EUROPEANISATION AND THE NEWS MEDIA: ISSUES AND RESEARCH IMPERATIVES

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Abstract

A growing source of literature within media sociology and journalism studies is focusing on the role and influence of the news media, originating from and around the political institutions of the European Union. However, there are particular challenges and problems with methodologies and research designs. A distinction should be made between two main perspectives: one developed within a political communication tradition, emphasising the role of the national news media and the practice of foreign or transnational news journalism as an important political institution within European democracy. The other perspective is mainly developed within a combined political economy and cultural studies approach, focusing on the power of the news media to further social and political change, usually in terms of increasing or decreasing Europeanisation. The two perspectives differ in several important respects and we are led in different directions when it comes to developing research designs and evaluating findings. This essay attempts to highlight these differences and discuss consequences for new research imperatives.

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In the discussions following the postponed constitution process in the European Union, the news media was again addressed and accused for failing to inform citizens about their true, political interests in further European integration. For the media research community, such accusations raises the question whether and how contemporary media research is making sound and scientifically based connections between the news media and the European integration project and related institutions. Does European media and journalism research provide society with theories and empirical findings that make a difference? Does it for instance inspire to productive media policy initiatives and create realistic expectations about the political and cultural role of the news media? This essay looks at some of the challenges and problems that confront researchers who try to develop research designs in this area.

A growing source of literature within media sociology and journalism studies are focusing on the role and influence of the news media, originating from and around the political institutions of the European Union. Now doubt, new research priorities and perspectives in an emerging Europeanised research agenda are inspired and influenced by the potential for research funding within the European Union. The research imperatives are legitimate and related to important questions on how the news media and the practice of journalism are connected to social, cultural, political and economic changes in the European region. However, methodological and scientific challenges and problems are connected to the choice of research focus and strategies for empirical research that I believe need particular attention.

It is useful to separate between two main perspectives within this literature: one developed within a political communication tradition, emphasising the national news media and the practice of European or transnational news journalism as a political institution within European democracy. The other perspective is mainly developed within a combined political economy and cultural studies approach, focusing on the power of the news media to further social and political change in terms of increasing or decreasing Europeanisation. The two perspectives differ in several important respects and we are led in different directions when it comes to developing research designs and evaluating findings. There are both theoretical and methodological differences and towards the end, possible solutions and ways forward are suggested, advocating a stronger "bottom up" perspective and a more realistic view on the power and role of the news media.

The distinction between the two perspectives is made on the basis of two basic observations. First, the underlying understandings of what Europe and the European level of society means differs, in terms of how it raises questions and imperatives for media research. In the first perspective, European political institutions are taken as the starting point as a legitimate and more or less stable democratic order where the news media plays a political, deliberative function in informing citizens of the European Union. In the alternative perspective, the news media is seen as a social and cultural power influencing processes of Europeanisation and European integration itself.

Transnational Journalism and the Democratic Deficit Approach

In the first perspective, the starting point is an expectation that the news media ought to function as a democratic communication system for mediating information and public debate between the political institutions of the EU and the citizens of Europe. It is first and foremost a normative and liberal democratic perspective, and the paradigmatic, theoretical model underlying much of the European media research literature within this perspective is the public sphere model, developed in the early writings of Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989). In the original essay on the public sphere, Habermas portrayed the news media as a social technology with great potentials for disseminating information to large audience groups and for coordinating or orchestrating public discourse in a transparent, open way. In the historical sociological analysis of the proliferation and transformation of public communication, it is argued that the public sphere becomes a core, democratic institution, inscribed in the ideology of liberal democracy. Its actual development is linked to social, political and economic changes in urban life at the time when the invention of print technology became socially important for societal organisation in the 16th and 17th century Europe. The early print media, pamphlets, public letters and announcements and the practice of literary criticism combined to form an increasingly important and vital public communicative space for political and cultural expressions. In due course, these early practices of criticism and writing created a new communicative space where the practice of participatory debate and development of a critical political discourse outside the state could be developed. In the history of democratic and social reform, Habermas acknowledges how the media has helped developing and securing an informed citizenry and served as an important public institution for the continuous struggle for increasing emancipation, expanding participatory rights, justice and improved social conditions in 19th century Europe. But at the same time, the media and the public sphere are structured in particular ways, which makes it important to maintain a continuous critical discourse about the performance of the media alive. The news media might not live up to the normative ideals of the public sphere, and it's this gap so to speak, that for some time now has been and continues to be a concern for political communication and media research on journalism and the news media (Peters 1986, Habermas 1989, Calhoun 1992). Since Habermas places the normative ideal of the public sphere within modern, liberal democratic political discourse, criticism on the actual performance of the news media and the practice of journalism can be developed from the point of liberal democratic theory.

