
What We Talk about When We Talk about “The Market”: Conceptual Contestation in Contemporary Media Policy Research

Author(s): Kari Karppinen and Hallvard Moe

Source: *Journal of Information Policy*, Vol. 4 (2014), pp. 327-341

Published by: Penn State University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jinfopoli.4.2014.0327>

Accessed: 05-07-2019 21:00 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



JSTOR

Penn State University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Information Policy*

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT “THE MARKET”: CONCEPTUAL CONTESTATION IN CONTEMPORARY MEDIA POLICY RESEARCH

BY KARI KARPPINEN* AND HALLVARD MOE†

How would media policy discourse benefit from more precise use of the ambiguous term “the market”? The term’s economic and metaphorical constructions are often conflated, say the authors. For example, the metaphor can be used ideologically to obscure private political and economic interests. While there is no single uncontroversial definition of the term, greater clarity about the difference between its empirical and normative uses, according to the authors, will produce a more fruitful debate on both in the realm of media policy.

INTRODUCTION

It is often taken for granted that the importance of markets and market-based valuations and principles has grown in European media and communication policy in recent decades.¹ Policy and business decisions are routinely justified in the name of “the market” and its perceived demands, benefits, or failures. Terms like “marketization,” “market values,” and “free markets” also invoke strong intuitive arguments both in favor and against. Yet it is often difficult to pin down what the term *market* actually refers to. Despite its frequent use in both public and academic discourse, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the meaning of the concept itself and the different ways in which it is being used in current media policy debates.

The aim of this article is to deconstruct different meanings of the *market* notion in contemporary media policy research. Our intention is not to address different understandings of the market from the perspective of economic theory or to discuss the dynamics or special features of today’s media markets as such. Instead, the aim is to sharpen the analytical focus of media policy research by examining the assumptions and contradictions behind different uses of the term. Many of the points discussed herein apply more generally to political uses of the *market* concept, but in our examples, we draw specifically on the context of recent European media policy documents, public debates, and academic studies.

* Post-doctoral researcher, Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki.

† Professor, Department of Information Science and Media Studies, University of Bergen.

¹ See for example Jan van Cuilenburg and Denis McQuail, “Media Policy Paradigm Shifts. Towards a New Communications Policy Paradigm,” *European Journal of Communication* 18 (2003): 181-207.

To start with, we argue for a basic distinction between two broad meanings of “the market.” The first refers to the market as a concrete, empirically observable institution – the marketplace. The second, metaphorical meaning refers to a more abstract conception of “market logic” that is not necessarily dependent on any specific institutions. In this second meaning, the market can thus be understood as a framework for understanding and discussing various aspects of culture and society, even where there is no actual market available – as in public services or state bureaucracies.

Upon closer inspection, we will argue, both of these meanings reveal problems and contradictions. In the first meaning we usually take the existence of the media market for granted. However, despite policymakers’ and researchers’ routine use of constructions such as the television market, the advertising market, or the news market, it is rarely specified what products, actors, and rules these different markets actually involve – and how they relate to each other, the broader media market, the state, and other non-market forms of social coordination.

While problematic, the uses of the term *market* in the first meaning might still be considered something that can be clarified by means of empirical analysis. The metaphorical uses of *market*, on the other hand, are often recognized as being value-laden. This is evident, for example, in the normative use of phrases like the “marketplace of ideas,” “market values,” or “marketization” in media policy debates. The lack of definitional clarity, however, is no less problematic from the normative perspective. If critics of marketization and market values do not agree on what exactly it is that they object to, it is difficult to assess their arguments against different ideological positions.

Moreover, we argue that empirical and normative uses of the term *market* often blend into each other, obscuring the distinction between the market as a metaphorical construction and as an actual object of empirical analysis or regulation. As a consequence, people with different understandings of the term often end up talking past each other in policy debates. To engage with and evaluate these different views, we need a clearer understanding of what we actually talk about when we talk about markets. The outcome of such attention should be not only research with better chances to address specific media policy problems, but also more fruitful debate on the normative questions associated with media and the market.

The article is structured as follows. First, we look briefly at the roots and basic definitions of the term *market*, and connect them with the notion of markets in contemporary media economics. Even in economic debates, however, the term lacks a commonly agreed-upon definition and it is evident that it also has strong metaphorical connotations. Consequently, we then turn to more abstract uses of the term *market* and outline, with examples of each, two different ways in which the market concept is used metaphorically in broader media policy discourse: as a general ontological metaphor and as an ideological term. Finally, we draw together our argument and call for increased analytical clarity and contextual awareness when using the term *market* in media policy research.

