The sample provides us with information on countries that are small in different ways: Austria in comparison to its giant neighbour; Estonia having the smallest population size; Latvia having, in addition to its small economy, a peripheral position to power centres; and Croatia as experiencing the loss of size due of its historical transformations. The country case studies thus enable us to show different types of smallness as explained in the Section 2.

4. Research Interests in the Four Domains of Risks and Opportunities

As indicated in Table 2, the journalism domain has contributed to a great extent to the analysis of risks and opportunities related to media developments in the selected countries during the last 20 years. The domain of media-related competences seems to be the newest and the least studied.

4.1. Journalism

The journalism domain seems to be the most studied field in all four countries. The topics of research cover a wide variety of developments in media and exhibit a high diversity of research methods. Research on journalism is rooted in sociology, with influences from the humanities in Austria, Estonia, and Croatia, and

also from political science in Croatia. Most of the studies have been dedicated to developments in the media market or journalistic content. Less studied topics are working conditions, the professional development of journalists and—as a comparatively new topic—stress factors in journalistic work.

Table 2. Number of publications (%) in four research domains reflecting the risks and opportunities for news media and journalism in a country.

	Journalism	Legal and ethical regulation of media	Media usage patterns	Media competences
Austria (N = 197)	57	30	16	6
Croatia (N = 449)	56	21	13	11
Estonia (N = 165)	60	25	20	17
Latvia (N = 302)	55	24	49	23

However, the research topics differ from country to country. In Austria, the journalism domain is covered by a large variety of empirical sources, and research initiatives are highly specialised. In recent years, the complexity of different data collection procedures seems to have increased, and there is a discernible trend towards internationally comparable research settings. Several large-scale journalists' surveys have been repeated and refined over the past two decades (most recently, Kaltenbrunner et al., 2020). In Croatia, journalism research is related mainly to topics of media market conditions, diversity and pluralism in the market, concentration tendencies in the television market, and the autonomy of public service media. Publications dealing with the journalistic profession and journalists' working conditions are rare, except in relation to international comparative studies. In Estonia, the journalism domain is also relatively well studied, as nearly all possible aspects have been covered to some extent. However, the policies of the owners and managers of media outlets have received virtually no attention. Academic research is typically critical-analytical. In Latvia, regular monitoring of the field is almost completely missing. In 20 years, there has been only one longitudinal research project (Šulmane, 2011) that covers journalists' professional identities. Although the largest number of studies have been in the field of journalism (42%), they mainly reflect the results of the analysis of current contents or market structures.

Research in all four countries is linked to international research projects, at least to some extent. All of the countries are covered, for example, by the comparative MPM (most recently, the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2022), and all of them participate in the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS; e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

4.2. Media Usage

The data on research on media usage collected for the present study probably represent only the tip of the iceberg. Media usage research by private companies is often not made public and rarely grants open access: "In countries where 'media has become a huge business,' media-related research is also big business, and the role of academic media and communication research has remained marginal from the point of view of the media industries" (Herkman, 2008, p. 152).

Media usage research has been driven by diverging interests. In Austria, data quality in the area of media usage is still impaired by the interests of commercial research institutions and their continuing struggle to

synchronise the established “currencies” to measure audience reach in different media sectors. In Estonia, the academic monitoring of media usage is rather fragmented; most of it is related to trending topics and international comparative projects dealing with digital media, e.g., EU Kids Online. The financing of broader original academic research has decreased since 2014. The main interest in media usage for policy planning is related to the integration of the Russian-speaking population. In Latvia, media usage and audience research have formed one of the relatively popular research directions, making up a third of the analysed publications for the current study. A significant number of media usage studies have been carried out for commercial purposes, and there are two main directions of data gathering: public opinion polls on media consumption and media usage data. In Croatia, most academic publications about media usage have been published during the last 20 years, and this attests to the late development of media usage research in the country, though this research is of high quality and is often comparable to international research.