The Structural Dilemma of Transnational Politics

It is an inspiring model and probably the most influential model and perspective for media and communication studies ever made. However, when the public sphere concept is used in a critical discussion on the relations between the news media and the political institutions of the European Union, a structural problem within the theory itself appear: Both the theory of liberal democracy as well as the theory of the public sphere has been developed within a more or less tacitly and implicit frame of reference to a particular kind of society: that of the nation state (Calhoun 1992, Schlesinger 1999).

Thus, an important challenge for theorists and media researchers working within a political communication perspective has for some time been to reformulate the critical potential of the public sphere model to a complex and constantly changing transnational, European system of transnational, democratic governance. Criticism has also been raised concerning the limited historical evidence for the actual existence of a public sphere, and given Habermas' focus mainly on developments in Britain, Germany and France, if there ever was one, it cannot or should not become a generalised model for other societies. As a result of the implicit national framing of the historical analysis, there is a tendency to idealise the conditions for rational discourse in the early print media, which easily leads to a neglect of other cultural expressions and forms, more connected to a cultural dimension and identity politics (e.g. Calhoun 1992, Frazer 1992). Whatever the historical evidence yields, several suggestions exist to loosen up the idea of the public sphere concept as indicating a unified entity and an actual, social historic space for democratic deliberative communication.

For instance, Craig Calhoun (1992) has argued that we ought to think of "spheres of publics," instead of public spheres, in order to avoid the idea of a unitary spatial and cultural entity that disregard important social and cultural differences. In a similar pragmatic way, John Keane has suggested that the original national public sphere model could be better seen as divided into different functional or organisational levels, where macro, meso and micro spheres together provide a chain of public spheres. Within a transnational perspcetive, the macro, meso and micro levels could then be extended across national borders (Keane 1996). Philip Schlesinger on his side has taken up the suggestion of "spheres of publics," introduced by Craig Calhoun, and argued that cultural and linguistic differences remain important obstacles to any development towards one public sphere. In a recent work, Schlesinger goes further, arguing that there probably never will be a *one* public sphere, since cultural and social differences continue to play the decisive role in the structuring of spheres of publics in Europe (Schlesinger 2003).

Habermas himself has also contributed with new interpretations on how the theory of the public sphere can be applied in a transnational, European context. Accepting the argument of some of his critics, Habermas argues that the concept of public spheres now should be seen as more flexible, as a network of more or less transparent, public spheres. This new interpretation challenges media researchers to widen their research agenda from a traditional narrow focus on access problems, journalistic performance and reporting strategies in news media, to an inclusion of how also more discrete spheres for communication among experts, politicians and representatives of organised interest are functioning within a larger framework. The public sphere concept is then not any longer exclusively related to the existence of public journalism and daily news media, but to the existence of a wide variety of parliamentary institutions, committees, networks and meetings that count as procedural, representational and indirect, and networked spheres. Seen in relation to Habermas' earlier writings, the "porous" connections that he once suggested had to exist between institutionalised opinion- and will-formation and informal public communications, have become a more central feature of the definition. (Habermas 1996, 506). The porous connections are so to speak lining up behind the public sphere concept.

These theoretical moves have resulted in a lot of interesting work about how to apply the reformulated public sphere model to the European context (Schlesinger 2003, Eriksen 2004, Trenz and Eder 2004). Disregarding how one conceptualises the public sphere in the theory, there seem to be a general agreement that the concept and model address important challenges in terms of a media related *democratic deficit* in the European Union. However, there are some problems when the connection is made between the theory and the democratic problem: First, it is probably no general agreement about exactly where the democratic deficit resides in the multilayered, networked system of democratic governance. Perhaps it is more or less everywhere, and the good thing about the public sphere model for media research is that it becomes possible to discuss standards and institutional contexts for *publicness* across different levels of governance (Thompson 1995). Secondly, although media researchers might escape the problem of where the democratic deficit actually is located, it becomes more unclear what the news media has to do with it.

In a complex situation of competing interpretations and theories about the democratic system of governance, media researchers runs the risk of developing pragmatic but reductionist research strategies. For instance, given the knowledge we already have about the political role of the news media within the nation state perspectives, on the imperfections in professional, market driven journalism, on commercial pressures and news priorities, and on the tendencies towards increasing personalisation, scandal journalism and sensationalism, a critical perspective of what we could call the *media related democratic deficits* in the EU can be developed through a more or less direct copying of earlier, research agendas and research designs. If our theories and previous findings about the the political role of the news media are basically correct, we should expect the same deficiencies that appear in national and local politics to appear also at the European level.

