In recent decades, media systems went through deep transformations, due to social phenomena such as globalization and digitalization; thus, they are to rewrite their boundaries, closely related as those of national states in which media operate. Since the Four theories of the press, studies on communication systems assumed the nation as a privileged frame for the analysis of the relationship between media, political and social structure; yet, what happen when new technologies, mass migration or even financial and institutional supranational bodies burst redefining media production and national cultural identity? Can we still consider national view of media system valid and to what extent can we talk about transnational media systems? Which dimensions are better able to explain the change? In this article, I try to answer these questions from a macro perspective and with a multidimensional approach in order to identify variables useful for defining media systems beyond national boundaries. A new model for studying media systems untied from administrative and geographical states should take into account:

1) The internationalization of media ownership, that is foreign investments in national media organizations and vice versa;
2) The technological development, that encourages circulation of media contents and information on a large and global scale;
3) The national legislation on media, where we can use to trace the degree of supranationalisation by the laws; d) the language, that is the ability of cultural and linguistic to unify through the media communities and groups around the world.

**Key words:** National media systems; transnationalization; multidimensional approach; globalization; digitalization.

**INTRODUCTION**

In recent decades, two important phenomena are changing the society in which we live: globalization and digitalization. The simultaneous action (Colombo 2005, viii) of these two processes produced major changes that affected the world since the Sixties and the Seventies of the twentieth century; besides, constant flows of people, goods, capital and information are able to reconfigure the spatial and temporal dimensions of the world (Appadurai, 1990) which are typical of the contemporary age.

These processes invested the mass media, that are exposed to the threats and the opportunities of global and digital world; this leads scholars to investigate the
concept of “national media system” and question about the possible change of paradigm. In Western countries, the development of mass communications has often been correlated with that of national democracies, as exemplified by concepts such as Habermas’ “public sphere” (1962) or Anderson’s “imagined community” (1983). Mass media and national states have been intimately linked with each other; thus, communications systems have been intertwined, over the years, with institutional, economic and cultural structures of the countries belonging. This led to study and analyse media systems as finite and territorially defined, coinciding with the boundaries of the nation-states.

In this article, I try to describe the structural changes that lie ahead of the national media systems in a time of new social and economic geographies (Gillespie and Robbins 1989) and rewriting of political and economic boundaries of the globe, due to mass migration, supranational organisations and development of new information technologies. First of all, I will provide an overview of the existing theoretical and empirical researches that have taken into account the relationship between media and nations; for many decades, their reciprocal influence has been the ground where communication research consolidated and only in recent years structural changes and transformations of media systems led to talk about transnational media. Then, in the central part of this article, I will focus on the need to observe the media from a multidimensional perspective: this approach, variously used by several scholars, has often been applied within the national media systems, but not in a supranational way. Thus, I will try to trace some key dimensions to understand media systems beyond national boundaries, because in the contemporary world the weight of the nation-states is weakening and the media are even more characterized by global and transnational flows and exchanges that imply to revisit traditional perspectives and explain the nature of media systems untied from administrative and geographical states and boundaries.

**Media systems beyond national borders**

Since the pioneering work entitled *Four theories of the press*, done by Siebert et al. (1956), the variable considered for the study of the relationship between mass communications and social structure has been national state. Two fundamental questions got through the entire book: “Why is the press as it is? Why does it apparently serve different purposes and appear in widely different forms in different countries?” (Siebert et al., 1963: 1). The work of these three American scholars is considered the bearer of great normative value, but presents some theoretical gaps especially related to the historical context of the Cold War, so it seemed the main concern of the authors was the “dichotomy between the contending U.S. and Soviet models” (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 10). Other scholars (Nerone 1995; Sparks and Reading 1998) criticize theoretical and methodological work of *Four theories* as too tied to the idea that the media reflect the beliefs of the population and as the comparative approach too broad and generic.

