

SECTION 2

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research is aimed at studying the history of development and the current condition of mass media in Kyrgyzstan. It was initiated and supervised by the Swiss organization CIMERA and funded and administrated by the Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation SDC. A team of researchers was selected during an open competition organized among educational and research-oriented institutions in Kyrgyzstan. The Swiss side developed the main framework and goals of the research, which were used as the principal guidance in implementation of the project. On the basis of these directions and goals the researchers designed a project consisting of two phases:

- Phase 1: "History, development and current structures of mass media in independent Kyrgyzstan" .
- Phase 2: "Causes and nature of the information gap between the south and north of Kyrgyzstan".

Each of the phases was divided into three components with the respective tasks and research methods (see annex C1 "Research methods").

2.1 Methodological aspects and peculiarities of the research situation

Historical development and the modern context in Kyrgyzstan predetermined the peculiarities of the research situation, which in turn influenced the course and the results of the research. From the very beginning of the project implementation, the researchers faced difficulties in studying the character of the functioning of the Mass Media System (MMS). These difficulties were caused by objective factors and preconditions and included the following:

- Unsurpassed, from the Soviet era, totality of society – totality of the state and its structural peculiarity – no clear-cut separation among the autonomous spheres of politics, economics, culture, etc. In this sense, autonomy of science and research fields in these spheres is also problematic.
- Scientific autonomy in the sphere of media studies is problematic for another reason: weak institutionalization of journalism (both as a science and an applied discipline) and the resulting deficit of domestic researchers of the real processes taking place in the media sphere.

- Due to the absence of scientific research in the media sphere, the real mechanisms of media functioning and their interaction with the political, economic, social and cultural processes remain non-transparent for the public and outside observers. This is why the poly-semantic, evolutionary processes in journalism over the last ten years may be described as a single and long-term “systemic crisis.”
- The researched situation itself is multi-layered, multi-framed and the functioning of the mass media system is an indivisible tangle of political, economic, cultural and other processes. Studying the reality of political, economic and cultural life in Kyrgyzstan, we have to take into account the processes of collapse, transformation and development that happen at the same time, overlapping with each other. It is not possible to talk about stability and longevity of any project on transformation and development – this phenomenon has been named by researchers and analysts “non-conceptuality” – of politics, economy, etc.
- The above-mentioned phenomenon of non-conceptuality of the development of various spheres of life is the reason for a general absence of the “image of the future”. This is why in practical journalism the absence of the “image of the future” with the journalists is one of the most important reasons impeding the development of the media system.

2.2 Theoretical foundations and approaches to the research

The above described context and peculiarities of the research predetermined the choice of methodological approaches, the foundation of which was a combination of certain principles of various theoretical concepts and traditions:

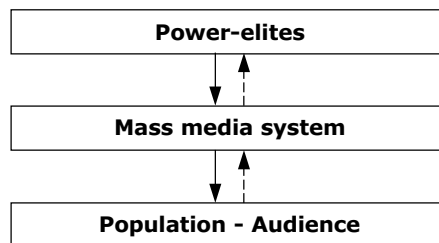
- The structural and functional theory which traditionally identifies the social and political system with the nation state and singles out the notion of institution as the key category, in accordance with which the normative, role, structural and functional aspects of media activities in the society are singled out.

Norms, structures and functions define the media system.¹ Norms have efficacy in the mass media system: historical and legal foundations, as well as less formalized professional and ethical standards of the professional journalistic activity. The structural context of journalism considers what institutions journalism is carried out through. On the whole, media institutions determine today how journalism work is taking place. “Functional context of journalism” defines achievements and the impact of journalism system. The central question in relation to journalism work is, finally, what are the effects of information supply on the opinions, predispositions and conduct of media publics and their reverse impact on emerging texts? The internal circle is made up of the media actors – journalists themselves.

¹ S. Weischenberg. *Journalistik/ Medienkommunikation: Theorie und Praxis*. Westdeutscher Verlag GmbH, Opladen/Wiesbaden, 1998 page 71.

Finally, autonomous in construction of reality, they are, however, included in the normative, structural and functional interrelations, which to a certain extent pre-determine their behavior. Under the modern mass communications conditions, the journalists' behavior is carried out in strict frameworks that are based on historically developed conditions. This is why the full description and analysis of the processes taking place in the media suggest detailed study of all these components. On the whole, journalism is subdivided into three different types of enterprise: an economic enterprise per se – production with all its market features; a creative collective of people who create news, form public opinion and its adjustment; a group of people within the framework of organizations establishing and observing the rules and norms regulating a large part of their activities.