A structurally related problem appear concerning the object of study, since there are none or few equivalent news media that can be said to be operating at the European level. This level just do not exist in other than very rudimentary forms, and what we actually end up doing is to study the same national media as before, and locate the democratic deficit problem at the European level. Thus, in order to trace the news with relevance for democratic deficits in the EU, researchers usually look for EU-related coverage in national news media as where evidence of democratic deficits can be found. For instance, several studies have investigated media contents in various national elite newspapers in order to find out to what degrees and in what ways these news media actually pay attention to the political processes and institutions within the EU. Studies have been made both as single unit studies (for instance focusing on one or two newspapers from one nation, e.g. Ørsten 2003, Slaatta 1999) or comparative designs (similar newspapers, usually elite newspapers from different national media orders, e.g. Tjernström 2001). Central questions in this kind of research design are often concerned with what scope and kind of diversity that exists in the coverage, for instance in terms of themes, genres, styles and narratives, and whether there are structured uses of sources, news priorities and frames in this particular news media coverage. And indeed: Findings from several different studies agree that there are structured characteristics of the

news media coverage on the EU, and shortcomings or gaps seem to appear when actual cases of EU coverage are measured against an ideal model.

Two methodological problems arise from this research strategy. First, it often remains unclear whether the structures and shortcomings that are found actually can be traced back to a specific European model of journalism, caused by the political institutions and particularities of the European continent. Can we know whether the shortcomings we find should be seen as specific or just the same, classic problems of political journalism, transferred to a transnational system? If we were seriously trying to consider whether the EU-coverage in national news media reflected some kind of fair priority or attention that is caused by political journalism in general, rather than occurring because of particularities within the EU itself, we would have to contrast our findings with content analysis of other forms of journalism in the same media. We would have to consider how for instance national political journalism was covered compared to other kinds of journalism, sports, entertainment, or financial news. How would we otherwise be able to say that the coverage of the EU is somehow as expected, or a bit less or a bit more detailed or sensational as expected?

Second, it is a great probablitity that what we will actually find as the specific, EU-related structure or effect in EU-coverage, is the "national." In other words, we actually risk confirming that the national news media is national in specific national ways. Besides, *domestication* and various kinds of *proximity-effects* have for some time been well established findings in the studies on international news and foreign news, and the finding that European news are seen and treated as foreign and European rather than national and local should perhaps not come as a surprise. However, in a transnational, European focus, it can be argued that the domestication model operates on a particular old-fashioned model of separately structured spaces. To domesticate something means to transport it across a border, from an outside to an inside; from the outside of the nation state – into the nation sate. Thus, this model or concept does not take into consideration the way in which processes of Europeanisation and globalisation already has changed European societies. Neither does it open up for an understanding of how these processes continue to change society, at a local, rather than a national and European level. Perhaps it is the local news discourse in the local media that are the actual places where the meaning of Europe is presently most strongly negotiated and contested. Instead of looking at how the news media presently are domesticating externally defined, EU-related news, researchers (and journalists) should be interested in understanding how their societies are already reflecting global and European structures of transnational governance.

In my view, the specific European proximity effect is first of all wanting because the institutional connection between media and politics is absent at the European level. To emphasise this is to stress that the normative implications of a national bias might easily be exaggerated. To locate a preference or bias for national sources or national political issues at the national level of the European news media order is not sufficient evidence for an argument that the national frame of reference automatically produces distorted or negative images of the EU, nor that it automatically contributes to a democratic deficit. It is only possible, on the basis of empirical evidence of for instance content analysis, to confirm that the already

expected, institutionalised, national connection and frame of reference is operative also in the production of EU news. Whether this is fair, correct or democratic is not possible to determine. And could it not be taken as strength rather than weakness? The national level for public discussions and cultural identity is not delegitimised in the present transnational model of governance. So I am tempted to ask a bit bluntly: Doesn't the public sphere work, when it works against the ideals of further integration and Europeanisation?

Comparative Research

A comparative research design will obviously better bring out the national ideosyncracies. However, by focusing on how the same, predefined EU news discourses are filtered and reformulated, the comparative research design risk leaving out all the complexitites of various discourses and discursive orders surrounding the selected news story. By doing this, one easily mistakes a predefined category of EU-related news discourse with a nationally representative discourse on Europe, disregarding the fact that the selected discourse is a pre-structured discourse. And the problem of journalistic context continues to haunt the research design: since we cannot know whether or not the EU coverage reflect a balanced and fair amount of coverage, are we not led to mostly be looking for effects and biases from journalism more in general? What is then specific with the EU-related news? To test hypotheses of specificity in the comparative design, other journalistic material must be compared as well.

