

# Discussion on International Communication and IS in run up to WSIS

Masters Degree in Journalism and Media Studies

*Media Policies and Institutions*

*26 Jan. - 6 Febr.*

*Guest Lecture*

dr. Leo Van Audenhove

Leo.Van.Audenhove@vub.ac.be

# Overview

- International discussion on information flows (news, more general content)
  - Free flow of information (1950-60)
  - NWICO and Balanced flow (1970-80)
  - IS and revival of free flow (jaren 90- )
- Points of attention
  - News agency
  - Role of journalist



# News and news agencies

- 19th century development of news agencies
  - important evolution for newspaper sector
  - only possible because of spread of telegraph
  - main emphasis by commercial news
- Until 1930 European players dominant
  - France: Havas (later AFP) 1835
  - Germany: Wolf 1849
  - Great-Brittain: Reuters 1851
  - from the beginning all international players
    - connected to their colonial empire
    - make cartel to split up world into territories
      - exclusive territories and shared territories

## □ After WO I

- role of Wolf diminishes
- Associated Press (1848) starts with news on Latin-America (until then Havas and Reuters)
- after 1930 AP and United Press slowly gain strength

## □ After WO II

- breakthrough of US news agencies
- over time diversification of products and services
  - photo's, video and AV-news, financial info and databases

# Three main agencies

	<b>Associated Press (USA)</b>	<b>Reuters (UK)</b>	<b>Agence France Presse (France)</b>
Bureaus	237	183	140
Countires	112	157	165
Languages	6	23	6
Journalists	3.421	2.072	1.200
Words a day	20 million	3 million	2 million



## □ Associated Press

- AP services 15.000 organisations with news
- AP Engles, Spanish, Swedish, German and French
- 1 Billion people hear or see something spread by AP a day

## □ Three main agencies provide 80% of public news worldwide (Unesco)

## □ Associated Press Television News & Reuters Television (former Visnews)

- control marked for AV-news

# Free Flow of Information

- After WO II Bipolar world
- For West (especially VS)
  - function of international communication = promote democracy, freedom of expression, etc.
  - Free flow of information
    - part of liberal free market discourse
    - media companies should have the right to:
      - produce what they want
      - sell where they want it
    - against censorship, import taxes and state regulation

