



Studying in the digital era: where are we heading?

ComDev at Malmö University as a representation of
“Digital for Development”

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Abstract

Technological progress is in almost every single household nowadays; its importance is hard to downplay, and it becomes even more obvious in the times of the crisis. Could we imagine some months ago what we are going to face these days? Coronavirus pandemic has been changing the normal flow of everyday life: a lot of countries have closed their borders, unnecessary travel is reduced to minimum, supermarket shelves are suddenly getting empty, people are panicking about what is going to happen next...

But despite all that, life is going on. Work processes have not stopped because people are working from home; universities still provide knowledge to students thanks to distance learning; all kinds of digital tools help us keep different processes running.

Long before coronavirus and its effect on the mankind in general, the Communication for Development programme at Malmö University (Malmö, Sweden) has demonstrated an example of the use of information and communication technologies in practice. The programme has been running for almost 20 years already (September, 2020, marks its 20th anniversary), and its distance learning format has been one of the main attractive factors for students with other commitments, such as family, job, voluntary work, etc. More than that, an innovative and interdisciplinary nature of the programme has made it possible for people from all around the world, with different backgrounds and life schedules, participate in it.

On the one hand, it looks like ICT and new media have created a perfect ground for the studying process. But on the other hand, probably it is quite early to be too optimistic about it.

This paper tries to look deeper into the role that the pedagogical approaches, communication, media and digital channels play for the ComDev students and alumni. The current work also aims at investigating the impact of ComDev on their alumni's paths and practical use of the acquired theoretical knowledge in the field of social change. Survey research in the form of an online questionnaire and semi structured interviews are used as qualitative research methods in the body of the paper.

I would like to carry out this study as action research for optimization of the studying process and finding more efficient ways of promoting social change, that could be helpful in the future for ComDev.

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1 Introduction

The influence of ICT and new media cannot be underestimated: nowadays it's almost impossible to imagine a single sphere of life without those; their role has been dramatically increasing worldwide. Castells (2011) coined the term "information-saturated society" to highlight the presence of media and new technologies in our everyday lives. Undoubtedly, we are living in the digital era, when a lot of daily activities are automatized and simplified for our convenience, when digital communication quite often replaces the physical one, and when we spend more and more of our time online (especially with the Covid-19 pandemic changing working and studying formats, making a home office and distance learning the new normal). As Voogt (2008) stated, effective integration of ICT implies the reviewing of educational aims and their curricular content. The European Commission is promoting the use of ICT in learning processes through its eLearning Action Plan, one of the aims of which is "to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchange and collaboration" (Sangrà and González-Sanmamed: 2010).

At the same time, the role of media, ICT is much more complex than it may seem at first glance: it is multi-faceted, creating opportunities, as well as obstacles, for its users, sometimes without them realizing that. All the time, however, the wider communications field lacked consensus on a common focusing concept for researchers who remained interested in the broader "consequences" of media and communications for everyday life and across social space, yet were aware of the acute methodological difficulties of isolating and identifying such effects within the complex weave of contemporary experience (Couldry and Hepp: 192). Couldry and Hepp (2013) also state that this problem - the problem of "consequences" - goes back to the very beginnings of media and communications research when Lazarsfeld and Merton (1969) identified as the first "effect" of media the sheer fact of media institutions' existence, but regarded this "effect" as unresearchable because it could never be experimentally removed from the conditions of modern life.

Speaking about social media during the ComDev studies, obviously it includes a variety of platforms. In the current paper, they are referred to as "a specific set of internet-based, networked communication platforms [that] use a business model of a database built by its own users [and] enable the convergence of public and personal communication." (Meikle, 2016, p. x). The following media and digital channels will be discussed most in the thesis:

Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, e-mail, Google docs, Twitter, LinkedIn. A short description, as well as comparison of the Canvas and ItsLearning studying platforms used at Malmö University, will be also provided in the body of the paper.

The Communication for Development Master's Programme has created its own blended format, consisting of the combination of both traditional studies with innovative, distance ways of learning. The paper aims to question this "glocal" format and how ComDev at Malmö University has been responding to the social change agenda.

To achieve that, I would like to look at the role of communication and pedagogies in the ComDev studies at Malmö University with focus on digital channels. The paper also tries to analyze some data on how the ComDev alumni actually maneuver further in social change work as a consequence of the course's weaknesses and strengths.

Thus, the central research question and sub-questions are as follows:

1. What does ComDev's "glocal approach" lead to and facilitate? Does ComDev represent "Digital for Development"?

1.1. What kind of potentials and problems does the pedagogy create for promoting social change?

1.2. How do the ComDev graduates maneuver further in the social change work as a consequence of the course's weaknesses and strengths?

To answer these research questions, the thesis is structured as follows: First, I will start with the background about digital development and technology, looking more closely into the Swedish media landscape, since MAU's ComDev programme was founded in Sweden. It is further followed by the subsection about media and communication channels at Malmö University. Then I introduce Communication for Development as a field of study, later on providing the description of the ComDev Master's programme and the concept of the Glocal Classroom, developed by MAU in cooperation with the three partner universities in Canada, South Africa, and Australia. The literature review and theoretical framework chapters are presented next: first, a broad introduction to the field is given, followed by a narrower selection of the literature that I will apply in my thesis.

The next section describes the methodology used in the current paper, that includes the overview of the qualitative methods, data collection, sample size and analysis process, as

well as ethical considerations. It is further followed by the presentation of the research results and their analysis regarding the theoretical framework applied in the current work.

Finally, a summary of the main findings is provided, together with the contributions and limitations of the paper, and some suggestions for future research.

2 Background

In this chapter, the discussion of the terminology around Digital Development is presented, as well as the concept itself and what role technology plays in the contemporary world and development field. Then, the focus is shifted to the Swedish cultural context: technology and media landscape in Sweden is shortly described, since in the body of the paper we will analyze the pedagogies, ways of communication, and digital platforms used in the Communication for Development Programme at Malmö University, which is located in the south of Sweden. It is followed by the introduction of the Communication for Development programme itself, some of its history, distance-learning format and close interrelation with digital media.

2.1 Digital Development and Technology for Social Change

In this section, I would like to touch upon digital development and its role in the modern world, but first of all it may be important to look deeper into the concept itself.

Heeks (2019) poses the question of the usage of the two terms: "Digital Development" and "Digital-for-Development". Roberts (2019) continues this discussion, and takes it even further, explaining his interpretation of "Digital in Development", "Digital for Development" and "Development in a Digital World". According to Roberts, "Digital in Development" means the use of ICT by development institutions or actors to improve their work productivity. It may be evaluation systems, online monitoring, or mobile survey tools. As for "Digital for Development", here the focus is on digital tools designed and used specifically for the development purposes. Some of digital ICT4D initiatives that have been successfully implemented include eHealth, civic tech, eAgriculture, and others.

Tim Unwin and Dorothea Kleine have argued that the use of the "for Development" language is advantageous because it requires us to be clear about what we mean by development, and what the claimed relationship is between the ICT and the Development

outcome (Roberts: 2019). Thus, Roberts suggests that probably it is more appropriate to use the term “Digital in a Development World” for describing the relationship between international development and the increasing worldwide impact of digital technologies. He also finds it practical to use “Digital Development” as a collective term for this broad field that incorporates the abovementioned notions.

Speaking about MAU’s ComDev, it exemplifies this wide term “Digital Development”, since it uses ICT in its everyday work, which in its turn shows strong bonds between international development and the growing impact of digital technologies (“Digital in Development” and “Digital in a Development World”). The current paper questions whether the ComDev programme at Malmö University also represents “Digital for Development” through addressing the social change agenda with the help of its global practice.

Roberts (2019) also speaks about ten rules of technology for social change. The two rules which may be especially applicable to the current paper are rule number 3 and rule number 4, namely “Technology is socially shaped”, and “Technology is a process of applying knowledge to goals”. Saying that “technology is socially shaped”, Roberts means that technologies are determined by different social considerations, which may include such as economic, military, and political ones. Social relations of the systems, as well as the demand and consumption of the technology, are the important factors that shape ICT. Technology simply cannot exist in the social vacuum. It may be one of the explanations why the Communication for Development Programme in the form of distance learning combined with traditional studies was founded in 2000 at Malmö University. It may be explained by the demand of the society at that time to have another form of learning allowing people to combine a degree with other commitments, or study from another part of the world; and it marked the creation of a more digital educational space.

As for rule number 4, technology can be quite often seen as knowledge applied to goals. This begs the questions: "who's knowledge?", "applied by whom?" and to "who's goals?" (Roberts: 2019). In the case of Malmö University’s ComDev, it may be regarded as the knowledge of the teaching staff and coordinators of the programme applied by them to the students’ goals. Among the aims of the programme the following ones can be listed: to teach students about such a broad Communication for Development field, look at it

from different disciplinary angles, bring practitioners and experiences of global diversity in contact, alongside with international students giving insights from their different locations, and so on.

