

Foreword

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a new world order. The highly polarized first and second worlds and the third world are no longer the pillars of the world order. A thoroughgoing restructuring of markets and marketplaces – ongoing processes of commercialization, deregulation and privatization – characterized the period. Globalization is the watchword of the day, the theme social scientists and cultural historians use when they seek to define the constitutive elements of the new order that has emerged after the cold war.

The processes summarized in the word 'globalization' can – given the will to do it – help realize hopes and ambitions to bring justice, peace and security to all the peoples of the world. Globalization can open new avenues for solving the problems of injustice and poverty through trade, technology transfer, knowledge, and a keener awareness regarding shared values like democracy and human rights.

But, the globalization we see today is not always truly global. The world today is more fragmented than perhaps ever before – between rich and poor, between the powerful and the powerless. Billions of people are excluded from the interaction made possible by globalization. Exclusion is not only a condition experienced in the poorest countries of the South; it is equally a problem among groups in the wealthier countries of the world. Problems and conflicts of a similar nature cut through just about every nation of the world: widening income gaps, poverty, environmental degradation, contagion and ill health, ethnic conflict, racism, inequality of men and women, discrimination and intolerance.

Exclusion is more than a matter of material possessions. It is also a question of access to knowledge and cultural resources, vital to social development. Unless the cultural diversity that is present in a society is respected, the outlook for political, economic and social development remains bleak.

For many people globalization has meant that the world has shrunk. We have gained access to cultures and knowledge that were once beyond reach. Cultural boundaries are being transcended, and many people from many walks of life take part in global public fora. But there is also a risk that globalization has a homogenizing effect, that totally foreign cultures may soon be a thing of

the past as dominant cultural patterns set global 'standards'. Clearly, the institutions and enterprises that control globalized mass culture do have such a standardizing effect. Commercial interests – in many cases patterns of market demand in wealthy countries – rule.

At the same time, in some respects the world seems more distant, as peoples of different cultures struggle to preserve their cultural identities. Thus, transcendence of boundaries and defense of boundaries seem to be two aspects of globalization. As a consequence, new 'front lines' have emerged – on both international and local levels.

Media play a central role in the processes we call globalization. Indeed, without mass media and modern information technology, globalization as we know it would not be possible. Access to media, telephones, and digital services of various kinds are increasingly held forth as being decisive factors for political, economic and cultural development. A large share of the world's population lack electricity; those who are excluded from electricity nets are doomed to be marginalized. The so-called 'digital divide' runs a jagged course between countries, but also within countries, often coinciding with other 'divides': income, ethnic, age and gender.

Globalization of the media has progressed at a rapid pace due to the rapid pace of innovation within information technologies, coupled with ongoing deregulation of the media and communications sectors and concentration of ownership. Of particular interest are communications satellites, digitalization and advances in computer technology. Together, these developments have made the enormous expansion of the global market for media products, e.g., television programmes, films, news, games and advertising, possible. These technological advances are *sine qua non* to the global and quasiglobal multimedia enterprises and to massive flows of information over national frontiers. Producers and distributors of media products are concentrated in few hands, nor is there a great diversity of content. We also observe a blurring of the boundaries between information and entertainment, between software and hardware, and between product and distribution.

Roughly half a dozen media companies dominate the distribution of media products. They have a palpable presence on virtually every continent. Most of them are based in the USA or Europe. Examples are AOL-Time Warner, Walt Disney Co., Viacom and Bertelsmann. Their dominance implies an increasing dominance of the English language worldwide – a dominance which the Internet and World Wide Web only confirm.

In the midst of the global development of mass media and the net are our young. Children and youth (under 18 years of age) represent more than one-third of the world population. The ratio varies, however, between regions; in the least developed countries young people account for half the population, whereas in the industrialized regions of the world the figure is 22 per cent. Of the two billion children in the world today, about 90 per cent live in what we call poor countries, and 10 per cent in what we term wealthy countries.

Viewed in the longer term, new media technology and the changes we note in the media order have a profound influence on the conditions and cultures of young people. For many children in the world today culture is something they partake of via electronic media. What is the nature of the content in this burgeoning media output? Whose values and judgements does it represent?

Young people in wealthy countries and middle-class young people in the other countries are an important target group for media companies, and particularly their advertisers. Nowadays, young people are exposed to a steady stream of commercial messages. Because of its powers of penetration, television has a unique position as an advertising medium, but advertising directed to youthful viewers is quite prevalent on the Internet, as well. Many cartoons, programmes and computer games are a form of advertising in themselves inasmuch as they are the vehicles for 'merchandising', i.e., the marketing of toys, dolls, clothing, accessories, etc., to youthful viewers. A nearly universal lingua franca today, the vocabulary shared by young of all classes in a good part of the world, are product trade-marks and logotypes.

