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**Transformation of media structures and media content.
A diachronic analysis of five Western European countries**

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the transformation of media structures and possible effects on public communication from 1960 to 2008. To build a basis for the evaluation of trends and situations in the various models of media and politics (Hallin/Mancini 2004), this paper will systematically analyze and compare the cases of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland (democratic-corporatist), Great Britain (liberal) and France (polarized-pluralist), by classifying media suppliers and media supply with an etic approach. By this, we can show the large (but not necessarily linear) transformation of media structures: differentiation of the press from its former political and social ties, more press concentration and generally more tabloidization. Against the background of increasingly commercialized media systems, this paper looks at possible effects on media content and presents indicators and first results of a content analysis.

1. Introduction

The content and the quality of the media depend on the structures in which they are embedded (Altmeyden 2006; Giddens 1992). These structures have decisively changed in the last decades in several European countries. These structural transformations include, among others, the sudden rise of free dailies, which threaten to surpass both in circulation and advertising revenue the quality papers and 'traditional' tabloids (Bakker/Seethaler 2009), and the financial basis of the quality papers, which tends to shift away from culturally 'embedded' towards anonymous capital (Habermas 2007) and which heightens (stakeholders' and management's) expectations in short-term economic success (Jarren/Zwicky 2008). The television sector also undergoes remarkable transformations. The rise of local and regional broadcasters and the comprehensive digitalization of broadcasting and receiving put public service broadcasting (PSB) under pressure (Lucht 2006). In Switzerland, for instance, a revised law now diverts some of the public funding for the PSB *SRG SSR idée suisse* to private broadcasters. Critics argue that this will increase the pressure on PSB and lower the quality of its programming output (even more). In Germany as well, PSB is heavily involved in a quality and financing debate, which directs high public attention.

Research analyzing both media structures and media content does not provide a coherent picture. Especially in a trans-national perspective, theoretically sophisticated models and assumptions are not always provided with necessary empirical evidence from media content (cf. Voltmer 2000), or studies focus on one national media system only, or only on one point in time. But in order to evaluate these trends – whether diagnosed or feared – one would require an empirical comparative basis, both in a diachronic and a cross-country perspective.

This is one of the main objectives of this paper.¹ On a theoretical and empirical level, we will focus on the transformation of media structures from 1960 to 2008. On the basis of an overarching concept of the dimensions and possible effects of mediatization (Imhof 2006), Udris and Lucht (2009) have captured media structures in three sample countries – Austria, Germany, and Switzerland – within the democratic-corporatist model of media and politics (Hallin/Mancini 2004). Going one step further, we expand the range of models by including the liberal and the pluralist-polarized model (represented by France and Great Britain, respectively) as well to check whether, first on the level of structures, these models are distinct in this respect and, second, how they could contribute to the changing media content (2). These results reflect the degree of the differentiation of the press from its former political and social ties, the degree of press concentration, and the type of press and television

¹ This paper mainly draws on findings from the project "Democracy in a media society", which is part of the National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) "Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century", funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

supply; they are presented in (3). A second objective of this paper thus is to link the structural and the content side of the media. We expect the transforming media structures to have an impact on political communication in the (news) media (4). On the basis of the hypotheses, we present results of a content analysis (5). On that basis, conclusions are drawn (6).

2. Capturing media structures in a diachronic and cross-country perspective

When evaluating phenomena in political communication, using a comparative approach – both in a spatial and a temporal dimension – is necessary. Systematic analyses of the situations in various countries and over time allow making (or revising) classifications and typologies, which again facilitates the building of hypotheses and theories (cf. Thomaß 2007). Taken together, the combination of a synchronous and diachronic comparison of media systems or media structures in several sample countries gives further answers as to whether the “structural transformation of the public sphere” (Habermas 1989) or rather the “new” or “second” structural transformation of the public sphere (Imhof 2006) is similarly marked in the various countries, has started at the same time and is going into similar directions.