The ‘defining rule of the modern world’ (Malone 1995) fuels an information and communication technology revolution that, numerous pundits tell, is changing and will change the way we live (MacKenzie and Wajcman: 1999). If it was unusual and innovative to study online even some years ago, nowadays it has become the new normal. Malmö University with its Communication for Development Programme has been one of the pioneers in the field, and more explanation about the underlying cultural context and the history of the programme is presented in the next parts of the thesis.

2.2 Swedish technology and media landscape

When we look at technological changes, they should always be studied within their social context. One of the most interesting findings in the interdisciplinary research on information and communication technologies is that they have hugely different social implications and cultural connotations in different societies (Eriksen 2007: 35).

Sweden has one of the leading positions in the world regarding digitalization and technological progress. Taking into consideration that Swedes make up a small percentage of the global population (0.13 per cent), this Scandinavian nation has quite a disproportionate amount of influence on global innovation. Sweden tops the Innovation Union Scoreboard, an index published by the European Commission¹. It is designed to evaluate both advantages and disadvantages of national innovation systems and helps different countries identify certain areas they should pay special attention to.

Sweden has also achieved high rankings in innovation surveys such as the Legatum Prosperity Index and the Global Innovation Index².

The UK’s publisher of news Independent ranks Sweden at the top of the list of the most innovative countries on earth³. Nowadays Swedish companies like Spotify are outperforming such tech-giants as Apple, Google and Microsoft. What is the secret of such a rapid technological development? In the same article of the Independent named

¹ <https://sweden.se/business/innovation-in-sweden/>

² <https://sweden.se/business/innovation-in-sweden/>

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/sweden-s-technology-powerhouse-shows-brex-it-britain-a-positive-way-to-fix-its-ailing-economy-a8118641.html>

“How Sweden became one of the most innovative countries on earth”, Sam Manaberi, founder of Gothenburg-based startup Trine, claims that Sweden’s social safety net and wealth equality are at the very heart of what makes his country so innovative⁴. The Swedish risk-taking and transparent environment with its safety nets, as well as free education and huge investments in research and development, have resulted in a big technological leap and mass digitalization of the population.

That is why living a digital life and working/studying/solving tasks online has not been a rare phenomenon in Sweden for quite some time already. Internet penetration is high in Sweden, as well as in the whole Scandinavian region. Approximately 95 percent of Swedes have access to the internet. Ownership of digital devices is widespread: over 90 percent own a computer, 75 percent own a smartphone and 60 percent own a tablet⁵. The preconditions for the internet use are thus advantageous.

According to the same data source, traditional online media is not as popular as the social online media in Sweden: every day 52 percent of Swedes prefer social media to the traditional one (choice of only 34 percent of the population). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook Messenger, and Youtube are the top social media and messenger brands⁶. Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform: approximately half of the Swedish population have their accounts on Facebook, using it primarily as the main source of news and events happening in the world⁷.

Besides, Sweden ranks quite highly for media freedom. It took one of the top-three positions in the Reporters Without Borders 2019 World Press Freedom Index, with only Norway and Finland being ahead in the list.

According to the data provided by BBC News, by June 2019, around 9.7 million Swedes were online - 96.4% of the population⁸.

⁴ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/sweden-s-technology-powerhouse-shows-brexits-britain-a-positive-way-to-fix-its-ailing-economy-a8118641.html>

⁵ <https://medialandscapes.org/country/sweden/media/social-networks>

⁶ <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2017/sweden-2017/>

⁷ <https://medialandscapes.org/country/sweden/media/social-networks>

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17961251>

2.3 Malmö University: brief history, values, and the use of media technology

Malmö University is located in the central part of Malmö, a city on the very southern edge of Sweden, which is a close neighbour to another Nordic city: you can find yourself in Copenhagen, Denmark, after just a 20-minute train ride through the Øresund Bridge. Malmö is the third largest city in Sweden after Stockholm and Gothenburg, and it is a very international one (around 40% of the population come from the countries other than Sweden).

If we briefly look back at the history of Malmö, it was one of the earliest and most industrialized port towns in the Nordic countries, but it later took a post-industrial path. After the Øresund Bridge was opened in 2000, Malmö has been constantly undergoing important transformations, which resulted in developing the city's infrastructure and architecture, as well as supporting new tech- and IT companies. Malmö is situated in the Skåne County of Sweden, and it has historically been the local economic and education hub, forming it together with a university town called Lund. Malmö University has played an important role in the transformation of Malmö from an industrial town into a modern center of learning.

Founded in 1998, Malmö University is a young, international and dynamic institution. One of the biggest universities in the country, it has about 25 000 students, employs around 1400 staff, and offers undergraduate and postgraduate education.

One of the characteristics of Malmö University is its unusual, not a very traditional approach to education. As stated on the official website of Malmö University, research and education should be innovative, multidisciplinary, international, and safeguard the strengths and values that characterise the University⁹. Malmö University has a unique opportunity to be an open university which invites people to discuss complex and uncomfortable societal issues¹⁰. Thus, we can see that the focus is mostly put on innovation, intersection of different disciplines, openness to everyone, internationalisation and diversity, and fundamental beliefs.

⁹ <https://mau.se/en/about-us/vision-quality-and-internationalisation/>

¹⁰ <https://mau.se/en/about-us/vision-quality-and-internationalisation/>

Speaking about the MAU's core values, those are the pillars the educational institution relies on: democratic, human and academic values based on the principles of an open society, critical thinking and freedom of speech. MAU's vision is to contribute to a sustainable and more equal society through research-based knowledge, critical reflection and a readiness to act¹¹.

The use of technology at Malmö University has been a usual practice for many years in a row. Having innovation at its forefront, MAU has been widely using technology in its teaching process. The university has been recently operating on the Canvas and Ladok platforms, with the former one mainly used for reporting the grades, while Canvas serving different educational and communication purposes.

In the spring of 2020, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, MAU started following the recommendations from The Public Health Agency. As of March 18, the university has completely switched to digital learning and examination. It has been done to prevent the further spread of the virus, but keep the functioning of the university with its everyday activities at the same time.

3 Communication for Development as a field of study

ComDev is a relatively new field of study, and it has been evolving and changing throughout the past decades. ComDev emerged after World War II in the form of technologically-, economically-, and politically-driven foreign aid investment programmes by Western countries to developing countries through bi/multi-lateral institutions to promote development (Wilkins 2015) and "rescue" them from post-colonial degradation (Clammer 2012). The development discourse has been undergoing significant changes in the course of time: different views on power within the process of social change have appeared alongside with new approaches to development.

The early Dominant Paradigm articulated by Lerner, Schramm, and others assumed that media, as a tool to promote national development goals, would have the power to inspire individuals to act and think in modern, Western ways. Dependency scholars reminded us of the global structure within which developing countries work, situating power in the hands of wealthier nations (Wilkins 2000: 2). A vertical, top-down paradigm, a sender-

¹¹ <https://mau.se/en/about-us/vision-quality-and-internationalisation/>

receiver mass communication format, together with “the white savior” narrative, have been predominant in the field for some years, until the voices of the marginalized ones started sounding louder and finally began to be heard.

The situation started changing in the 1960s with the emerging criticism of the hierarchical structure of the approach and its strong contextuality; several theorists from Asia and Latin America, such as Paulo Freire and Antonio Pasquali, were among the first ones to initiate this shift from “the white savior” to the community direction, which resulted in the development of several participatory communication theories (Waisbord 2014:16-18). Participatory approaches to development drew our attention to the power of local communities to recognize and resolve social concerns. Recent attention to social movements complements participatory approaches by emphasizing the ability of marginal communities to control their own social change (Wilkins 2000: 2).

Many of the scholars urge us to consider the complexity of social change processes, moving away from dichotomous notions of development and power (Wilkins 2000: 1). It has further resulted in the expansion of the ComDev field and a closer focus on strategic, deliberative initiatives in general by any group, in any geographical setting (Tufte & Mefalopulos 2009: 10; Wilkins 2015).

3.1 Communication for Development Master’s Programme at Malmö University

ComDev as it was outlined and developed at Malmö University’s School of Arts and Communication (K3), did not emerge from within the existing field. It was rather a result of the conflation of a global cultural studies viewpoint on the one hand and a media practitioner’s perspective on the other (Hemer and Tufte 2012: 230).

The history of the Communication for Development Master’s programme at Malmö University started 20 years ago, in 2000. A short timeline of ComDev is presented in the next paragraph below.

Though the idea itself appeared in 1999 and an application for the development of a pilot version was approved by SIDA the same year, the first course in Swedish started in September, 2000, with 30 participants. The second course was also in Swedish, and the first examinations followed in 2001. The first international course in English, with a pilot

group of 10 selected participants from developing countries, was launched in 2002¹². The first streaming experiment took place in Sarajevo in 2003, where a seminar for the second international course was held, in collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers that provides a number of student grants for project works in the West Balkan region¹³. As for online participation with live streaming of the seminars, it already became possible in 2004.