- The theory of genetic structuralism, the concept of dual structuring of social reality identified by Pierre Bourdieu, as a balance to the structural and functional tradition submerging the social agents into the "objective structures" of the society. In accordance with this methodological assumption, the key groups of actors in the field of politics are identified. These possess various types of capital and interact in the situation of conflict and consensus in expectation of profits from the positions they occupy in the field. Based on this, the researchers looked into the position of media in Kyrgyzstan using the following three-level chart as a foundation:²



Despite the eternal striving of journalism at all times and in all societies to assign itself the task of serving the society – stating the superiority of the customers – mutual relations between these levels-structures during different periods formed in a different way. The determinant of these relations was the relation between the power structures and the media.

- Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, according to which the synchronic and diachronic analysis is utilized, as well as the concept of interests of various political groups, conflicts of interest and conflicts based on interests and globalization and world system function. This theory allows use of the scales of synchronic and diachronic relativity when studying the character of changes taking place in the media system.
- Post-modern tradition of looking at mass media as the means to create virtual reality, transfer of politics and governance into the informational and symbolic dimension.

² The thick arrows on the chart denote the main flow of information, while the dotted arrows symbolize the weak information flow in this particular direction.

- Virtualization of society is one of the global tendencies of the modern times, which has become possible through the mass media system. At the same time, since information reality is mirroring the processes taking place in various social spheres and institutions, the mass media system is the platitude of simulation not only of various structures of the society but also of itself.
- Theory of media globalization providing the framework of the world system where the media system of Kyrgyzstan, provincial in its essence, exists. In relation with this, the researchers singled out the following processes and concepts: influence of external information flows and denationalization of mass consciousness, collapse of national identifications and threat to the information security of the state.³ As a result, the status of the national media of Kyrgyzstan in the global context can be defined through the term "provincialism." Provincialism is understood in a wide sense: both as the technical underdevelopment of information flows and media themselves and as the special type of mentality in journalism environment.
- Geo-sophist tradition of politics analysis thanks to which the political processes and problems of media functioning are studied not in general but rather in terms of specific geo-economic and geopolitical conditions.

One of the key aspects of the research in this paradigm is the process of regionalization, which in Kyrgyzstan, being one of the background political processes, is strengthening and acquiring disintegrative tendencies. Among the factors that deepen regionalization dominate both the internal ones (such as weakness of the center, destruction of the vertical system of political, economic, ideological control of the Soviet time and the general social and political decentralization as a result of democratization of the country, economic difficulties of transition, ethnic, cultural, natural variety and many others) and the external ones (global and geopolitical processes, military and strategic determinants, territorial and ethnic conflicts and others). In the geopolitical aspect, the category of CCZ is used – the Closest Consideration Zone, i.e. the horizons of thinking and vision of both individual politicians and whole nations, which refers to the geopolitical self-definitions.

At a first glance, the theoretical traditions and approaches listed above, such as globalization and regionalization, Marxism and post-modernism, seem mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. However, the peculiarities of development and the modern context in Kyrgyzstan described above, their multi-facetedness, diversity, complexity and intertwining make the simultaneous development of contradictory tendencies possible. This is why such a diversified set of theoretical tools and approaches was utilized, which, in our opinion, allows to describe most adequately the reality of the media system in Kyrgyzstan.

³ The term "denationalization of mass consciousness", (as well as the term "information security of nation states") was introduced by Ivan Zasursky to denote the process whereby citizens lose their national and state identifications as a result of weakness in domestic national information flows and the expansion of foreign information flows. The consequences of such denationalization are weakening the information security of the state and "spiritual and intellectual immigration of citizens" – for more detail about this process see chapter "Structural context of modern journalism."

2.3 Research procedure

At the preparatory stage of the project as a basic tool for the research, a general questionnaire on media activities was adapted for the newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations. An interview guideline containing a list of additional questions was developed for personal interviews with media managers, which were to be taken after the questionnaire was filled out (see Annex C2 "Questionnaire for media survey").

To study the regional media, the researchers chose a strategy of field research. Trips to the regions (on average one week long in each of the oblasts of Kyrgyzstan, excluding Batken and Chui oblasts) included identification of all current media outlets through requested information from post offices, kiosks and audience polls. Then the heads of all identified media were invited to fill out a questionnaire and 1-2 days later – to meet for a personal interview based on the additional questions. This strategy turned out to be quite effective – a total of 39 questionnaires were received and the same number of interviews conducted, most of which were tape-recorded.