THE MARKET AS INSTITUTION

Understanding the market as a concrete social institution, or a place, is probably the most basic meaning of the term. Historically, the idea of a market is associated with a physical location – a marketplace – which brings together buyers and sellers of distinct goods. Rosenbaum, for instance, quotes Cournot's 1838 definition of a market as “a region in which buyers and sellers are in such frequent intercourse with each other that the prices of the same goods tend to equality easily and quickly.”²

The reference to the marketplace remains prevalent in everyday use. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, this basic meaning can also be extended to trade, business, and other broader uses, including the action of buying or selling, or a sale. In everyday talk about today's media markets, the extension of the term from the physical location of the marketplace to a set of globally-spread institutions is of course obvious. Importantly, though, even in the extended use of this specific meaning, the market still refers to a concrete institution with relatively established rules and norms of conduct.

In this sense, there seems to be at least a vague agreement that the market refers to a set of social institutions, or perhaps a network that facilitates the buying, selling, and trading of goods and services. Other central identifiable characteristics associated with markets include exchange and competition, which can be used to distinguish markets from other forms of social coordination, such as hierarchies, communities, central planning, or casual transactions.³

The broad definition of the market as an institutional setting for exchange, of course, leaves open several questions. Turning to media markets as a specific type of market, we can ask, for instance, who are the sellers and buyers in a given market, what are the products and services being traded, and what exactly are the rules and norms that govern the exchange? Central questions of media economics today concern the applicability of general market models and theories in explaining developments in the media. This is especially the case for the Internet, where the market is obviously a very complex construction, marked by geographical and structural separation of buyers and sellers, lack of clear boundaries, and the abundance of very different types of products and services being traded.⁴

Understanding the media market as concrete institution also raises questions about the delineation and scope of local, national, and global markets, and the relationship between different product markets, such as television, newspaper, or news markets. Of course, there are no exact definitions of

² Eckeard F. Rosenbaum, “What is a Market? On the Methodology of a Contested Concept,” *Review of Social Economy* 58 (2000): 458; quoting Augustin Cournot, *Research into the Mathematical Principles of the Theory of Wealth* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897).

³ Rosenbaum, 463; Malcolm Chapman and Peter J. Buckley, “Markets, Transaction Costs, Economists and Social Anthropologists,” in *Meanings of the Market. The Free Market in Western Culture*, ed. James G. Carrier (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 225-250.

⁴ Terry Flew, *Global Creative Industries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 79.

different markets that make up the broader “media market.” But at least to an extent, these issues can be seen as empirical questions for economic analysis.

THE MEDIA MARKET AS RESEARCH OBJECT: MEDIA ECONOMICS

Scholars of media and cultural economics routinely apply economic models and theories to the field of media to reflect on core questions, such as the workings of media markets and their specificities; the convergence and divergence of markets; changes in market structures, conditions and dynamics; the strategies and behavior of market actors; issues of market entry, and so forth.⁵ As noted above, it is beyond the scope of the present discussion to map or assess the field’s uses of the term. Rather, we will bring up three challenges: the challenge of engaging with complex, sometimes controversial, concepts of economic theory; the challenge of overlooked markets; and the challenge of actually defining the market’s components and actors.

At the outset, it needs to be noted that many of the key concepts of conventional economic analysis are inherently contested and thus indeterminate as a guide for policy choices.⁶ Turning to economics as the “home discipline” of the term does not help much in trying to find a generally agreed-upon definition of *the market*. Though there is no lack of talk about markets in economics, economists neither agree on a simple definition, nor tend to engage much in actual analysis of the market as a concept.⁷ Despite a veneer of scientific neutrality or objectivity, even the basic models of market economics, such as “the law of supply and demand” are hardly laws, but rather models that suit some real-world situations better than others. Despite the widespread assumption that markets emerge spontaneously, and operate under universal laws similar to the laws of nature, there is much more controversy over the actual basic workings of “the market” as a socio-economic phenomenon than is usually recognized.

One of the basic concerns of media economics research has been to discuss the specific characteristics of media markets that make media products different from hypothesized typical products in standard economic models. Media economists have, for instance, referred to media products as “public goods” that are “non-rival” or “non-excludable.” This basically means that media products are not used up in the process of consumption. Watching a television broadcast, for example, does not prevent others from consuming the same content – on the contrary, the ability to share the experience (e.g. to discuss news with friends) will probably enhance its value for consumers.⁸ Media products have also been seen as “merit goods” that create “positive externalities,” which means that media consumption involves not only private benefits but also public benefits for society at large.⁹

⁵ See for example Gillian Doyle, *Understanding Media Economics* (London: Sage, 2002); Robert Picard, *Media Economics: Concepts and Issues* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989).

⁶ C. Edwin Baker, *Media, Markets and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4-5.