The momentarily most influential and sophisticated attempt to classify and typify media systems, which are affected by the structural transformation of the public sphere to a (yet) varying degree, has been made by Hallin/Mancini (2004). In three “models of media and politics”, Hallin and Mancini distinguish among a liberal, a polarized-pluralist and a democratic-corporatist model, the characteristics of which have been summarized in various studies and articles (e.g. Wessler 2008; Brants/van Praag 2006) and which we thus do not need to repeat at this point. We choose five European countries; for the liberal model Great Britain, and for the polarized-pluralist model, we include France. For the democratic-corporatist model, we choose Germany. Furthermore, we opted to capture two small states – Austria and Switzerland (both democratic-corporatist) – because we assume that the ‘smallness’ of the according media markets in comparison to the big states has effects both on media structures (e.g. media use heavily oriented towards the “next door giant”, cf. Tunstall 2008: 261ff.) and – possibly – on media content.

Against the background of this analytical classification, by comparing three countries within the democratic-corporatist model – Austria, Germany, and Switzerland – we can first check the homo- or heterogeneity of this (ideal type) model. Second, should our analysis support the homogeneity of this model, thus making these three countries ‘most similar’ in this respect, and should then media content differ among these three countries, then this would indicate a stronger influence of factors outside of media structures, such as the degree of

polarization, political culture, small state versus big state etc. Third, by analyzing also one country each from the other two models – France representing the polarized-pluralist model, Great Britain the liberal model – we can add further evidence as to whether media content is converging in all three models or whether media structure or political structures basically result in largely different media content. Does the polarized-pluralist model, to give one example, really favor a higher degree of ‘personalization’ than do media systems in the consensus-oriented democratic-corporatist model?

Along with this spatial comparison, we ask when and to what extent media structures have been transforming over time and which phases can be distinguished. Following Strömbäck (2008), we try to find several phases of “mediatization”, which includes not only changed media content and logics in the relation of media and politicians (media logic versus political logic) but also the structural embedding of the media, for example the (organization) link of the media to political actors. Specifically for the democratic-corporatist model, Brants/van Praag (2006) propose three phases of mediatization for the case of the Netherlands after the Second World War, connecting the phases to three distinct logics of political communication. Political communication before the 1970s was, according to the authors, shaped by “partisan logic”, between 1970 and 1990 by “public logic” and after 1990 by “media logic”. The basis of these types of logic and the three phases are – apart from journalistic role models and social differentiation processes (e.g. declining pillarization) – specific media structures, including the degree of differentiation of the media from political actors and milieus, the importance of PSB and the degree of commercialization. In order to cover the postulated phases, we analyze media structures in the years 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2005, and 2008.

As for the objects of our analysis, we understand by media structures a set of elements (actors such as media firms, associations as well as specific political and social actors; subsystems such as the press system) and their relations and differentiations (interactions; rules and resources, e.g. regarding media regulation or competition-relevant characteristics) (Jarren 2003: 20). With regard to media structures, our goal is to empirically capture for each sample country the most important suppliers and supply in the area of political communication and to analyze them against the background of specific relations. Precisely, we capture press outlets (dailies, weeklies and magazines) and television programs that fulfill the criteria “universal content” (not addressed at a specific audience) (cf. Wilke 2004: 450f.), regular and event-oriented publication dates (at least once a week) as well as the existence of a political focus.² We thus focus on a mass media arena which shapes the perception and

² The criterion ‘political focus’ is necessary so we can exclude outlets and programs that include ‘public’ issues which are not addressed at a specific audience but which do not include links to the political system (e.g. “Help, our children are too fat!”). The political public sphere or “policy sphere” on the other hand, as Bennett and Entman argue (2001: 4), is “that subset of public sphere where ideas

interpretation of current processes and events in a given society. This mass media arena is a crucial forum of society-wide and political communication in modern democratic societies (cf. Kamber/Ettinger 2008).

