

The Association for Canadian Studies in Flanders

The Jean Monnet European Centre of Excellence

“European Centre for the Interdisciplinary Assessment of Initiatives for Public Governance”

The University of Nijmegen

The University of Antwerp

INVITATION

MEETING OF EXPERTS

THE MEDIA IN DYNAMIC INTERACTION WITH GOVERNMENT, MARKET AND CITIZENS

An interdisciplinary evaluation of initiatives on responsibility and accountability in the media in Belgium, Canada and the Netherlands.

UFSIA - University of Antwerp, 28th March 2003

In recent years we have seen that the absolute belief in the free market is once again under debate. Not only is there the argument for a return to a controlling government as the main provider of a context in the complex ‘ecology’ of communication policy, but possible solutions are sought, rather, in greater responsibility for the media actors themselves (media companies and organisations, citizens, supervisory boards and commissions) and in self-regulation in the media profession. There is, for example, great interest in ‘socially responsible enterprises’ and characteristics of ‘good corporate governance’, where it is not only the interests of the shareholders that are served, but other social interests also play a part in policy-making. In this case, when enterprises take social responsibility it is supplemented by its justification to society: this means ‘accountability’ in addition to ‘responsibility’.

Criticism of the primacy of the free communication market flared up in the USA, Canada and Western Europe as early as the nineteen-forties. There were the traditional arguments for the freedom of the press; in addition, in its report entitled ‘A Free and Responsible Press’, the American Hutchins Commission focused attention on the social responsibility of the press. As expressed by Hutchins, the theory of this responsibility stated that media ownership was a public trust. This line of thought gained in influence from the fifties, both in the press and the still young broadcasting industry. The ideas of this commission were received positively in Western Europe too, because of the need for a more ‘progressive’ policy and as a defence against the concentrations of the press in the sixties, whereby media moguls and monopolies were already in danger of forming.

Structural changes in the media world, including an increase in competition and commercialisation, meant that the topicality and urgency of the notion of social responsibility in the media is increasing. It appears that, analogously, discussion of the social responsibility of companies and organisations is a central concern in the business world and the government: the relatively new concept of ‘good governance’ is a sign of this. The intention of this meeting is for several experts to put forward concrete plans for social responsibility at the level of the media organisations, individual media professionals, participating citizens and the intervening, controlling authorities. Several examples of best practices in Canada, Flanders and the Netherlands will be presented. We are thinking of mechanisms for accountability such as a contract between the government and the broadcasters, an ombudsman, forms of self-regulation, supervisory bodies, forms of public consultation, and the profession seeking contact with the citizens (e.g. civic journalism).

Although the main focus of attention is on the media, experts from other sectors will also present criteria for social responsibility and mechanisms for accountability. The intention is to evaluate the extent to which such initiatives can be applied to the media. A series of statements and keynote speeches by guest speakers mainly from Belgium, Canada and the Netherlands will be followed by a debate in which the public may also take part.

Speakers are (among others): Jo Bardoel (University of Nijmegen), Petty Bozonelos (Ryerson University, Toronto), Leen d’Haenens (University of Nijmegen), Per Jauert (University of Copenhagen), Lou Lichtenberg (Bedrijfsfonds voor de Pers/Netherlands Press Fund), Bart Pattyn (University of Leuven), Marc Raboy (Université de Montréal), David Taras (University of Calgary), Luc Van Liedekerke (University of Leuven), Hans Verstraeten (University of Ghent), Christina von Wackerbart (VRT/Flemish Public Broadcaster).

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Upon registration, a full program of the day will be sent to you by mail.