⁷ Rosenbaum, 455.

⁸ See for example Joshua Gans, *Information Wants to Be Shared* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).

⁹ Baker, 7.

As Baker notes, economics-oriented analyses also typically rely on oversimplified economics. For instance, it is rarely recognized that within public finance theory, non-rivalry is sometimes used as the only defining characteristic of a public good.¹⁰ Likewise, the concept of *merit goods* as defined is controversial in some strands of mainstream economic science because it creates a paradox: on the one hand, a merit good is an epistemologically necessary concept, while on the other hand it contradicts mainstream economic science's basic assumption of consumer sovereignty since the concept refers to some value judgment beyond the consumer's choice.¹¹

A second challenge has to do with overlooked markets. As former Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Mark Fowler reminded us in a call for the liberalization of US broadcasting policy, any media producer is also in the market for equipment, facilities, and skilled labor – and also competes with other businesses for attractive land.¹² Such aspects are rarely the object of media economics or policy research, but can be useful inroads to an analysis of the workings of the media. Does it, for instance, matter that Bertelsmann, the German publishing and media company with €16.065 billion in revenues in 2012, owns the restored Stadtkommandantur building with the address Unter den Linden 1 in Berlin Mitte (between the Museumsinsel and the Humboldt University), as a venue to provide “an appropriate setting both for political, economic and cultural exchange and for festive events”?¹³ The answer is clearly *yes* for anyone interested in the workings of the German media, its power relations, the role of media companies in society, and the actual processes of media policymaking.

A third challenge, then, is identifying the market being analyzed, and its components and actors. Let's take the example of the *television market*. Even such more specific terms, pointing to the market for one medium, potentially cover a range of dimensions. We know that the term *television market* rarely means “the market for television sets,” but we also know it does not mean “the whole business of television” either, including copyright transactions and brands. Sometimes it could refer to infrastructure, as in the market for buying and selling distribution capacity and content in television cable networks. At other times the same term could refer to the international trade of television program formats – a trade that actually has its own physical marketplaces.

Adding to the complexity, all media markets today involve a range of transactions. Traditionally, media economists talk about “two-sided markets,” where media enterprises not only sell products to consumers but also sell audiences to advertisers. Recently, more “sides” have been added to such models, to keep pace with new businesses that sell information about audiences to third parties, typically in connection with online social network sites or other Internet businesses like Google that

¹⁰ Harvey S. Rosen, *Public Finance* (Boston: Irwin, 1992), 66; Concetta M. Stewart, Gisela Gil-Egui, and Mary S. Pileggi, “The City Park as a Public Good Reference for Internet Policy Making,” *Information, Communication & Society* 7 (2004): 346; Clive Fraser, “On the Provision of Excludable Public Goods,” *Journal of Public Economics* 60 (1996): 111-130.

¹¹ Wilfried Ver Eecke, “Adam Smith and Musgrave's Concept of Merit Good,” *Journal of Socio-Economics* 31 (2003): 709.

¹² Mark S. Fowler and Daniel L. Brenner, “A Marketplace Approach to Broadcast Regulation,” *Texas Law Review* 60 (1982): 211.

¹³ Bertelsmann SE & Co., “Bertelsmann Unter den Linden 1,” accessed Aug. 8, 2014, <http://www.bertelsmann.com/company/corporate-center/bertelsmann-in-berlin/>.

collect huge amounts of data about their users. Such markets, then, are labeled “three-sided” or “multi-sided” markets.¹⁴

This challenge is well-illustrated in recent media policy debates, particularly in the debates that focus on the “market impact” of public service broadcasting. Much policy debate about the status, funding, and development of public service broadcasters in Europe has, over the last decade, been framed within a market perspective in the sense that publicly funded broadcasters’ activities are assessed based on their impact on commercial actors’ activities. In some ways, this seems reasonable: If we concentrate on the market where listeners and viewers are being sold by broadcasters to advertisers, and the related later market where listeners and viewers are buying access to content from broadcasters, then there was no market in broadcasting during the monopoly era. As soon as the monopoly ended, public service broadcasters by default made an impact on the market. Yet, it does not follow from this that their services should be assessed based on the manner and degree of their impact on commercial competitors.¹⁵

Such an assessment has, however, spread throughout Europe during the 2000s. For example, since 2006 the BBC in the United Kingdom has been subject to a “market impact assessment” as part of the much-debated “public value test” of any new publicly-funded media service from the broadcaster. Under different names, similar test schemes have been introduced in several European countries.¹⁶

These schemes require the assessment of a non-market actor’s impact on a market. The definition of relevant markets to be analyzed, however, is a challenge that can have some interesting consequences. In Germany, the second public service television broadcaster’s (ZDF’s) Television Council attempted to evaluate the impact of the online services of the public service provider by trying to demarcate a market for German-language Internet services.¹⁷ Such a market includes a great number of providers and a great range of different types of content. Sorting and assessing the impact of a new service on all of them is no easy task.