The inheritance of the book has crossed much of the twentieth century: many scholars (Altschull 1984; Martin and Chaudary 1983; Merrill 1974; Picard 1985) worked several revisions and updates without questioning the theoretical and regulatory framework. Only since the eighties, studies of media systems have begun to shift attention from macro-geographical theoretical scenarios to the empirical analysis focused on single national media. Two studies were particularly emblematic in this regard: that of Alexander (1981) - who began to compare the development of journalistic professionalism and autonomy in the United States with that of European countries like France and Great Britain – and the work by Hallin and Mancini (1984) on comparative analysis of U.S. and Italian news of the early Eighties. Beyond the results returned, these researches have paved the way for a flourishing tradition of studies that, focusing on different parameters, allowed to grasp the peculiarities of a single national media system and its relationship with social and political structures. The methodological innovation introduced by some authors who combined a macro perspective with a micro perspective (Example, Gunther and Mughan 2000) did not call into question the national and state-centric object of investigation. The same tripartite division operated by Hallin and Mancini (2004), who identified three different models of media system in respect of eighteen Western democracies, is based on the adoption of “four major dimensions according to which media systems in Western Europe and North America can usefully be compared:

1. The development of media markets, with particular emphasis on the strong or weak development of a mass circulation press;
2. Political parallelism; that is, the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties or, more broadly, the extent to which the media systems reflects the major political divisions in society;
3. The development of journalistic professionalism; and
4. The degree and nature of the state intervention on media system” (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 21).

As may be seen, these four dimensions consider the nature of media systems as circumscribed within the borders of the nation-state; in fact, all the variables reflect an international order based on the nation as separate entity, each with its own specific economic, institutional, political and professional ethics. This perspective does not seem to take into account the “structural and institutional transformation of media systems” (Chadha and Kavoori, 2005: 86) in an era of globalization and
internationalization, as well as the revival of claims trends and local interests. If the compass has guided the studies and the definition of media systems since Four theories of the press has been the national state, nowadays the nation “is a declining institution worldwide, due to the influence of globalization, communications networks, and modern technology” (Howison, 2006: 7). As Colin Sparks (2007) argued:

If the media landscape was limited by the boundaries of the state, and if the state was the force that had power to control the nature and content of the media, then it was clear what the site of political action should be: to influence the media one needed to influence the state (Sparks 2007: 131).

A multidimensional approach

The future of the nation-state has been the subject of analysis and reflections by various scholars of different disciplines: while some of them claim the gradual disappearance of national states (Van Creveld 1999; Waters 1995; Albrow 1996), others talk of simply declining (Mann 1997; Weiss 2000). Certainly, as Raymond Williams (1983) already argued in the early Eighties, “the nation state, in its classic European forms, is at once too large and too small for the range of real social purposes” (Williams 1983: 197-8); similarly to the states, even the media systems identified by conventional national borders are experiencing a process of downsizing and loosening of mutual ties (Curran 2002: 31). Therefore, what is fundamental is a “remapping of media spaces” (Chalaby 2010: 101) that involves a rewriting of the perimeters within which the communication systems have been studied thus far.

Then, I propose a rereading of national media system in the lens of some dimensions that summarize the process of supranationalization of mass communications in a given country. To fully understand this process, we have to take into account a multidimensional approach: in fact, the integration of different variables and dimensions helps to bring out the mutual dependency between media systems and social context in which they operate, functioning as a cure for reductionist and deterministic drift, as underlined by Schudson and Waisbord (2005). A multidimensional approach is necessary because in contemporary society the influence of media (above all in their new digital version) has been increasingly grown, weakening the weight and the role of others systems and agencies, as pointed out by «media dependency theory» (Ball-Rokeach and De Fleur 1976). As Colombo and Carlo (2006) stated, the new media landscape is going through a phase of change that makes necessary the overcoming of technological approach. If for a long time, in fact, the technological dimension has been the main aspect able to explain the evolution and transformation of mass-media, now the new dynamics of convergence and hybridization suggest to take into account other dimensions, such as socio-economic, political and cultural variables. The authors identify four frameworks that are very related each other:

1) The technological framework, that is the development of technical supports;
2) The economic framework, that concerns the market, financing and production mechanisms;
3) The institutional framework, that refers to the laws and the relationship between media and political system;
4) The cultural framework that concerns the content and the forms of transmission. In their multidimensional model, the authors consider “a single medium in a given historical period as a momentary equilibrium between a multiplicity of social dimensions that go beyond the medium itself” (Colombo and Carlo 2006, Figure 1).