The same problems adhere to the selection of news media: If we, as part of a comparative research design, choose the national, privileged elite newspapers to test how the news discourses on EU are structured, and whether they in some way can be said to be fair or adequate, we easily miss out of sight the way there are nationally structured *media orders* with distinct logics for production of discourse. Thus, we risk reproducing simplistic distinctions both between the national and the European and between elite and popular media in our research design. If we have selected the elite newspapers, our first hypothesis should be similarity, not difference: The privileged newspapers in each national context should be expected to produce more or less the same quantity and quality of news, and the same (but nationally different) elite perspective. If we go on to find variations, they primarily become related to nationally located explanations of political culture and the national specific EU discourses in each nation. Differences are then directly or indirectly thought through national particularities of news production, for instance as different forms of domestication. As earlier mentioned, the theory of domestication in international news is a well established model of thinking about how international news are imported and translated into national media orders. Thus media researchers working within the democratic deficit perspective and doing mainly content analysis of EU coverage in national news media risk confirming the obvious and miss analysing more important research questions.

As earlier mentioned, when interpreting variations as indications of democratic deficits, we are constantly coming back to an indeterminate situation where our findings cannot be compared to a reliable standard or ideal of European democracy itself. We will find shifts in thematic structures, in agent focus and uses of sources, but we cannot say much about the way in which these shifts are con-

nected to particular events, happening at particular times or related to particular local priorities, or whether there are more fundamental, structural conditions underlying the coverage. Complex hypotheses must be made about how different national discourses reflect varying positions on different sets of issues within different political fields. In their domestic and historically constituted political cultures, European integration and the political institutions and initiatives within the European Union takes on different symbolic meanings in each nation state. Thus, the complex way in which transnational and national interests and identities are continuously constructed and contested in public discourse can easily become simplified in the research process.

National Doxa in News Production

In research on European and EU-related journalism, it is crucial to consider two things more in detail: the changing political-economic conditions for European news media and the context of distribution and reception in national and local media orders, and the changing institutional and socio-cultural context of news production.

News Production

If we take the context of news production first, it is important to take seriously the *transnational* aspect of EU-related news production. This is not so easy, because we have to see the relationship between discourse production and the media order as both fundamentally structured (along the national/European dimension) and at the same time as dynamic and in constant (and contested) transition. Our first and most important observation should always be that the institutional connections that we rather instinctively take for granted exist between national news media, political journalism and national political institutions, are more or less totally absent at the European level. What institutional connections am I thinking of?

First of all the well established and institutionalised routines of beat journalism at the different national political institutions. The importance of this to news priorities and news frames has been particularly emphasised in the classic work of Guy Tuchman and cannot, in my view, be underestimated (Tuchman 1980). This orga-nisational routine of production secures what another American media scholar, Herbert Gans, coined the daily representation of "national symbolic complexes" (Gans 1981) as part of the "web of facticity" provided by news journalism. These insti-tutionalised conventions and connections between national politics and news journalism is the ground pillar in the theorising about the "media institution." If an institutional theory of the news, for instance as proposed by Timothy Cook and others (Cook 1998), is used in relation to the democratic, public sphere perspective at the European level, it immediately confuses and obscures the way in which the institutional connection between media and politics is first of all developed as a nati-onal institution. There is no European equivalent to the national news media institution – or at least it must be described in very different ways. My point is that an institutional perspective easily leads to hastened conclusion about democratic deficits.

Given this insight, an important research theme is to consider whether there are particular ways in which EU news are being produced as part of a transnational political order where both the national and the European political level is active