The postulated transformation of media structures has effects in several dimensions of media and social (de-)differentiation (Imhof 2006; Imhof 2008). In a *functional* dimension, the media become 'disembedded' (Giddens 1992) and sever their former ties to political and other intermediary actors. In this process, they build novel logics of selection, interpretation and portrayal which, as the importance of the media in society keeps growing, puts pressure on political (and economic) actors to adapt to these media logics (mediatization effects). In the *stratificatory* dimension, which a large part of the literature on media systems neglects (for a notable exception see Hallin/Mancini 2004: 82ff.), specific effects of national and international concentration processes in the media sector can be expected (Siegert et al. 2005). Other trends include the growing dominance of certain media formats and types, the worldwide hierarchy of 'leading' or referential media especially during key events (e.g. the postulated 'CNN effect', cf. Livingston 1997), the adaptation of the political system to quasi-plebiscitary power of the media (e.g. parliament reacting – even if only symbolically – to tabloid campaigns; cf. Walgrave/van Aelst 2006), the substitution of traditional socialization institutions with the media that focus on life styles and scenes, and the growing relations of inequality, as both media supply and media use become more differentiated and fragmented along economic, social and cultural capital (phenomena such as 'knowledge gap', 'digital divide', 'media malaise'; cf. Curran et al. 2009). In the *segmentary* dimension, political domains become disentangled from those reached and covered by the media; thus, the de-nationalization of politics and economy does not find its equivalent in media structures and media content. This applies on the national level, as it creates political institutions 'without' a public sphere in local areas that are – from an economic perspective – not interesting to media firms, and it creates 'new' areas that are not compatible with politically defined domains and (internal) borders (e.g. across states). On a European level, we can see the opposite: political institutions of the European Union are only the kaleidoscope of references tied to the nation-state (Gerhards 1993: 96-110). This means that links between political domain, public sphere and identity, which would be necessary from a democracy-theory point of view, are weak at best (cf. Lucht/Tréfás 2010). In principle, all these differentiation dimensions have to be considered to get a comprehensive account of the structural transformation of the public sphere. In view of such a huge research endeavor, we pragmatically focus on the functional and stratificatory dimension.

and feelings explicitly connect with - are communicated to, from, or about - government officials, parties, or candidates for office who may decide the outcomes of issues and conflicts facing society."

Regarding the functional differentiation and relying on one indicator of “party-press parallelism” (Seymour-Ure 1974) or “media-party parallelism” (van Kempen 2007),³ we analyze the differentiation of the media from their former social and political ties by capturing and categorizing the structure of media suppliers. We distinguish public service suppliers (e.g. PSB, “*Amtsblatt*”), intermediary actors (e.g. parties, churches, associations) and economic actors (media organizations) which have almost completely lost their ties to political and intermediary actors. We expect different types of (selection and interpretation) logics and orientations (citizens or consumers as the targeted audience) depending on the type of suppliers (e.g. a stronger “market orientation” for media outlets supplied by economic actors than by intermediary actors, cf. also Beam 2003). The basis for this classification is: the declaration of the media outlet or program itself (e.g. declaration as “official organ of XY”), the organizational links (e.g. chief editors acting as members of parliament) as well as the form (e.g. publicly traded organization, cooperative, public-service institution) of the supplier that produces or publishes this media.

Along with this analysis of the functional dimension of differentiation, we also capture the *stratificatory* dimension of differentiation (cf. Hallin/Mancini 2004; Imhof 2006) focusing on the *dominance* (or power) of media suppliers (e.g. question of media concentration) and media supply (e.g. question of dominance of certain media types). We capture press concentration by calculating the share (in terms of circulation) of the largest five press suppliers within the thirty largest press outlets. Media supply is differentiated into (1) popular/tabloid press, (2) forum/mid-market press or (3) quality press. Television programs are categorized into (1) soft news, (2) mixed, or (3) hard news. In doing so, we do not rely on existing typologies which apply different ‘quality’ standards in and to different countries (emic approach), but base our categorization of tabloid, forum and quality media on an etic approach and indicators (e.g. extent of political coverage, differentiation of sections, existence of a section devoted to broad cultural and social issues as in the *Feuilleton*) and own archive work. This approach is led by the questions about the degree of covering public (versus private) issues and politics (Sparks 2000). Media that focus almost exclusively on publically relevant questions and that systematically cover events and processes connected

³ Van Kempen (2007) distinguishes four levels where the “media-party parallelism” is manifest: media content; ownership structure of the media; affiliations / role models of journalists, owners and editors; structure of the readership. In view of the high costs and time efforts involved in a cross-country analysis on the first three levels, she argues for an analysis on the fourth level (structure of readership). With our approach, we try to take into account at least two levels. Media content is checked with content analyses (cf. below). Ownership structures of the media are – despite the efforts – systematically captured. Data on affiliations / role models and on the structure of the readership would be available for the present but not for a diachronic analysis. This is why those two levels can be taken into account only partially.