Four dimensions for supranational media systems

A transnational media system collects multiple aspects of everyday life; therefore, a multidimensional approach helps to decline the functioning, the organization and the diffusion of mass media on a global scale and prevent the revival of a strictly national point of view. Nevertheless, the global and international flow of news and information doesn’t remove the local and national approach since in all countries the media “see the world through a narrow lens of geography and national interest” (Stevenson 1998: 115).

The same opinion is expressed by Örnebring (2009) who suggests the existence of a “national filter” that contradicts the vision of globalization as universalization and homogenization. However, since the last decades of the twentieth century, new transnational media grew in many Western areas, especially in Europe; a transnational television is a “television that in its technology, ownership, distribution of programmes and audiences works through the boundaries of nation-states and language communities” (Barker 1997: 45). Many experiments and projects of transnational television arose in Europe during the Eighties, such as European broadcasting union (EBU), launched by five European countries; the Francophone Tv5Monde which linked some public and commercial channels around the French language; 3Sat, with the involvement of three public channels of Germany, Switzerland and Austria, an example of transnational television based on common language and geographical contiguity; Euronews, developed through collaboration among Italy, France and Spain and soon became an important all news commercial player in Europe.

Anyway, if the literature and the case studies about transnationalization of media system are large and widespread, what has been poorly treated by social and
Communications scientists is the concept of supranationalization of media, that is, the way each national media system goes over national boundaries. Denis McQuail (1983) defined a media system as:

"the set of media organizations and activities, together with their own formal or informal rules of operation and sometimes legal and policy requirements set by the society" (McQuail 2010: 59);

For this reason, since media build a relationship with social, political and economic structure, they “should reflect in their structure and content the various social, economic and cultural realities of the societies (and communities) in which they operate, in a more or less proportional way” (id.: 199). Then, we can say that it is very difficult to “understand the news media without understanding the nature of the state” (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 8).

In the contemporary world, where the power of influence of the national states is limited by supranational institutional and economic bodies and the birth of people communities that transcends the national boundaries, even media systems have to rewrite their relationship with the structure of the society (or the societies) in which they operate. Thus, I try to apply the multidimensional model drawn by Colombo and Carlo not only to the single medium, but to the whole media system, with reference to the degree of enfranchisement from national setting or resistance of national elements. Focusing on a macro perspective that is fundamental to grasp the structural collapses of media system in an era of new economic and political borders, the aim is to integrate and evaluate many dimensions, which in turn lead different variables (Garnham 1990). The frameworks identified by the multidimensional model above could be used to draw the lines of a new paradigm for the analysis of media systems in a globalized world: economic, technological, institutional and cultural dimensions are four areas able to describe and measure globalization (Raab et al. 2008) and, in our perspective, they are able to show the trajectories of supranational media systems as shown in Figure 2.

The economic framework affects the internationalization of media ownership that is, the degree of participation of national companies in foreign media industries and the degree of openness to foreign investors in national media sector. The technological framework concerns the dimension of technological development, with reference to the impact of the internet in a country and the diffusion of foreign sites, providers, on line journals among the users. The institutional framework deals the laws on media, with a look to the geographical references and ties with national boundaries within the norms. At last, the cultural framework includes the dimension of language, concerning the diffusion of media in language communities living in other countries.

Internationalization of media ownership

The first dimension reflects one of the most important aspects of the globalization and fits into the current of critical theory; with the end of the opposition of the world in two blocks, an integration among different economic models developed and generated a competition not only within the states, but on a worldwide ground restricting the autonomy of the countries (Lacher 2006). In media sector, the internationalization of the ownership declines in two opposite ways; on the one hand, we have to consider the ability of a national media system to attract foreign investors, as for example occurred in Spain since Nineties with the openness of the most important commercial broadcasters to participation of foreign media industries, above all from Italy and Mexico; on the other hand, there is the expansion of national media in foreign contexts, that is the ability of media organizations to gain market share through the entrance in media companies.
from other countries, as done by Italian Fininvest (later renamed Mediaset) during the Nineties, with acquisition of Spanish commercial broadcasters, and recently in emerging markets such as China, India, North Africa, South America.