Malmö University's ComDev history is full of other important milestones: for instance, the meeting in Los Baños, the Philippines, conducted by the Communication for Social Change Consortium, with participation of twelve universities, and the foundation of The Communication for Development and Social Change University Network, as well as the start of the Memories of Modernity project in 2005; more seminars and exhibitions taking place in different parts of the world, etc.

The Master course officially became a Master programme in 2010, marking the tenth anniversary from the start of ComDev at Malmö University¹⁴.

The overall aim of the Communication for Development programme is two-fold:

- to provide in-depth knowledge of various aspects of globalisation, emphasising the role of culture, media and new information and communication technology from a global development perspective; and
- to provide skills for work with development and social change in international development cooperation as well as in other areas¹⁵.

Communication for Development is an interdisciplinary field of study combining research and fieldwork that has emerged in the post-war era through the practical intersection of communication and development theories¹⁶. This cross-discipline field lies within media, cultural, development and communication studies. These multiple entry

¹² <https://wpmu.mah.se/comdev/about/history/>

¹³ <https://wpmu.mah.se/comdev/about/history/>

¹⁴ <https://wpmu.mah.se/comdev/about/history/>

¹⁵ <https://edu.mah.se/sv/program/hacfd>

¹⁶ <https://edu.mah.se/sv/program/hacfd>

points create a rich framework for challenging hegemonic notions and knowledge, and engage with questions of social, cultural, economic and political power. The theory and practices of ComDev play an important role as witness to global injustice and marginalisation, as amplifiers of dissent and as connectors between people, cultures and stories¹⁷.

Thus, ComDev aims at having a deeper look into communication in the context of articulating the processes of social change on both local and global levels. The pedagogical approach used in the programme is called “Glocal Classroom”, which is described as “a global learning space grounded in local realities”¹⁸. It is quite a cutting-edge way of learning that has been offered by ComDev: a blend of distance studies and more traditional, on-site forms of education. “Glocal Classroom” is also a physical place located in Malmö University in Malmö, Sweden. It is an actual classroom, which has been used to record lectures, seminars, but also welcomes anyone who wants to participate in some sessions in person; it has as well travelled to partner universities and conferences abroad.

While the first year of the programme is more theory-based and gives an overview of the whole field (it comprises Media, Globalisation and Development, and Communication, Culture and Media Analysis courses), the focus of the second year is shifted more to the hands-on empirical fieldwork (blog-based ICT4D module, a research methodology course as a preparation to the Degree Project, and a thesis course).

The form of the assignments is quite blended: it involves both teamwork and individual tasks, group discussions and peer reviews, presentations and essay writing, etc. Working with peers who have different backgrounds and experiences is supposed to help with expanding horizons, learning more from each other and exchanging diverse perspectives among groupmates. Working by yourself and having individual assignments is aimed at developing self-discipline and reflective, critical thinking. If some support or clarification is needed, the students in the programme can address the professors, groupmates or supervisors via different digital channels.

¹⁷ <https://edu.mah.se/sv/program/hacfd>

¹⁸ <https://edu.mah.se/sv/program/hacfd>

As abovementioned in this chapter, ComDev currently operates on Canvas, which is used as one of the main digital ways to keep updated about the course of the programme, get necessary learning resources, and be in constant touch with the teaching staff and peers. Canvas is a multi-functional platform, which includes literature lists, Inbox, communication forums; it gives access to MAU library and Zoom, as well as has video archives of lectures and seminars, and many more. Before 2018, ItsLearning had been the main educational platform used in the programme; the switch to Canvas happened during summer-autumn 2018. Besides Canvas, the students and teaching staff also use other digital and media channels to stay in touch with each other, and keep up-to-date in the ComDev field.

As for its presence in social media, the ComDev Programme has two official pages in Facebook¹⁹²⁰, and one group in LinkedIn²¹. Since August 2010, ComDev Malmö University has been active on Twitter²² as well.

The abovementioned features and components of the programme are meant to open new opportunities for the students, such as being able to work both interdisciplinary and transculturally in their future career paths.

3.2 The Glocal Classroom

*“Yes, you read correctly, the **glocal** classroom. We have decided to rename the project, partly to distinguish it from the many Global Classroom projects around the world, but mostly because the glocal is a more adapt term to characterize the process of globalization, which has made the global-local dichotomy irrelevant”.*

“We wish to create a common ground for discussion on the pedagogical application of ICTs in teaching and learning in general. Just as the former division between “old” and

¹⁹

https://www.facebook.com/groups/comdevmau/?multi_permaLinks=1355633697968036¬if_id=1587912355474622¬if_t=group_activity

²⁰ https://www.facebook.com/comdevmalmo/?eid=ARBe_s-Rh3rhA3Lkj-eNlorlHHJb24lwHmbNuixZnbchWRtVcwOFO2DXV-fDpPuK-haY9P2NYZv01jmm

²¹ <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2822162/>

²² <https://twitter.com/mahcomdev>

“new” media has been overruled by convergence media, this project aims at enhancing what might be called convergence pedagogy”

Oscar Hemer, Professor, Project leader, Malmö University

Malmö University, together with three other partner universities, has created the concept of the so-called “Glocal Classroom”. These four universities (Stellenbosch in South Africa, Guelph, Canada, Malmö, Sweden, Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia) have built a global platform for collaboration and interchange in web-based learning²³. After they started it in 2014, a number of seminars have been carried out and hosted by the participating universities.

The project is mainly meant to bridge the gap between traditional, on-campus forms of learning, with their web-based counterpart. To achieve this, the focus has been placed on innovation as a way of combining distance and conventional forms of learning. The platform has been used as a discussion forum of the relevant topics, and it has served as an example of the pedagogical application of ICT in both learning and teaching processes. Just as the former division between “old” and “new” media has been overruled by convergence media, this project aims at enhancing what might be called *convergence pedagogy*²⁴.

Since the project has been quite experimental throughout the years, there has been no fixed seminar content, but rather decided separately by each particular university. However, there have been certain key words to be used, such as “Social Justice”, “Digital Divide”, “Transformation”, and “Well-being”. All the seminars have been included in the curriculum of the ComDev programme at Malmö University.

4 Literature review: The concept of mediatization

What is mediatization? And why is it such a relevant concept nowadays? The notion of “mediatization” has been changing throughout the history; I have tried to describe a short summary of its evolution in the section below.

²³ <https://glocalclassroom.wordpress.com/about/>

²⁴ <https://glocalclassroom.wordpress.com/about/>

Beyond the new media developments and their mediations in everyday life, a more fundamental analytical entry point for understanding the new media developments lies in the overall process of mediatization (Tufte 2017: 38).

First, there was the brute fact of media's growing role in everyday lives in so many developed countries by the mid-2000s, a decade that saw the normalization of fast Internet access, the near universalization of mobile phones, the massive expansion of web search capacity, and the emergence of blogs, then YouTube, then social media as new communicative forms—in other words, the fact of media in our lives, every day, as a basic reference point for children, friends, family, and work (Couldry and Hepp 2013). The omnipresent and multidirectional nature of media's contribution to the “texture” of our lives (Silverstone 1999: 6) has changed the direction of the media research. While in the 1980s the focus was mostly on the approach with the production-text-audience correlation, the 2000s has brought us an important shift towards the open-ended and non-linear consequences of media as they reshape our lives.

The scholars Jesus Martín-Barbero from Colombia and Roger Silverstone from the United Kingdom played a very important role in this move. Silverstone had from the beginning of his career framed “media” in a broad way: in terms of “myth” (1981), or the production of knowledge about science (1985). Silverstone took this further in a manifesto for studying media that, while it avoided an explicit conceptual architecture, insisted on the linked diversity of fields in which media mattered (Silverstone 1999) (Couldry and Hepp: 193).

Then, in addition to that, the shift of power dynamics in 1990s was also one of the main reasons that led to the recent convergence around the concept of mediatization. What actually happened during the last decade of the twentieth century, was the emergence, and increasing dominance of approaches to power, which no longer belonged to powerful institutions, let alone powerful people, but which instead appeared everywhere else: for instance, in a huge network of linkages, apparatuses, and habits within everyday life. The key influence here was of course Michel Foucault (particularly *Discipline and Punish*, 1979), but another later influence of growing importance—and itself influenced by Foucault—was the Actor Network Theory (ANT) of Bruno Latour and others, still barely acknowledged however in media and communications research by the early 2000s (Couldry 2000: 6–7).

If by the mid-2000s, these multiple influences and research streams were converging around a need to find a common term for research into media's broader influences, some proximate causes were required to prompt today's emerging agreement around the term "mediatization" (Couldry and Hepp: 194). One such cause was the increasingly effective internationalization of the media and communications research field, evidenced by the increasing number of non-American members in the International Communication Association (ICA) and the emergence of a separate European association, the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), whose former president François Heinderyckx became 2012 President-elect of the ICA (Couldry and Hepp: 194).