Virtually all the children in the industrialized countries watch television each day. Somewhat fewer listen to the radio or read a book. Playing computer games is as common as reading a book. More and more young people use the Internet.

It is estimated that there is about 250 television sets per thousand inhabitants in the world – a considerably greater share than have a telephone. In less than a decade – from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s – the numbers of television channels, television sets in households and hours spent watching television have more than doubled. Satellite television reaches all continents, transnational satellite channels offer many times the previous numbers of channels, and numerous niche channels that target narrow segments of the population have been introduced – not least channels that target young viewers.

In the span of a couple of years in the latter part of the 1990s, some fifty television channels directed specifically to children were introduced. Those having international distribution, such as Cartoon Network, Disney Channel and Fox Kids Network, are often referred to as "global children's television channels". The popularity of international specialty children's channels has prompted national television services in many countries to cut back their production of programmes for children.

In many poor countries, however, media expansion has been sluggish, particularly in rural areas. In many countries of Asia and Africa television and the Internet are primarily urban phenomena. The fact that vast regions of the third world still lack electricity means that radio is the most important medium. The penetration of television in the least developed countries is estimated to be about 30 per thousand inhabitants. This is to be compared with about 650 per thousand in the wealthy countries of the world. Where the sector has been deregulated, many western-style radio and television channels have come on the air. Films, serial drama, talk shows and music predominate; air time is seldom devoted to children's programmes.

The Internet is generally considered the prime example of the 'digital revolution'. The net is in several respects a young people's medium. An estimated 10

per cent of the people of the world used the Internet on one or more occasions (during a three-month interval) in 2002. More than 75 per cent of today's Internet users live in the wealthiest OECD countries, which represent only 14 per cent of the world population. In Africa, only about 1-3 per cent of children and young people have access to the Internet. In other words, we find a markedly skew distribution of Internet use – the digital divide between countries in the South and North is as wide as it ever was. Most prognoses indicate that the new information society will open up new horizons to 30-40 per cent of the people of the world, leaving 60-70 per cent by the wayside. The absence of communications infrastructure in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America will deny many people Internet access for years to come.

Thus, whereas children and young people in wealthy countries are looked upon as "the multimedia generation", many children in the world still do not have television in their homes, and books are rarities.

The aim of this fifth Yearbook is to give examples of the role of media globalization in children's lives from different parts of the world. This theme is more or less virgin soil. Much has been written about, on the one hand, the globalization of media, and, on the other, young people and media, but seldom do these two discourses meet – strange as it may seem. The consequences of media globalization are especially palpable for the 36 per cent of the world population who are children. What does this mean for children's and young people's cultural identity and participation in society – and for digital and economic divides among young people (and adults) both within countries and between richer and poorer countries – in light of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?

This fundamental question is wide-reaching and cannot be answered at one sweep, since answers must cover both the production side of the media, the media contents, and the child audience in different contexts. Hopefully this book, by presenting case studies on young people and global media from different angles and from all continents, will stimulate discussion as a basis for further research and actions.

Let me conclude by thanking, on behalf of the Clearinghouse, all the contributors who have made this Yearbook possible and whose articles put the focus on these important areas of research. Thanks, also, to UNESCO and the Swedish Government without whose financial support the book would never have seen the light of day.

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Finally some words about the Clearinghouse's activities and name change. The work of the Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen has more and more turned toward communicating scientific knowledge about children, young people and the media from a variety of perspectives, as a direct consequence of users' demand. 'Effects' and 'influences' cannot be seen in isolation; children's total media situation needs to be considered – and in this context media education and media literacy have come increasingly to the fore.

The concept of 'media literacy' has been given a great many definitions world-wide. What we have in view here is knowledge of children, youth and media, and efforts made to realize children's rights in this respect, not least their right to influence and participate in the media. The Clearinghouse should present reviews of recent and current international trends in media literacy, which includes references both to research and practices. This is how media education relates to the work of the Clearinghouse.

In the final analysis, it is a question of securing children's rights. Here we are guided by Article 13 – that the child shall have the right to freedom of expression – and Article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which enjoins us to ensure children's access to information and material of social and cultural benefit to them, whilst protecting them from material that is injurious to their well-being. This calls for both innovative research and fostering media literacy.

We have to recognize that the name of the Clearinghouse used hitherto no longer accurately describes its work. The broad focus indicated by the new name – *The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media* – is more relevant.

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