TRANSFORMATION OF NEWSPAPERS' THEMATIC STRUCTURE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ESTONIA, FINLAND AND RUSSIA

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Abstract

This article focuses on the thematic structure and contextualisation of the future in the main daily newspapers of the three neighbouring countries of Finland, Estonia and Russia throughout the 20th century. We mapped the content of 2079 Finnish, 2242 Estonian and 1723 Russian daily newspaper articles. The Finnish *Helsingin Sanomat* concentrated on the issue of "state and legislation"; the second most common topic in the Finnish sample was economics, at about 20 percent of the articles, with the exception of the 1910s and 1930s. In Estonia we did not find any dominant topic during the 20th century; there were many different topics related to the agenda. Politics and governance and related issues were particularly dominant during the periods of independence. Economy-related issues were more or less dominant during the period of Soviet occupation. The topics of economics and human relations and values were dominant in the Russian *Pravda* throughout the 20th century. The analysis reveals that Finnish media were more diverse than Estonian and Russian, which displayed a lack of diversity especially during the Communist period.

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Vol.20 (2013), No. 1, pp. 89 - 106

Introduction

We see in the history of journalism that for centuries the content of journalism has broadened, varied and become structurally more complex. However, we can still observe journalism as a stable long period structure, which has certain directions and fixed thematic areas that journalism turns to time and again.

Inspired by the classification of media systems by Hallin/Mancini, in the last decade researchers have again turned intensively towards discussions of the interrelations of the media and society (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 2012; Dobek-Ostrowska and Glowacki 2008; Dobek-Ostrowska 2010; Trappel 2011). Based on solid empirical data, Hallin and Mancini have classified the media systems of democratic societies. Their basic postulates have been used by Siebert et al. to develop four theories of the press: the "Press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted. We believe that an understanding of these aspects of society is basic to any systematic understanding of the press" (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1963, 1-2). These first attempts to classify the press have been criticized often (see the summary, e.g Hardy 2012, 187) and the main point of the critiques has been the redundant simplicity of the empirical basis of the model: "the results have usually been disappointing, as no typology can do justice to all the complexities of a particular media system" (Jakubowicz 2010, 8). The critique is based on two pillars: "the first problem is that of defining media systems" and the "range of variables they use to analyse media systems is clearly insufficient" (Jakubowicz 2010, 9-12). It is not common knowledge that the classification of Siebert et al. was not a mere ideological weapon of the Cold War world. It has become evident that it was also based on empirical data, which like previous classifications placed the newspaper's role in a culture in the forefront in classifying media systems. There is evidence that Siebert, Peterson and Schramm had access to international media monitoring data. Hence, their four models are based on empirical material. All these classifications depend on indicators that can be counted and measured: newspaper sales, gender differences in newspaper readership, variations in newspaper markets, political orientations of media, organisational connections between media and political parties, governance of public broadcasting, journalistic role orientations and practices, autonomy of journalists and press freedom, institutionalisation of professional norms, etc. (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

Our study continues in the direction taken by the structuralists (e.g. R. Jakobson) and researchers of cultural content (e.g. Gerbner). We will attempt to explain the thema-tisation of journalism as an indicator of societal types and processes using sociological tools. Through our analysis, we hope to contribute to the system-theoretical approach of interrelations between media and society, but from another point of view. We examine the knowledge of the world that mass media produce and reproduce (Luhmann 2000, 76). We take as a starting point the question Luhmann asked "Which society emerges when it routinely and continuously informs itself about itself in this way?" (Luhmann 2000, 76). Together with Luhmann, we assume that the monitoring and mutual linkage/ interpretation/informing of the subsystems of societal systems take place in the content of the media (news media). While Luhmann generally claims that the subsystems

of a contemporary society are autonomous, we try to show that in a totalitarian society, where politics dominated everything and controlled other subsystems, the monitoring of media content took place according to the regulations of the political system.

> *Soviet media was originally convinced that media exist for the purpose of developing political awareness and commitment to work for a just and fair society, that is, a socialist philosophy. ... The socialist normative theory of the media in its original form was designed to avoid the tilt of free-market media toward the capitalist class, and to give voice to ordinary working men and women in their desire for a better world. It was thought that the most effective role of socialist media was either to help organise revolutionary activists, in the case of the Marxist party newspaper, or to mobilize the general public, in the case of other, more mass-based media* (Downing 1995, 185).

On the contrary, in a democratic society, where meetings of leadership and discussions of leadership rules are main characteristics of the public sphere, the political sphere is one of the central monitoring spheres. Whereas, historically, the public sphere had a proactive function in asserting the economic and political rights of the individual, it can be said, more generally, to negotiate the terms of cooperation between social agents and the state (Jensen 2002, 6). Media create visions/sketches for conceptualising the present and other time-dimensional relations.

As long as a society is also a sufficiently actualised environment of the interaction system, it acts as a concurrent guarantee of events that otherwise would not occur. Hence, diachrony and synchrony are intermediated simultaneously and also with a perspective to the future. The present, in which everything is taking place and happening simultaneously, is a differential between the past and future. Only in this way can time become a social reality of the succession of the presently vital past and future (Luhmann 1997, 819).

Media, as self-reflective tools of a society, have several significant roles.