4.3. Legal and Ethical Regulation of the Media

In the legal and ethical regulation domain, there are clear interests related to deliberative communication and democracy that derive from belonging to the common value network of Europe. The dominant topics have been press freedom, freedom of expression, and the regulatory context for granting these freedoms. Nevertheless, we found significant differences in the specialisation and status of the research among the countries. The field of law is traditionally considered significant at Austrian universities and, consequently, key legal texts concerning media, as well as critical commentary (both by academic actors and NGOs), are easily accessible, although empirical research is under-represented. In Croatia, the legal dimension, with its focus on freedom of expression and the legal transformations of the media field after socialism, made up about one-third of relevant texts in the four areas of the discipline. In Estonia, there is currently a lot of data concerning the domain, but little information on the legal environment or tendencies concerning freedom of expression and especially freedom of information. In Latvia, the issues of media and journalism regulation have not been sufficiently analysed, and there is a lack of high-quality research on both basic issues (freedom of expression, protection of journalistic sources, professional ethics, etc.) and such issues as the digitisation and regulation of audio-visual services. Research on legal regulation and ethics is interdisciplinary, and it certainly requires cooperation between communication and law scholars. Still, such cooperation seems to be rather rare, and practically non-existent in Estonia and Latvia.

4.4. Media-Related Competences

The youngest research domain, where the risks and opportunities discourse is increasing, focuses on media-related competences. In Austria, research in this field is clearly less differentiated than in the other domains, presumably a result of either weak institutionalisation or its typically interdisciplinary character, which makes it difficult to identify a clearly defined canon of literature. In Croatia, the sub-field has started to develop in the past 10 years, due to EU media literacy policies and international projects with the participation of Croatian researchers. Several NGOs have been very actively pursuing the goals of media literacy, but these efforts are mainly centred on children and adolescents, to the exclusion of other vulnerable populations. The issue of education curricula has also received research attention. In Estonia, research has been sporadic and done by individual enthusiasts. The interests of researchers have focused on media and information literacy and digital skills. Specific groups, e.g., children and students, have received more attention due to international research funding (e.g., EU Kids Online). In Latvia, the main developments in the

research field started in the 2010s. Researchers of media literacy have focussed on a broad range of topics, covering structural changes, which are necessary to include media literacy competences in different stages of education, as well as pedagogic methods and the content to be included in a set of media competences.

5. Institutionalisation of Media and Journalism Research

To understand the differences described above, it is important to take a more systematic look at the actors and infrastructures (including relevant publications and associations) that drive media and journalism research in the countries studied.

5.1. Actors and Institutions

Considering the small size of the analysed countries, all four of them report comparatively broad ranges of actors involved in media research and monitoring initiatives. However, the degrees of institutionalisation and, consequently, their contribution to public discussions vary greatly.

In Austria, there are three big university-based institutes that focus comprehensively on communication studies, with other specialised programmes on different aspects of journalism and communication at other universities. The Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences is an example of a supra-university research institution with a specialised focus on comparative approaches. Besides a variety of actors from the media, the political and economic sectors and civil society also contribute to the research and monitoring capabilities related to news media and journalism. Examples include the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF), with its internal Public Value Competence Centre; the private Medienhaus Wien (Media House Vienna), an independent research and education company financed by funds from shareholders; and a broad range of commercially oriented market research and contract research institutions that collect, among other things, key data for the analysis of media usage patterns.

In Croatia, academic departments that run programmes in journalism, communication, and media at the BA and MA levels exist at five universities, while doctoral studies in media and communication are offered in four. The Centre for Media and Communication Research at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Zagreb is the only university centre that combines international comparative research with academic teaching and training. There are a host of private higher education organisations that also offer courses or degrees in communication with a more professional orientation. Domestic and international market research organisations also conduct media audience research. The number of academic staff members in the discipline grew with the establishment of new university departments in the field.

In Estonia, the main actors in data and knowledge collecting are commercial research enterprises, academic research groups, and individual researchers at the University of Tartu and Tallinn University. Both universities offer doctoral programmes. Other relevant institutions that monitor media and journalism include the Data Protection Inspectorate (concerning the freedom of information), Statistics Estonia, and the Ministry of Culture, which has been collecting data on broadcasting (within the last few years), e.g., the number of employees and employment contracts, the financing of different channels, as well as the content, type, and number of programmes. The most important private company collecting data about media usage has been Kantar Emor (since the 1990s).