Similarly in Norway, the assessment of the impact of public broadcaster NRK’s proposed traffic information website on commercial competitors led to concerns about the future business opportunities of Google, whose Google Maps service bordered on the proposed NRK service.¹⁸ The success and growth of the American giant Google, however, is clearly not the reason why “market impact assessments” were originally introduced in Norwegian media policy. In fact, it is doubtful that

¹⁴ Ernie G.S. Teo and Hongyu Chen, “Multi-Sided Markets with Heterogeneous Users and Negative Externalities,” working paper (2013), accessed Aug. 3, 2014, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2213037.

¹⁵ See for example Des Freedman, *The Politics of Media Policy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Hallvard Moe, “Governing Public Service Broadcasting: ‘Public Value Tests’ in Different National Contexts,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 3 (2010): 207-223; Karen Donders and Hallvard Moe, ed., *Exporting the Public Value Test: The Regulation of Public Broadcasters’ New Media Services across Europe* (Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2011).

¹⁷ Runar Wold, “Erkenntnisse aus den Marktgutachten im Rahmen der Drei-Stufen-Tests: Öffentlich-rechtliche Onlineangebote: Keine Gefahr für den Wettbewerb,” *Media Perspektiven* 2 (2011): 66-79.

¹⁸ Norwegian Competition Authority (Konkurransetilsynet), *Vurdering av konkurransevirkninger vedrørende søknad fra NRK om forhåndsgodkjenning av ny trafikkinformasjonstjenester i samarbeid med Statens vegvesen, Trafikanten AS og Ruter AS*, report to the Norwegian Media Authority (Nov. 2011), accessed Aug. 8, 2014, <http://www.medietilsynet.no/Documents/Nyhetsdokumenter/Allmennkringkasting/Trafikkportalen%20Signert.pdf>.

Norwegian policymakers are really keen on protecting “the market” as such. Instead, policymakers can invoke the appeal of “free and competitive markets” rhetorically in order to protect domestic producers, specific content providers, and specific forms of content.

In summary, although we take it for granted that such a thing as the market really exists, it is not a spontaneous, natural order whose definition and limits would be self-evident. The actual workings of the market in different contexts thus need to be treated with detail and nuance in specific analyses.

We often speak of “markets” when we really have something else in mind. References to free and competitive markets in media policy debates can refer not only to the actual economic functioning of a market but also to underlying concerns about the functioning of democracy and the public sphere. It is thus clear that the term *market* has strong metaphorical connotations. In other words, the market provides a terminology and a framework for discussing various aspects of the media landscape, including political, cultural, and other non-economic developments. It is these more abstract and metaphorical uses of the term *market* that we now turn to.

THE MARKET METAPHOR

So far, we have discussed *the market* as a socio-economic institution, whose definitions and dynamics may be contested, but whose existence we largely take for granted. Besides this basic meaning of *the market* as an existing institutional arrangement, which can be contrasted with alternative coordination mechanisms such as central planning, there is also a second meaning in which the term is routinely used in media policy.

As William Davies argues, apart from the meaning of a “historically extant institution for circulating goods,” the market is also used in a more abstract meaning as “a logic of justification” (market logic), which is not necessarily limited to the actual marketplace as an institution.¹⁹ In this perspective, the market does not refer to a particular locale or any observable social phenomena such as exchange or trade. Instead, the market can be understood as a specific discursive framework that can be used to discuss almost any aspect of culture and society.

Drawing on the terminology of sociologists Boltanski and Thévenot, the market can thus be understood to constitute a particular “social order of worth,” a justificatory framework, which provides both normative principles (such as commitment to competitiveness and efficiency) and a set of evaluative technologies (economics) for assessing the worth of persons, goods, and services. In their theoretical framework, Boltanski and Thévenot list six different frameworks of justification: civic, market, inspired, fame, industrial, and domestic, which each contains their own principles of evaluation.²⁰ Without going into the details of these different justificatory frameworks, the point here

¹⁹ William Davies, “When is a Market Not a Market? ‘Exemption’, ‘Externality’ and ‘Exception’ in the Case of European State Aid Rules,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 2 (2013): 37.

²⁰ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economics of Worth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

is to understand that as a justificatory framework *the market* is constantly in conflict with other established ideologies and social norms.²¹ Clarifying this second meaning of the market is thus crucial for understanding the politically and ideologically contested nature of the market.