During the trips, focus groups for media audiences were conducted, the main purpose of which was studying the patterns of media use. With the same purpose, as well as with the purpose of identifying the stereotypes on conceptions of northerners and southerners of each other, a questionnaire was developed, administration of which was contracted on the site (see Annex C3 "Questionnaire for audience survey").

In November 2000, the basic questionnaire was translated into Kyrgyz and printed at a print house (the same questionnaire that was used to collect the data on regional media in the field research). The questionnaire was sent out under a mail survey to the Bishkek and Chui media uncovered during the research trips.

With the purpose of receiving addresses and contact information for the mail survey and developing the database of media in Kyrgyzstan, in October 2000 an official request was made to the Ministry of Justice to provide the information on all media registered with the Ministry. Since registration in Kyrgyzstan has a mandatory permissive character (i.e. no media can start operation without registration⁴), it was logical to believe that the Ministry of Justice would have the most complete database of all existing media. In response to the request, the Ministry provided a list of 362 media, names of their heads and mailing addresses. After the correction of errors on the list and the exclusion from the mailing list of the media that had already been covered, a total of 232 media were selected for the mail survey and the questionnaires were sent to all of these selected media.

As a result of the first mailing, 23 questionnaires returned filled out, and 79 letters returned with the stamp "undeliverable" because the addressee had either moved out or did not exist at all. Although it was impossible to define what was the true reason for non-response – whether because this mass medium terminated its activities or

because it had changed its address, these media were excluded from the second mailing in which 130 questionnaires were sent out. After the second mailing, 24 letters were returned as undeliverable and 12 questionnaires were filled out. The results of the mail survey in terms of response are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. *Response to the mail survey*

	Radio and TV stations	Magazines	Newspapers (Kyrgyz)	Newspapers (Russian)	Total
First mailing (November 20-25, 2000)	37	48	74	73	232
Returns – as undeliverable (non-existent/moved out)	7	23	21	28	79
Returns – filled out questionnaires	0	6	11	6	23
Second mailing (January 28-31, 2001)	30	19	42	39	130
Returns – as undeliverable (non-existent/moved out)	2	0	3	4	12
Returns – filled out questionnaires	5	2	11	6	24

Thus, the return rate of the first mailing in November was 15% and of the second mailing in January – 11%. Therefore, the average return rate for the entire mail survey is 13%.

Table 2 presents the cumulative response results for the entire survey of Kyrgyzstan's media. It combines questionnaires received during the field research in the regions and as a result of the mail survey. The total number of questionnaires filled out under the written survey was 75.

Table 2. *Cumulative response to the survey (mail and personal distribution)*

	Radio and TV stations	Magazines	Newspapers (Kyrgyz)	Newspapers (Russian)	Total
Mail survey	2	6	22	5	35
Research trips in the regions, personal interview	9	0	19 (3-Uzb)	7	40

To carry out the content analysis component, Tursunai Chodurova, a student of the AUK Journalism Program, started to collect materials for the content analysis component on coverage of southern regions by the central press in October 1999. For the sample it was decided to use the issues of "Slovo Kyrgyzstana" (as a representative of a pro-government press) and "Delo #" (as an independent newspaper) for 1999-2000

4 For more detail, see Section «Legislative and legal environment for media activities in the Kyrgyz Republic. Registration.»

and to select all articles that included mentions of the Osh, Batken, and Jalal-Abad oblasts. Tursunai Chodurova used these materials for the basic content analysis included in her own graduation paper later published by Internews at the site www.internews.kg. The same sample was also used for the qualitative content analysis in this research.

In December 2000 and January 2001, students of the 2-4 year AUK Journalism Program participated in internships at the newspapers "Delo #", "Kyrgyz Tuusu," "Slovo Kyrgyzstana," and at the KOORT television station. In June three more students interned with the newspapers "Vecherny Bishkek," "Res Publica" and at the Pyramid television channel. These internships were organized as participatory observation to study the structures of major media. Initially, it was planned to organize internships on televisions KTR, NBT and VOSST. However, these internships were not carried out for various reasons. At the end of the internship the students submitted a report in the form of answers to the questions for the participatory observation. The data from the submitted reports was used to analyze the media structures.