Journalism has different functions in society, according to its relationship to the political system and the cultural context. The need for comparative research is more evident in areas where we find a strong relationship between communication phenomena, on the one hand, and political systems and cultural value systems, on the other (Esser and Hanitzsch 2012, 4). We selected three neighbouring countries with closely tied historical, political and cultural backgrounds – Estonia, Finland and Russia – to empirically analyse differences in the self-reflection of society. The fates of these countries during the course of the 20th century have been different enough to create reliable data for a comparative approach. The media in the three countries represent the contexts of different political systems. According to the model of Hallin/Mancini, Finland is a perfect example of the democratic corporatist type (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 70), while Estonia and Russia do not fit into this model at all, instead being presented as examples of the "post-communist" model in more recent publications (Hallin and Mancini 2010).

Russia and Estonia functioned in rather similar political contexts for half a century, "[before the 1917 revolution] Russia was not a democracy then either; it knew only a few months of rather chaotic and limited wartime democracy in 1917 between the overthrow of the czars and the Bolshevik revolution. It was a heavily militarised, centralised government run by hereditary emperor-kings, the czars"

(Downing 1995, 187). But one can point to differences between the two countries that can be understood in terms of their relative positions as centre and periphery. In Estonia, longer periods of independence and democratic governing are more characteristic (1917-1939 and since 1992).

Such major events as World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union are historical landmarks that create an additional reference system that makes our three cases even more useful for comparison.

In our research, we analysed the content of the daily newspapers of the three neighbouring countries and compared the different cultures. The perspectives of the content and temporal dimensions of daily newspapers raised a number of very fundamental issues, including journalism's functions through the thematisation of social reality and the construction of collective perspectives. Basically, we focused on two issues: (a) changes in thematisation throughout the 20th century in the daily newspapers of the three countries, and (b) a comparison of how the portrayal of the future changed in the three countries.

Longitudinal Textual Analysis of Thematisations and Future Perspectives in Daily Newspapers

Methodologically, the system-theoretical viewpoint presupposes a broad analysis of the process scale. "Large-scale societal processes that are estranged from personal experiences can only abstract themselves from concrete social interactions of actors," and "analysis should be done independently of the motives of actors in those processes" (Beyme 1991, 350-351).

The present study has the main goal of illuminating the visibility of large-scale social processes in journalistic content. We followed "a constructivist re-conceptualisation of quantitative measurement" (Schrøder 2002, 105), where the analyst is a reader of the meanings of a text (Krippendorff 1980, 22). The text as a research object is qualitative, as it includes *cultural meanings* (Jakobson 1960). This, therefore, necessitates the use of a methodology that will open up these meanings, i.e. the use of textual analysis is suitable. A systemic approach to the analysis of media content is essential for the field of media and communication research as a whole (Rösser 2012, 459). It makes it possible to make deductions regarding different national contexts and national politics.

The idea of a longitudinal study is to compare data of different periods of time according to principles defined in a research design. Typically, longitudinal studies focus on a period of 20 to 30 years in the media system of one particular country. As a result, these studies have generally shown a relationship between social transformation and change in mass-mediated content (Mervola 1995, Becker 2000, Barnhurst and Nerone 2001, Luostarinen 2004 and Huang 2008). This study has chosen to depict a somewhat longer period (the 20th century), as it is assumed that a shorter period (for instance, pop culture is normally described in terms of *decades*) doesn't make it possible to point out tendencies, but rather tends to focus on changes related to particular social/historical events. For example, Huang (Huang 2008) conducted a study that was based on articles published in a Chinese daily from 1945 to 2005. By studying the binary "institutional authority" vs. "individual authority," he concluded that Chinese culture became more democratic during the second half of the 20th century (Huang 2008, 8).

In order to lessen the possible impact of random events on general trends, special attention was paid to the creation of the sample in our study. The most important newspapers of the three countries published throughout the 20th century were chosen: *Päevaleht/Rahva Hääl/Eesti Päevaleht* (Daily/The People's Voice/Estonian Daily), *Helsingin Sanomat* (Helsinki News) and *Pravda* (The Truth).[1] As central dailies of the countries, these three publications represent leading constructions of social reality: "leading" in the sense that they represent what the political/cultural elite disperse to the broader public. The present study does not include analysis of the diversity of social constructions in the public sphere; for that, we would have needed to broaden our sample to include specialised print media, for example cultural and political magazines and yellow press publications.

For the analysis of an unclear amount of data, we used a multi-step principle of creating a sample (Budd et al. 1967). The data was gathered from every fourth year, in order to determine trends in the dynamics of media and society. The results are presented in a sequence of decades. This didn't make it possible to determine exact historical moments when changes in mass-mediated content occurred, but this was not our purpose.

The selection of every fourth year focuses on an even shorter period, and therefore provides a more frequent look than the customarily used 5- or 10-year periods in longitudinal studies; for example, Mervola (1995) employed a five-year interval in studying Finnish newspapers, and Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) used 10- and 30-year intervals to investigate US journalism. The design of our study conforms to suggestions made by other researchers to select daily newspaper articles to achieve representativeness of material sourced from a long period (Riffe et al. 1993). Studies that compare the representativeness of different sampling strategies conclude that, for daily newspapers, a random week provides a good representation of the whole material (Riffe et al. 1996). Our aim was to gather a typical sequence of daily newspapers. The period of study started in 1905 and we included every fourth year until 2009.