We can see that the notion of "mediatization" has gone a long way, with its focus moving away from the discussions about the "effect" of media texts to a much broader take on it as something being deeply embedded in our everyday lives, and affecting them in certain ways. For instance, Ernst Manheim (1933) spoke about the "mediatization of direct human relationships" (p. 11). He coined this term to show the transformation of social relations throughout the years, changes which have among others led to the appearance of mass media.

As for some other approaches, the social-constructivist and medium theories also played an important role in the development of the concept. The medium theory made a contribution by the idea of placing emphasis not only on media contents but also on the influence of media in their materiality as a way of communication. It is quite different from the social-constructivist point of view though. The social-constructivist tradition's understanding of mediatization, by contrast, highlights the role of various media as part of the process of the communicative construction of social and cultural reality (Berger & Luckmann 1967). Mediatization here refers to the process of a communicative construction of socio-cultural reality and analyzes the status of various media within that process (Krotz 2009; Hepp 2012; Hepp 2013: 54–68). Generally speaking, mediatization is a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other (Couldry and Hepp: 197).

Mediatization has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. As for the qualitative side, we speak here about use of different media for different means of communication. With regard to quantitative aspects, mediatization refers to the increasing temporal,

spatial and social spread of mediated communication (Couldry and Hepp: 197). Indeed, with the beginning of every decade (if not every year) it becomes more and more obvious how digitally dependent we have become, and how normal it is nowadays to communicate via media in different situations.

5 Theoretical framework: Globalization and Glocalization

Eriksen (2007: 3) speaks about three main factors that impacted the rise of globalization: the end of the Cold War entailing a tighter global integration, the Internet, and identity politics, which came to the forefront of the international agenda. These three dimensions of globalization - increased trade and transnational economic activity, faster and denser communication networks, increased tensions between (and within) cultural groups due to intensified mutual exposure – do not suggest that the world has been fundamentally transformed after the late 1980s but that the driving forces of both economic, political and cultural dynamics are transnational – and that this is now widely acknowledged (Eriksen 2007: 4).

Acceleration (alongside with disembedding, standardization, interconnectedness, movement, mixing, vulnerability and re-embedding) is named by Eriksen (2007) as one of the central features of globalization and modernity. Thomas Friedman (2005) refers to one of his earlier books published in 1999 claiming that only in the beginning of the 21st century accelerated change has led to a more integrated and “flatter” world. In the domains of information technology, consumption and retail trade, the world is doubtless becoming ‘flatter’, to use Friedman’s term, although it should be kept in mind that perhaps half the world’s population does not take part in this (Eriksen 2007: 38). If we look at acceleration from a spatial angle, it becomes quite obvious that some places change much faster than others. For instance, Malmö University was one of the pioneers in distance learning, and its location in Sweden with its socially shaped technological context played a certain role in it.

Interconnectedness is also important to mention as another globalization feature in relation to MAU’s ComDev. This brings us to the concept of “the network society” developed by Castells (1996). The notion of ‘the Net’ comprises two interrelated processes: economic globalization and the spread of ICT, which makes distance irrelevant. Whereas classic industrial society was organized through ‘the space of places’, information society takes place through ‘the space of flows’, where the degree of

connectedness, not physical proximity, is the decisive factor. Networks are built around nodes, that is points where lines intersect or, less technically, a site where relevant activities connected with other activities (or nodes) elsewhere take place (Eriksen 2007: 72). A node can be a person with relevant connections to others. Networks are, importantly, ‘open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network’ (Castells 1996: 469). Following the principle of interconnectedness, MAU’s ComDev created its own network of practitioners (students, graduates, teaching staff) which keeps on growing despite the distance factors, but thanks to digitalization (groups in Facebook and LinkedIn).

When it comes to the re-embedding feature of globalization, we speak here about the notion of glocalization. It may sound like a paradox, but that’s point where the world is becoming a single place, and where disembedding meets re-embedding. Eriksen (2007) points out that globalization is always glocal in the sense that human lives take place in particular locations – even if they are transnational, on the move, dislocated.

According to Eriksen (2007), globalization is dual and operates, one might say, through dialectical negation: It shrinks the world by facilitating fast contact across former boundaries, and it expands the world by creating an awareness of difference. It homogenizes human lives by imposing a set of common denominators (state organization, labour markets, consumption and so forth), but it also leads to heterogenization through the new forms of diversity emerging from the intensified contact. Globalization is centripetal in that it connects people worldwide; and it is centrifugal in that it inspires a heightened awareness of, and indeed (re)constructions of local uniqueness (Eriksen 2007: 142).

Thus, to summarize it, the disembedding side of globalization goes hand by hand with re-embedding projects, which retain or recreate a sense of continuity, security and trust.

6 Methodology

This chapter describes a methodological approach used in the paper, methods and analysis process of the research, as well as ethical considerations.

6.1 Research bias

This thesis is written with the purpose of finding out unbiased opinions of the ComDev students and alumni on what the studies lead to. On the one hand, that was one of the difficult parts of writing the paper, since my own participation in this Master's as a student and my personal interest and perception of ComDev could have created obstacles to have this research completely unbiased and not subjective. However, on the other hand, it can be seen as an advantage for the current study. I believe that studying at Malmö University, taking an active part in the programme and knowing it from the inside could have also enriched the research through my informed interpretations (Peshkin 1988: 18). I am a member of the ComDev Malmö University online groups, both in Facebook and LinkedIn, and I also follow the ComDev Twitter account to receive relevant information and be aware of what happens in the field. Browsing the Communication for Development portal has also helped me to understand the programme better, starting from the early days of its existence.

Thus, I have tried to be reflexive and critical in order to minimize bias while conducting the research and writing the thesis. Two more reasons for doing it can be listed here as well. The first one is that I conducted in-depth interviews with the students and alumni of the programme, and I know some of them, since I met them in person/online during the studies. Besides, there was some group work required during the course of the programme, and I did certain assignments together with some of the interviewed students. So, it was important for both of us to switch from "the peer students" attitude to "the interview-interviewee" mode.

The second reason is that the language of the interviewees and the language reported in the current paper are not the same, which added one more dimension to a possible interpretation of the study. Qualitative methodologies and methods such as case studies, interviews, and media texts analyses are all interpretative in nature: case studies seek to uncover phenomena's meanings (Merriam 2014), interviews are seen as collaborative interactions and as situated knowledge (Fontana 2001; Warren 2002), and texts are seen as polysemic (Lockyer 2008).

6.2 Methodological approach

This section will introduce to the readers methodology used in the paper. Two qualitative methods have been applied in the current study: survey research for collecting a bigger sample and having a broader picture of ComDev at Malmö University, and interviews for narrowing down the study to specific problems and issues raised by the students and alumni of the programme.

As abovementioned, interviewing has been used as one of the qualitative research methods in this paper. Interviews can be formally conducted in surveys, through the internet, over the telephone, or in face-to-face interaction, and they can be informally conducted; for example, as part of ethnographic fieldwork (Brinkmann: 3). In my opinion, this is the main strength of this research method: variety and flexibility of ways of doing it. Research interviews can be more or less structured, so there is always space for freedom for both researchers and respondents. Most qualitative research interviews are semi structured as a consequence of the agenda being set by the researcher's interests yet with room for the respondent's more spontaneous descriptions and narratives (Brinkmann: 3).

Thus, I have conducted a series of semi structured interviews with some ComDev students and alumni to ask them prepared in advance questions, but have certain room for improvisation and unexpected threads of discussions. To achieve this, I have built interviews mostly on open questions, which was made with the intent of leaving out the possibility of planting ideas in people's heads, but rather letting the respondents "own the conversation" and freely express their opinions and thoughts. Open questions created more opportunities for richer conversations and deeper conclusions.

Another qualitative research method that is used in the paper is survey research. Survey research refers to the set of methods used to gather data in a systematic way from a range of individuals, organizations, or other units of interest (Julien: 3). According to Julien (2008), specific methods may include questionnaires (on paper or online), interviews (conducted by any method; e.g., individual interviews done face to face or via telephone), focus groups, or observation (e.g., structured observations of people using internet access stations at a public library). I have chosen individual interviews as one of the research methods in this paper (as abovementioned), but I have decided to start gathering some preliminary data (both quantitative and qualitative) with the help of a questionnaire that

was composed in Google forms and was sent out to the ComDev students and alumni via e-mail, LinkedIn, Facebook, or WhatsApp.

Survey research is widely used in the social sciences. Many studies using more than one data collection method will include a survey method. For example, a quantitatively oriented questionnaire could be used to generate general understanding of a set of related questions, to identify interview questions for deeper qualitative investigation, and to identify possible interview participants. Alternatively, a questionnaire could be used to confirm the generalizability of results from a small interview study to a larger, more statistically representative sample (Julien: 3).

6.3 Research design

In collaboration with the ComDev department at Malmö University, its coordinators and teaching staff, a number of ComDev alumni and students have been contacted and asked to participate in the survey.