(Slaatta 1999). Indeed, recent studies of the journalistic beat in Brussels have shown that the practice of journalism also at the European level is structured as national practices (Slaatta 1999, Slaatta 2001, Baisnée 2002). Slaatta has for instance studied how news production strategies among Norwegian correspondents on the "Brussel beat" changed as the Norwegian membership debate ended and the EEA agreement was implemented. In the Norwegian situation, the institutionalisation of European politics and the EEA agreement at the national political beat was much more important for defining news production strategies than what happened in the EU. This is also the case for more central member states. Olivier Baisnées' studies of correspondents on the Brussel beat show how the journalist corps in Brussels is counted as the Unions "first publics." But although it is addressed and served as one public from the EU press system, the journalists act as national publics when it comes to producing their stories. Investigate (and potentially transnational) journalistic strategies are to some degree taking over, but journalists have to negotiate news frames and news priorities with their domestic editors. Thus, although the EU beat is growing in significance and numbers, to the editors and the publics of the national news media, it is still predominantly a foreign news beat (Slaatta 2001). The same structural division between the domestic and foreign can be seen in the way the journalist professionals are organised, and how careers that are oriented towards international news take different paths than those of ordinary, domestic journalist careers. The paradoxical situation is occuring, that the increasing flow of easily accessible information from all over the world to the home-based editorial staff provides rationales for a less permanent activity of reporters and correspondents all over the world. The foreign news journalist need not be a correspondent living abroad, but can report from home on the basis of easily accessed information through international news brokers (Slaatta 1999). More and more, the symbolic value of national presence, treasured both by elite news media and foreign ministries becomes the sole reason for keeping correspondents abroad on a permanent basis. Thus, although the journalist profession, journalist education, professional organisations, norms and codes of conduct has become more international, the workplace for most journalists are still predominantly in local and national editorial organisations.

The Reproductive Logics of Media Orders

Secondly, the historical development of *national media orders* is absolutely the dominant structure of the news media, both understood in relation to culturally separated audience markets and to the history of different media as typical national media histories. Only a handful of news agencies companies can be said to have had a truly transnational or international history. Thus for all good purposes, what we might call European news media platforms today still ought to be understood as working within a national frame of reference. This is visible in the way the news media themselves still continue to reflect on their national trajectories in their strategic development of their market positions, from an original social position and a particular political agenda. Whether we are thinking of the print media, newspapers, journals and magazines, publishers or public service television, their relations to their audiences have at least up until recently been built on some form of understanding of cultural tradition and social responsibility within

the national frame of reference. This is to some degree changing, because of the increasing globalisation and commercialisation of the media industry (Herman & McChesney 1999, Hesmondhalgh 2002). However, I will argue that both linguistic and cultural boundaries, formatted through historic structuring of social communication, over time has formed functional *communicative spaces* along the lines of the national borders that work towards social cohesion and strengthening of collective identities. My argument here is in line with Philip Schlesinger's in highlighting the important insight from what he labels the social communication tradition within historical sociology, stemming from the works of Otto Bauer and Karl Deutsch and further argued by more recent scholars like Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Michael Billig (Schlesinger 1999, Gellner 1983, Anderson 1983, Billig 1995).The same argument of the national dominance in the media order becomes relevant when we study how the media markets are still understood among the industrial competitors as culturally and linguistically separated, national markets. Although the industry is obviously changing, the most successful strategy for news media still seems to be differentiation and customisation of products and platforms to local and national market contexts. Media market competition is still a nationally structured competition between different media platforms within a nation, for instance between regional and national newspapers, between high and low, elite or popular media, or between public and private television despite the ongoing reordering of the division of labour within the media industries.

Thirdly, the importance of national or local culture and language in structuring the European media order cannot be exaggerated. The problems of building more European media platforms at a transnational level can be seen through the failures of recent attempts to establish a cross-national European newspaper *European,* (Schlesinger and Kevin 1999*)* and a magazine – the French *L'Européen* (Neveu 2002). Even though the media orders in Europe are changing, because of deregulation and increased pressure from a more and more global media industry, international news are still produced, mediated and actually read as part of social discourses reflecting national and local cultural contexts and social experiences (Bruhn Jensen 1998). I hasten to say, that these institutional relations are under strong pressures from interrelated changes within media technology, media regulation and media industry. But a relevant point to be made here is that the EU so far has regulated the media industry through competition law, rather than through cultural policies on their own (Wheeler 2004). Thus although increased non-discriminatory competition in the European cultural industries over time will weaken the national framework and institutional relations of the media business, a strengthened and unified European media order is not the probable outcome. Present research indicates rather that a more global and in general more Americanised media contents are the common element of the different national media orders (Morley and Robins 1995, Collins 2000, Miller et al. 2001). Present competition at local and national levels within the media industry, urge media to strengthen, rather than weaken their local and national production and framing strategies. In an increasingly globalised world, an immediate competitive advantage for national media is their historic trajectories within national and local geopolitically and culturally delineated spaces. And to strengthen a local and national focus is particularly easy in news production, since the implied and expressed public address can be framed

in reference to distinctions between us/them and we/they (Schlesinger 1991). In entertainment sections and the scheduling of audiovisual material in film, radio and television, the drives towards reducing costs moves many media in a more diffuse, global and Americanised cultural direction (Miller et al. 2001). Hence, increasingly it seems that the same globally produced content of the global cultural industry finds its way into the pages and screens of European media (Collins 2000). And at the local and national levels, there is presently a pressure towards consumption of either global media products or more distinct local and national products.

