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Media and Communication Studies in the UK:
The LSE as a case study

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the history, evolution and academic input as well as major hallmarks of the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The LSE is a renowned pioneer in the field of social sciences ranked amongst the top institutions both in the world and in the UK as far as teaching and research is concerned. This study uses a multidisciplinary approach that draws on history, ethnography, political economics and cultural studies.

INTRODUCTION

The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is renowned around the world for its reputation in the field of the social sciences, not only because it is a pioneer in establishing these studies but also because it has achieved this with a remarkably liberal bent, in the English sense of the term. In contrast to the deeply rooted British traditionalism which is displayed and exploited by universities like Oxford and Cambridge, with centuries-old campuses located far from the hustle and bustle of London, the LSE promotes itself as a paragon of modernity, a bastion of cosmopolitanism and openness situated right in the very heart of the British capital. This particular profile was the impetus for the LSE's birth at the dawn of the 20th century, albeit with the accent on 19th century positivism as it started with the ironclad conviction that technology and science are the best guarantors of neutrality, with the no less important addendum that the LSE applied this focus on the study of society, which was uncommon at the time. The LSE would not go on to invent the social sciences – Comte, Saint-Simon, Spencer, Weber and their counterparts did that – but it would unquestionably become one of the most longstanding driving forces within the field on the social sciences (Caine, 1963).

However, the profile of the LSE is not always easy to grasp, especially for citizens of southern Europe, who are used to polarised ideological positions (left-right) that are homogeneously defined. In stark contrast to this, the liberalism of the LSE embraces so many heterogeneous, if not antagonistic, positions that it is sometimes difficult to discern them from each other. One famous example is the clash between the LSE and Cambridge in the field of economics in the 1930s: with Friedrich Hayek, an eminent member of the Austrian School (and the referent of neo-liberalism since the 1980s) as the LSE's main opponent to Cambridge's Keynesian social democrats.

The LSE has actually served as a refuge for many economists who were dubiously liberal or clearly anti-liberal, in any sense of the term, as were many of Margaret Thatcher's advisors in the 1980s, many of whom graduated at the LSE (Moss, 1982). However, the LSE has also produced and welcomed Keynesian economists like Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz and has advised Labour governments at different points in time. It has even had Marxist-leaning proponents of socialism, such as Harold Laski, a professor of political science and politician, whose courses at the LSE trained an entire generation of Indian politicians after the country's independence, which

Laski fervently advocated, and served as the source of inspiration for President Nehru. For this reason, even today Indian students feel a great deal of fondness for this institution (Lessinger, 1993).

On the other hand, even though politics and economics are undoubtedly the disciplines which have garnered the most fame, sociology, philosophy and history are have also produced some the LSE's most emblematic personalities, such as historian Ralf Dahrendorf and sociologist Anthony Giddens – both of them former directors of the LSE. Likewise, its original donors included the philosopher Bertrand Russell, one of the first professors at the LSE and the epitome of British liberalism attempting to reconcile individual liberty with social justice and equality.[1] These latter issues are still common concerns on the LSE's agenda today, as can easily be corroborated by a glance at its course offerings, research units or lecture programmes.[2] Yet they are always approached from a critical perspective in the sense of being open to all viewpoints without partisanship in order to, as the slogan upheld by the school since 1922 says, *rerum cognoscere causas* (to know the causes of things).[3]

This hallmark is strengthened by the fact that the LSE was the first British university with an international research reputation to create a first-class Department of Media and Communications; according to the research ranking of the British government, all the other prominent communication, cultural and media studies departments are at universities that never appear in the top rankings of the best universities in the world (such as Westminster or East Anglia in 2008). What is more, from its inception this department has drawn from intellectual sources that were committed to the social perspective in media studies and that it has had and continues to have prestigious, socially committed scholars among its ranks. It is telling that despite the fact that it was created to study the role of the media and communication in the digital realm, the department set out not to be trapped by the hype or deterministic seduction of technology and the Internet, a truly unique endeavour in the early 2000s, precisely when the Internet bubble was at its peak.

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[1] This contradiction is perfectly reflected by John Gray in his prologue to Russell's text, *Sceptical Essays* (Routledge, 2004), where he defines Russell affectionately yet lucidly as a sceptical rationalist.

[2] This, for example, is the approach used by the research centres and institutions CASE (Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion), Centre for the Study of Human Rights, DESTIN (Development Studies Institute) and the Crisis States Research Centre.

[3] Taken from Virgil's Georgics (29 BC). In 2010, the school promoted itself on its website with this slogan: "Set up to improve society and to 'understand the causes of things', LSE has always put engagement with the wider world at the heart of its mission". [http://www2.lse.ac.uk/aboutLSE/aboutHome.aspx].

This paper essentially aims to answer the following three questions:

- How does the field of media, culture and communication studies fit into the LSE context?

- What has the Department of Media and Communications contributed to media studies in the UK?

- Where does the prestige of the Department of Media and Communications come from and what is the basis of its renown?

The underlying goal of this paper is also to grasp what exactly this liberal nature with which everything related to the LSE is always described consists of, and to what extent can it be applied, expanded or nuanced for the Department of Media and Communications. The ultimate purpose is not merely intellectual but also pedagogical, as a source of both academic and personal learning.

To conduct this study, the author had two visiting appointments in the LSE's Department of Media and Communications lasting a total of three and a half months during the winter terms of academic years 2009-2010 and 2011-2012. During these stays, the author conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the more senior faculty members (including all the founders of the department, who were there during her first stay) and some members in the faculty whose careers were still on the rise (lecturers and associates).