The research design and the sample were not chosen randomly; the ultimate goal was to have a more diverse spread among the current students and alumni of the programme. To achieve this aim, first, several posts with the introduction to the survey were created in Facebook and LinkedIn on the official ComDev pages; second, after the attention of several students and alumni was attracted and some feedback was received, I continued the thread of conversation with them, asked for their consent in the survey participation and gave them further information and clarification. And third, I read through some personal profiles in the social media, and contacted several people directly through private messaging via different digital channels, such as e-mail, Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, or Skype.

Since ComDev at Malmö University is an international programme and it's conducted in English, the online survey has been also created in English using Google Forms, and it has been sent out to the respondents via e-mail, Facebook, Whatsapp, or LinkedIn. Its link has been open and available in the programme-related groups to any ComDev student or alumni who was willing to participate in the survey. It consisted of 30 questions in total, including optional demographic questions (such as gender, age, nationality), and required questions about the programme itself: communication channels, digital

platforms, pedagogical approaches, possible networks generated by ComDev, and general impact of ComDev on people's professional and personal levels.

Thus, the survey has been designed to collect some background information about the respondents, as well as more specific opinions about ComDev. The combination of closed and open-ended questions has been used throughout the survey to achieve those ends. Julien (2008) points out that open-ended questions on a questionnaire or asked in an interview will produce text that may be analyzed qualitatively. Qualitative data gathered in survey methods tends to be in text form, such as narrative responses to open-ended questions posed in an interview or written responses to a "comments" item on a questionnaire (Julien: 3).

Possible outcomes may vary, and the results of the study depend quite a lot on the way the survey was created, as well as how the information was interpreted by the researcher after the answers were provided by the interviewees. Here we can have a look at the strengths and weaknesses of the method. I would like to start with open-ended questions. As for the strengths, open-ended questions give more freedom to both researchers (how the sentences are formulated, for instance) and respondents (opportunities for self-expression), and provide more details about opinions, personal experiences, and deeply held beliefs. Thus, they usually generate richer information compared to closed questions.

On the other hand, open-ended questions may seem to be quite difficult to the respondents because they are more demanding and time-consuming to reply. Sometimes people are more reluctant to answer open-ended questions, because they are not willing to spend more of their personal time on something that is probably considered by them as irrelevant in this fast-pace world where every day is filled with so many duties and responsibilities.

From the researchers' side, they often find that responses to open-ended questions require greater effort to record, code, analyze, and interpret than is the case for responses to closed questions (Julien: 4). In this aspect, closed questions may look more beneficial compared to the open ones, since they are more convenient for respondents to answer, and more effortless for researchers to decode. Indeed, responses to closed questions are easier to deal with for researchers as well, as they take less time to analyze, and they fall into certain categories. But closed questions have many disadvantages including eliciting responses where no knowledge or opinion actually exists, oversimplifying issues, and forcing answers into possibly unnatural categories (Julien: 4). The questions should be

specific and appropriate for all the respondents. As for another weakness, researchers should be aware of order bias, since respondents will incline toward the middle in a list of numbers, extremes in a list of ideas, and the second alternative in a list of two ideas. It is also wise to rotate the order of questions in case order influences responses (Julien: 5).

Thus, taking into consideration different advantages and disadvantages, a mix of both closed and open-ended questions was used in the current survey. As for the sequence of the questions, I tried to arrange them in a logical order and with a gradually rising level of difficulty, starting with more general, background information about the respondents themselves, and then asking them to provide some details about their experience of studying ComDev.

6.4 Ethics in the research

Ethical issues have been considered at all stages of the research process. Confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, and a consideration of the consequences of participating in the study were taken as ethical rules of thumb. Concerning the consequences, it is an ethical challenge to the interviewer that the openness and intimacy of the interview situation can lead the respondents to disclose information they may later regret, and there is a risk that the interaction may become a quasi-therapeutic relationship for which most researchers have not been trained (Brinkmann: 2008). This may also be considered as a weakness of the approach: without proper training, the interview questions and process in general may affect respondents in different ways, even up to causing not expected psychological consequences.

Ethical considerations regarding trust and honesty (Brinkmann: 2008) were important to take into consideration as well: before conducting the interviews, I asked for verbal consent from the respondents to record by hand, transcribe and use their interviews in my thesis. I also introduced my research topic, my connection to it, expressed my gratitude for their participation, and guaranteed confidentiality. Anonymity was relevant to be assured, since some of the respondents are still the students of the programme. All the data sources were treated with the most diligence and as much impartiality as possible to ensure the most accuracy.

7 Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical descriptive findings are presented and analyzed with the help of the chosen theoretical framework to answer my research questions. The results of the study are supported with illustrative quotes from the interviews with the students and alumni of ComDev. Simultaneously, the findings are discussed in relation to the literature review and background chapter.

7.1 Online questionnaire

I started my survey by designing an online questionnaire “Studying in the digital era: where are we heading?” via Google Forms. I tried to make it eye-catching, not very time-consuming, and quite effortless to fill in, which resulted in 30 questions of a blended format: a combination of closed and open-ended questions was used in the survey.

The achieved results and description of the collected sample are provided in the next sections of the paper.

7.1.1 The questionnaire sample

The survey took place from March 2020 until May 2020, and 36 responses to the questionnaire were received under that period of time. The respondents were either current students or alumni of the ComDev programme at Malmö University. They all signed consent to participate in an anonymous and voluntary way.

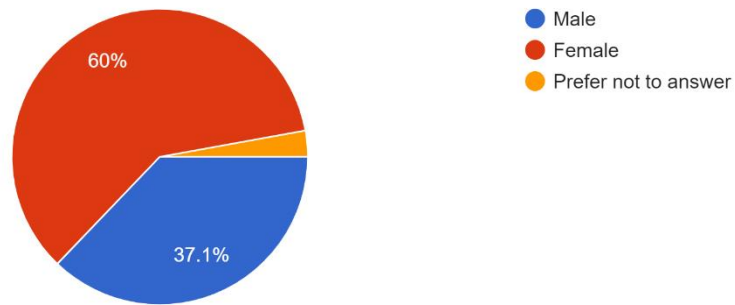
Overall, 19 students (52,8%) and 17 alumni (47,2%) took part in the survey. 60% of them were female, 37,1% - male, and 2,9% preferred not to disclose their gender. The majority of the participants (57,1 %) were between 30-40 years old, followed by the two equal groups of 40-50 years old and 20-30 years old (each of them – 20%), and with 2,9% that preferred not to answer this question about their age. As for the nationalities, most of the students and alumni were Swedish (18,2%), German (12,1%), and Danish (6,1%). The prevailing number of respondents pointed out that they were located either in Sweden or Denmark during the studies (67%); however, certain respondents also pointed out that they were constantly travelling from one country to another due to work. Regarding the year of graduation, 52,8% of the participants haven't graduated yet, 19,4% finished their studies later than 2018, 13,9% - earlier than 2017, 8,3% graduated in 2018, while 5,6%

finished the programme in 2017. The full background information of the participants is given in the charts below.

Questions 1-3 were not mandatory to answer, that's why the number of responses may vary.

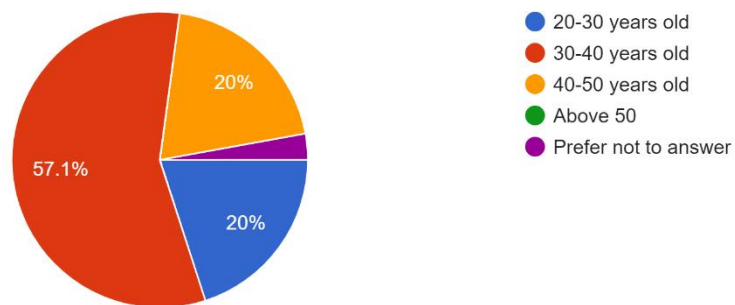
1. What is your gender?

35 responses



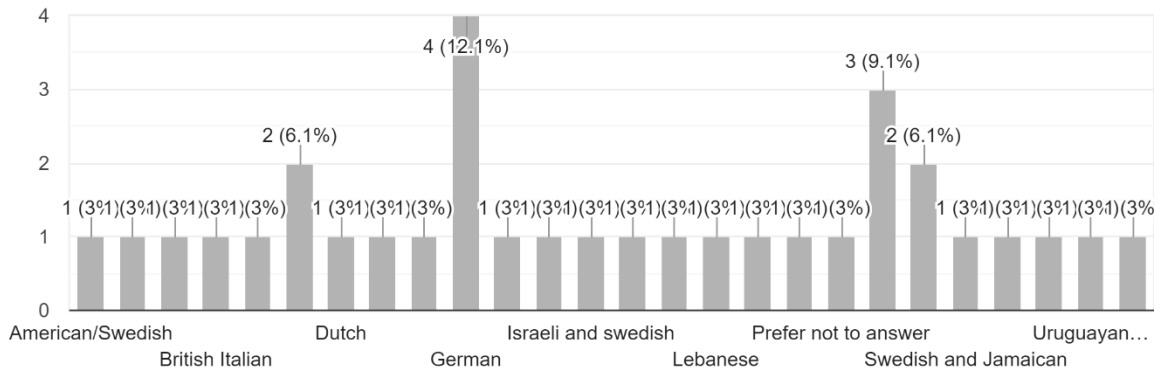
2. What is your age?