The European level is in danger of falling out, perhaps particularly in the local and national news media. But then this has less to do with journalism as such, and more to do with the political-economic structures of media development and market competition. There are for instance some political paradoxes linked to the fact that the European Union in a way is trapped in its own success: It is supposed to further integration and European harmony, but seems to be making most of its progress when there is little conflict and low visibility of EU politicans and institutions. But this, and similar symbolicly and discursively important logics are linked to the logics of the transnational political system, rather than the structuring and organisation of media.

A Culturalist Approach: Contested Constructions, Dynamics and Change

The fundamental and institutionalised connections between the national news media and the national political order are more acknowledged and integrated in what can be labelled a culturalist approach to European news and journalism studies. Compared to the nation states of Europe, we seem to have some way to go before the transnational, multiethnic, multilayered and perhaps even flexible, multi-speed political system of democratic governance in Europe reaches the same ideological status as a primary frame of reference as the nation state. The questions whether this is the solution that is wanted, and by whom, still remain unanswered. One just has to mention the challenges arising from continuous expansion through entrance of new member states, the continuous need to develop institutional reforms, and the recent failed attempt to anchor the constitutional process among the citizens of France and Netherlands to remind of the obstacles that exists to the development of a common (or should we say natural), stable understanding of the geopolitical space of the European Union as "a society" in any other than a superficial and pragmatic way. Right or wrong, in terms of how experts and theories would describe how the democratic system works in an increasingly globalised world, parts of the European citizens still try to mobilise their national democratic institutions in their political struggle.

The culturalist perspective could be said to direct more attention than the political communication perspective to a more realistic analysis of the role of the news media as an agent of or explanation for social conflict and social change (Poupeau 2000). The discussion on the role of the news media within this perspective becomes a discussion of power and power distributions in society, a pronounced tradition of media research within political economy and cultural studies approaches. News discourse is seen as a prime site for ideological struggle and potential dominance, since hegemonic and orthodox discourses are believed to be able to reproduce

ideological beliefs, values and norms that secure stability, manufacture consent and produce "status quo" in society. Early, this research perspective was connected to a critique of the state, understood as the *nation* state and its governmental institutions, which where seen to secure their social powers by reproducing a national, egalitarian and liberal discourse of consensus in opposition to discourses acknowledging and exposing the structured power distributions and effects of social class distinctions (see for instance Hall et al. 1981).

In this perspective, concepts like "Europe" and "Europeanisation" themselves become cultural concepts. It is important to distinguish the term "cultural" here from any essentialist interpretation. It is cultural because it is seen as an historical, social construct rather than a given social fact. However, the fact that it is seen as socially constructed does not render it without real social effects in Europe, as Gerard Delaney phrases it. What is real, Delanty continues elsewhere in his seminal book on European history, is the discourse in which ideas and identities are formed and historical realities constituted (Delanty 1995, 3). And it is within this discourse that "Europe" and "Europeanisation" can be seen as constituted and contested concepts. The production of discourse is linked to an ongoing struggle within the European and national cultural fields of production, to borrow Bourdieu's term. The news media in this perspective is but one important part of this field, providing us with a distinct public space for discourse production. At the same time the news media is a powerful weapon in the contest for power, stability and change in society and can represent and reproduce the power and impact of particular interests through their positions in the media order. Thus, it is of interest for media scholars within this perspective to study how discursive representations and meanings are linked to reproductions of social structures and distinctions, and how crisis and conflicts can be seen as part of, rather than opposite to European democracy and culture.

Research Focus

What else is different in this approach, compared to the public sphere or political communication perspective? Rather than letting the formal political institutions of the EU automatically become the primary object or focus of research, it is the links between news discourse, social movements and civil society that come into focus. Particularly it becomes interesting for media researchers within this perspective to broaden up the focus of the discourse itself: news discourse and other media discourses proliferating within the European field of cultural production are equally interesting ways of engaging in a political discourse on Europeanisation and European society. The culturalist perspective then acknowledges a more complex understanding of where the political discourse *is*: It is in literature, in poetry, music, documentary, and in film, as well as in popular culture phenomena and new media. Thus, news journalism is still important, but it should not so obviously be taken for granted to be the primary place for the contemporary mediation of politics. The recent focus on documentary film among producers and directors around the world has for instance something to do with ongoing changes, caused by changing technologies related to flexible speed, compression and direction of networks and communication flows, between media platforms and the circuits of content in the European media orders.