**Technological development**

The second framework I consider is represented by technological development. The impact of information and communications technology on globalization has been disruptive; although it should be rejected a deterministic vision, there is no doubt that modern information and communication technology (ICTs) influence communications between individuals, organizations and communities by effectively rendering physical space and distance irrelevant. Thus, although the introduction of technology is not unique in itself, recent ICTs have fundamentally altered the scope (widening reach of networks of social activity and power), intensity (regularized connections), velocity (speeding up of interactions and processes), and impact (local impacts global) of transformations (Mills and Blossfeld 2005, 6). The diffusion of internet and new digital media modified the behaviour of both producers and consumers, giving birth to concepts such as convergence, personalization, dis-intermediation that shape the relationship between users and media contents, languages and practices. In this perspective, the dimension of technological development could help to define a supranational media system by observing the geographical origin of privileged web sites and providers; in many countries, barriers as language, culture and media tradition represent national resistance, above all in the field of web sites of media companies, that reaffirm national identity in the global information flows.

**Media laws**

Another aspect useful to define how media systems go over national boundaries is the institutional one. In the era of globalization, politics acquired “a new configuration” (Milardovic 2008, 38) and new bodies and decision-making centers which transform state democracy in supranational democracy – such as European Union – were born. Thus, even the laws that regulate media sector have been subjected in recent years to review and reforms in line with the changes in the supranational legislation. In Europe, for instance, since the Eighties media policies at a continental level privileged deregulation and liberalization that influenced laws of countries; however, as Levy (1999) underlined, despite several attempts for shared European policies, a significant divergence in action and regulation of media at national level remains. Regulatory developments of media laws adopted by single countries shows how a long phase of national or sub-national setting (the reinforcement of public service broadcasting, the grants to local government bodies, the definition of a national identity) has been followed by a progressive openness to European directives towards a supranational media space.

**The language**

The last dimension I consider is that of the language: a national media system could be rethought around shared language with other countries, even geographically distant, that creates new boundaries and relationships. The language is a “crucial divider of media markets” (Jan 2009: 68) and could represent an aspect of unification regardless of the spatial proximity; this dimension invests some cultural and historical issues, such as the spread of a language in the world or the extent of the migration that rooted elements of a society in other contexts, and even media issues, as the spread of mass media in ethnic communities around the world. The language framework invites us to look at media systems from the perspective of a “common geolinguistic sphere” (Sinclair et al. 1996): if culture and language represent natural barriers against homogenizing trend of globalization, they could also become vehicles for the unification of communities.
disconnected from territorial tie, but re-aggregated around linguistic affiliation through the media. An interesting case, in this sense, is about Spanish media system: the development of Spanish-language media in Latin America or United States favoured the building of a Hispanic media system, based on shared language and able to create products, genres and formats containing typical features of Latin world and then exportable in other countries.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I tried to rethink the concept of “media system” beyond its traditional national formulation and identify some general criteria for the definition of a supranational view of it. For many years, studies and analysis about media systems have been focused on national states as privileged framework; what Beck (2004) called “methodological nationalism” led theoretical and empirical observations of scholars about the concept of media system. However, given the historical phase characterized by globalization and digitalization, the national view is no longer able to explain the complex nature of media and their relationship with social, economic, political, cultural or technological systems. Thus, as many authors began to study mass media from a multidimensional perspective, I tried to apply this approach to the building of a new paradigm for the understanding of supranational media systems. Following the multidimensional model elaborated by Colombo and Carlo about the study of digital media, a new approach to media systems has to take into account some variables as the internationalization of media ownership, the technological development and choices and practices of the users, the laws on media, the language as crucial aspects for the redefinition of the boundaries that delimit new conceptions of media systems unitied from the traditional and historical perspective.

Conflict of Interests

The author have not declared any conflict of interests.

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