On the textual micro level, our research is based on the semiotic argument that the typical characteristics and features of an era manifest themselves in the typical texts of the era. Hence, a mechanical increase in the number of texts was unnecessary. Methodically, we limited the number of articles coded from one edition of a newspaper to ten.

From each selected newspaper issue, the sample was composed of: 1) articles from the front page, i.e. those most accentuated by that edition, 2) editorials, 3) letters from readers, 4) opinion articles (written about different topics) and 5) news stories. We mapped the content of 2242 Estonian, 1723 Russian and 2079 Finnish daily newspaper articles.

The methods used to analyse all three dailies were similar, and were based on a code-book that evolved during the pilot study. Researchers with knowledge of all three languages coded textual content based on analytical categories. Thanks to the repeating of coding instructions and intense coder training, using multilingual proceeding as suggested (Rössler 2012, 463), the reliability of coding by the seven researchers was high: on average, 82 percent.

We analysed the categories "topics" and "portrayal of the future." The main topic of an article was defined as the subject of discussion that ran through the

entire article. We distinguished between six basic areas of life: a) topics related to the state and legislation (discussion and news devoted to the rules and norms of social life, public administration and legislation), b) the economy (industry-related issues, and the use and distribution of resources), c) culture and education (creative industries, and the education system and its institutions), d) abstract philosophical topics (the discussion of the nature of society, human beings, evolution etc.) and e) human-interest topics (issues related to the everyday contexts of life (such as attitudes, values and human relations – everything that relates to the immediate environment of an individual).

If references were made to the perspectives related to a particular topic, the presence of the dimension of "future" was registered, e.g. references to something that would happen/ might happen in two months, the day after tomorrow, in a year and in the unclear future. Through the future, the dimension of the progress of society was constructed. Some post-modern approaches refer to the current narrowing of the future vision, and to the disappearance of utopias. Behind these approaches, the change in journalism can be detected, "for journalism, the time crunch seems to have forced newspaper reporters and editors to focus on the present instead of gathering background information, spotting trends, or referring to future problems" (Barnhurst 2011, 99). Therefore, the comparison of the references to the future in the newspapers of the three countries was important in our empirical analysis. Possible evaluations of the future were coded as follows: 1) the future is hopeful and positive, 2) the future is frightening and negative or 3) ambivalent references to the future. Also, we encoded the diversity of views, i.e. whether alternative scenarios were discussed or not.

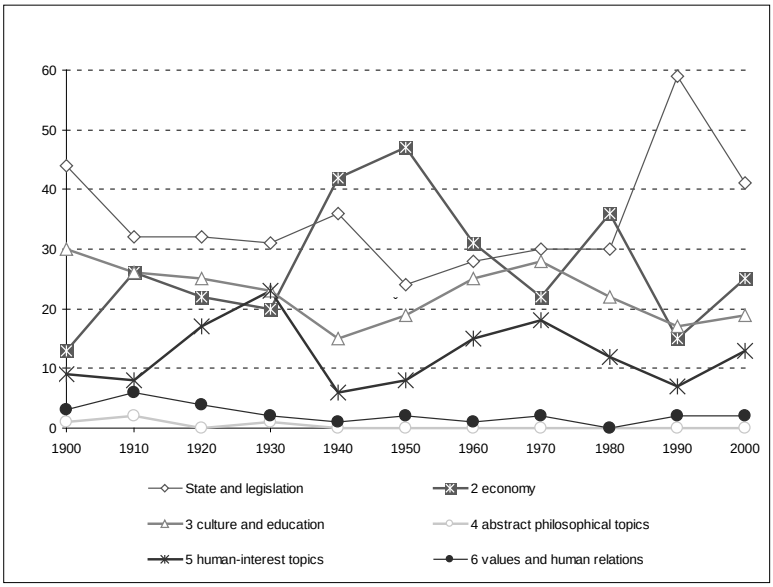
Results: Changes in Thematisations in the Three Countries

We were interested in the thematic changes in the newspapers of the three countries, which topics were in the forefront and how the interrelated structure of the themes changed. The presence in the foreground of different topics indicated the broad differentiations in societal self-reflections that the mass media had implemented.

Basically, as we looked at the Estonian sample, we saw that there was no dominant topic during the 20th century. There were many different topics related to the agenda of a particular period. Politics and governance and related issues were particularly dominant during the periods of independence. Economy-related issues were more or less dominant during the period of Soviet occupation. The presence of issues related to "education and culture" was remarkably stable throughout all of the century's decades: between a fourth and a third of the sample presented issues related to this area (Figure 1).

The Finnish sample was quite different from the Estonian. Throughout the century, the Finnish *Helsingin Sanomat* basically concentrated on the issue of "state and legislation" (Figure 2). The topic was found in around 40–50 percent of the articles selected. Hence, we can say that political topics were (and still are) covered more by the Finnish media than by the Russian *Pravda* and Estonian *Eesti Päevaleht*. Throughout the century, the second most common topic in the Finnish sample was economics, at about 20 percent of the articles, with the exception of the 1910s, 1930s

Figure 1: Main Topics of the Articles in *Päevaleht* (in percent for each decade)



and 1970s, when cultural topics were more common than economic ones. In other decades, the cultural topic ranked third, in about 15-20 percent of the articles. The cultural and educational topics correlated with the topic of economics in the 1910s, but after that their frequencies were in inverse proportion. Cultural topics rose in the periods when the economics topic fell slightly (the 1930s and 1970s) and the trend was the opposite in the 1950s and the first decade of the 21st century. In the development of the Finnish public sphere, the high frequency (about 15 percent) of the values and traditions topic should be noted. In other decades the presence of this topic remained consistent at the level of 5–10 percent.