The culturalist view also avoids taking a predefined categorisation of what

counts as EU-journalism. Instead it asks how different definitions of EU-related news work as representations and reproductions of particular discourses on European integration. As the theoretical point of departure is that EU-related news are part of a continuous construction and contestation of what kind of Europe we are or should be having, any predefined categorisation of EU-related news becomes highly problematic. The expectation to coverage also becomes different: instead of engaging in the mourning of the lack of European discourse in the most important, popular news media, the culturalist perspective would expect that the news media also in the foreseeable future will continue to give priority to national rather than EU-institutions. It is evidently true that discursive, symbolic and cultural powers, mediated through the news media, do not transfer as easy as formal sovereignty. Thus, the interpretation of what this means is different: Seen from the public sphere perspective, it too easily becomes understood as a cultural lag and a form of conservatism, strengthened in the way in which the news media continues to give priority to national agents, institutions or complexes (Gans 1979). From a culturalist position, it is rather expected that the news media reproduce a mostly national, doxical frame of reference, even when reporting on the EU. And instead of being a problem, this is the basic understanding of how the news media works. What is lacking in a Europeanisation perspective is not to be found in the national news media as such, but in a structural, cultural situation in which popular, transnational news media with a European focus, is not likely to be developed. What is not to be found, moreover, is a popular, wide-ranging media platform for news on the European Union.

Towards an Alternative Perspective

In a more culturalist, bottom up perspective, media researchers should engage more in the questions concerning whether the political institutions in Europe are responding adequately to emerging political agendas in Europe. Perhaps the media are not mediating well enough between the public and the institutions, because the popular media are not read by the political elites in Europe? At least it is no longer obvious that democratic deficits are only caused by the lack of transnational, European elite newspapers. To be able to understand better what the democratic problem of the news media actually is, we need to take more into consideration also the social relation between what we could call the *social orders of transnational politics* in Europe and the *media orders of Europe*. As soon as we take more seriously the local and community-based, social relations between media use and the socio-culturally defined positions in the social orders of Europe, we will in my view have a better chance of seeing what news are actually *doing* in terms of distributing, representing and negotiating symbolic powers in European society.

At the moment we are probably witnessing the development of an increased division between elite and popular media within Europe that should be more addressed by media researchers. The most pronounced division presently emerging within the European media order is probably not between different national audiences, but between elite and lay audiences across Europe. This increasing cleavage will not be seen, if we continue to address the question of EU journalism by studying only the most privileged and prestigious news media in each nation state. Just as the popular news media are positioning themselves as popular, the elite newspapers are positioning themselves exactly as that: elite newspapers.

They are elite newspapers because they for instance have a more reflected focus on international affairs. But there is another possibility for where, in the predominantly nationally defined media orders, that important platforms for "European news discourses" are now developing, connected to the importance of the local connection for many media markets. The fact that some news media will have a strategic advantage if they increase their local and regional focus in news production, also indirectly opens up for better and more improved journalism on EU-related issues and conflicts. In my own research on EU journalism in Norway, one home political reporter interested in EU issues repeatedly reminded me that a strategy for picking up good stories for his nationwide, financial newspaper (*Dagens Næringsliv*) was to read the local newspapers (Slaatta 1999). They, he argued, would be more efficient when it came to focusing on the problems of small and local industries, farmers and industrial plants working within the EU-regulatory framework of the Single Market. Thus, again, instead of looking for EU journalism in the elite newspapers, we should be looking for new and emerging division of labour in the production and distribution of political discourse. Globalisation and Europeanisation means that local news reflect more of the global context. Globalisation is also "glocalisation": Globalisation and Europeanisation have local effects, and vice versa. For media researchers, this mean that analysing the way in which different news media within the national media orders report on EU in different ways is perhaps just as important and interesting as comparing elite newspapers from different national settings.

An important effect of Europeanisation comes through the way EU politics slowly sinks into society, and re-emerges as public discourse. There is, as argued for instance by Trenz and Eder in a recent article, a strong learning potential in public media discourse (Trenz and Eder 2004). And this *is* the public sphere: it is contradictory, it is full of conflict, and the media is part of it all. What is bad about some of the trends in political journalism in news media, is generally bad, but not because it has to do with the EU. This means that EU journalism ought to be more generally compared with other forms of political journalism. And a more internalised, culturalist understanding of the media might help us to promote the good things about the media too, rather than repeatedly beating them for all the bad.