The distinction can be employed, for instance, to define neoliberalism. According to Davies, neoliberalism rests more on the abstract meaning of markets, rather than on markets-as-institutions in the manner of classical liberalism. If classical liberalism was defined by the aim to institutionally separate markets from the state, for Davies, neoliberalism can be defined as “the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state endorsed norms.”²² In this sense, neoliberalism is not so much about extending the realm of markets-as-institutions but about extending the idea of the market as an order of worth.

While Davies discusses neoliberalism as a societal process in general, his argument can also be applied to the domain of the media more specifically. We may argue that whereas there used to be a relatively clear distinction between the market and non-market sectors of the media in European media policy, nowadays we are increasingly talking about the media market as a general term that covers all media institutions and their activities. In this use, though, we are not referring to an actual marketplace or to a market as an actual institution, but rather to principles and techniques of evaluation that are being transferred to, or made applicable for, new sectors or parts of the media.

Public service broadcasting is a case in point. While in some senses, Europe’s publicly-funded broadcasting institutions are actors in a market (buying and selling television programs, for instance), in many ways they are not. Some of these institutions do not sell advertising spots, for instance, and few of them compete for subscribers. Often, then, when we refer to their position in the market, we refer to their position in a world where market-based principles and techniques of evaluation are increasingly being used to evaluate all types of organizations, rather than their position in an actually existing marketplace where goods are being bought and sold.²³

Moreover, the distinction between markets-as-institutions and the market-order-of-worth is useful in interpreting some of the related uses of the term *market*. For instance, marketization can refer to either or both of these logics. On the one hand, *marketization* can refer to the expansion of the commercial sector in the media (and the contraction of the non-market sector); that is, to the process where domains previously outside of the market are being incorporated within the market. It is in this sense that scholars have used marketization more or less synonymously with *privatization*.²⁴

On the other hand, besides actual institutional changes in the marketplace, *marketization* can also refer to the emergence of the market as a justificatory framework (and the displacement of other frameworks) for media policy. Potschka, for example, in writing about broadcasting, defines *marketization* to mean that “market-driven doctrines constitute the primary consideration for the

²¹ Ibid.; see also Göran Bolin, *Value and the Media* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 2.

²² Davies, 37.

²³ See for example Freedman, 50.

²⁴ Graham Murdock and Janet Wasko, *Media in the Age of Marketization* (New York: Hampton Press, 2007); Daya Kishan Thussu, “From McBride to Murdoch: The Marketization of Global Communication,” *Javnost* 12, no. 3 (2005): 47-60.

assessment of broadcasting in contrast to socio-cultural imperatives.”²⁵ Here *marketization* is given a wider meaning, resting on an understanding of the market order of worth, as it refers to changes in overarching principles of governing media policy.

It is worth noting that in this abstract sense, the term *market* can be used even where there is no actual market available for prices to be practically demonstrated, or at least without concretely defining who the buyers and sellers are, and what product is being offered for sale in that particular market. As Des Freedman argues, “neo-liberal media policy relies not simply on the use of market mechanisms in media environments, but on the recognition that market forces provide the most powerful logic for the organization of the environment as a whole.”²⁶

We have argued above that separating these two main meanings – the market as an institution and as a logic – makes it possible to untangle different uses in media policy in more detail. We will now discuss two different contexts for using the term *market* metaphorically in contemporary media policy discourse: as a general ontological metaphor and as an explicitly ideological term.

THE MARKET AS AN ONTOLOGICAL METAPHOR

Perhaps as the most common use of the term in the field of media and communication, the media market is routinely invoked as a general metaphor that is more or less synonymous with terms such as the *media landscape*, *media system*, or *media ecology*. In this meaning, the market thus functions as an “ontological metaphor” that provides a way of viewing, and making sense, of complex events and activities that make up reality.²⁷

The market is then clearly not used only to refer to an institutional setting for circulating goods. When talking about general media trends, we may say, for instance, that the television market has changed. Yet we do not mean only that there have been changes in, say, prices, demand, or supply of products related to the business of television. Rather, the *television market*, in this case, seems to refer pretty much to anything and everything that goes on around television, including not only products and prices, but also people, cultural trends, habits, norms, and technological developments – in other words, issues whose connections with the original meaning of the marketplace as a site of exchange are tangential at best.

In this sense, the term *media market* is comparable to other metaphors like *media ecology* that depict the media as a complex dynamic system drawing an analogy from other such systems like nature (note also the combination of metaphors in phrases such as “business ecosystems”).²⁸ However, just like media ecology can be criticized on the basis that the media do not at all operate in the same manner

²⁵ Christian Potschka, *Towards a Market in Broadcasting. Communications Policy in the UK and Germany* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 26.

²⁶ Freedman, 50.