The thematic structure of the Russian sample differed from the Estonian and Finnish samples. The topics of economics and human relations and values were dominant in the Russian *Pravda* throughout the 20th century (Figure 3). The frequency of the economics topic was quite stable, at around 20 percent. The topic values and traditions peaked in the 1940s-1950s, at 35 percent, and in the remaining decades it stayed at around 20-30 percent. Hence, we can see the shaping of the ideological environment through the topics of economics and values-traditions. In the Soviet period, the topic of state and legislation stayed at around 20 percent, but it rose over 40 percent in the critical time of the 1990s. A characteristic of the first decade of the 21st century was the peaking of the general interest topic (about 30 percent), followed by the topic of power, at about 25 percent, and values, at over 20 percent.

The Estonian sample quite clearly showed the periods of independence and the lack of it (see especially issues related to economics, and politics and governance). The prevalence of issues related to culture seemed to illustrate the important role of culture for the Estonian public.

Figure 2: Main Topics of the Articles in *Helsingin Sanomat* (in percent for each decade)

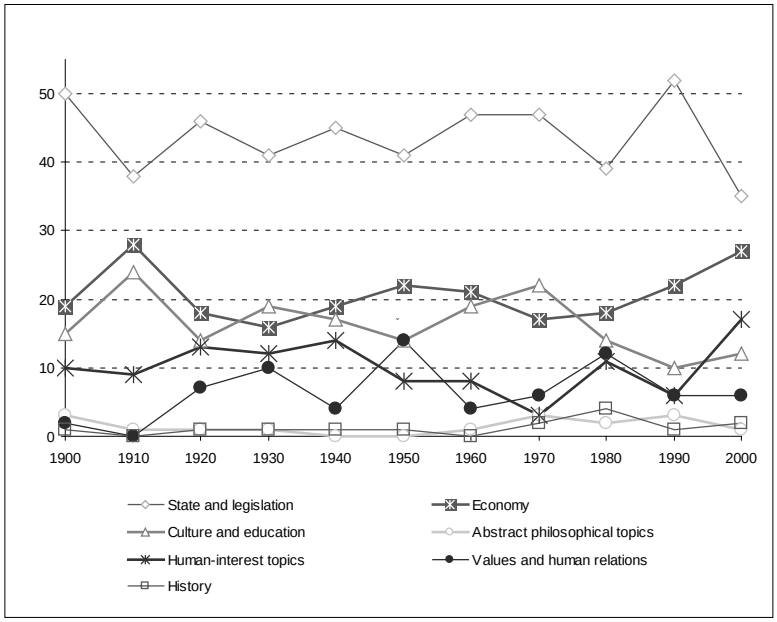
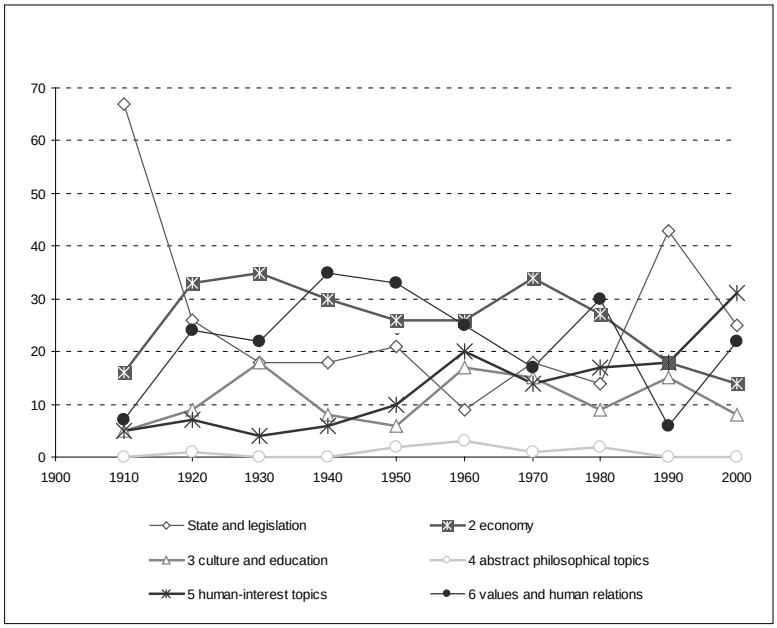


Figure 3: Main Topics of the Articles in *Pravda* (in percent for each decade)



In the case of the democratic public sphere and journalism, as in Finland we can see the absolute dominance of the topics of politics and governance in jour-