35 responses



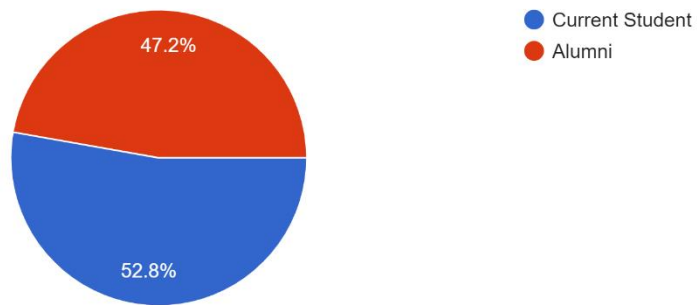
3. What is your nationality?

33 responses



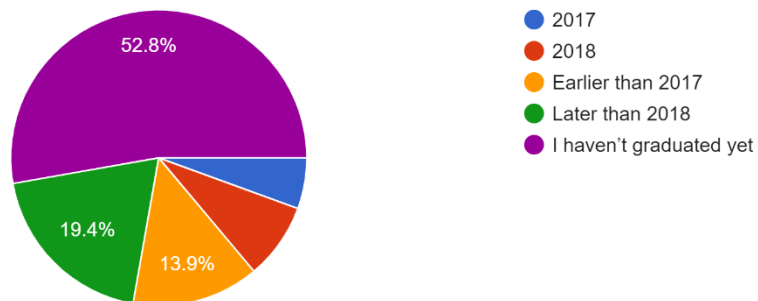
4. Are you a current student or an alumni of ComDev?

36 responses



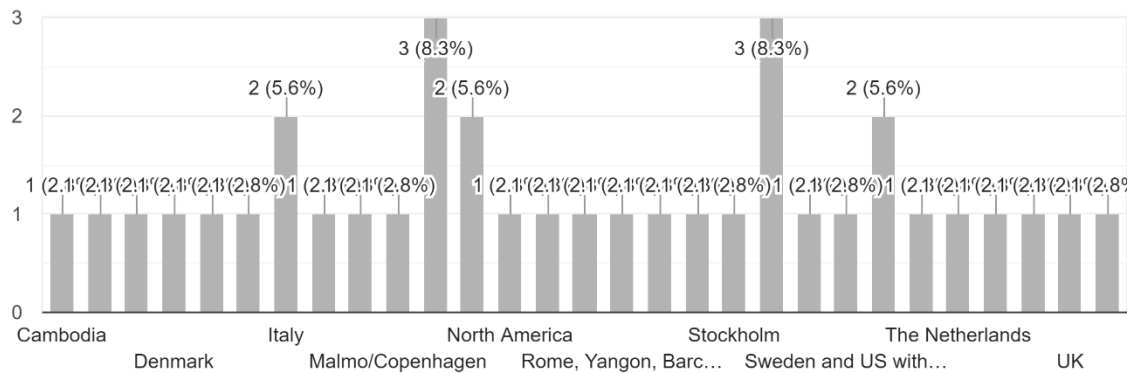
6. Which year did you graduate?

36 responses



7. Where were you located during the studies?

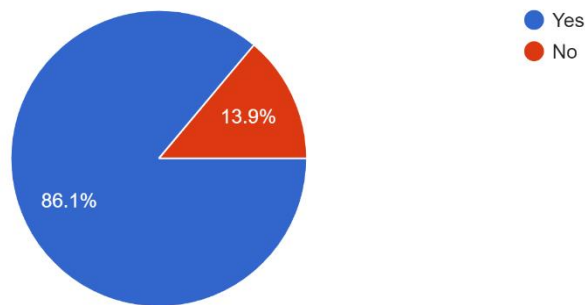
36 responses



As for the occupation, 86,1% of the respondents work, and more than a half of those (52,8%) have their job connected to ComDev. 25,7% started working in the ComDev field before the programme, as well as the same amount (25,7%) started working in ComDev after the programme, while 31,4% work in a different industry, and 17,1% don't work.

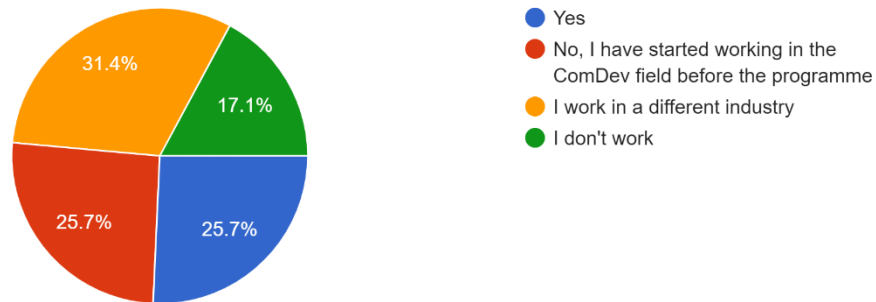
23. Are you currently working?

36 responses



25. If yes, have you started working in the ComDev field after the programme?

35 responses



7.1.2 The findings

Among the main reasons of choosing the ComDev programme at Malmö University the following ones were named: (1) career-related: direct relevance to work, wish to deepen the academic knowledge and practical expertise in ComDev; desire to move into the non-profit sector after years in the private sector; professional improvement, opportunities that ComDev may open for career development; (2) background- or knowledge-related: desire to take full advantage of the background and expand knowledge and skills; interest in the subject, or interest in strengthening critical thinking due to the interdisciplinary nature of the programme; (3) the advantages of distance learning, such as the possibility of combining the studies with other commitments thanks to its flexible format; (4) learn about effective communication methods, strategies and tools for positive social change; and (5) keep up with the speed of developments within the field and build a professional network.

According to Eriksen (2007), the concept of disembedding refers chiefly to the reorganization of social relations by virtue of processes which render society and culture more abstract and detached from local circumstances. Although disembedding is a key feature of modernity itself, it was argued that it is also an important condition for stable transnational connections and globalization, since it makes things, people and ideas more easily comparable and moveable than they were, and are, in societies where most of what goes on is embedded in the local (Eriksen 2007: 35). According to the received results, 71,4% of the respondents participated in some seminars and lectures in person, while only 28,6% did not. In response to the follow-up question “Did you want to have more face-to-face communication during the studies?”, the majority of the respondents said “maybe”

(37,1%), while “yes” and “no” were replied by the equal amounts of people (each one 31,4%). 55,6% replied that the combination of both digital and in-person communication worked best during the studies, while 44,4% chose digital communication as the most effective one. However, 69,5% of the respondents said that some misunderstanding occurred during the course of the programme due to bad communication.

The respondents mostly used Canvas or ItsLearning, or both, as digital platforms for their studies, and the overall majority was satisfied with them (97,2%). The most common ways of communication between the students were WhatsApp, Skype, Google docs, and Facebook, while between the students and teaching staff – Itslearning or Canvas, email, Zoom or Skype. With regard to qualitative aspects, mediatization refers to the specificity of certain media within sociocultural change: it matters what kind of media is used for what kind of communication (Couldry and Hepp: 197). Indeed, different media are used in ComDev regarding different types of communication. For instance, the research showed that the most preferable way of communication between students is WhatsApp, which they find convenient and fast, while the most common way of communication between students and professors is Canvas/Itslearning and email.

Overall, 80,6% were satisfied with the distance learning format of the programme, with 19,4% partly satisfied with it. The respondents also showed a relatively high level of satisfaction with the pace of the programme: 80,6% think that it’s just good enough to combine studies and other commitments, while the remaining 19,4% think that it’s fast.

The opinions got more divided about the pedagogical approach used in MAU’s ComDev. 47,2% of the respondents think that they received sufficient and timely support from the teaching staff, while 22,2% said that there was too much individual work and not enough guidance during the studies. Some of the respondents expressed certain concerns that there was not enough room for discussion, that their impression depended a lot on the course and its coordinator, or that there was too much reliance on group work and students to help each other, as well as a lot of individual reading required for such a short run program making the students feel really stressed. 2,8% replied that the pedagogical approach was very innovative at the time, letting students go with it in an experimental kind of way, which was described as very educational.

Another open-ended question in the survey was to share opinions about the content of the programme. It was mostly described as “educative, relevant and applicable”, “good and

interesting”, but some also mentioned it to be “a bit too theoretical”, and “limited to certain schools of thought”. 36,1% of the survey participants said that they use the received knowledge to some extent.

Some of the quotes from the survey are presented below to better illustrate what the respondents think about the content of the programme.