The interviews were supplemented by an analysis of documents from three different sources:

- Academic materials (books, articles, lectures) either recommended or supplied by the interviewees or found in the library.

- Internal administrative documentation (annual reports, other reports, plans) supplied by the administrative staff or the department heads.

- Informational public documents (articles, presentations, brochures, etc.) disseminated by the Department of Media and Communications or by the LSE through its website.

The author also participated in numerous academic activities (seminars, workshops, lectures) held by the department as part of the field observation.

No research was found that addresses the issues in this paper namely a study of the Department of Media and Communications and its link to the LSE, although several histories of this university have been published, written by different authors, including some of its directors (see, for example, Beveridge, 1960; Caine, 1963; and

Dahrendorf, 1995, 2007). Still, there is one necessary reference for this study: the introductory text written by the founders of the LSE's Department of Media and Communications when it was in the gestational stage; they framed it as an example of a new university initiative focused on the Information Society (Jankowski et al., 2001). This text was presented along with other case studies in a single volume.

THE LSE: HISTORY AND PROFILE

To situate the Department of Media and Communications (DMC) within the LSE, we should begin by introducing this unique, time-honoured institution.

Since 1900, the LSE is a university which has been affiliated with the University of London, a voluntary federation of 19 universities, faculties or institutes which are independent both academically and administratively, but which collaborate proportionally in an overall budget which is used to finance a set of institutes and services. Barely known as a structure despite the fact that it encompassed 185,000 students in 2011, the University of London is the largest British university and the third oldest in England. Founded in 1836, it initially stood out for offering education for non-Anglican Englishmen who were not admitted into Oxford and Cambridge (Thomson, 1990). The institutions affiliated with the University of London enjoyed considerable autonomy, and the LSE was among its most prominent members and arguably the most famous world-wide.

The LSE, in turn, currently encompasses up to 23 departments and institutes and 9,500 students, although it was much more modest in its early days. In its first academic year, from 1895-1896, it offered six disciplines (economics, statistics, trade, finances, mercantile law and political science) and was designed as a night school with lectures open to all. However, even if its beginning were modest, the School was an ambitious and pioneering project. The 300 students who registered in the first academic year attest to the appeal of the project. Ralph Dahrendorf justified this passion that the school initially inspired, which would continue in the ensuing years, by stating that the history of the LSE is also a reflection of the history of the 20th Century, albeit from the vantage point of the social sciences (Dahrendorf, 2007: VII).

The conception of this London-based school began with a modest legacy, yet one that sufficed to arouse the enthusiasm of four committed political activists. In 1894, a

member of the Fabian Society killed himself and bequeathed to another Fabian a sum of money with a specific purpose: that he use it to promote the ideals of Fabian socialism. The Fabian Society had been founded a few years earlier by socialist sympathisers, and it became the organisation that contributed to the creation of the Labour Party and that was at the core of the British Empire's subsequent decolonisation policies, particularly relating to India. In contrast to Marxism, this vision of socialism preached an avenue of action that was not radical but progressive in an effort to achieve major changes that were to put an end to the social injustice caused by capitalism.

Instead of revolution, the Fabians spoke about reform; instead of drastic change, they pursued gradual evolution,[4] postulates which many social democrat parties still adhere to even today. From the outset, the recipient of the inheritance, the activist Sidney Webb, clearly understood that the money had to be used to create a permanent institution that would uphold the cause that united them through knowledge. Social reformer Beatrice Webb, Sidney Webb's wife, the university professor Graham Wallas and the writer and journalist George Bernard Shaw, all members of the Fabian Society, shared this vision, although Shaw would soon abandon the project because he believed that it had sold out to the 'enemy' (Dahrendorf, 2007: 17).

Indeed, from its very start the LSE was ideologically slippery. Shaw was right: the new school would not become the standard-bearer of British socialism, yet nor did it veer in the opposite direction. In reality, from the start it would become, in Dahrendorf's words, a living testament of the permanent tension between knowledge and social commitment (Dahrendorf, 2007: VII).

To begin with, the three Fabians who ushered in the birth of the LSE, especially Sidney Webb, were much more clearly aligned with the ideas of Comte and Saint-Simon or the positivism of Herbert Spencer than with John Stuart Mill's liberalism. To their mind, the first step in reform had to come not from theories but from deeds. In consequence, reform should be conducted by experts, and knowledge, not political stripe, should take precedence.

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[4] In fact, its name, the Fabian Society, pays tribute to the Roman general Quintus Fabius Maximus, whose strategy on the battlefield consisted of avoiding head-on combat and promoting tactics that indirectly wore the enemy down. This strategy yielded outstanding results against the Carthaginian general Hannibal.

Secondly, the inheritance was not enough to undertake such an ambitious project, so it was necessary to raise funds. Securing financing proved relatively simple, but the economic support received from institutions like the London Chamber of Commerce – the 'enemy' to which Shaw referred, among other organisations – was not free of certain conditions, which always included avoiding partisanship.