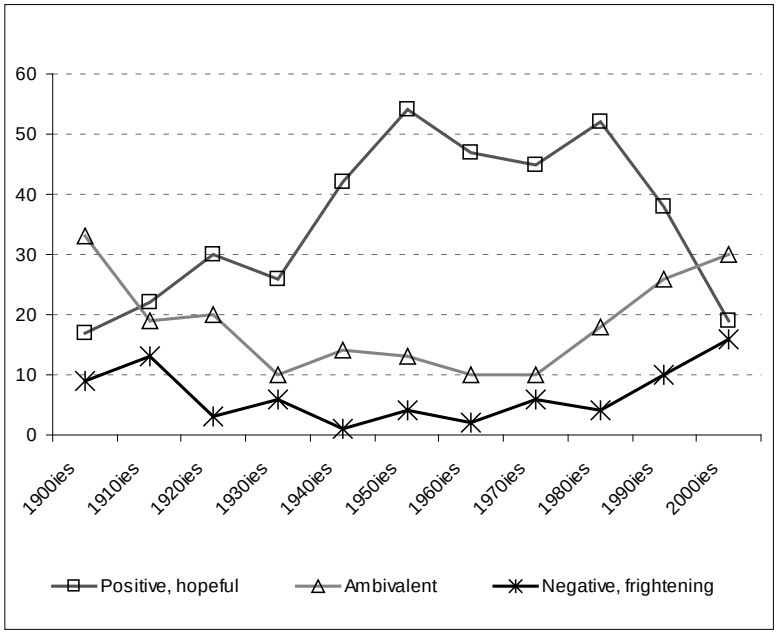
nalism throughout the century. To at least some degree, the Finnish public sphere seems to reflect Habermasian ideal notions regarding the role of journalism and journalists for the public debate on common practices and norms. The Russian case seems to be a good illustration of how the idea of the building of communism was communicated via the context of economics. As the field of economics was basically related to abstract values and lacked a positive correlation with the context of "human interest," we may assume that these texts were representations of Soviet official ideology, which was not intended to be accepted naturally by the public.

The Dimension of the "Future"

Journalistic/public texts form a part of collective modelling and, as such, they present mediated experiences. The modelling ability of journalistic texts is especially important in times of social changes or crises. They can open new perspectives and the mapping of the intellectual aspect on the basis of the reflection of mediated experience. New perspectives include public texts' depictions of the future, which can be especially effective in moulding the future. Depictions of the future can have the effect of designing the future. Barnhurst, in his long-term study in America, discovered that in the newspapers "speculation about future events followed a curvilinear pattern, increasing shortly before the turn of each century in the study" (Barnhurst 2011, 100).

In the Estonian sample, we clearly saw the dominance of positive evaluations of the future during the occupation (from the 1940s to the end of the 1980s). Before and after this period, more negative and ambivalent opinions were clearly expressed about the future (Figure 4).

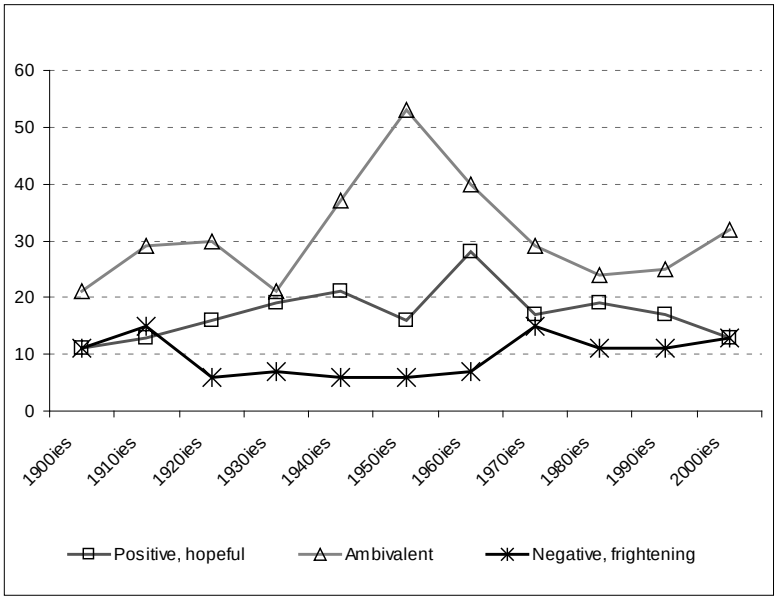
Figure 4: Evaluations of the Future in the Estonian Sample (in percent for each decade)



The Estonian sample was especially positive about the future in two periods: the 1950s and 1980s. These were periods when journalistic texts reflected positive expectations of the new and of hope for society. Both periods were decisive in shaping society. In the 1950s, after Stalin's death in 1953 and the 20th Plenary session of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (SUCP), the collective expectation of a better future grew. In the 1980s, after a long period of stagnation, the rise of Gorbatchev reflected the coming of a new society and hope for Glasnost and Perestroika. There was hope of developing society and collective perspectives in various fields, and a rise in willingness to actively participate in society. Both periods can be seen as times of growth in societal activity. Journalistic texts from that time showed participation in the future direction of society – as leaders or expressive reflectors of the collective spirit, or as both reflectors and leaders. Details of this trend are hard to establish, and would require a separate qualitative textual analysis of the contents to confirm them.

In the Finnish case, we saw the dominance of an ambivalent construction, especially in the 1950s. This is when economics-related issues became more important than issues related to culture and education. It is also important to note that issues related to human relations and values were more important during this period (see Figures 2 and 5).