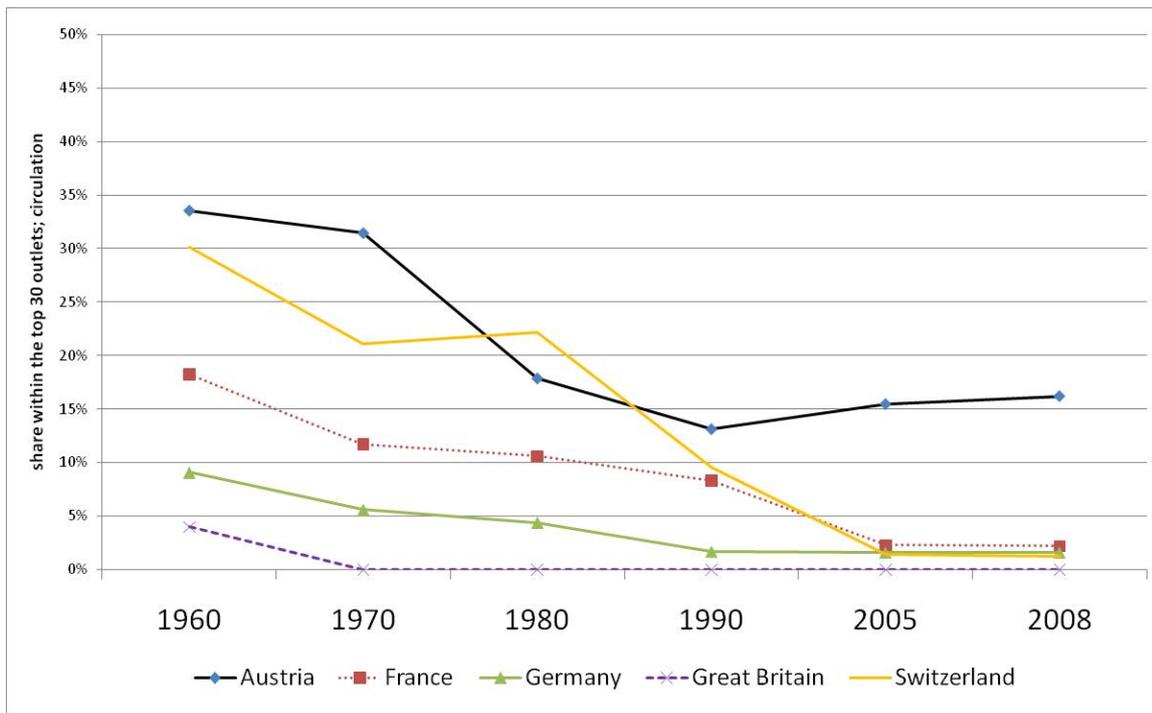
to the political and/or economic system have to be clearly separated from those media that focus on private matters and offer mostly sports, scandals and entertainment.⁴

3. Transformation of media structures

How have media structures been changing since the 1960s? Figure 1 shows the development of the structure of suppliers of the thirty largest general interest titles with a political focus in Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain and Switzerland.