Finally, after Graham Wallas' refusal to run the school and the impossibility of Sidney Webb's doing it alone, the first director of the school ended up being chosen exclusively for his administrative competence: he was neither a Fabian nor particularly socialist in leanings (actually, he would end up being an MP for the Conservative Party later), and he only accepted the post under the condition that he was free to choose the lecturers according to their mastery of the material, not their political affiliation. This was explicitly confirmed before the London Chamber of Commerce in 1895: 'The School would not deal with political matters and nothing of a socialistic tendency would be introduced' (Dahrendorf, 2007: 16). This declaration would lead George Bernard Shaw to write to Sidney Webb demanding that he remind the new director of the founding spirit of the project, using words that reveal the ongoing clash within the social sciences and within the LSE as well ever since it was founded. Shaw (cited in Dahrendorf, 2007: 17) wrote:

> [It must be made clear to the director that] the School of Economics will have a Collectivist bias. Any pretence about having no bias at all, about 'pure' or 'abstract' research', or the like evasions and unrealities must be kept for the enemy. [...]. Third, the Collectivist flag must be waved and the Marseillaise played if necessary in order to attract fresh bequests.

Shaw would lose the battle and the LSE would indeed be born with a bias, but not the one Shaw wished for. The LSE would be born with positivism as its raison d'être, although this raison d'être was also joined by the commitment to influence as the driving force. The stress on political and economic theory in its academic programmes did not pursue merely educational goals, but also political ones by bringing together the best thinkers as instructors and thus assembling a laboratory of ideas, or a think tank, with the goal of influencing social decision-making. The LSE's very location in London reflected this drive: it is located in the legal, political and cultural triangle made up of the City (where the Palace of Justice was located), Westminster (the seat of the British Parliament) and Bloomsbury (the location of the British Museum, the site of the British Library until 1977). The fact that today the

British media view the LSE as one of the most important sources for statements by experts that represent voices of authority reflects one of the ways that the school has managed to exert this influence.[5]

The tension between social commitment and knowledge was joined by the third hallmark of the LSE even today: its openness to the world. The first brochure from the first academic year proclaimed that the school was not limited to studying society in the UK but that it would also observe the world; proof that this goal was met is how the world has flocked to the LSE in droves. In academic year 2008-2009, 45% of the professors and staff at the LSE came from outside the UK, and 70% of the students were international.[6] For many years, the LSE campus has been the most cosmopolitan of all the university campuses on the planet: according to figures from the university, more than 100 different languages were spoken there in 2011. The LSE is considered to be one of the most intellectually dynamic academic institutions, most likely due to the fact that half of its students are postgraduate students, yet also due to the intellectual stimulus that such a multicultural forum inevitably generates among its members (LSE, 2009).[7]

In summary, throughout its history the LSE was shaped by the combination of the British academic tradition, a commitment to influence the social/political scene and cosmopolitan openness. Yet as we have seen, all of this must be understood within its context. The British academic tradition, i.e. a positivist spirit, is in constant contradiction with its mission for social and political commitment. Openness, in turn, reflects a particular definition of the critical vision (or 'radical approach'), according to which being critical in a liberal context is more closely related to not accepting ideologically unmovable postures than with defending specific fixed ideas. At times this leads to postures which seem excessively milquetoast or pragmatic to their critics, if not hypocritical or radically erroneous if the goal is to seek just social reform (Dahrendorf, 2007).

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[5] Just like other major elite universities, the LSE keeps an Experts Directory on its website, which uses a search engine to easily find the contact information of its professors and associates, along with their academic and/or professional description in order to facilitate the media's job, and naturally for promotional purposes as well.

[6] Asia, with 28% of the students, outstripped Europe with 22% and North America with 15%. South America and Africa are also represented among the student body with 2% each.

[7] Even though Oxford and Cambridge universities also have highly international campuses, the proportion of foreign students and professors is lower than at the LSE, and so is their diversity, since the majority of internationals come from the United States. At Oxford, for example, 41% of professors and 30% of students come from abroad, and in 2010 30% of the latter came from the United States according to the university's website.

For all of these reasons, the LSE does not fit any of the models of its day by which some have claimed that it was inspired (École Libre des Sciences Polítiques in Paris, Columbia College in New York and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston), although it shares with all of them a unique feature in its homeland when it was founded. The school has always been at the top of the international rankings of best faculties in the world in the field of the social sciences – in contention with Harvard, UC Berkeley and Stanford[8] – and in 2009 it was the third-ranked British university in the overall rankings, behind Cambridge and Oxford, and the first in the social sciences.[9] Fifteen Nobel Prize winners have sat or taught in its classrooms (eleven of them in economics), along with countless social and political leaders (LSE, 2006).

In academic year 2011-2012, the LSE offered 36 degree programmes and 134 graduate programmes (Master's and PhDs) through 23 departments which operate as a single faculty with associated research centres. It earned 244 million pounds sterling in revenues (around 287 million €), 54% of which came from student registration fees. To better grasp these figures, we can compare these figures with those from Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain, which is a school of a similar size (15 faculties or schools) and scope (also focused on the social sciences[10]).

Table 1: LSE vs. UPF: Academic Community and Revenues				
2011-2012	# of students	Revenues (million €)	Revenues from students	Total staff
LSE	9,300	287	54%	2,900
UPF	11,413	130	15%	1,594
Source: Annual Reports				

Despite the high proportion of revenues from student registration fees, the LSE is a public institution. The fact that part of its budget is financed by funds from the public treasury grants it public status in the UK.[11]

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[8] See ARWU.

[9] See RAE 2008.

[10] Even though the UPF also offers programmes in engineering and the health sciences, twelve of its fifteen schools or faculties are in the social sciences.

[11] Legally, the LSE has double status: it is a private enterprise subjected to the Companies Act 1985 and a charitable organisation subjected to the Charities Act 2006. It should be noted that university education was free in the UK until 1998.