Figure 5: Evaluations of the Future in the Finnish Sample (in percent for each decade)

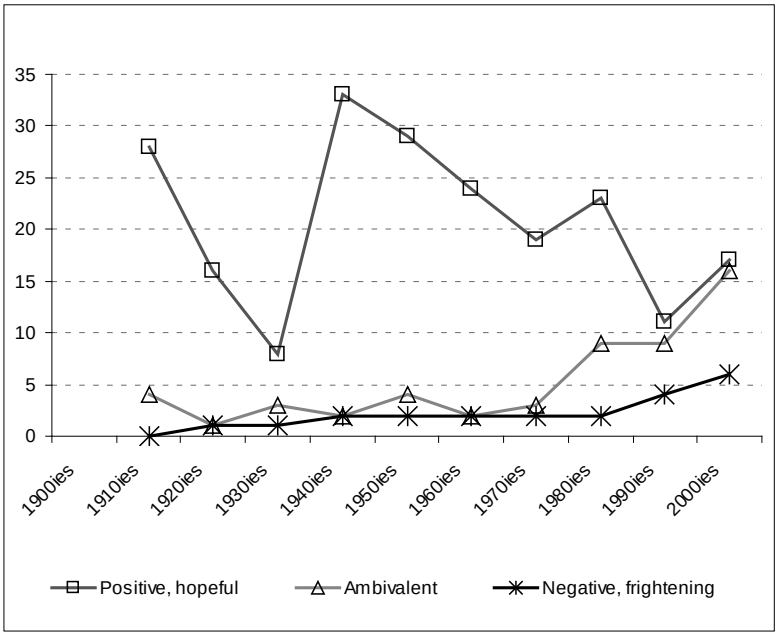


A positive and hopeful attitude to the future was visible in 1960s Finland. The most negative attitude to the future prevailed in the 1910s (when the frequencies of politics and legislation topics were below average and attention was paid to economics, culture and education) and in the 1970s (when the percentage of articles related to culture and education was higher than the percentage of articles connected with economics).

As we compared the Finnish situation to the Estonian and Russian ones, the plurality of perspectives was very apparent. The future was neither completely frightening nor to be glorified. Scenarios could be either positive or negative. For Finland, the 1960s were years in which to become acquainted with "world culture." The spread of television made it possible to introduce distant countries to Finland. The 1970s were, in contrast, significant as a period of self-reflection, and it is also clear that internal affairs were rather important then. Future perspectives were relatively contradictory and ambivalent in that decade.

As for the Russian sample, the "positive world-view" of communist ideology seems to have dominated throughout the 20th century, although to a lesser extent than in the Estonian sample (about 1/3 of the articles and 1/2 of the articles, respectively; see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Evaluations of the Future in the Russian Sample (in percent for each decade)



In all decades, *Pravda* portrayed the future as mainly positive, except in the 1930s and 1990s. Negative, as well as ambivalent and frightening portrayals of the future started to increase only in the 1980s. Both periods of higher negativity (the 1930s and the 1990s) were periods of crisis and rapid change. Presumably, uncertainty about the future was what caused ambivalence and hopelessness. The rise in positive evaluations of the future was connected with Perestroika, which opened up new perspectives and thus stopped the decline in the feeling of hope that had occurred since the 1950s. In contrast, the 1990s were characterised by diverse and contradictory perspectives.

Social Context of Messages in Newspapers

What is characteristic of the larger picture of Estonian media? *Päevaleht* was established in 1905, with a liberal view of the economic future and an autonomous political structure. Dominant topics in *Päevaleht* were "politics and governance." From independence in 1918 until the economic-political decline in the 1930s, a stable journalistic orientation towards a clear model of the future developed. A crisis in the role of journalism and national perspectives was clearly evident from the middle of the 1930s until 1940.

After the destruction of the Estonian political system by the Soviets, the Estonian journalistic system was replaced by Soviet ideology, publications and journalists. From the 1940s on, the Soviet Union's new and optimistic ideology for Estonian peasants and the working class was based on an orientation towards the future. Journalism was sharply divided into two camps: official journalism and the unofficial silenced public. Journalism was transferred to a pseudo public sphere. The division between right and wrong, good and bad people was extreme. Often the media were used against people as repressive tools. Thoughts and actions unsuited to Soviet policies came under attack by the media.

In the 1940s-1950s, the totalitarian system's media were not free, but part of the propaganda machinery of Moscow's totalitarian system. Soviet economic achievements were the main topics that were canonised. At the end of the 1950s, a freer atmosphere developed, mainly through translated texts, but also through themes of technology and innovative development. The 1960s were characterised by the coming of new themes and authors into the media, an interest in the external world, the openness of texts, and mental vigilance. The number of anonymous texts decreased and experts and foreign authors were allowed a voice in the media. In journalism, the 1970s were a time of depression and pseudo publicity, and there was a turn towards inner themes and the development of style. Foreign authors and translated texts were still allowed.

The early years of the 1980s were, for the media, a time of pronounced political pressure, although stylistic brightness and diversity increased in journalistic texts. The second half of the 1980s was a time of opening up in Estonian media. The liberation of Estonian journalism, like water bursting through a dam, saw new authors and personalities appear in the media. The time of closed media and inner banishment had passed. The human perspective became the focus of journalistic texts. Into the spotlight of journalistic texts came the experiences of people, memories, history and generations. It should also be noted that the importance of the Estonian national mental "landscape" – most visibly the aspects of the publishing of memoirs and openness to the world – rose rapidly. High reflexivity was characteristic of Estonian journalism. Experts in different fields were the authors of written and spoken texts.