“It’s an interesting program and very informative, however, it’s also very broad, the aspects it covers made me question it sometimes, i.e., globalization studies mixed with postcolonial theories, and development theories, to social change and social theories, and then digitalization and social representation. I think it can be better tuned”.

“Very relevant although more practical elements would be useful. For example, there is module on Wordpress which is great, but it would be useful to look at collaborative tools and other digital ways of dissemination of information and leveraging technology to affect social change”.

“Very interesting but remains at the surface level. The modules go by super fast and we don't get time to engage with a topic more in-depth”.

“Excellent in academic terms but would have liked more discussion and practice of applied C4D approaches”.

“Good but would’ve liked more in depth of social media practices”

“As it is an academic oriented rather than focus on practical application, I think the current content is sufficient to just analyse tons of academic literature. Personally, I would rather see some practical application happening in e.g. designing a communication strategy with an organization. But that is because I came from a commercial background”.

“It's good, but sometimes a bit too theoretical. I would have appreciated more inclusion of teaching technical communication skills as well”.

The next question in the survey was about the knowledge received during the studies, and it also generated different opinions. 48,6% of the participants of the survey replied “yes”, and 34,3% replied “maybe”. As for some of the respondents, they expressed concerns that without the prior background in development studies they would have been completely

lost, and made a suggestion that the university should offer a foundation course for students from different backgrounds prior to starting this Master's.

As for the communication networks, the main ones that have been generated by the programme are as follows: friend network (22,2%), work network (13,9%), audience generated during the studies (blog audience, for instance) – 5,6%, some of them (36,1%). The rest of the respondents replied that none of them were triggered by ComDev.

The studies inspired 58,3% of the respondents to promote social change or be a part of that change, while 41,7% replied – to some extent.

According to the results of the survey, ComDev plays different roles in people's lives, which could be classified as (1) educational; (2) professional, career-related; (3) inspiration for social change; (4) vision-building; (5) raising awareness of communication mechanisms and development issues; (6) stimulating the ability of critical thinking.

A lot of rich insights have been received in response to the question “What would you change in the programme?”. Overall, the respondents would like to have less focus on theory, more room for discussion and in-depth focus on the topics, change in the teaching approach, optimizing interactions during live lessons (onliners were sometimes neglected), more detailed feedback on written assignments, more interactive assignments, more emphasis on practical, non-academic approaches to working with C4D.

“More real-life communication, seminars, lectures, and it would be great to have more support, help, clarifications from the teaching staff”

“The degree project should be panned at earlier stage and maybe given more credit, its lots of work and empirical searches for 15 credits only”.

“I believe there is lot of self study happening while some of us doesn't have any background about the topics addressed”

“Sometimes we are learning so many things but merely scratching the surfaces, which will lead us to just ensure delivering assignments while fair realization of the so many topics addressed is not achieved”

“More hands-on approach. Leverage the technology available. Many NGOs could do with an overhaul when it comes to using new technology”

“At the time I was in the program, I would like more practical assignments. I found it too theoretical”

“A fairer balance between abstract theoretical framework (though useful) and testimonies and experiences from people who are on the ground. In a nutshell, a more efficient "Glocal approach" as advertised by the program”.

As for the overall impression of the programme, 44,4% think that the programme is very good, and the same amount of the respondents think that it is good, while only 11,1% evaluate it as “fair”.

7.2 In-depth interviews

Alongside with receiving the data from the questionnaire, I continued gathering more detailed information and narrowing down my research by conducting semi-structured interviews with some students and alumni of MAU’s ComDev. The interviews consisted of around 10 questions about the respondents’ background and their ComDev experience, with some of them being logical continuation of the questionnaire, asking to elaborate more or give more details and examples. Interviews have been conducted as a semi-structured process where ‘...the researcher retains some control over the direction and content to be discussed, yet participants are free to elaborate or take the interview in new but related directions’ (Cook 2008: 423). However, each interview was not strictly limited only to the ComDev-related topics: we also touched upon the pandemic situation in the world, health agenda and personal issues connected to the coronavirus crisis, that is why our discussions took from around one hour to one hour and a half on average. The interviews were not audio- or video- recorded, based on the confidentiality principle.

7.2.1 The sample

Overall, 4 students and 4 alumni were interviewed during March 2020-May 2020. They were mostly based in the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the US during the studies. Such a wide range of locations exemplifies the quantitative aspect of mediatization (Couldry and Hepp: 197), which means the spatial and social spread of mediated communication.

The four alumni graduated in 2018, 2019, and 2020, thus being quite recent programme graduates. All the respondents, except one, currently work in the public and private

sectors (5 of them - in the ComDev field). They all have different backgrounds, such as work in the embassy, the hospitality management sector, journalism, gender studies, anthropology, peace and conflict, international development and politics. They all mentioned that ComDev attracted their attention because of its interdisciplinary nature and cross-cutting themes.

7.2.2 The findings

Apart from some questions on background, location, work, etc., the participants were asked to answer the following questions, which formed the core of the interview:

- 1) What do you think about the 'flexible distance' format of the programme? Did it work well for you?
- 2) Did you have experience in physically participating in seminars or lectures? Do you consider it more efficient than (or describe how it is different from), distance learning?
- 3) What do you think of the pedagogical approach on the programme, with guidance and interaction mainly through online discussion forums, and online group interaction, and none or few face-to-face meetings?
- 4) Was the support from the ComDev teaching staff enough for you?
- 5) What communication networks were triggered by ComDev? What networks did you develop during the studies (for career, or friendship)? Give examples of stakeholders or networks triggered.
- 6) How do the learnings and theoretical knowledge acquired during the programme work in practice? Is it applicable/useful in real life? (for research, or practice-related work or projects) Give examples.
- 7) Do you keep in touch with your network(s) from the programme?
- 8) How did the programme impact your personal and career development? Did it boost your career? If yes, in which ways?
- 9) Did the studies inspire you to promote social change or be a part of that very change? If yes, in which ways?

Due to the research framework, the current section presents the summary of the data based on the answers to the abovementioned questions, as well as other received information that may be crucial for the study.

All the interviewees replied that the “flexible distance” format and “glocal approach” is one of the reasons why they chose the programme, and that such a blended format offers the same quality of education as the traditional one. MAU’s ComDev exemplifies here “Digital for Development” (see Roberts 2019) working in practice, according to the research sample results.

These are the strong points that were highlighted by the interviewees: its interdisciplinary nature and cross-cutting themes; the programme does not make you bound to one place, it’s possible to study it from anywhere, thus making education more accessible. Globalization is tantamount to a particular form of acceleration, which reduces the importance of distance, frequently obliterating it altogether. In the era of wireless communications, there is no longer a connection between duration and distance (Eriksen 2007: 35). It was also pointed out that the programme is modern and innovative, paving a new way in education and opening up more perspectives; it’s perfect to study online for working and family people; it’s really elastic and flexible, and the format of the programme is especially relevant now, with the pandemic situation.

Due to work and family commitments, not all the interviewees were able to physically participate in lectures and seminars. However, all of them admitted that physical participation offers more interaction with everyone present on site, helps to get to know peers and teaching staff, as well as creates networking opportunities. All the interviewees admitted the value of meeting people in person and creating the sense of community, but on the other hand they believe that the digital format and flexibility of the programme makes it “ground-breaking and unique”.

The “glocal approach” has been especially pointed out by the respondents due to its innovativeness that they have not come across before. The project exemplifies the “time-space compression” concept, which was coined by Harvey (1989). He defines time-space compression like this: [P]rocesses that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves. I use the word ‘compression’ because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us (Harvey 1989: 240).

The pedagogical approach was described by the interviewees as different from the traditional one, meaning that there is a high level of self-autonomy, and students need to be more independent and make their own decisions more often. According to the respondents' words, support and guidance varied a lot depending on the course. 3 current students expected to have more guidance, especially on complex topics, such as racism, feminism, gender studies, identity politics, but the students felt they were basically left to themselves. They said that it would be probably more productive to have more discussions, and share ideas between each other. One respondent gave an example of the literature seminar as being very helpful to her, and she wished there were more discussion days like that.

The biggest dissatisfaction was expressed by the interviewees regarding the DP course: 3 out of 4 alumni said it was the worst course for them, without sufficient support from the teaching staff. It was described as "a very lonely process of a thesis writing lacking enough time and guidance for a good quality research". Another opinion about the DP course was as follows, "I would have appreciated more opportunities to discuss our work (for example in a seminar form), especially in the early stages of the process, it would have been very useful to have a sort of "ideas seminar", where we could have had discussions and gotten some inspiration and thoughts from the teaching staff and other students".