THE BIRTH OF THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION, CULTURE AND MEDIA STUDIES AT THE LSE[12]

The field of communication, culture and media studies in the UK is, just as in the rest of the world, a relatively new academic one. However, it came to the UK earlier than it did to Spain, where it existed only in professional schools until the 1970s. The first university research chair in social communication was created in 1959 at the University of Leeds (Granada Research Fellowship in Television)[13] and the first research centre was founded in 1966 at the University of Leicester (Centre for Mass Communication Research)[14]. However, university programmes in media studies truly began to proliferate in the 1970s and 1980s, with a shared feature all over Europe: their multidisciplinary nature. At their outset sociology, psychology and political science were the fields with the greatest impact on these programmes in the UK, although other fields, including economics, law, business, technology and the humanities, joined them later on.

Despite its speciality in the social sciences, the LSE constituted media and communications as one of its academic departments somewhat late (in 2003). According to my interviewees, the reason for this can be found in the considerable resistance by some in the academic community to the idea of considering media and communication studies a separate field, comparable to the traditional fields within the social sciences, yet at the same time multidisciplinary and eclectic; i.e. lacking clear boundaries. This was joined by the reluctance of the social science departments which offered the first media programmes to the possibility of losing this field of study.

At the LSE, the first media studies programme was launched in 1993. It was a Master's in Media and Communications, directed by Sonia Livingstone from the Social Psychology Department. Shortly thereafter, the process of expanding these studies would be stepped up at the school thanks to the arrival of sociologist Anthony Giddens as the director in 1996. Soon after he began his tenure, Giddens, convinced

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[12] This section was written based on Media@LSE documents (2002, 2005 and 2010), the chapter from Jankowski et al (2001) and the interviews conducted with the co-founding researchers of the LSE's Department of Media and Communications (see Note 5).

[13] See "Current Activities" in the *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 167-171 (1959): http://gaz.sagepub.com/cgi/pdf_extract/5/1/167.

[14] Now part of the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the same university. See in the history of the University of Leicester: http://www.le.ac.uk/mc/mcintro.html

of the key role of media systems in society, decided to spearhead the expansion of media studies by creating a Chair in Media and Communications, which was granted to Roger Silverstone in 1998. A few years later, in 2001, media studies became an interdepartmental programme (sociology/social psychology), and in 2003 Roger Silverstone, with Giddens' support, managed to achieve what had previously seemed impossible: to create a separate department where much of the research and teaching in the field offered at the LSE could be brought together – the first new department at the school in 20 years.

As one of the leading figures in the development and consolidation of this field until his death in 2006, Roger Silverstone requires little introduction to people knowledgeable about this field of study in the UK. In his obituary in *The Independent* Nick Couldry (2006) wrote that '[t]he academic field of media and communications research has grown to maturity over the past three decades, and Roger Silverstone was a giant within it'. A Geography graduate from Oxford University, a former BBC television producer and an editor with a PhD from the LSE, at the age of 53 Silverstone became the first Chair of Media Studies at the LSE. Prior to that, he had been the first Professor of Media Studies and Chair of The Media Studies Subject Group at the University of Sussex, and he had also left an important academic legacy in the field of Media Studies at the Brunel University (Couldry, 2007). In response to Giddens' invitation, Silverstone devoted his efforts to promoting this field and became an indefatigable defender of it to its sceptics. In 2002, Media Studies at the LSE (grouped under the heading Media@LSE) attracted 120 graduate students in four Master's and one doctoral programme in which up to eleven different faculties were involved. Silverstone's tenacity and personality – supported by the other researchers in Media@LSE group including Sonia Livingstone, Robin Mansell, Margaret Scammell and Terhi Rantanen – led to the creation of the Department of Media and Communications (henceforth, DMC) in 2003.

This founding context shaped some of the particularities of the new department. To begin with, the LSE did not agree that a Bachelor's degree programme should be created, and instead the department was founded with only post-graduate degrees. The strategy of specialising in media and communications for students trained in other disciplines became one of the unique features of the department, in addition to its accentuated cosmopolitanism and its multidisciplinary nature, both of which are very prominent as compared to most other departments in the LSE as a whole.

However, the best way to define this starting context is to hark back to Silverstone's own words, captured in one of his most influential texts – written precisely in the years when the DMC was being gestated, between 1999 and 2003. They clearly reveal four concepts which, in my opinion, have majorly influenced the evolution of this department either directly or indirectly (such as its academic legacy, the shared research perspective for its colleagues and/or disciples and the way the department operated and was organised). These four concepts are mediation, proper distance, criticism of redeeming techno-determinism as the first step toward an ethical theory of the media, and the need to make the study of the media both a humanistic and human enterprise. Two of the texts in which Silverstone best captures this vision are *Why Study the Media?,* published in English in 1999 (Silverstone, 2004a; in Spanish) and 'Proper distance: Towards an ethics for cyberspace', (Silverstone, 2004b).

In these texts, Silverstone suggests rethinking the study of the media as a process of mediation; 'of the constant transformation of meanings' (Silverstone, 1999: 13), which is central to our daily lives because of its social, cultural, political and economic dimensions, yet always recognising that it is a fundamentally political process, or, more accurately, a 'politically economic' process (1999: 4). He also proposes that this study be conducted with proper distance, which to Silverstone lies in the ability to expand one's own perspective while attending to and recognising the other in his or her difference and similarity to oneself. That is, the goal is to study the object while maintaining a certain distance with regard to oneself and simultaneously while displacing ourselves from the centre (Silverstone, 2004b).