In the 1990s Estonian journalism was characterised by an ideological and practical turn towards themes related to politics and governance. Approaches centred on systems and structures. Considered as battlefields during the Soviet times (1940-1990), these themes were then almost absent from daily newspapers. Journalism became a political sphere in Estonia, as it had been before the 1940s. The points of view of politicians and officials became prominent and the voices

of ordinary citizens less common. The theme of structural change dominated the scene, while the themes of people, culture and the social sphere were pushed into the background. Estonian journalism in the first decade of the 21st century was continuously system-centred and the frequency of economic issues increased. We saw the individual's return to the media, but personality was not valued. Journalistic texts were again characterised by great emotionality and politicisation. There were similarities to the texts of the 1950s. The differences between publications grew and more experts from diverse fields were used. Notably, instead of using real experts, journalists and politicians tended to appear in texts as experts.

The Finnish *Helsingin Sanomat* demonstrated a rather clear structural framework that is maintained by the "thematisation" of "general public interest": the analysis of political-structural processes. "Objectivity" seemed to be a dominant factor in *Helsingin Sanomat*. It was important to consider an agenda as a kind of political choice. In the case of *Helsingin Sanomat,* thematisation was a process that created an understanding of political space. Secondly, the Finnish thematisation should be seen as the function of "newspaperness," i.e., the sole criterion of a decent newspaper. That, in turn, reflected the collective independence which journalism was supposed to provide.

From its inception, *Helsingin Sanomat* was an organ of the metropolitan social liberal political movement called *Nuorsuomalaiset* (Young Finns). In the early years of the 20th century, the newspaper played a seminal role in the construction and definition of Finnish nationhood. After the Finnish Civil War of 1918, in the 1920s and 1930s, *Helsingin Sanomat* was a staunch defender of national-liberal values against powerful right-wing pressures.

After World War II, the period of national reconstruction and restoration in Finland lasted until the early 1960s. This era was characterised by an attempt at national social and political integration, which bore fruit later in the 1960s, when the early cornerstones of the Finnish model for *consensus* were laid. These were also years of major Finnish economic and social restructuring, when tens of thousands of small farms all over Finland disappeared and population growth started to concentrate in the south of Finland, in the metropolitan area around Helsinki. New employment was now found, especially in public services and the expanding export industries. The late 1960s and 1970s were the period of the construction of the Finnish welfare society: public education, public health care, a day care system and other social services were expanded in a big way. There was an urgent need for social scientists – sociologists and social political experts – to advise and coordinate the rapid development.

Newspapers, and the media more generally, played a central mediating role in these processes. In order to coordinate such profound societal transformations, it was necessary to have a pluralistic and diverse mass communication system which could facilitate the integration of the still severely divided (after the 1918 trauma) society. At that time, although *Helsingin Sanomat* was only one of many metropolitan newspapers, it was the only one that claimed to be politically neutral: other newspapers had more or less close political party allegiances. In order to enhance plurality in the mass media, a state aid system was developed for political newspapers.

In the 1980s Finland entered a period of *consensus*, meaning that the main interest groups – the leading parties, trade unions and other seminal social and

political players – agreed on the most important policy goals for the coming years. The years of *consensus* were characterised by political stability and reduced social tensions. For many, it was also a period of declining social and political dynamics and debate: *consensus* meant that disagreements were avoided. At the same time, the political system was criticised for becoming non-political administration. Newspapers adjusted well to the consensual social and political system, and the relationship between the leading politicians and the media remained close. Popular participation in politics started to decline, as did other forms of organised social activities. Different forms of grass-roots activism started to develop and the Green Party was established.

Towards the end of the 1980s, Finland started to relax its financial regulations, which led to uncontrolled foreign lending and currency speculation. Partly as a result of this, and partly because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the early 1990s Finland suffered a deep economic crisis. The trade relations with the Soviet Union had been extremely important for the Finnish national economy, and there was no immediate substitute. The Finnish path out of the crisis involved severe cuts in public spending and generous public support to industry, especially to the ICT sector. New forms of social stratification emerged as structural unemployment became a constant factor.

For obvious historical reasons, the dynamics of Russian media were totally different. From the time it was first published, *Pravda* was an official medium of the Bolsheviks. In the early decades of the 20th century, *Pravda* played a seminal part in the construction of new perspectives for Russian society. Class warfare and the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat over the Russian state and over nationalities prevailed from its birth on. Its main ideological focus was on the future: issues such as the building of the Communist Society on Earth, the idea of Communism as a new Era for Humankind, the creation of a new kind of Man, etc. Throughout the 20th century, *Pravda* was a central propaganda channel, since it was defined as the official carrier of the Communist Party's voice. As a result, it cannot really be considered to be typical journalism. Rather, it should be defined as "journalism" only in so far as it was created through journalistic means. Due to its ideological bias, the dominant genre in this respect was not news (as was the case in Finland), but *features*. A feature gives an especially important role to the presence of the mediator – the Author. Through *Pravda,* the vast Soviet Empire was domesticated into a "homeland" for every citizen.

Topics dealing with the economy and related issues were in a central position in *Pravda* throughout the whole century. The cultivation of the proper understanding of the "economy" was supposed to create a unified journalistic field for all of the Soviet Union, as well as creating the New Man. The basic division in the case of Russian media was between the period prior to World War II and the rest of the century after 1945.