⁴ The differentiation of the press types into tabloid, forum and quality is first made with a look at the structure of the sections (*Rubriken*). In a first step, tabloids can be separated from forum and quality papers. Forum/mid-market outlets, like quality papers, have differentiated editorial structures and *sections* regarding politics (e.g. national news, international news) and economy (e.g. trade, companies, stock markets), and they display a multifaceted cultural section which is more than just a counselling section or merely a calendar of events but in-depth coverage of events and processes from the areas of culture, entertainment *and* science and religion. Quality papers in addition to forum papers have a classical “feuilleton” and provide special sections and supplements that are not devoted to ‘lifestyle’ issues (e.g. fashion, travel) but that largely deal with the “structural changes in the world” (Sparks 2000). Examples of quality papers are *Le Monde* in France, the *Zeit* in Germany, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in Switzerland, the *Observer* in Great Britain or *Die Presse* in Austria, while forum papers resemble the German-speaking *Generalanzeiger* and the British ‘mid-market’ paper, including titles such as *Ouest France* or *Sud Ouest* (France), *Wolverhampton Express & Star* (at least for the 1960s but not for the present), *The Daily Mail* (Great Britain), *Westdeutsche Allgemeine*, *Sächsische Zeitung* or *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* (Germany), *Kurier*, *Kleine Zeitung* oder *Tiroler Tageszeitung* (Austria; but also *Standard*, which is not a quality paper according to our criteria), *Tages-Anzeiger*, *Tribune de Genève* or *Thurgauer Zeitung* (Switzerland). “Popular” or tabloid media, finally, often mingle politics and economy with private issues and human interest issues, and formally, they often lack differentiated structures and *Rubriken* or sections. Examples of tabloids are *Bild* or *Express* in Germany, *Blick* or *20 Minuten* in Switzerland, *Kronenzeitung* in Austria, *Daily Mirror* or, recently, the *Wolverhampton Express & Star* in Great Britain or *Le Parisien* in France. For television, we opted for a terminology different from the press because of the large differences in format. Hard news programs focus heavily on politics and economy and public matters (e.g. *ARD Tagesschau*, *ORF Zeit im Bild*, *SF Arena*); soft news tend to focus on human interest issues, often combined with private affairs (cf. also Patterson 2000). Programs which in addition to politics systematically include also the coverage of spheres other than politics and economy (e.g. sports, culture, religion) at the expense of the latter are classified as “mixed” (e.g. *WDR Weltspiegel*, *ORF Bundesland Heute*, *SF Schweiz Aktuell*), also those that include a combination of both hard news and soft news (e.g. news programs of private broadcasters).

Figure 1: Role of intermediary press suppliers in a diachronic perspective⁵



The analysis clearly shows the process of ‘disembedding’ of the press, most strikingly in the press systems of the democratic-corporatist model. Especially in Germany and Switzerland, the press has disentangled itself from their former social and political ties (intermediary), as suppliers now almost exclusively are commercial enterprises (economic). In Austria, the same process can be observed but stronger structural intermediary links remain than in Germany or Switzerland. Still, while about one third of the calculated circulation is bound to intermediary actors in 1960 (Germany: around 10%; Switzerland: around 30%), this share drops especially by 1980 to 20% (Germany: 4%; Switzerland: 23%) and, during the 1990s and 2000s, to 15% (Austria) and around 2% (Switzerland and Germany), respectively.

This decline represents the following phenomena (only with regard to the media supply and their suppliers):

First, media suppliers have been stripping off their intermediary connections, transforming themselves to purely ‘economic’ (media) organizations, if not big media firms. In Switzerland, for instance, the *St. Galler Tagblatt* until the 1990s declared itself as a ‘bourgeois-liberal’

⁵ Basis: thirty largest dailies, weeklies and magazines with a political focus in Austria (2006 instead of 2005), France, Germany, Great Britain, and Switzerland. Sources: *Österreichische Auflagenkontrolle, Pressehandbuch, Handbuch Österreichs Presse, Werbung, Grafik*, Melischek/Seethaler (1999) (Austria), *Stamm Leitfaden für Presse und Werbung, Presse- und Medienhandbuch Stamm, IVW Quartalsauflage* (Germany), *Répertoire de la presse française, Association pour le contrôle de la diffusion des médias (OJD)* (France), *The Newspaper press directory and advertisers' guide* (and subsequent publications by Benn's Brothers, based on circulation data from ABC), Seymour-Ure (1996), www.abc.org.uk, www.newspapersoc.org.uk (Great Britain), *Schweizerischer Zeitungstarif, WEMF Auflagebulletin, Impressum* (Switzerland), own calculations.

paper leaning towards the *Liberal Democrats* (comparable to the FDP in Germany); in the meantime, these connections have largely disappeared, also in view of the financial investment of the larger *NZZ* group. *Second*, it is the circulation of these 'intermediary' outlets that has been sinking more than (if at all) has the circulation of those outlets published by economic actors. The social-democratic *AZ (Arbeiterzeitung)* in Austria, for instance, reduced its circulation from 1960 to 1980 by one quarter. At the same time, the *Kronenzeitung* saw a massive increase in circulation, from around 100,000 in the beginning of the 1960s to almost 900,000 in 1980. *Third*, formerly important intermediary newspapers and magazines stopped being published in this process. Both the *Arbeiterzeitung* in Austria and the catholic-conservative *Vaterland* ceased in 1991.