In Latvia, there are three main institutions of higher education hosting permanent study programmes and research activities focused on communication, media, and journalism. The Institute for Social and Political Research at the University of Latvia is one of the leading institutions in the field. A host of private institutions are also active. Other actors involved in media monitoring include the Ministry of Culture, regulatory bodies and the Latvian Journalists Association.

5.2. Associations and Journals

Even though the number of institutions and individuals involved in research on media and journalism may seem significant in all four countries, there are certainly differences regarding the importance the countries attribute to this field of study. The differences are visible by looking at the different forms of organised representation of available experts. In Austria, for example, media and communication research is organised under the aegis of the Austrian Society of Communication (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Kommunikationswissenschaft), which deals with both academia and media practice. Among other things, this organisation is in charge of publishing the quarterly *Medien Journal* (Media Journal) and also hosts a bi-annual conference. There is also a Croatian Communication Association, although information on its membership etc. is not available, and it appears that its only activity is publishing two journals. In contrast, Estonia and Latvia do not have similar associations at the national level, which certainly limits the public visibility of experts in this field.

Similar differences exist regarding the number of specialised journals. In Croatia, a total of six academic journals are devoted to media and communication research: *Informatologia* (since 1969), *Medijska istraživanja* (since 1995), *MediAnali* (from 2007 to 2018), *Medijske studije* (since 2010), *In Medias Res* (since 2012), *Media, Culture and Public Relations* (since 2012), and *CM—Communication Management Review* (since 2016). All academic journals are required to be available in open access. Austria also has a broad range of different journals, most of them with very specific focuses. The *Medien Journal* (published since 1977) is the only journal which includes all kinds of questions related to media and communication in society; the publications *Medienimpulse*, *medien & zeit* and *Medien und Recht* cover issues of media education, media history, and media law. In Latvia, on the other hand, there is no academic or non-academic journal of media and communication research. Previous research periodicals, such as *Daudzveidība*, *Agora*, and *Domino*, were not peer-reviewed and only published a couple of issues. Estonia has one annually published academic periodical: the *Yearbook of the Estonian Academic Journalism Society*.

6. Integration Into the International Research Community

The globalisation of science (Stichweh, 1996) is a trend that characterises modern societies. Increasing specialisation means that in smaller countries there are only a few researchers working on certain topics and thus only the international research community can provide infrastructure for the exchange of ideas (Vanderstraeten, 2010). The growing internationalisation and “journalisation” of German-language communication research has been analysed in detail by Domahidi and Strippel (2014). Our case studies show that processes of internationalisation have developed in all four countries since 2000. However, each country has its own specific elements. Table 3 shows the direction of publishing efforts towards international and national audiences, and also highlights the availability of information for a wider audience.

Table 3. Research publications (%) reflecting the risks and opportunities for news media and journalism in English and in national languages and their availability, i.e., open access.

	Publications for international audiences (in English)	Publications for national audiences (in national languages)	Publications available via open access
Austria (N = 197)	45	54	39
Croatia (N = 449)	25	75	84
Estonia (N = 165)	77	18	58
Latvia (N = 302)	40	60	61

In Austria, the country with the longest and strongest tradition of internationalisation, less than half of the publications dealing with risks and opportunities for media are available in English, although this number is growing with increased membership in international research associations (International Communication Association, European Communication Research and Education Association, etc.). The internationalisation process is also clearly visible at Austrian universities, where the chairs of media and journalism studies have increasingly been filled with international scholars. While Austrian scholars participate in European comparative projects and networks, the increasing internationalisation also has drawbacks because it tends to obscure specific characteristics of the Austrian media system. An evaluation of the Austrian research and monitoring capabilities demonstrated that many international scholars at Austrian universities have little or no interest in doing research on Austrian media.

Croatian researchers also participate in the field of media and communication and a growing internationalisation is visible. A quarter of the Croatian publications in the four analysed areas were published internationally, over 90% of them in English. Croatia is among the rare CEE countries with previous research on the intellectual history of media and journalism studies (for histories of the CEE, see Jiráček & Köpplová, 2008; Peruško & Vozab, 2016; Splichal, 2020). The pioneering analysis by Slavko Splichal of communication in socialist Yugoslavia (1989) found a distinctly “Western” paradigmatic approach to the discipline (i.e., the Soviet media theory was not known or used) and different schools of thought: Critical theory, Functionalism, and “Productive Inclusivism” (Splichal, 2020, p. 355).