As for the networks that were triggered by MAU's ComDev, all the respondents said that they developed a few friend connections who they keep in touch with. Networks are not necessarily transnational, but this is increasingly the case, finds Castells, who sees the deregulation of world markets, the growth of information technology and the end of the Cold War as parallel processes creating conditions for an accelerated and intensified globalization (Eriksen 2007: 72). Indeed, one of the alumni shared the news about getting a job in the non-profit sector via WhatsApp with her international friend network from the programme; 4 more respondents still communicate with the peers they worked together with in the blogging exercise; 3 of the current students constantly talk to their peers in common WhatsApp groups and ask for their help regarding some ComDev assignments. Some professional level networks were mentioned as well, though less often than the friend ones – 3 respondents said that they really appreciate that they can find some important information in the LinkedIn and Facebook ComDev groups, as well as send out articles and discuss the news in the field there.

Speaking about the use of the knowledge on the practical level, the opinions got divided here. For instance, one of the alumni working in the development sector said that he uses only 20-30% of the knowledge received. Another alumni who moved from the private sector to the non-profit one, said that she passed her job interview thanks to MAU's ComDev, but she believes that experience in the field matters more. She described ComDev as very academic, and quite difficult to use in real life. Here is one of her quotes for a clearer explanation, "How to make a communication plan for instance? Or how to spread a campaign about Covid-19? In ComDev I got insights on the theories, and that is nice to know. However, you also need to learn how to actually communicate, but ComDev does not give you practical tools".

Another alumni said that the application of knowledge in real life depends on which industry you want to work in further. He believes that the theoretical part can be especially useful in the education sector (where he currently works in) or public communication, for instance. Here comes his quote, "When it comes to development communication, it's no commercial field. And it may not work for some commercial sectors".

An interesting observation was made regarding quite different opinions between the alumni and the students of ComDev: the alumni said that the programme mostly gave them a theoretical base for decision-making and confidence in what they are already doing rather than opening a new world perspective; they also highlighted that practical tools and experience is what counts, while the current students said that ComDev gave them a fresh, new perspective of seeing the world, cultural awareness and a feeling of belonging to the ComDev professional community.

Overall, the majority of the respondents admitted that ComDev at Malmö University played an inspirational role in their lives, as well as boosted their career in a way. Thanks to the programme, a half of the respondents either got job interviews or actually landed a job.

8. Conclusions

In this section, I answer the posed research questions by summarising the main findings of the analysis, introduce the relevance of the research to ComDev, as well as the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

8.1 Answering the research questions

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What does ComDev’s “glocal approach” lead to and facilitate? Does ComDev represent “Digital for Development”?

1.1. What kind of potentials and problems does the pedagogy create for promoting social change?

1.2. How do the ComDev graduates maneuver further in the social change work as a consequence of the course’s weaknesses and strengths?

MAU’s ComDev, being a development programme in the education field, pursues online global in reach education around social change. The intended global practice of ComDev is enhanced through the use of the blended format (traditional and distance learning) of the programme, its “Glocal Classroom”, which is aimed at raising the social change agenda via web-based learning on global and local levels, and the world-wide coverage of the programme. Thus, we can say that it represents “Digital for Development” (Roberts 2019), since it is designed and used specifically for the development purposes with focus on digital learning, and that’s one of the main reasons why people enroll in MAU’s ComDev.

According to the results of the research, ComDev’s “glocal approach” is viewed as “unique and groundbreaking”, and “making education more accessible”. It was named as one of the main reasons of joining the programme, thus proving rule number 3 of Roberts’ (2019), which says that “Technology is socially shaped”. The majority of the respondents pointed out that the seminars that took place in different locations and follow-up discussions within the framework of the “glocal approach” were very insightful, and made them develop critical thinking. Besides, the respondents really appreciated meeting people with different backgrounds, which they saw as a possibility to generate good networks, and which would never happen if it was another programme. Several interviewees said that they found communication with such a diverse group of peers very inspirational and helpful, and they still keep in touch with them via Whatsapp, Facebook or LinkedIn.

Another interesting observation is that the programme format creates closer bonds between peers, promotes respect for other cultures, diversity and inclusion, and even creates ground for students to be teaching their peers and learning from each other. This unique approach also creates a feeling of belonging to the ComDev community. As a pioneering theorist of contemporary globalization, Roland Robertson, succinctly puts it: ‘Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness about the world as a whole’ (Robertson 1992: 8; Eriksen 2014: 4). The compression of the world brings us closer to each other and creates a community feeling, which in the case of MAU’s ComDev was described by one of the respondents as “a professional home”.

One of the respondents put it this way, “The programme is very special, probably even the ComDev staff don’t realize it yet”. It can prepare the graduates very well for what the future may hold, especially in the current coronavirus situation. The format of the programme allows students to choose themselves what’s best for them; they can participate in person or do it completely online; it allows to pave their own studying path, according to their pace.

As for potentials and problems the ComDev pedagogy creates for promoting social change, the respondents mentioned both. In their opinion, the programme gives more personal, than professional development, and more theoretical knowledge, but no practical tools. The ComDev field gives the graduates a sense of direction and plays an inspirational role when it comes to a career path. Several respondents got job interviews/jobs, and switched from the private to the non-profit sector thanks to the programme; it boosted their confidence and desire to promote social change. One of the interviewees said that since her focus at work is on research-based communication (she works in the ComDev field, at one communication agency in Denmark), the research pedagogy helped her a lot; and it really improved her writing skills.

ComDev provides a fresh viewing of the world and new perspectives; it creates potentials to root decisions, be sure of the arguments and moral stands thanks to the theoretical knowledge, which was described as one of the strengths of the programme. However, the respondents mentioned “the lack of field ComDev”, for instance, doing reports, making a communication plan, or spreading a campaign, which could create some difficulties in the social change work as a consequence of this weakness.

ComDev was described as “very academic”, seen by the respondents as a problem that the pedagogy creates for promoting social change. The majority of the respondents named a blog exercise “the only practical part of the programme, but it was like a drop in the ocean of the social media”. You need to learn how to actually communicate,

Thereby, the research showed that a heavy reliance on theory is seen as both a potential and problem that the pedagogy creates for promoting social change, since actual communicating in the sector is different. The application of more hands-on communication with various types of audiences during the programme is needed for better social change practices in the future.

8.2 The relevance of the research problem to Communication for Development

I would like to touch upon the relevance of this paper regarding the ComDev field. I see this research topic as a way to understand how the theoretical knowledge, practical tools, use of digital channels and way of communication at Malmö University and, specifically, in the Communication for Development department where I am studying, impacts the students and alumni, their development, and how it inspires them to promote social change or be a part of that very change.

The revolution of the ComDev field and its growing importance worldwide has become quite obvious and undeniable. However, it would be simply one-sided to talk about ComDev only from that point of view. This paper tries to contribute to the field by analyzing an actual impact and use of the ComDev studies in a real-life context. The current work aims at looking at ComDev from a critical and reflective point of view, but not downplaying its actual role at the same time.

The present paper is written with the main purpose of promoting the optimization of communication and learning practices at Malmö University. Hopefully, the research and collected data will be useful to the ComDev department and bring some input about possible communication issues, the use of digital channels, pedagogical approaches, as well as practical applications of the received knowledge at Malmö University.

8.3 Limitations and future research

The first limitation concerns the constraint of time, since the research was conducted during February 2020-May 2020, within four months, and this period of time also

overlapped with the worldwide pandemic situation. Due to the coronavirus crisis, all the interviews had to be conducted online via different digital channels instead of the preliminary plan to do them in person, which impacted the quality and my interpretation of theirs in a certain way.

The second limitation is connected to the scope of the analysis: the collected samples of both the questionnaire and the interviews are rather small and exploratory, thus, the results cannot be claimed as fully representative of the whole ComDev student and alumni community.

The third limitation is that my interview sample consists of the current students and recent alumni of the programme (2018, 2019, and 2020 years of graduation), thus narrowing down the research to the latest years of the ComDev existence. Therefore, further research can present interviews with more alumni from the previous years, and maybe also have a comparison of the then- and modern digital platforms and tools. This could provide new insights and suggestions about possible improvements in the programme.

Lastly, the time framework did not allow the interviews with different stakeholders, primarily the ComDev teaching staff and coordinators, which could have definitely enriched the analysis. Another reason for deciding against interviews with the teaching staff was a possible bias that could occur in the process of discussions between a ComDev student, who I currently am, and the professors, who are currently teaching me.

Thereby, future research can include interviews with some of the ComDev teaching staff and coordinators sharing their vision of the programme, which can make the research less one-sided.

Word count: 12 863

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Appendix

A list of links of all the online media texts used in the thesis

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/sweden-s-technology-powerhouse-shows-brex-it-britain-a-positive-way-to-fix-its-ailing-economy-a8118641.html>
2. <https://sweden.se/business/innovation-in-sweden/>
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17961251>
4. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2017/sweden-2017/>
5. <https://mau.se/>
6. <https://glocalclassroom.wordpress.com/about/>
7. <https://wpmu.mah.se/comdev/about/history/>
8. <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2822162/>
9. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/comdevmau>
10. <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=communication%20for%20development%20malm%C3%B6%20university>
11. <https://edu.mah.se/sv/program/hacfd>
12. <https://medialandscapes.org/country/sweden/media/social-networks>