This should be undertaken with the goal not of creating a single media theory, which Silverstone views as impossible, but of building a web of ethical theories (1999: 5). To accomplish this, he adds that the study of the media should be critical, should be relevant, should be thinking in action. Furthermore, studying the media should be an enterprise with a logic that is the enemy of the tyrannies of technological and social determinism, which must try to navigate at the boundary between the social sciences and the humanities (Silverstone, 2004a). With unusual lucidity for a text written in 1999, Silverstone (1999: 4-5) claims:

> Much contemporary debate draws on a sense of the speed of this various changes and developments, but mistakes the speed of technological change, or indeed of commodity change, for the speed of social cultural debate is fed by the perception of

the speed of [the] different changes and transformations, but it confuses the speed of technological change, and even changes in goods, with social and cultural change.

Some viewed Silverstone's work as the output of a sociologist who superseded the vision of political economists in the critical field. However, more than superseding it, in my opinion what Silverstone did is complement it: 'The study of media must be relevant as well as a humane science' (1999: 5), since ultimately what we are discussing is a question of power (1999: 143).

Some years later, in 2006, when Silverstone published *Media and Morality*, Ulrich Beck claimed, without concealing his enthusiasm, that he was the new Habermas, producing a 'new critical theory on the emerging global civil society and its contradictions', as stated in the promotional materials for the book. Professor Rantanen summarised Silverstone's thinking in a very clarifying way by stating that what he had done was to place the media 'at the heart of the moral future of civilisation' (Rantanen, 2006). This vision of media studies which is at once humanistic and social, coupled with the economic-political variable ('a question of power') and his acute and realistic diagnosis of technology, is the vision that Silverstone contributed to the new department which the other founding members had previously adopted as their own or shared.

This realistic approach to ICTs, along with the humanistic and social compromise, is captured in a paragraph of the text that defined the purpose of the LSE's media programme just before the department was founded:

> [The Interdepartmental Program in Media and Communications, called Media@LSE and located at the LSE] is an example of a program explicitly designed to encourage critical reflection on the many issues emerging in a world where digital technologies are becoming intensely intertwined with our everyday lives. However, those contributing to the program have a strong commitment to ensuring that the new technologies of the Internet Age are not privileged over other media or over developments in the social work (Jankowski et al., 2001: 171).

Thus, according to its founders, the DMC at the LSE set out to address the confluence between social change and technological change, very clearly setting the mission of not allowing itself to be solely absorbed by technology (Jankowski et al., 2001: 173-174):

> [The internet] should neither be reified nor fetishised. [...] There would be a need to work on content and context, and to resist the demands of students to focus only on the immediate or on the future rather than the past, the digital rather than the analogue; on the Internet and not on radio or television.

The promoters of the department claimed that the objective was to go 'beyond connection' to contribute new interpretations of the media which were guided by neither technological determinism nor social determinism. This spirit is what leads me to claim here that the department aimed to counterpose the usually separate perspectives of political economics and cultural studies.

At first there were five avenues of research created at the DMC: Democracy, Digital Economics, Literacies, Culture and Community, and Ethics. Their descriptions, written by their promoters, indicated a critical focus that implicitly attempted to converge cultural studies and political economics (with the stress on power relations, exclusion/inclusion, inequality, the moral approach and issues related to cultural and personal emancipation) (Jankowski et al., 2001: 174-177).

Finally, at its inception the DMC also drew from the university tradition of the LSE itself and of the disciplines from which the founders emerged. This meant that their educational objective was and still is more centred on research than on practical professional training, yet always following the British tradition of prioritising on empirical research.

THE LSE'S DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS[15]

The LSE's Department of Media and Communications (DMC) was founded with six full-time members in 2003, which had risen to fifteen by 2011, plus the part-time teaching staff. In 2003 the department was the smallest at the LSE, but after its relative growth by 2011 it had become the third smallest department.[16] In 2010 the departmental website and promotional brochures stated the following overarching objectives:

- To be the leading research based department in media and communications in the UK and one of the top five in the world.

- To provide a high quality postgraduate education in the major social scientific approaches to media and communications.

- To prepare students for doctoral or professional research in media and communications and for entry into a variety of media and communications-related careers.

- To conduct research of significance to academic, policy, media and public agendas, impacting on each.

Courses available and students

In 2013 the DMC offered four one-year Master's programmes and two two-year double degree MSc programmes in addition to two doctoral programmes. The fields covered by the Master's included research into communication and specialised research into communications governance, communication and development, global media and communication, policy and communication, media and gender. The doctoral programmes offered two main avenues: media and communication and the new media, innovation and literacy. In the Master's in Global Media and Communication, after taking the first year in London at the LSE, students can choose to study the second year either at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California (USC), one of the leading communication schools in the United States with major ties to the industry in Los Angeles, or at the Journalism School of Fudan University, with ties to the media in Shanghai, the most populous city in China and the site of this university.

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[15] The information in this section was mainly extracted from Media@LSE (2002, 2005 and 2010), from its *New Research Newsletters* and website.

[16] The institutes on methodology and gender were the only smaller ones. The departments with the highest number of instructors and researchers at the LSE in 2011 were Management, Economics, Law and Government.

In academic year 2012/3, the Department had 224 students (31 of them doctoral candidates), 20% of whom were from the UK or the European Union, while the other 80% came from outside Europe. Until at least 2010, the demand for Master's programmes in the department had risen every year at a rate higher than the average rise in demand for places at the LSE as a whole. Furthermore, all the DMC programmes were profitable. Until that time, the doctoral programme had been receiving around 50 applications per year, and until 2010 it only accepted six new students per year.