²⁷ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

²⁸ Carlos A. Scolari, “Media Ecology: Exploring the Metaphor to Expand the Theory,” *Communication Theory* 22 (2012): 204-225.

as nature,²⁹ “the media market” can also be criticized for simplifying media and cultural systems to a collection of consumable goods with monetary valuation that ignores the wide variety of different cultural, social, and political dynamics that shape the media.³⁰

General uses of *media market*, however, stand out in one important way from these other metaphors. The metaphors borrowed from biology (“ecology”) or geography (“landscape”) are all-encompassing; they depict a complete world where every part has its place and a relationship to the other parts. By comparison, despite its nearly universal use, the media market still hints at an outside, parts that are not included – the non-market. A key problem with such metaphorical use of the term *market* is that it has become increasingly difficult to identify its outside. If markets only attain their identity in contrast to the non-market,³¹ what does the non-market consist of if everything that goes on is described in terms of the market? There is an obvious danger here that the concept becomes so general that it lacks discriminatory force and becomes redundant.³²

A second, related problem with this kind of use of *media market* emerges if the normative underpinnings are not explicated: choosing the market above any of the other general metaphors at hand means that a preference should be made clear. As Baker argues, the language of the market is just one (often useful) language for approaching media policy problems, but “the danger of hegemony arises when a particular language either implicitly or explicitly claims to be the only way to reach insight.”³³ With this, we now turn to the ideological and political connotations of *the market*.

THE MARKET AS AN IDEOLOGICAL TERM

Finally, then, *the market* is also used in media and communication policy as an explicitly ideological term – with both positive and negative connotations. The notion of *free markets*, in particular, is known as above all an ideological construct for both defenders and critics. Either the market is seen as a zone of individual autonomy and freedom, or a sphere of necessity and greed with inherently undemocratic outcomes.

As John Durham Peters has shown, the market has a massive appeal as a metaphor in general: it connotes a lively world, not conglomerates; at the market what you see is what you get, many voices compete individually, and so forth.³⁴ In media policy one of the most prominent metaphoric uses of

²⁹ Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, *Greening the Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁰ Bolin.

³¹ Davies, 54.

³² Rosenbaum, 462.

³³ Baker, 6.

³⁴ John Durham Peters, “‘The Marketplace of Ideas’: A History of the Concept,” in *Towards a Political Economy of Culture. Capitalism and Communication in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Andrew Calabrese and Colin Sparks (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 80.

the market is in the notion of the *marketplace of ideas*, a term which Peters claims “drips of nostalgia for the town square,” and which he likens to rabbits in Australia (for spreading so quickly).³⁵

Philip Napoli has noted that the *marketplace of ideas* metaphor contains elements of both economic theory and democratic theory.³⁶ The democratic theory interpretation focuses on aspects like the effective functioning of democracy and free exchange of ideas, invoking the market purely metaphorically. On the other hand, the economic interpretation takes the *marketplace* notion more literally, focusing on efficient exchange of information and entertainment goods, often assuming that there is a causal relationship between efficient economic exchange and the democratic functions associated with the notion.

At their core, democratic theories and economic theories constitute very different justificatory frameworks for discussing media policy. Yet, in the uses of the phrase *marketplace of ideas* in media policy, they often blend into each other. Reflecting the assumption that “free market entry” and “effective competition” are naturally the best guarantees of pluralism, policymakers have often assumed that “democracy is best served by a situation in which many media operate on the market by offering a wide range of ideas, information and types of culture” and that “a viable marketplace of ideas depends in large measure upon a competitive economic marketplace in the media field.”³⁷

The quote above, from a Council of Europe report, provides a clear example of how different meanings of *the market* get mixed up in different phases of the debate so that it becomes impossible to determine if the concept is being used as an analytical tool or purely as a metaphor. As Entman and Wildman, among others, have argued, the consequence of promoting economic and social values at the same time under the umbrella of the *marketplace of ideas* metaphor is that the concept often ends up lacking explanatory force either analytically or normatively.³⁸

While the ideological assumptions of free market discourses are often brought up by critical political economists and other critics of “free market ideology,” the uses of *the market* by critical theorists are often equally ambiguous. For example, it is commonly argued in a critical tone that media policy has become more “market-driven.”³⁹ But what are the values and doctrines promoted by the market or market hegemony? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *market-driven* means “motivated by the needs and wishes of consumers.” Yet, in media policy discourses it seems that “market-driven” is actually often used as a synonym for “corporate interests” – or the concentration of media power in the hands of a small number of private corporate actors.⁴⁰ But to talk about the interests of (a few)

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Philip M. Napoli, “The Marketplace of Ideas Metaphor in Communications Regulation,” *Journal of Communication* 49 (1999): 151.