In February and March 2001, preparations for the focus groups started: a design was developed (see Annexe C4 "Focus group design") as well as questionnaires for the participants. This was followed by the preliminary selection of participants. The focus groups were chosen as a method of qualitative research for studying the professional issues and problems of the media. Initially it was planned to conduct four two-day focus groups with media specialists (two with journalists – one with television and radio journalists separately and one with print journalists; another two with the media heads – one with chief editors of newspapers and one with TV/radio news editors) and two one-day focus groups with the financial managers of TV and radio companies and separately with financial managers of newspapers. However, in the process of recruiting participants it turned out to be impossible to gather the financial managers for two reasons. 1) Most of the media have no financial managers as such,⁵ and traditionally the financial management is carried out by accountants who are not independent decision makers and report directly to the media heads or founders. 2) Media heads or founders refused to allow the participation of their accountants and financial specialists in the focus groups justifying this by the fact that the financial specialists have no decision making power and that they would not provide more information than the media heads themselves.⁶ In the end, we failed to gather a focus group of financial managers and it was decided to instead conduct two more focus groups with journalists and media heads.

In total, during the period March-May 2001, six two-day focus groups were held for which we invited one media representative from each oblast and three/four experts from Bishkek. The composition of the conducted focus groups with a total of 42 participating experts was as follows:

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- 5 Some media do have financial managers who have a certain relative freedom of decision making, for example, in "Slovo Kyrgyzstana" and "Vecherny Bishkek" there is a position of a commercial director, as well as in many non-state electronic media.
- 6 When trying to organize participation of the financial specialists, which had to be coordinated with the media heads or owners, they often expressed their bewilderment and suspicion through a question like "And why do you need an accountant? You ask me everything you need, I will tell you what I think is proper. We do have the right to keep a commercial secret as well, you know."

- Focus group # 1 (March 30-31) – 8 journalists - radio and television
- Focus group # 2 (April 6-7) – 8 newspaper journalists
- Focus group # 3 (April 20-21) – 5 heads of state television and radio stations
- Focus group # 4 (April 27-28) – 8 chief editors of oblast state newspapers
- Focus group # 5 (May 11-12) – 5 independent and free-lance journalists
- Focus group # 6 (May 25-26) – 8 heads of independent radio and television stations

Materials for the content analysis were collected and processed during the entire project. For the analysis of television news, all news programs of television channels KTR, Pyramid, NBT, KOORT during three months: November 2000, February and June 2001. Later, of all the news programs a sample of all news pieces relating to southern regions or mentioning them in one way or another were selected (a total of 244 news pieces). From the newspapers *Delo* # and *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*⁷ for 1999 and 2000 all the articles containing any information on the South were selected, while from the regional southern newspapers "Ush Sadosi," "Ekho Osha" and "Osh Janyrygy" – all articles with information on northern regions and Bishkek (a total of 561 articles) were taken into account. The subject of content analysis was the image of regions in the national media and the image of Bishkek and other regions in the southern media. The total number of analyzed texts was 805. Besides this, all articles in the "Vecherny Bishkek" newspaper on the subject of "politics and society" were studied in issues February 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 (a total of 79 articles). The task of studying the texts of "Vecherny Bishkek" was formulated in the following way: "To what extent do the regions act as subjects of politics on the pages of major national newspapers?" The research made use of both quantitative and qualitative content analysis (see Annexe C5 "Content analysis").

During the entire research, all publications relating to the situation of mass media in the country were monitored. A secondary analysis of information was also carried out, especially focussed on newsletters produced by organizations working in the area of media and communications. "Communication", (Internews), "Media Insight Central Asia MICA", former "CAMEL" (CIMERA) and «Media: Legislation and Practice» (Kyrgyzstan Bureau for Human Rights and Compliance with the Law). Also, a comparative analysis of results of earlier studies of media was carried out.

On the whole, the researchers used both qualitative and quantitative methods to study the research subject. The variety and diversity of methods and tools used for the research allowed us to build up a full picture of the mass media system in independent Kyrgyzstan.

⁷ All these media, first of all, from the beginning of the 1990s, were defined if not as quality, then in any case as the most popular ones and therefore representing the journalist standards of actual coverage. Secondly, they indicate various editorial policies and represent differing segments of journalism. Thirdly, they are believed to produce impact on persons making responsible decisions in the area of politics and economics. Therefore they have special significance in the mutual game between the media and politics.