Taking a closer look within the democratic-corporatist model, two points stand out. *First*, the process of differentiation starts much later in the small states within the democratic-corporatist model and then also much faster as in Germany, which in this respect shows more similarities with the 'liberal' model. Some reasons are obviously the market size (economies of scale), which in Germany after the "zero hour" ("Stunde Null") right after World War II allowed a diversified and financially potent press system to build up faster than in Austria. The structures of a small state have constrained a fast transformation of intermediary media suppliers into purely commercial enterprises. Furthermore, both in Austria and Switzerland, pillarization remained longer than in Germany, thus contributing to the important role of the party press (and vice versa). *Second*: Looking at the current situation, it is not Germany but Austria that is the 'outlier' to a certain extent. Especially in Germany but also in Switzerland almost all media suppliers are commercial enterprises. Dailies such as the *Neue Westfälische*, in which the *Social Democratic Party* invests financially, or the Sunday paper *Il Mattino della domenica*, published by the right-wing populist *Lega dei Ticinesi*, are clear exceptions. The 'political parallelism' of the Austrian press is slightly more visible on the level of structures, which the example of *Styria Medien*, financed by the *Katholische Medienverein* of the *Diocese* of Graz (intermediary actor) reflects (for this case, see also Seethaler/Melischek 2006).

Compared to the democratic-corporatist model, the differentiation of the press in the liberal model also starts much earlier. In our data, Great Britain only had a (weak) intermediary press in 1960, with economically shaped suppliers dominating the press market ever since. In 1960, the *Reynolds News/Sunday Citizen* (connected to the Labor Party), the *Daily Herald* (belonging to a substantial degree to the *Trades Union Council*) and the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (declared conservative paper) make up less than 5% of the calculated circulation. Soon afterwards, they saw sinking circulation rates (as did the Communist *Morning Star*) and/or ceased publication while outlets by commercial enterprises become even more important. This is not to deny certain remaining forms of 'political parallelism' on the level of the

audience (van Kempen 2007) and also of content, but on a structural side, intermediary links have mostly disappeared. This is also reflected by the fact that suppliers (and their papers) are neither 'embedded' in social milieu nor follow any party lines but tend to switch sides whenever it appears to be beneficial for "commercial reasons" (Kuhn 2007: 217-218), as the famous example of the *The Sun* in the 1990s shows.

The polarized-pluralist model, as represented by France in our data, provides a more ambivalent picture. Generally, France has seen a disembedding of the press in the period we examined, largely because of falling circulation rates of intermediary titles (*L'Humanité*, the organ of the Communist Party, or the Christian-conservative *La Croix*) which lost significance in comparison to (new) titles supplied by commercial enterprises. More recently, however, a (perhaps temporary?) lack of differentiation from political actors can be observed. This is mainly due to the political involvement of Serge Dassault, who has been both controlling *SOC Presse* (publishing *Le Figaro*, for example) since 2004 and acting as a mayor in Corbeil-Essonnes and a Senator for the bourgeois *RMP* and later *UMP*, respectively. This involvement, however, differs from a stable 'embedding' of the media in a social milieu since it is largely focused on the main owner, who furthermore plays more the role of a businessman and media tycoon than *homme politique*.