□ Political and economic interests

○ US most important producer of content

□ free flow in its own interest

○ Free flow helps in spreading Western views and lifestyle

□ via news agencies western view on reality

□ via entertainment promotion Western lifestyle

○ helps in campaign against Communist bloc

□ Free flow questioned from the 70 onwards

○ Scientifically: flow theory

○ Political: discussion around NWICO

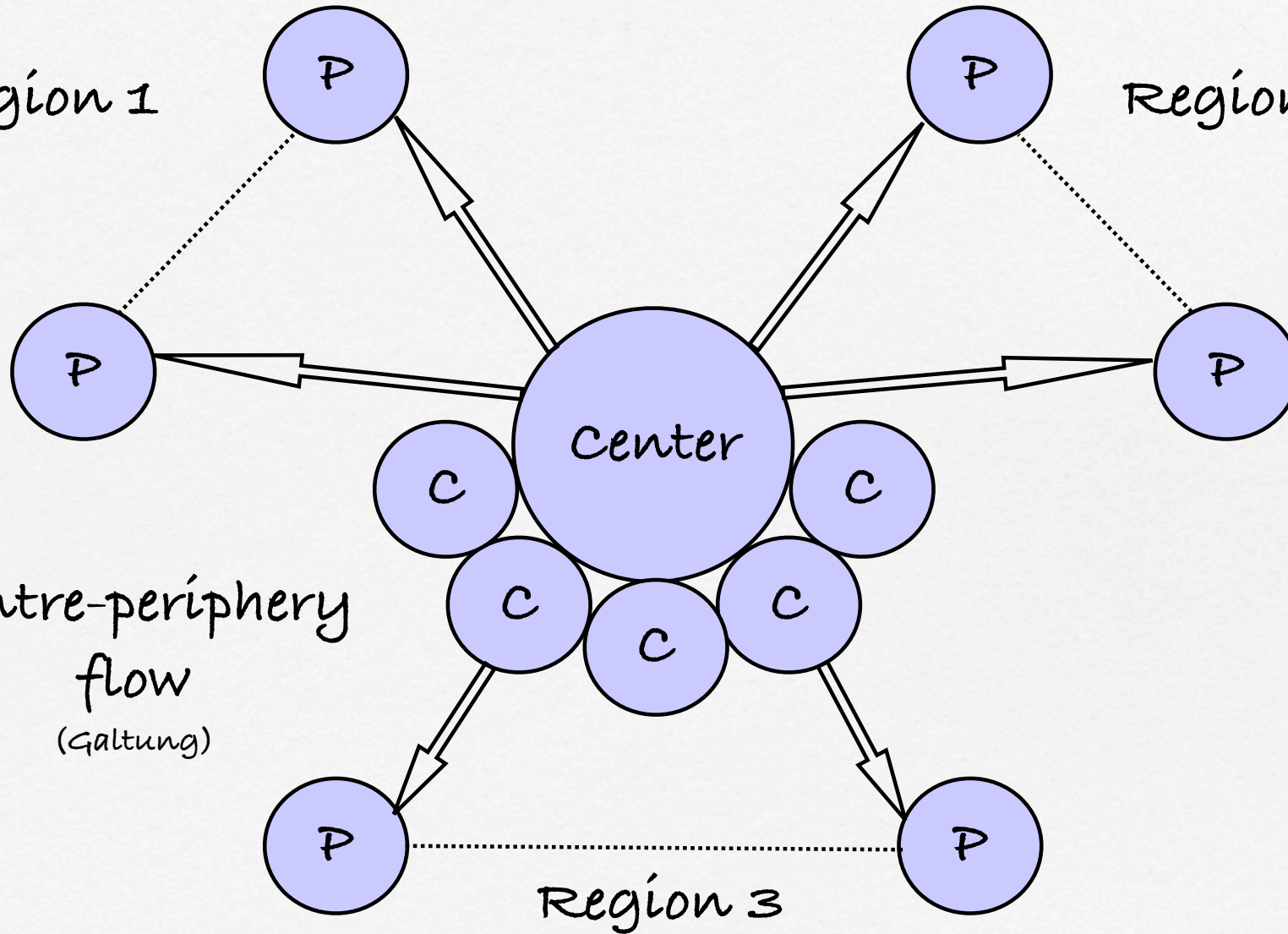


# Flow Theorie and News

- Based on content analysis of mass media
  - data for coverage of foreign news in media
  - data for coverage of national news in foreign media
  - data about several countries in working of flows
  - Remark: methodological problems, but provide an insight
- Two important group of studies:
  - studies on flows and content of news
  - studies which look for factors determining news selection

Region 1

Region 2





- news from the centre most dominant in coverage
  - flows between countries in the centre strong
  - flows from centre to periphery strong
    - in periphery after own news, news from the centre strong
- news from periphery mostly weakly represented
  - flows from periphery to centre weak
    - little attention for problems of the South in the West
    - based on a selection by Western agencies
      - attention for disasters, political problems, etc.
  - flows between countries in periphery weak
    - less in South America, case for Africa
    - flows between regions in periphery almost inexistent
    - 'round flow': news on periphery in periphery selected and processed by Western agencies

# New World Information and Communication Order

- New World Information and Communication Order
  - launched by Non-Aligned Movement in 1970s
  - translation of economic discussion on NIEO
  - Most important arguments:
    - international information-system reinforces inequality
    - South too dependent on the North in terms of soft & hardware
    - West responsible for a wrong portrayal of the South o.a. as a result of dominance news agencies
    - information seen as an economic product, not as a cultural good



- Discussion on NWICO takes place within Unesco
- 1977 establishment of the MacBride Commission
  - based on research input and political negotiation
  - recognizes that certain undemocratic systems hinder free communication ⇒ emphasize participation of population in policy and in communication
  - freedom of the press linked to freedom of expression and 'right to communicate'
  - critique on concentration in the media especially at the level of news agencies
  - recognition that some countries try to destabilize internal stability of other countries o.a. by use of international media

## □ NWICO and UNESCO

- 1980 Resolution in UNESCO to come to a NWICO
  - elimination of the imbalance and inequalities which characterise the present situation,
  - elimination of the negative effects of certain monopolists, public or private, and excessive concentration,
  - plurality of sources and channels of information,
  - freedom of the press and information,
  - the freedom of journalists and all professionals in the communication media, a freedom inseparable from responsibility, ...
- supported by almost all developing countries
- very critical document in terms of current standards
  - WSIS less critical



□ Critiqued by the West

- seen as attempt to put media under state control
- in conflict with Western liberal values
- way of legitimizing state censorship
- 1985 and 1986 US and GB withdraw from UNESCO

□ Initiatives to realize 'balanced flow'