Estonian academic research is strongly integrated into international research. This trend was encouraged by the need to break away from the Soviet scientific system. At present, it is quite common in the field of media and journalism to have comparative international research grants rather than national ones. The scarcity of national funding has led to the need for international competitiveness among scholars (Estonia has the largest share—80%—of project funding as R&D funding among EU countries; Reale, 2017, p. 38). Most publications are written in English, and new findings in the field rarely receive attention in popular forms in national journalism.

In Latvia, with significantly lower funding for R&D in the country, less visibility and competitiveness have been achieved. A small number (7%) of publications on media and journalism are indexed in international scholarly databases, and less than half are peer-reviewed. The international research community has limited opportunities to become acquainted with research on Latvian media and journalism, as more than half of the publications are only available in Latvian. In the absence of resources for longitudinal research, individual

researchers tend to focus on current issues at the national level. Longitudinal and comparative data are mostly available when researchers become involved in EU-level research projects and have the opportunity to contribute national data in support of current EU research objectives.

The different historical backgrounds of countries make it possible to describe different stages of internationalisation. Austria and Croatia were on the Western side of the Iron Curtain for most of the 20th century. Although a part of socialist Yugoslavia, Croatian and other Yugoslav researchers had open intellectual exchanges with the West and “Western” theoretical paradigms. Although Estonia and Latvia, as former parts of the USSR, have both lagged behind in the internationalisation process, the development of internationalisation has moved at different rates in the two countries: Estonia’s encouraging policies have led to quite significant success, resulting in large numbers of international projects and English-language publications. At the same time, the smallness of the country and its media and journalism research community contributes to both international (in)visibility and the lack of capability of self-reflection of this community vis-à-vis international media research. Internationalisation without balanced, adequate, and attentive monitoring of national phenomena by the community of researchers is an increasing risk for the development of media systems in small countries.

7. Conclusions

The study presented here is exploratory in nature. Our main question was whether small countries have the capacity to carry out media monitoring to identify the risks and opportunities of media transformations. Although there are some similarities, we found more differences.

Despite the relatively small size of the country, the research and monitoring capacities in Austria are based on a comparatively wide range of publications and other sources, especially in the field of journalism research. However, the national discourse in media and journalism research is strongly influenced by international trends (especially from Germany). The result is a constant struggle between “Austrification” and internationalisation, with some observers expressing concern that expert knowledge about the specific conditions of the Austrian media system might eventually be lost (see also Thiele, 2017).

A relatively long history of media and communication research gives Croatia an advantage over most CEE countries. The quality of theoretically designed empirical research still leaves much to be desired. The number of research articles has increased in each decade since 2000. The language of most publications in this study is Croatian, reflecting the national policy of giving priority to publications in the national language. The publication of journals in Croatian (many are now in English) is also linked to the need to develop the national vocabulary in the discipline. This may be a problem specific to small states.

In Estonia, media and journalism research is fragmented and sporadic, but well integrated into the international research community, though less visible domestically. The contribution of research to societal self-reflection is minimal (academic journals and respective institutions are lacking).

In Latvia, due to the lack of a tradition of media research and the scarcity of resources, not all issues included in the four areas have been sufficiently studied. This also explains the “smallness” of ideas and data of existing research. The studies depend on the individual interests of a small number of researchers, who depend on

project-based opportunities and have not been able to contribute to the development of a scientific school or communication theory.

Despite the differences, an examination of the development of media and journalism research shows that the late 1960s was a time of renewed interest in communication in all four countries. This was followed by what can be described as a period of consolidation. Today, the discipline is characterised by internal diversity and growing fragmentation in all countries. However, only Austria, the largest country in terms of economy and population, has a national infrastructure for knowledge exchange. In the other three countries, academic associations in communication and media studies do not exist or are unable to function. In this sense, media and journalism research for small countries should be international.