In the 1930s, the importance of economic topics decreased and somewhat more attention was paid to education and culture. In reality, this appears to have been due to the Stalinist repressions. The situation in the 1940s clearly illustrates the depression related to war: the New Man was pictured as having a bright future. The New Man was supposed to save the communist system and rebuild the society after the war. Beginning in the 1940s, the Soviet media were oriented to ideological

work with individual members of society, and the correct understanding of the economy was the key to communicating the ideals of the communist society. The content of *Pravda* was not aimed at creating an analytical environment (as was the case with *Helsingin Sanomat*). Every word published in *Pravda* was meant to mobilise individuals to serve the Soviet system. The presence of topics that stressed the importance of relations between individuals and society was rather high compared to the Finnish (and also Estonian) case.

It is also notable that, in the Russian case, a negative portrayal of the future was rather uncommon throughout the century. The basic task of a journalistic text was to be a tool for modelling a better future. Most definitely, the future had to be bright. This is a case of a "social critique" that had a special role to play in making improvements in the functioning of society, especially on the level of individual members of society (workers, social services, education etc.). That kind of critique normally had consequences in real life, which means it was applied in the separate contexts of the life-world of Soviet citizens. What is particularly important is that this critique was never applied to the system itself: under that kind of regulation the role of management – The Communist Party – remained indisputable.

It is typical of Russian journalism that in critical periods of history messages about political processes have been mediated at the level of the individual: communication and public sphere values, personal histories, (auto) biographies etc. were covered, especially in positive and heroic contexts. There was a special genre in 1940s and 1950s journalism that was known as the "decoration board." This also emerged in the 1980s. It was only in the 1990s that *Pravda* was de-ideologised and thus started featuring issues related to politics and governance.

Conclusions

Our large-scale comparative analysis of newspaper texts in the different countries has introduced us to strategic instruments for moulding the public sphere. We have showed (both through thematisation and the representation of future) the possibilities of the interrelations of the news media and society. There are four basic conclusions that can be drawn based on the study:

1) The function of democratic journalism is basically to mediate issues that reflect on a nation's political structures. This function of free media is visibly disturbed by totalitarian regimes. In our case, this applies to the Estonian *Rahva Hääl* (1940-1990) and the Russian *Pravda* (until the 1990s), (see also Kõnno et al. 2012; Lõhmus et al. 2011).

2) The portrayal of the future contained an ideological dimension, especially in the case of "building the bright future of Communism." This, in turn, created an additional textual genre specific to Soviet journalism (the "Soviet feature").

3) Under the conditions of a free and democratic society, the portrayal of the future tended to be ambivalent. This can be seen in the case of Finland throughout the 20thcentury and also in the Estonian case at the very beginning of the century and in the last decades of the century. Ambivalence in the portrayal of the future at the end of the 20th century was also evident in the case of Russian journalism. According to the results of our empirical research, we conclude that only under the conditions of democracy is the media system able to construct and represent several variants of future perspectives. And this is the only way to provoke readers

to think about the alternatives available in their everyday lives. The presence of a multifaceted future is a critical dimension of free media.

Our research has proven the fruitfulness of comparative research in explaining the phenomena of the relationships between daily newspapers' content and society.

4) Through examining the topics, we observed that one of the major functions of the publications was to model the future (Lõhmus et al. 2011); in this sense, we see that the themes and topics became instruments for future-directed questions and tendencies. Renewal and constantly changing dynamics indicated that the trend through seemingly the same topics was to continually construct new directions in changing circumstances. Philosophically, we dare to claim that the more general function of journalistic outlets is *to model the future;* the future, in a constant state of being created, is associated with and arises through strong interpretation, through self-regulation processes, where a movement forward takes place (compare Luhmann). The results from our previous study comparing the dynamics of the presence in the foreground of the past and future reinforce these assumptions (Lõhmus et al. 2011). We cannot affirm our claims with empirical data, but we assume this possibility from the general picture based on a complex analysis of time-dimensional indicators.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the *Helsingin Sanomat* Foundation, and by the Estonian Scientific Foundation grants No SF0180017s07, ETF9121, ETF5854, ETF8329.

Note:

1. It was important that the daily newspapers selected for our sample were published throughout the century and had the status of "major" newspapers. The Estonian *Eesti Päevaleht* ("Estonian Daily") started to appear in 1906 and it was included in our sample until the last year of the Republic of Estonia (1940). After the war, Rahva Hääl was considered to have the highest priority in the local mediascape (published 1940-1995). It was the publication of the Communist Party. Nowadays, the largest (non-tabloid) daily is Postimees, but it was not selected due to the fact that in the Soviet period it was a local paper with a limited publication area.

In Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat* has the largest circulation in all the Nordic countries and is the only Finnish newspaper that can actually claim to be national (Salokangas 1999; World Press Trends 2009). Although Finnish media researchers have indicated the fact that Helsingin Sanomat cannot be taken as a "representation of Finnishness," it is without doubt the most important daily newspaper in Finland.

In Russia, *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* both can be treated as central dailies in Russia in the 20th century, both being established in 1917. *Pravda* was the official paper of the Communist Party (nowadays, the printed paper reflects a pro-communist attitude), while Izvestiya represented the ideas of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and thus had a narrower basis of represented ideas. This was the primary reason that we chose *Izvestiya* for our analysis.

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