According to figures provided by the LSE on its website, 93% of students who finished some programme in the Department of Media and Communications in academic year 2009-2010 found a job within the next six months. The main fields in which the department's alumni find work are the media, the publishing industry, the advertising industry, public enterprise, trade, banking, foundations and education. According to the LSE, the average starting salary of DMC graduates was almost 30,000£ (around 36,000€ then) in 2009-2010.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that the registration fees at the DMC are higher than the costs of similar programmes at other universities in the UK, among the highest of all the London universities with graduate programmes in social communication, and even higher than the social sciences programmes offered at Oxford and Cambridge University. In the academic year 2012-13, a Master's in the Department of Media and Communications at LSE costs £16,512 per year (19,500 €) for any student. However, it should also be noted that these tuition fees are average at the LSE, where Master's in Economics or Finances can far outstrip or even double these figures. This fact, combined with the high percentage of non-European students and the low number of scholarships available, lead me to imagine a prevalence of students from wealthy families in emerging countries at the LSE, and in the Department of Media and Communications as well. Table 2 shows the tuition fees for 2012-2013 at London-based universities with social communication programmes.

Table 2: Universities in London. Comparison of annual registration (full-time) of Master's in Media and Journalism		
University *Academic year 2012-2013*	**National and EU** *In pounds sterling*	**Others** *In pounds sterling*
LSE	16,512	16,512
Kings College(*)	8,200	15,140
Westminster	From 5,500 to 7,500	From 11,000 to 12,000
East London(*)	5,490	9,990
Goldsmiths	From 4,290 to 9,400	From 11,100 to 14,900
Birkbeck	From 3,700 to 6,200	From 10,900 to 13,092
Source: Websites of the centres (*) Academic year 2011-2012		

These high fees are no coincidence; rather they are part of the LSE's strategy, and mandatory for all departments. However, during the interviews it was perceived that the ability to attract students able to pay these high registration fees and to attract researchers capable of attracting domestic and international funds is viewed by the DMC as a way of forging ahead with its expansion, as some department members have acknowledged.

In fact, one of them defined the LSE in an interview as the most elitist university in the UK. For this reason, the LSE regards the two time-honoured universities in the UK, Oxford and Cambridge, as its main competitors, along with the leading American universities.

Research

The LSE's Department of Media and Communications has always been a small centre yet one with a significant ability to attract financing and produce benchmark literature. During its first five years (2003-2008) the department managed to raise £350,000 (€413,000) in addition to its regular budget for projects like the creation of a Silverstone Fellowship in Global Journalism (a research grant worth £5,000 for a journalism professional) and the launch of POLIS, which analyses the impact of journalism on society. This dynamism and level of publications led the DMC to rank third in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE 2008) in the category of communication, culture and the media. This ranking also considered 75% of the

professors in the DMC as world leaders in their field or showing international excellence. At the time this assessment was published, the department only had ten members and had been in existence for a mere five years. After 2008 the amount of projects and research funding the department has been able to attract has greatly increased to about £3,6 Million (€4,3 Million) – see also Table 3.

Today, there are four thematic areas in which the bulk of the research at the centre is concentrated, although they all also incorporate such a range of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary visions that the dividing lines are not always clear. The areas are: innovation (technological change) and governance, the mediatised public sphere (political communication, social participation, journalistic ethics), transnational media cultures (global media cultures, global trends, media representations, ethnicity, gender and human rights) and digital and media literacy (audiences, identities, new competences and new abilities, etc.). Within these areas issues of ethics and morality as embarked upon by Roger Silverstone and continued by Lilie Chouliaraki are central.

The professors at the DMC stand out for having occupied or for currently occupying posts in important organisations or boards both nationally and internationally, in both academia and politics, and for having spearheaded the creation of recognised international publications in this discipline. The late Roger Silverstone was one of the founders of the journal *New Media & Society* (Sage). Robin Mansell was the president of IAMCR (International Association for Media and Communication Research, 2004-2008) and was or is a member of numerous international academic committees (University of Salzburg, Open University of Catalonia, Asia Media Information and Communication Centre-Singapore, Third World Institute-Uruguay, LIRNEAsia-net-Sri Lanka) and European Commission research committees (European Research Council). Sonia Livingstone was the president of the ICA (International Communication Association, 2007-2008) and has advised and consulted with numerous British public organisations (UK Council of Child Internet Safety, Department of Education, Ofcom, Internet Watch Foundation, Higher Education Funding Council for England and others), especially on issues related to minors' access to the Internet. Terhi Rantanen is the co-founder of the *Journal of Global Media and Communication* (Sage). These professors were and still are the editors of compilations published by prestigious academic presses like Sage, Routledge and Blackwell-Wiley, but the complete list of the department's

participation, consulting jobs, international publications, guest lectures and other activities is rounded out, of course, by the efforts of the other non-senior researchers in the department, some of whose careers are quite prominent and relevant as well (such as Bart Cammaerts or Damian Tambini, among others). The total upshot is a level of output and participation that is astonishing in terms of its volume and public relevancy (the number of citations in academic journals, media appearances, etc.), which we shall partially illustrate below.

According to figures from the department itself, between 2001 and 2008 the members of the department received up to 22 recognitions in the guise of prizes, honours of research funds; they delivered 198 lectures in seventeen different countries, 47 of which were guest lectures; they served as the moderators of up to 22 congresses; and they served as expert advisors 22 times. In the same period, they were present in up to 64 non-executive and advisory posts (35 of them on governmental organisations), were members of up to 47 editorial councils, they participated in fifteen national reports and seventeen research networks, and they secured external financing for ten far-reaching projects and 25 medium-sized or small projects.

