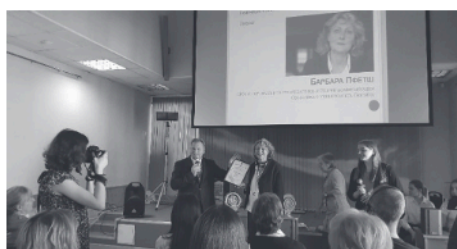


Do we still need publics?

The 7th International conference 'Comparative Media Studies in Today's World' (CMSTW'2019)

St. Petersburg, Russia, 16–19 April 2019



Barbara Pfetsch (Germany) receives the Neva Award for Theory of Communication from St. Petersburg State University

On unusually sunny days of April, St. Petersburg State University hosted International academic forum 'Media in Modern World' (SMIF'2019). The Forum, of over 300 participants as of today, has been there for 58 years, almost as long as ICA annual conferences. Nowadays, it is the second biggest gathering in the Russian communication and media science. Since 2013, the Forum has had two distinct parts — the English-language one and the Russian-language one. From the

first days of its existence, the English-language part called 'Comparative Media Studies in Today's World' has been the only world conference dedicated deliberately to comparative media and communication research. CMSTW is already recognized by the leading scholars from 28 countries who have visited the conference since its establishment.

In 2019, the conference delegates explored the theme of 'Communities. Audiences. Publics.' They not only problematized the shape and borders of the mediated social groups and identities, but also questioned the quality of the public sphere(s) and assessed the media consumption patterns in comparative perspective. The plenary podium discussion asked: in the age when a person, not a group, is the ultimate crossroads for information flows, do we still have and need publics? Sudeshna Roy (USA) has admitted that polarization of audiences has captured societies as different ones as the USA and India, and plays a decisive role in political transformations, often negative in the view of political normativity but inevitable from the perspective of the youth. Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska (Poland) and Kamilla Nigmatullina (Russia) have both agreed on the growing role of algorithmization of social communication when speaking to a chatbot might become a more pleasant experience than talking to human peers. The keynote speeches have introduced the recent concepts in the area of media-audience and media-public interaction to the Russian scholarly community. Thus, Barbara Pfetsch has spoken on the disruptions of today's public spheres, Florian Toepfl has explained his theory of heterogeneity of publics in non-democratic countries, and Andreas Hepp introduced figurations-based rituals that surround pioneer journalistic practices in the times of 'deep mediatization'. Jean Burgess (Australia) has added the link to digital media rituals, and Nico Carpentier on the general plenary conceptualized communicative experiences on the whole as predominantly political due to their hegemonic nature.

Central and Eastern Europe has a growing representation on CMSTW, with 10 scholars coming to St. Petersburg. Poland, the 'guest country' of 2019, was represented by Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska and Michał Głowacki.

Text and photo: Svetlana S. Bodrunova