In all four countries, the coherence and systemic development of the field of study still needs to be improved. In Austria, the process of differentiation is driven by universities of applied sciences and non-university research institutions as new actors in the field. In Croatia, the lack of independence of the discipline of media and journalism studies and its subordinate position in “information and communication sciences” have limited cooperation between researchers and departments and have hindered integration in the field. The same can be said of Latvia and Estonia, both of which lack the resources to create strong institutions that can systematise and promote the development of media and journalism studies.

This has both positive and negative implications for the development of the discipline. Small economies have fewer economic and human resources to develop diverse and sophisticated media and journalism research. The low level of national funding can lead to fierce competition among researchers, which can be seen as a risk for the field. As an opportunity, it can also stimulate the search for international cooperation. If there are few media and journalism scholars in a country, they are not able to cover all relevant research topics. For smaller economies, the right level of institutionalisation can be seen as an opportunity, as in Austria, where all of the necessary institutions exist and their functions do not overlap. In countries with fewer resources, institutionalisation is insufficient to develop and coordinate an appropriate and balanced research policy.

Moreover, based on the relational nature of the concept of smallness, the stronger and more prominent national monitoring and research initiatives are, the more they provide an operational basis for self-reference that can turn smallness into an asset. Conversely, where the historical background and the development of an institutional base have had little or no positive influence, media monitoring and research is dependent on external funding. Our country cases show that the smallness of the country can create tensions between national and international focal points; this undoubtedly encourages the search for coping strategies to deal with smallness and explains the discontinuity and lack of long-term monitoring initiatives. However, this trend can also be seen as providing flexibility in the selection of the most timely research topics.

Some limitations of the study should be mentioned. The data collection on the state of media and journalism research and its impact was clearly focused on four specific research areas and is not representative of all media and journalism research. Another limitation of the study is the accessibility of the data: it represents only easily accessible, i.e., publicly available data. Limiting the analysis to accessible data was a deliberate choice: data and publications that are hidden or unavailable cannot contribute significantly to the self-reflection of the media system or society.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Ragne Kõuts-Klemm is associate professor on sociology of journalism and head of the Institute of Social Studies at the University of Tartu, Estonia. Her research focuses on journalism and media in strengthening social resilience. She has analysed the role of the media in the integration of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia, the changing media use practices of the public, and the phenomenon of media trust in the context of the emergence of information disorders.



Tobias Eberwein (PhD) is deputy director of the Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies (CMC) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the University of Klagenfurt, where he also leads the research group Media Accountability and Media Change. His research focuses on the fields of media ethics and media accountability, media structures and media governance, journalism, media innovations, comparative media, and communication studies. He is the head of the Austrian research team for Mediadelcom.



Zrinjka Peruško is a full professor of sociology of media and communication at the Department of Media and Communication, Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, Croatia. She is member of the Academia Europaea Section for Film, Media, and Visual studies. Peruško is engaged in comparative analysis of the transformations of media systems, media cultures, and audience dynamics. Her latest book, *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems: The Case of Southeast Europe* (2022), received the Croatian science prize.



Dina Vozab is assistant professor at the Department of Media and Communication, Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, Croatia. Her research interests include media and democracy, comparative media systems, and media audiences. She has published in the *Central European Journal of Communication*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Journalism*, and others.



Anda Rožukalne is a member of Academia Europaea and corresponding member of the Academy of Science of Latvia. She holds the positions of professor and senior researcher at the Faculty of Communication, Riga Stradiņš University (RSU) in Latvia. Her fields of expertise include the development of journalism values, media systems, media management, media regulation and self-regulation, and media audience studies. Currently, her research interests focus on building artificial intelligence-aided innovative audience and media content research tools.



Ilva Skulte is a media researcher, cultural journalist, and critic. She is associate professor at the Faculty of Communication, Riga Stradins University, Latvia. She has taught cultural journalism, communication history and theory, as well as media theory and media literacy theory. Her research interests include media discourse analysis, media and information literacy, children and media, cultural journalism, and the reception of literary texts in the multimedia environment.



Alnis Stakle works as assistant professor of Communication Studies at the Riga Stradiņš University in Latvia and as director of the BA programmes Multimedia Communication and Photography. He teaches photography, visual content analysis, and visual literacy. He is the author of a number of academic and peer-reviewed articles. His current research interests include visual culture, photojournalism, media literacy, and visual arts.