From 2008 to 2013, the department's researchers led or participated in up to thirteen major research projects, eight of them financed by the European Commission through highly competitive programmes.

Table 3: Main projects in the LSE's Department of Media and Communications with international financing in 2008-2013		
Project	**Kind of participation**	**Financing**
EU Kids Online II (since 2006)	Sonia Livingstone (Principal Investigator) and Leslie Haddon (Co-Investigator)	EC Safer Internet Programme
Family Platform	Sonia Livingstone (Principal Investigator)	FP7 of the European Commission
International Knowledge Management – Emergent (IKM-E)	Robin Mansell (Steering Committee Member)	European Association for Development Training and Research Institutes
Media And Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe	Terhi Rantanen (Co-Investigator)	European Research Council
Media Citizenship	Myria Georgiou (Co-Investigator)	FP7 of the European Commission
Mediated Humanitarian	Shani Orgad (Co-Investigator)	Leverhulme Trust

Knowledge		
Media Policy Project	Damian Tambini (Principal Investigator)	LSE and Open Society Foundation
Opaals (until 2010; now continues as a European network)	Paolo Dini (Principal Investigator)	FP6 of the European Commission
Knowledge Society in the European Union and Latin American and Caribbean Countries (EULAKS)	Paolo Dini (Co-Investigator)	FP7 of the European Commission
Youth Participation in Democratic Life	Bart Cammaerts (Principal Investigator), Shaku Banaji and Nick Anstead (Co-Investigators)	European Commission (DG EAC) and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)
Connected Learning Research Network	Sonia Livingstone (Co-Investigator)	MacArthur Foundation
European Network of Excellence on Internet Science	Alison Powell and Paolo Dini (Co-Investigators)	European Commission
Socio-Economic Impact Assessment for Research Projects	Paolo Dini (Principal Investigator) and Robin Mansell (Senior Research Associate)	European Commission

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES, CONTRADICTIONS, RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES

If we had to summarise the features that best embody the LSE's DMC today based on the study presented in this paper, we would highlight the following:

The first would be that the DMC was founded with and still upholds the objective of approaching research in the field of media and communication from the vantage point of social theory, in what some of the interviewees called the department's 'research ethos'. More specifically, the goal is to study the media as mediation, that is, all the multidisciplinary elements that lead the media to have the implications they have in the context of the information society, while consistently avoiding technological determinism. This ethos is also consistent with the British tradition of prioritising empirical research.

This endeavour requires a multidisciplinary approach, and the research conducted at the DMC is certainly multidisciplinary, encompassing subjects that span from social psychology to sociology, politics, economics and technology. This multidisciplinary approach can be found not only in the fields of study but also in the perspectives, with

a sort of counterpose between cultural studies and political economics, although the former weighs more heavily, judging from the department's output.

The DMC's critical approach links up with the definition of English liberalism mentioned above and is at the core of the most progressive departments at the LSE, according to the perception of my interviewees and my own vantage point – 'critical but not revolutionary', as pointed out by one of the researchers. The concern with issues relating to inequality, suffering or power relations attests to this approach, and one interviewee corroborated this by stating that the department is there to provide 'public value, not to earn money for companies'.

This, in turn, comes with the need to exert influence, primarily on the public sector, which is the sector with the power to determine social changes according to this vision. The department has, judging from the data, indeed managed to do this since it was founded: all the professors in the department have at some point served as advisors to British government organisations or were appointed to government committees; several of them have participated in drawing up reference documents for international organisations such as UNESCO; and some of the projects they have led have had quite a considerable media impact (UK Children Go Online, directed by Sonia Livingstone, appeared in more than 220 media sources by 2010, for example, according to data from the department). The creation of POLIS, which revolves more around the world of journalism, pursued the same goal and was defined by the centre itself as a think tank from its very inception.

However, there are also several important contradictions to this spirit, which are coupled with some risks and uncertainties with deserve to be mentioned.

First of all, the centre's research ethos was spearheaded by the generation of researchers that engendered it, who have recently begun the natural process of generational attrition. In some cases, the younger researchers clearly identify with the original spirit, yet a distancing from this spirit is clear in others. For example, it is difficult not to notice the technological determinism at least in the definition of the digital ecosystems project OPAALS (Open Philosophies for Associative Autopoietic Digital Ecosystems), coordinated by a visiting research fellow. The entire mission of this project is based upon the fact that a technological change (a new generation of internet applications based on open systems) is going to lead to social change (in the guise of a stimulus to regional economic development).

Additionally, the research spirit based on contributing non-technologically deterministic theoretical knowledge to society is challenged daily by the interests of the students, most of whom are dominated by their desire to fit into the job market. The high degree of cosmopolitanism among the students also takes its toll in the guise of the absence of British or even European research topics.

Secondly, the multidisciplinary approach is real at the level of the centre as a whole, but much lower at the level of individual researchers, as we were able to observe and as was corroborated by the interviews. That is, the researchers start from their original fields (be it sociology, psychology, economics, etc.) to study mediation phenomena, yet they rarely perform truly cross-disciplinary studies individually or with other researchers, and instead tend to work with researchers from their own field. However, there are some researchers whose visions and studies are indeed cross-disciplinary, but in a limited fashion. This fact corroborates the enormous difficulty of conducting truly cross-disciplinary studies in this field, even in such multidisciplinary settings as the DMC.

Thirdly, until now the DMC has been among the most liberal departments (once again in the English sense of the world) in the LSE in terms of its subjects of study and perspectives. The initial impetus, marked by the support of an LSE director with a progressive bent, Giddens, was later solidified by the group of founders of the centre, with subjects and perspectives along the lines described in the sections above. However, there is a minority of researchers that do not fit this profile. The critical thinking of this minority is clearly weaker than that of their colleagues.