³⁷ Council of Europe, *Report on Media Concentrations and Pluralism in Europe*, report. Committee of Experts on Media Concentrations and Pluralism (Jan. 1997), 5.

³⁸ Robert M. Entman and Steven S. Wildman, “Reconciling Economic and Non-Economic Perspectives on Media Policy: Transcending the ‘Marketplace of Ideas,’” *Journal of Communication* 42 (1992): 5-19.

³⁹ See for example Potschka.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26.

incumbent major media corporations does not necessarily address “the market” and definitely not the “wishes of consumers.”⁴¹

Critical political economists can thus be equally criticized for lacking a nuanced understanding of the details of key players, markets, and dynamics of all elements that make up the media (market). As Nicholas Garnham puts it, “A crude and unexamined romantic Marxist rejection of the market *per se* ... has blocked analysis of how actual markets work and with what effects.”⁴² This, of course, is not meant to deprecate critical political economy of media as a research tradition, and its contributions to understanding the complex relationship between the media, the market, and other social forces in ways that go beyond standard neoclassical economic models.⁴³

Moreover, if the market is used as an abstract logic of justification rather than as a concrete institution, then we need be aware that there are other rival logics of justifications that can be mobilized by political actors. Often, the critics of market discourse fail to define what alternative valuations should be used instead. In this sense, it is not only the market and non-market that we ought to speak about. We should in addition ask what alternative principles and techniques of evaluation there are, and to what extent they are incommensurable with the logic of the market.

CONCLUSIONS

As the discussion above shows, the term *market* is used in a wide variety of ways in media and communications policy discourse. The term appears in highly technical debates about market impact assessments or market share analyses, and also in broad metaphorical phrases like the *marketplace of ideas* or *free markets*. Whether we talk about how actual markets work or about the free market as an ideological construct, it is evident that the term *market* does not have a single uncontroversial meaning. In the absence of a commonly-agreed definition, the concept is used with different meanings by different people in different circumstances.

Sometimes the ambiguity is unintended. There may be situations when we speak of the market unreflectively when we really have something else in mind for which we lack a proper expression. At other times concepts are used ambiguously on purpose: the vague notion of the market or “market demands” can be mobilized ideologically to veil real political and economic interests or to avoid responsibility for political decisions. The market might also serve as a euphemism for specific business interests, companies, or industries.

This ambiguity in itself is not at all exceptional, and the same could be said for many other abstract concepts in the social sciences. There is always a potential tension between analytical precision and the need to discuss complex social realities with concepts that are necessarily contested and

⁴¹ See Baker for difference between the “wishes of consumers” and “free markets.”

⁴² Nicholas Garnham, “The Political Economy of Communication Revisited,” in *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications*, ed. Janet Wasko, Graham Murdock, and Helena Sousa (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 42.

⁴³ See for example Jonathan Hardy, *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2014).

indeterminate. Although it may be tempting to argue that we need a more precise, commonly agreed-upon definition of the market, this is not something that this article has tried to do, nor is it likely to be accomplished by others. Rather, different uses are to be expected, and at times also needed. Instead of policing the right and wrong uses of *the market*, we have tried to draw critical attention to the contexts that underlie different uses of the concept.

Since the lack of a common definition of *the market* can in part be explained by different contexts and circumstances in which people use the term, it is more sensible to judge the different uses of the term on their own merits, against their usefulness for their chosen purpose.⁴⁴ This is why the distinction between the two understandings of the market, as actually existing institutions and as order-of-worth, matters. While it is clearly impossible to separate purely empirical and purely normative analyses from each other, recognizing and reflecting on the multiple meanings of the concept of *the market* is required in both instances. If we as media researchers intend to empirically analyze actual markets, we should define what markets we are talking about: which medium or media, which “sides” of the market or aspects of the market process, who are the sellers and buyers, and of which goods or services?

When discussing the market as an ideological justification, or when using terms such as *marketization* or *market-driven politics* we should be aware of the complex and sometimes contradictory normative assumptions surrounding these notions. When criticizing *the market* as an abstract logic we should also seek to define what principles and criteria we actually object to and explicate what we deem to be a better framework.

