

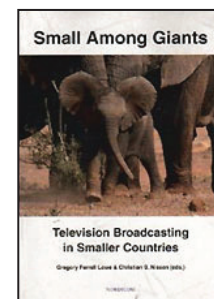
Critical book review

FERRELL LOWE, G.; NISSEN, C. S. (ed). *Small Among Giants: Television Broadcasting in Smaller Countries*. Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg, 2011, 231 p. ISBN: 978-91-86523-16-9.

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On the scale and nature of small countries' disadvantage in international media markets and the inappropriateness of large country models and one size fits all policies

This book helps fill a glaring gap in the literature. Because of their small markets, small countries find it difficult to maintain cultural policy-making autonomy and strong and dynamic national media industries. However, the literature on small countries' media systems and policies is relatively sparse. In Europe, initial interest in the plight of small countries was sparked by the special competitive challenge with which they were presented by the European Union's single market policy – embodied in the 1989 Television Without Frontiers directive (see Kleinstaub 1990b; Burgelman & Pauwels 1992). Further studies, analysing the structural vulnerabilities and dependencies of small countries' media systems and the constraints on their media policies, remained thin on the ground (but see Trappel et al 1991; Meier and Trappel 1992). Since these early years of the single television market, there has been very little more work done on the subject. Now, suddenly, there is renewed interest. In 2009 a special issue of the *International Communication Gazette*, edited by Puppis and d'Heanens (2010), was devoted to the subject. It produced some highly interesting case studies on the current situation in Switzerland, Austria, and Portugal, and comparative case studies of the two language communities in Belgium, the Nordic states and the Baltic states, but clearly not all the chapters were comparative and none systematically compared small with large countries.

Small Among Giants is another edited collection but this time the contributions are explicitly comparative and contain large and small for comparison in their samples, which is most welcome. Edited by Ferrell Lowe and Nissen, the book reports the findings of a research project conducted by an international team of scholars from universities across Europe and North America, a good number of whom also have experience as practitioners in media and media policy making, which cer-

tainly shows in the quality of the insights they offer in their chapters. The team examined the small state perspective from a number of angles, including the media economics of small countries and the problem of comparatively limited resources; the structure and dynamics of the television industry; media policy and regulation; and the problems posed by the European Union's single television market. *Small Among Giants* confirms the particular problems faced by small states highlighted by earlier studies. It also carries an important message: arguing that the models and rules presented by larger countries - and the 'one size fits all' approach of the European Union - cannot be deemed appropriate for small countries.

The book is well structured. In the first chapter, Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Christian Edelvold Berg and Christian Nissen set the scene by discussing why size matters. This chapter reviews the literature on small countries as a specialised area of study, identifying features of particular relevance for the media environment and explaining the variables considered to be significant for analysis. The second and third chapters, respectively by Robert Picard and Christian Edelvold Berg, primarily provide economic analyses showing how size matters. Both chapters compare a large sample of countries, which range widely in terms of population size and wealth as measures of size, and both provide sophisticated analyses to demonstrate conclusively that size matters in terms of constraining the resources and capabilities of national broadcasters. Edelvold Berg's chapter also provides a number of particularly useful statistical tables and figures, confirming the relationships between population and economy size, market volume and the level of investment in home originated TV content. While both conclude that the same policies will not be equally effective in countries of different size, Edelvold Berg also shows that political intervention through public subsidy and public service broadcasting are crucial for securing domestic production in both large and small countries, though the degree of intervention has to be higher to compensate, in part at least, for small size.

The fourth chapter, by a research team led by John

Jackson, examines the socio-cultural context of media markets, comparing the implications of relative (rather than absolute) size for dependency relations between five small countries and the larger neighbours with which they share a major language, these being Austria (Germany), Canada (USA), Ireland (UK), New Zealand (Australia), and Taiwan (China). The chapter is very interesting in terms of its analytical approach, though the empirical treatment each case receives is short on detail. The chapter demonstrates commonalities between the cases arising from their economic and cultural dependencies and argues that there has been a shift in internal value orientations from contemporary liberal, welfare state orientations to classical liberal, neo-conservative orientations in these countries' media policies. However, the evidence provided for this shift is weak. For instance, in the case of Canada most of the empirical treatment is devoted to showing how – as in all the cases – media policy responses have traditionally been in significant part responses to 'intrusions from their neighbours'. However, the single paragraph referring to the generalisation about a shift in value orientation, while certainly pointing to the challenges to the distinctive Canadian 'cultural policy toolkit' (Grant and Woods 2004) arising from new technologies and globalisation, hardly demonstrates a significantly weakened commitment to it and overlooks completely the fact that Canada successfully opened up a new international front against liberalisation, which led to the signing of the international Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO 2005).

The fifth chapter by Josef Trappel very neatly complements the preceding chapters by filling out the picture as to how small country size affects the actual broadcasters in terms of their capacities and room for manoeuvre. Echoing themes from his earlier (see above) and more recent (Trappel 2010) insightful work on the subject, this chapter provides an authoritative up-to-date account of the characteristic industry structures and dynamics in small countries, points to their if anything worsened circumstances and echoes the call of other contributors in the collection for adequate media policy measures. The sixth chapter by Nordahl Svendsen highlights the particular problems posed for small European countries by the European Union's (EU) audiovisual regulatory policy, particularly in connection with the operation of the 'country of origin principle' at the core of its 1989 single market directive, Television Without Frontiers (recently revised to cover new media) and its competition policy, while showing that Member States have failed to adequately fulfil the EU's protectionist European quotas. This chapter raises a familiarly common cry among many scholars against the perceived threat of the EU's competition policy. The fact that the European Commission's Communications (of 2001 and 2009) on the application of state aid rules to PSB contain a clause recognising small country difficulties, Nordahl Svendsen appears to dismiss as inconsequential. While the extent of threat to PSB posed by the European Commission authority has been persuasively contested as exaggerated (see Donders 2010), the

special problems posed to small countries by competition within the EU single market framework – including what Nordahl Svendsen calls the 'reflagging' of channels (though its extent is again perhaps rather exaggerated) – are undoubted.

Up to this point all the chapters in the collection have concluded that size matters. However, the following chapters interestingly depart from this clear-cut consensus, each reflecting their particular focus. The seventh chapter, by Chris Hanratty, focused on patterns of governance, investigates specifically the degree of *de jure* and *de facto* independence of public broadcasters *vis a vis* government and private broadcasters *vis a vis* dominant shareholders, and finds no significant variation between larger and smaller countries. The eighth chapter, by Tom Moring and Sebastian Godenhjelm, focused on broadcasting for minorities (an area on which the literature is even thinner than on small countries), and finds that while size clearly matters to some extent policy matters more. Regardless of size, the quality and extent of provision would appear to depend on a combination of public service broadcasting and political will. The final chapter, by Annette Hill and Jeanette Steemers, focused on the production and trade flows of entertainment formats provides a sophisticated analysis combining political economy and audience analysis to show that while size is clearly a constraint, it has not impeded some small countries from achieving remarkable success, notably the Netherlands and Sweden. The chapter is somewhat pessimistic about recent trends because globalisation has seen national ownership diminish, but overall it highlights a theme that emerges strongly from this very interesting edited collection but which might have been the subject of a special chapter in its own right, namely how political will and media policy makes a difference between similarly constrained small countries. The book is very well produced, but it is a pity that it does not provide an index.

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