There is also a rather widespread contradiction related to the elitist nature of the school. Specifically, the perspective of a critical approach in research prevails, with special attention to inequality, yet at the same time the centre and the entire school exploits this inequality in its main goal of capturing wealthy students, the only ones capable of shouldering the high cost of tuition at the LSE (with the exception of a small group of students who can vie for scholarships large enough to make attendance at the LSE feasible).

Despite this, the progressive tradition of the university was stressed in the interviews, as throughout its history the LSE has embraced some of the most significant events in social change (such as a prominent commitment in May 1968, greater than what was expressed by the other British universities). The LSE's urban campus also attests to

this commitment today: Houghton Street, the pedestrian corridor which is the main artery of the LSE, permanently displays the students' commitment to causes all over the world.

Finally, related to what we have just claimed, the DMC's commitment to exert an influence without partisanship also deserves separate mention. Traditionally, the weight of the department's influence was exerted on the public authorities, but there is an important trend to open up to the private sector as well, which was mainly instigated by POLIS, although the ties here are not with private enterprise but with journalism professionals. In any event, as acknowledged by several of the interviewees, the department's influence is more significant than what is visible and reveals the vast difficulty of maintaining independence, even for a liberal school like the DMC. For example, the DMC researchers advised the Labour governments for 15 years until 2010, as one of the interviewees recalled.

CONCLUSIONS

Everything set forth above enables us to venture several answers to the initial questions of this study on the LSE's Department of Media and Communications.

First of all, the DMC fits perfectly into a university characterised by accepting diversity and radical criticism in the broad sense (from both collective and individual positions). In this vein, it is interesting to note how visions that are non-partisan, open to all viewpoints, eclectic or intermediate are enormously difficult to find among human beings. The openness of the LSE's perspectives stems from the diversity of the collective of individuals as a whole, yet it is difficult to find in equal measure in each individual, although there are, of course, exceptions. This logically leads to scenarios of permanent tension among its actors. This tension, which is highly accentuated in deeply politically polarised settings like Spain, also exists at the LSE, although it is much more diverse – not polarised – and much more accepted; that is, the actors in tension better accept the discrepancy.

Secondly, the DMC makes a threefold contribution to communication, cultural and media studies in the UK. First, it managed to carve out a niche for itself as a department in a setting like the LSE contributing to strengthening the field in the country, and it also obviously contributes to enriching the global vision mentioned

earlier. Given that the school is a training ground for leaders, this contribution is not negligible. Likewise, the effort to counterpose political economics and cultural studies has been praiseworthy from the start, adhering to a trend that is globally supported yet rarely put into practice. Finally, the department contributes benchmark research on some issues in the field of power relations, exclusion/inclusion, inequality, the moral approach and issues related to cultural and personal emancipation. It also does so in prominent fields like ICTs, minors and collectives.

The last question related to the source of the DMC's prestige. We can discern the answer to this question from the previous section, of course. The founding members of the department made an enormous effort to position the department in a leadership position in the UK in a mere five years and staff hired later have also eagerly joined this effort. Logically, the context of British academia plays a key role in this, as it exerts a great deal of pressure on the DMC's staff to achieve international excellence in its ongoing battle with the United States to attract the top international scholars as faculty and students. The DMC has thus become a small or medium-to-small department with vast public impact thanks to all this effort. However, we cannot lose sight of the terrain in which the project was fertilised. The LSE has built an internationally prestigious brand which plays a major role in disseminating, raising funds and attracting professors, researchers and students for all of its departments, as the researchers interviewed acknowledged.

Finally, in conclusion it is worthwhile to highlight certain factors that prompt reflection:

1. Until today, the DMC has been a department dominated by women. Roger Silverstone surrounded himself mainly with female researchers, and they carried on with and grew the department after his premature death in 2009. Before the appointment of Charlie Beckett to professor in 2013, all the chairs in the department were occupied exclusively by women. This inversion of the gender division in academia is a unique exception in the UK and beyond, and unquestionably a fascinating topic of study in itself.

2. The department receives both national and international financing, but by far the largest source of revenues to date has been the European Union. In fact, the leading English universities primarily rely upon the European Union as their major source of financing, which prompts interest in studying how this affects

their vision of Europe in a country that is polarised between Euro-scepticism and Europeanism.

3. The founding principles of the department are still clearly reflected in the work of many of its researchers; however, there is a clear trend in other directions as well, and in some respects these principles have not managed to take root. The technological determinism driven by the seduction which everything digital has generated in both students and financers has also penetrated the department in the guise of student interests and research projects undertaken by some visiting researchers. Likewise, the convergence between cultural studies and political economics seems more like a merger through absorption, the former of the latter, than a true combination of knowledge and perspectives.

4. Despite its contradictions, the liberal approach provides enrichment from a collectivistic (and not just individualistic) perspective. For example, there is a noteworthy desire to influence and connect with society without this involving the exclusive association of *society* with *private enterprise*. To date, for the DMC influencing has primarily entailed influencing policies and government for the public or societal good. Despite the pragmatism shown in its current objectives, the concerns of the full range of educational programmes as a whole and the majority of research projects in the department tend to revolve much more around knowledge than around the labour market demand, as can be seen in the curriculum and the subjects studied. There is no doubt that this is particularly relevant and inspiring for many European media studies departments which are hovering between both extremes in the wake of the Bologna reform.

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