

Media as a holder and a vehicle of power

1. The aims of the study

The study produces concrete and empirical knowledge that illuminates media power in today's information based society. It analyses the impact of publicity from the point of view of decision-making and its preparation and implementation. **On the one hand**, the issue is one of media's ability and means to influence social decision-making. **On the other hand**, the issue is how the other sectors of society promote their interests by utilising media and publicity.

The special interest of the study is to analyse how representatives of different sectors of society perceive media and its power from the point of view of their own fields. In previous research this kind of "external view" of the media and journalism has usefully challenged media's own perceptions of itself.

The research consists of four parts. **The most important** part comprises approximately sixty theme interviews with representatives of different power sectors of Finnish society. **Secondly**, the knowledge gathered by the interviews is evaluated by analysing media contents. **Thirdly**, the findings of the interviews are tested with a survey. The survey can be repeated, for example, after three years, which makes it possible to monitor how conceptions of media power change over time. **Fourthly**, the project will build international research contacts to compare findings in different countries. At the end of the project an international research seminar will be arranged. Researchers from foreign countries will present findings concerning media power in their respective countries and comment the findings of the Finnish research project.

2. Power, media power, journalism and publicity

Conceptual ambiguity has been one of the main weaknesses in the general debate about media power. On the one hand, there has not been a common perception of the concept of power, and on the other hand, media, journalism and publicity have been merged in the debate, although in serious analysis these concepts should be kept separate. In this research the conceptual field will be specified at least within the next four areas:

Overt and covert power. The conceptions of power can be roughly divided into two. In one conception power means the ability and resources to achieve the outcomes one desires and to influence the actions of others. In this conception, power is *overt* and in the possession of its user. In the context of media the question could be, for example, how different actors in the society use media to gain their ends.

In another conception, power is not perceived as someone's ability or resource, but is seen as embedded in cultural meanings and conventional practices. This is a matter of more intangible and *covert* power, about the micromechanisms of power that more or less subtly exclude some views from the debate, call some actors to the inner circle of power and leave others outside it.

This research project starts from overt power and those sectors of society that undeniably exercise social power. Then the research moves to more subtle forms of power, to practices and roles that also shape publicity and the impact of media on concrete social decisions.

Power in the different phases of decision-making. The exercise of power will be analysed in different phases of decision-making. How decision-makers act in relation to media 1) when preparing decisions, 2) when making decisions public, 3) when implementing decisions, and 4) when reacting to the feedback given in the media? It is evident that the impact of journalism and media is different in each of these phases. For example, in the preparatory phase media may have power to promote public debate and criticism of the issue, which may dovetail with the interests of some actors but may conflict with the interests of others. In the implementation phase the interests, ends and power resources may be totally different.

The power of media and journalism. It is important to distinguish between concepts of media and journalism. Media denotes media as a whole, whereas journalism denotes one special part of media. Journalism has obligations to monitor how social power is exercised, to inform citizens and to nurture public debate. The other kinds of media, for the most part, do not have such obligations.

The various sectors and resources of power. Power is always based on some resources, like institutional position, money or knowledge. This study will analyse different sectors of society each having different resources of power and different relationships to publicity and media power.

3. The time table of the study

The research project started in autumn 2007 and it will end in autumn 2009.