⁴⁴ See for example Rosenbaum.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, C. Edwin. *Media, Markets and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Bertelsmann SE & Co. "Bertelsmann Unter den Linden 1." Accessed Aug. 8, 2014, <http://www.bertelsmann.com/company/corporate-center/bertelsmann-in-berlin/>.
- Bolin, Göran. *Value and the Media*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011.
- Boltanski, Luc and Laurent Thévenot. *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Chapman, Malcolm and Peter J. Buckley. "Markets, Transaction Costs, Economists and Social Anthropologists." In *Meanings of the Market. The Free Market in Western Culture*, edited by James G. Carrier, 225-250. Oxford: Berg, 1997.
- Council of Europe. *Report on Media Concentrations and Pluralism in Europe*. Report, Committee of Experts on Media Concentrations and Pluralism (Jan. 1997).
- Cournot, Augustin. *Research into the Mathematical Principles of the Theory of Wealth*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897.
- Davies, William. "When is a Market Not a Market? 'Exemption', 'Externality' and 'Exception' in the Case of European State Aid Rules." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 2 (2013): 32-59.
- Donders, Karen and Hallvard Moe, ed. *Exporting the Public Value Test: The Regulation of Public Broadcasters' New Media Services across Europe*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2011.
- Doyle, Gillian. *Understanding Media Economics*. London: Sage, 2002.
- Entman, Robert M. and Steven S. Wildman. "Reconciling Economic and Non-Economic Perspectives on Media Policy: Transcending the 'Marketplace of Ideas'." *Journal of Communication* 42 (1992): 5-19.
- Flew, Terry. *Global Creative Industries*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
- Fowler Mark S., and Daniel L. Brenner. "A Marketplace Approach to Broadcast Regulation." *Texas Law Review* 60 (1982): 207-257.
- Fraser, Clive. "On the Provision of Excludable Public Goods." *Journal of Public Economics* 60 (1996): 111-130.
- Freedman, Des. *The Politics of Media Policy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.
- Gans, Joshua. *Information Wants to Be Shared*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012.
- Garnham, Nicholas. "The Political Economy of Communication Revisited." In *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications*, edited by Janet Wasko, Graham Murdock, and Helena Sousa, 41-61. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Hardy, Jonathan. *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Maxwell, Richard and Toby Miller. *Greening the Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Moe, Hallvard. "Governing Public Service Broadcasting: 'Public Value Tests' in Different National Contexts." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 3 (2010): 207-223.
- Murdock, Graham and Janet Wasko. *Media in the Age of Marketization*. New York: Hampton Press, 2007.
- Napoli, Philip M. "The Marketplace of Ideas Metaphor in Communications Regulation." *Journal of Communication* 49 (1999): 151-169.
- Norwegian Competition Authority (Konkurransetilsynet). *Vurdering av konkurransevirkninger vedrørende søknad fra NRK om forhåndsgodkjenning av ny trafikkinformasjonstjenester i samarbeid med Statens vegvesen, Trafikanten AS og Ruter AS*. Report to the Norwegian Media Authority (Nov. 2011). Accessed Aug. 8, 2014,

- <http://www.medietilsynet.no/Documents/Nyhetsdokumenter/Allmennkringkasting/Trafikkportalen%20Signert.pdf>.
- Peters, John Durham. "The Marketplace of Ideas': A History of the Concept." In *Towards a Political Economy of Culture. Capitalism and Communication in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Andrew Calabrese and Colin Sparks, 65-82. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
- Picard, Robert. *Media Economics: Concepts and Issues*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989.
- Potschka, Christian. *Towards a Market in Broadcasting. Communications Policy in the UK and Germany*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Rosen, Harvey S. *Public Finance*. Boston: Irwin, 1992.
- Rosenbaum, Eckehard F. "What is a Market? On the Methodology of a Contested Concept." *Review of Social Economy* 58 (2000): 455-482.
- Scolari, Carlos A. "Media Ecology: Exploring the Metaphor to Expand the Theory." *Communication Theory* 22 (2012): 204-225.
- Stewart, Concetta M., Gisela Gil-Egui, and Mary S. Pileggi. "The City Park as a Public Good Reference for Internet Policy Making." *Information, Communication & Society* 7 (2004): 337-363.
- Teo, Ernie G.S. and Hongyu Chen. "Multi-Sided Markets with Heterogeneous Users and Negative Externalities." Working paper (2013). Accessed Aug. 3, 2014, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2213037.
- Thussu, Daya Kishan. "From McBride to Murdoch: The Marketization of Global Communication." *Javnost* 12, no. 3 (2005): 47-60.
- van Cuilenburg, Jan and Denis McQuail. "Media Policy Paradigm Shifts. Towards a New Communications Policy Paradigm." *European Journal of Communication* 18 (2003): 181-207.
- Ver Eecke, Wilfried. "Adam Smith and Musgrave's Concept of Merit Good." *Journal of Socio-Economics* 31 (2003): 701-720.
- Wold, Runar. "Erkenntnisse aus den Marktgutachten im Rahmen der Drei-Stufen-Tests: Öffentlich-rechtliche Online-angebote: Keine Gefahr für den Wettbewerb." *Media Perspektiven* 2 (2011): 66-79.