- International: development of alternative news agencies
  - vb. Pana
- National: Development Media Theory & Practice
  - In certain countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, India

□ UNESCO left in shatters

- little political legitimacy in West
- financially loses two of its biggest contributors

# Free flow & IS

- Free flow since 1990 predominant ideology
  - depends on neo-classical revival in West
    - results in liberalization of markets at international level
    - introduction of competition and privatization in national markets
      - media: corporatization of SABC is example in SA
      - telecommunication: Telkom and many other operators
      - processes introduced in many developing countries
- Free flow underlying ideology of the IS
  - open networks in telecommunications
  - Internet inherently open and global network of free flows



# Run up to WSIS

- Theme of liberalization and free markets themes in all international conferences on IS former to WSIS
- WSIS should not be seen in isolation
- *G7 Ministerial Conference on the IS (Brussels 1995)*
  - first international meeting on cooperation around IS
    - reflect largely western interests of open markets and lib.
    - push for open networks, common standards, etc.
  - Important is challenge of Deputy President Mbeki to organize a follow up on the challenges for DC

## □ Information Society and Development Conference (Midrand 1996)

- G7, EU and selection of developing countries
- Important differences between West and NGO-groups in the South, later emphasize (in alternative text):
  - equal and inexpensive access (question liberali-privatization)
  - applications adapted to cultural and linguistic needs
  - public policy important task in stimulating IS development
- Supported by South-Africa, Egypt and Mexico
- Reaction of West (esp. US) furious, wants to walk away
  - Text added as annex
  - Central declaration repeats dominant discourse

## □ G8 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit (Japan 2000)

- first time the G8 recognizes problem of Digital Divide
  - produce a Charter on Global Information Society
  - at first appears move away from G7 Ministerial Conference because of recognition of problem
  - in effect policy standpoint does not change
    - private sector in liberalized markets seen as driving force for development of IS
    - reform of legal structures blocking exchange of information—intellectual property rights and the free circulation of information
- establishment of Digital Opportunity Task.force
  - established to help DC introduce IS
  - recognition of a more social agenda (but not in discourse)



# World Summit on the Information Society

## □ UN Resolution 56/183 (2001)

'... contributions from all UN bodies, (...) non-governmental organisations, civil society and the private sector to actively participate in the governmental preparatory process of the Summit and the Summit itself'

## □ Main goals

- develop a common vision on the IS
- develop strategies to close the digital divide

- Some people high hopes WSIS would result in more nuanced view
  - civil society would take part as equal partner
    - should also revive the summit events (some fatigue)
  - UN Summit process seem to lead to consensus
    - Some former summits had achieved nuanced views
- Others more skeptical
  - organization by ITU
    - organization with more technically oriented mandate
    - no representation of NGOs or civil society in its working
  - unesco involved but careful because of legacy NWICO
    - US and UK were thinking of rejoining unesco

□ Prepcoms important as these had to define the role of civil society

○ in UN system

□ countries are members and have vote

□ NGOs status of observers (no voting rights)

○ discussions do not lead to new role civil society

□ status of observer

□ all important decisions taken behind closed doors

□ Declaration and Action plan don't reflect concerns of civil

○ reasons

□ mainly authoritarian development countries against

○ China and Pakistan, fear critique of NGOs

□ Brazil fear that identical status for private sector would make these interests too strong



# Heated debates ?

- What are the debates about
  - everything-summits have tendency to lead to broad statements
- *Infrastructure, access and digital divide*
  - access recognized to be important by everyone
  - private sector and West: end of story
  - civil society:
    - emphasis on fact that IS can not be reduced to technology
    - about knowledge, creativity and education
  - South: asks attention for digital divide

## □ Communication rights versus security

### ○ civil society, European Council and unesco

- freedom of expression, rights to privacy
- fear that emphasis on security will infringe on these rights
- civil society also right to communicate (active right)

### ○ US and Russia:

- safeguard networks against criminality and terrorism

## □ Participation, e-government and education

### ○ West

- more efficient communication with citizens (services)
- e-education seen in a very utilitarian way

### ○ Civil Society

- citizens participation in policy making and governance
- right to education from humanistic point of view

# WSIS, So What ?

- Status of UN Summit Meetings
  - strong policy statements
    - putting themes on the political agenda
    - force countries to think about issues
    - force NGOs to think about issue !!!!!!!!
    - strong coverage in media
  - tend to be rather general statements with little concrete Action Plans
  - not legally binding on governments
    - most summits face problems when it comes to implementation