Concluding Remarks on the Two Perspectives

The attempt to single out two perspectives in the research on Europeanisation and the news, has perhaps mostly served as an excuse for a general discussion of methodological issues and research imperatives. I have argued that in order to find out whether European news media and journalistic practice live up to the ideals of a European public sphere, it is too easy to search for answers in contents of the elite, national news media. The answer on media performance then almost follows naturally: The national news media contributes negatively to the democratic deficit in the European Union. In my view, more complex hypotheses must be introduced.

According to the institutional relations that already exist at the national level between news media and political institutions, we should continue to expect more or less all national news media in Europe to focus dominantly on their national representatives and EU-related political bodies at the national level, and on the

issues that particularly seem to be of salience for their national audiences. However, there might be different positions in what we could call the national media orders. Since there might be several opinions about the actual politics and reforms that are suggested by the EU, we could expect important differences in the way in which different national media overplay or underplay the sovereign potentials and powers of the national vs. the European political institutions in their news frames. This could be possible to observe for instance in what ways national and EU officials are enhanced with different symbolic powers: how they are given access, in which way the news coverage open or close for critical voices, in what degree specific national discourses on strategies and bargaining positions within the EU is connected to the news discourse. This will vary according to how various media are competent, active and interested and reflecting distinct positions within both media markets and opinion markets. It goes without saying, that when we take such complex considerations into account, it becomes much more difficult to read variations at the level of content as indications of media performance in a European democratic, public sphere perspective. And it becomes clearer that a dominance of a national frame of reference in EU-coverage cannot – without further qualifications – be seen as weakening the democratic role of the media.

One of the problems of media research on EU journalism is that it continues to report back to so-called responsible institutions that more transparency and more professional journalism from the EU beat system will improve and repair democratic deficits within the European Union. No doubt this is true, but might it not also produce a mythical belief within EU information professionals that the legitimacy problem can be solved if only more information about the EU, what it is doing, and how they are functioning, is reaching out to more people? I don't claim that it is wrong that the EU institutions try to improve their transparency policies and routines as well as their more proactive information strategies; however, I think the political aspects of their information become neutralised and naturalised in the process, and that the information then becomes adequate in some respects, but systematically inadequate in other respects.

I think the media research profession bears at least some of the responsibility for the way in which the creation and revision of information strategies and PR-departments has become the automatic organisational reform to legitimacy crisis situations, presently actualised by the D-plan initiatives. Researchers have not been explicit enough about what their fundamental perspectives actually were, and the research might not even have been good enough. When politicians and bureaucrats feel betrayed by the media and the public, media researchers all too often take the same perspective. They easily fall prey to a general critique of journalistic performance and to the way in which the news media institution are producing negative effects when compared with the ideals of the public sphere model. However, another line of argument is probably more important. It must be stated firmly, that a natural consensus on what Europe is, and how the EU is representing European interests and societies does not exist. Thus, the media should not be expected to be this neutral, mediating platform for information and debate. The media are themselves structured according to political and economic structures in society, and are consciously or unconsciously participating in the constant negotiation and contestation of what kind of Europe we might be asked to imagine.

The political communication perspective I have portrayed here is connected to an idea of the democratic role of the news media both at a national and at an European level. By doing so, it, in my view, holds up standards of news production and journalistic performances to European news media that are not very realistic. Thus media research that follow this track risk continuing to beat a dead horse. The democratic deficit should rather be looked for in the political institutions themselves than in the news media. Increasing Europeanisation in the public sphere perspective means increasing legitimacy, efficiency and democratic participation to European institutions and governance processes. There are ongoing theoretical discussions in elite spheres on how we are supposed to understand these terms in the European model of transnational politics, just as there are ongoing popular discussions about politics, economics and culture. Media research intended to analyse how different news media actually produce effects in these matters must live up to this complex situation. We cannot pin our hopes for increased democracy in Europe solely on high quality EU journalism and transparent, open information policies. But without it, we would obviously be a lot worse off. The news media continues to be a precondition for modern politics, but European politics has not yet proved to be a sufficient basis for the development of a media public sphere as a communicative space at a transnational, super spatial, European level. We have to go beyond the immediate level of news content in major privileged news media in different countries, and study local and more field-specific, professional news discourses in other media. For instance, several smaller media are attempting to produce discourses that deliberatively attempt to mobilise critical discourses on EU issues. There is a constant possibility, that what is seen as "important" news in general elite newspapers is a kind of discourse that is already structured and already systematically excluding important aspects of social life. And in addition to uncovering the dominant voice of power, researchers must also engage in finding the marginal and marginalised discourses on European society. Discourses that must be fed back into the political system and the dominant news media discourses.

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