

More Than Just a Data Guide to the Historical Development of the Press, Film, and Radio in the Czech Lands

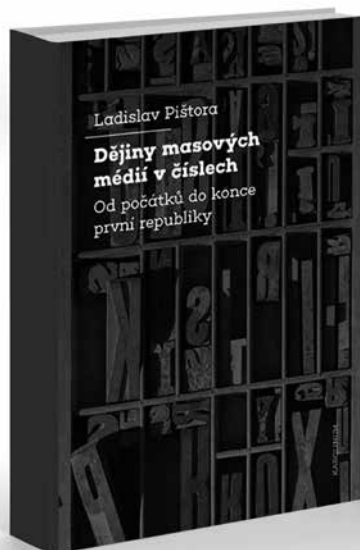
– Book Review

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PIŠTORA, L. *Dějiny masových médií v číslech. Od počátků do konce první republiky.* (History of the Mass Media in Numbers: From the Beginnings to the End of the First Czechoslovak Republic.) 1st Ed., Prague: Karolinum, 2025, 308 p., ISBN 978-80-246-5845-2

At the beginning of the year, a new publication History of the Mass Media in Numbers with the subtitle From the Beginnings to the End of the First Czechoslovak Republic, which is the work of Ladislav Pištora, an author known to all those who are interested in data, appeared in the offer of new titles of professional booksellers. It was published by the Karolinum Press of Charles University.

The publication is a data guide to the development of the media (the press, film, and radio) gradually in the territory of Bohemia, today's Czech Republic, and interwar Czechoslovakia. In the introduction to the publication, the author outlines all the pitfalls he had to face when drafting the publication, however, which for him (and perhaps precisely due to that) represented both a challenge and the actual reason for such an undertaking. Statistical data on the development of the media were not systematically monitored and published for a long time, because they did not represent a key, especially economic, interest. If any data appeared at the beginning of the development of periodicals, it was rather sporadically, mainly



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to support certain claims, and their publication was more or less random. The situation was better in the case of film (since the beginning of the 20th century) and later regarding radio, too (since the 1920's).

When listing the pitfalls involved in the compilation of such a data publication, the author highlighted issues related to the temporal, spatial, and factual comparability of the data. These issues and their possible solutions are addressed in a comprehensive accompanying text commenting on the presented data. The aim of the publication is thus not to analyse the development of these media, but to describe them using statistical data. In this respect, it is necessary to appreciate the author's careful approach to solving all the issues related to the availability, quality, and comparability of the data. The publication has an extensive note-taking apparatus and bibliography and data sources.

Leaving aside the introduction, the publication is divided into three thematic chapters devoted to the development of the press, film, and radio. The text part of the chapters is accompanied by a number of detailed tables illustrating the described period. At the end of each of the three chapters, there are also summary tables. Detailed (and summary) tables are accompanied by charts in a number of places. Unfortunately, orientation in them is often difficult for the reader (if not impossible, in the case of pie charts), given that the charts, originally designed for colour printing, were adopted for use in this publication without being adapted for the capabilities of black and white printing.

The author places the beginning of the development of periodical press (newspapers and magazines), traceable in the data, at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, which is a period considered by historians to be the period of the origin of Czech journalism. Data on periodicals in that initial period are sporadic and the author admits that he had to rely solely on secondary sources. Statistical data sources can only be traced back to approximately the 1860's, when, in connection with the publication of the Press Act, periodicals were monitored for the purposes of registration and authorisation (by repressive authorities).

The author divided the development of periodicals in data according to historical events as well as data availability into the period of the first half of the 19th century, then the period around the revolutionary year 1848, then the period after the issuance of the Press Act (1862) up until the 1890's, then the period until the end of the First World War, and, finally, the period of the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic. For each of these periods, the author describes and documents available data sources, the specifics of print runs of individual titles in terms of their number, thematic focus, the language of publication, etc. However, the text of the chapters is not a mere accompaniment to the presented tables, but rather a detailed description and commentary on the situation concerning periodicals at each of the monitored stages of development. Logically, the longest sub-chapter is devoted to the period of the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic, in which the author drew from rather rich and trustworthy data sources and documents. I appreciate that in the period after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, the author deals in detail with the first statistical survey of periodicals in 1920, which was one of the first on this topic on a European scale.

The beginning of the historical stage of the development of film in data, the author situates to the very beginnings of cinema (the end of the 19th century), although he adds that the period until the end of the First World War is not data rich in this respect, i.e. it is not possible to talk about a systematic monitoring and reporting of the number of films, titles, distributors, cinemas, viewers, etc. In the Czech Lands, we have the first figures on the number of licences granted to operate cinematographic enterprises as early as the year 1896, i.e. only one year after the first presentation of the Lumière brothers' cinematograph in Paris. The development of technology, the accessibility of film screenings for a wide audience led not only to their rapid spread, but also to the possibility of statistics to monitor all these phenomena. Given a sufficient database on the development of cinematography, the author focuses (in terms of both data and text) on the situation in the Czech Lands and Czechoslovakia as well as in developed European

countries (France, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and the United States of America. Rich data sources, easier data comparability (including international comparisons), and high-quality accompanying text make this chapter very interesting and readable.

The development of radio broadcasting in Czechoslovakia dates to 1923, when the first regular broadcasting from a transmitter in Kbely took place. An important moment in its further development in terms of data was the nationalisation of radio in 1925, i.e. the fact that, under the then applicable law, the state became the only radio broadcaster. It ensured regular monitoring of a range of quantitative data on all aspects of radio broadcasting (licences, transmitters, receivers, listeners, licence fee payers, broadcasting genres, etc.), including regional disaggregation. Given the availability of sufficient data sources, the author deals with international comparisons (as in the case of film).

The *History of the Mass Media in Numbers* is a publication intended for all those who are interested in the historical development of the media from a data perspective. The author dealt with a number of pitfalls in the form of difficult comparability and low availability of data from the 19th century and, on the contrary, showed what interesting quantitative and qualitative information can be obtained especially from the period of the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic. It will undoubtedly find its readers among experts and students in the field of the media, but also among the general public interested in the history of the press, film, and radio.