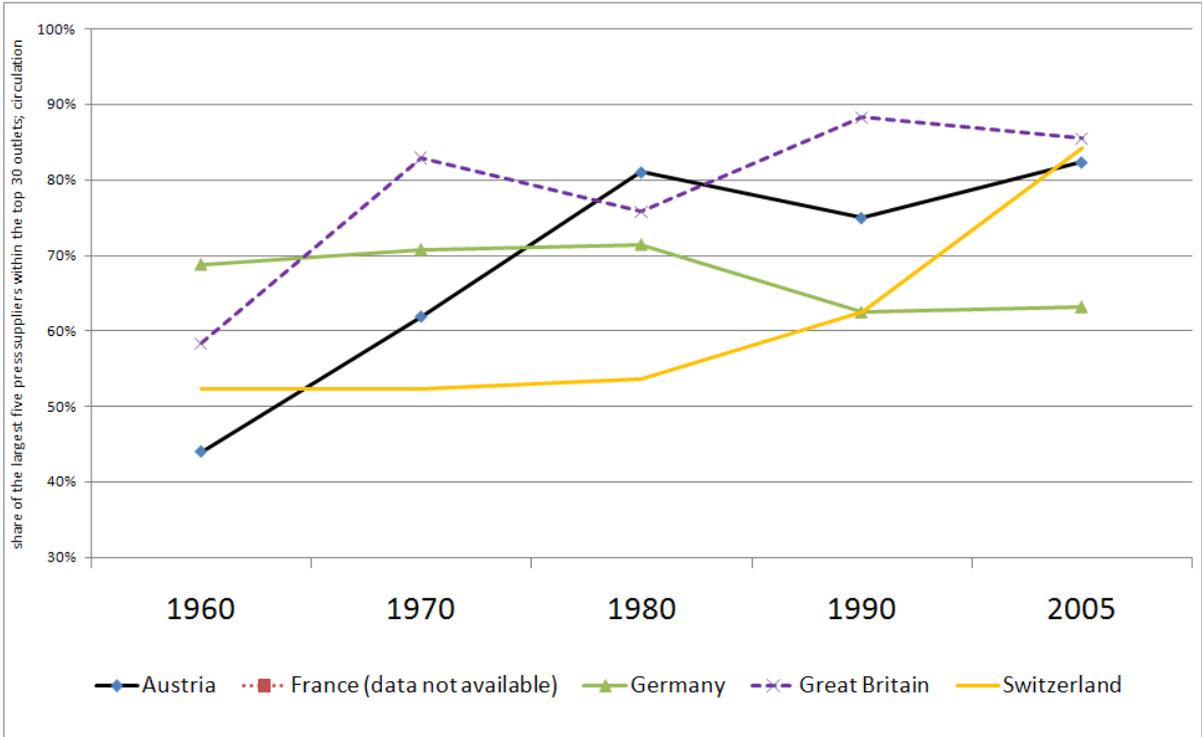
Parallel to the growing differentiation of the media from its political and intermediary environments, there is reason to assume that the public sphere is challenged (if not "colonized") by market imperatives (Habermas 2006: 420-422). Two possible indicators of this are a growing media concentration and a growing significance of the tabloid media (which typically are targeted at large audiences to generate the revenue). Both are supported with our data.

Press concentration is high in the four countries for which we have managed to get the data. In 2005 (2006 for Austria, respectively), the share of the largest five press suppliers within the thirty largest outlets is 63% for Germany, 82% for Austria, 84% for Switzerland and 85% for Great Britain (see Figure 2).⁶ The media firm *Axel Springer Verlag* alone contributes 39% to the calculated press circulation in Germany. In Switzerland, *Tamedia* (which owns *20 Minuten*, *Tages-Anzeiger*, *Sonntagszeitung*, *Facts*, *Thurgauer Zeitung*) makes up 29%, *Ringier* and *Edipresse* 19% each. The Austrian press is heavily dominated by the *Krone Verlag* (40%), the (German) *G + J Holding* (18%) and *Styria Medien* (13%). Concentration is accentuated by the fact that both the *Kronenzeitung* and the *Kurier* (belonging to G + J

⁶ In order to have a coherent sample, we only took into account those outlets of a press supplier that was also part of the thirty largest outlets in a country in a given year. Of course, this analysis can only partially say something about 'opinion dominance' because, first, it neither includes all press outlets nor other media products (e.g. radio station) by a media supplier and, second, it cannot do justice to the problem of possible complementary use of different types of media and possible overlap of the readership (cf. Kepplinger 2007).

Holding) partially belong to the German *WAZ* group and together finance the print company *Mediaprint*. Similar to the findings above, the process of concentration starts much later in the small states Switzerland and Austria than in Germany where concentration ‘waves’ had started before the 1960s and where – with regard to the sample – press concentration did not rise as fast (in contrast to media-diagonal concentration).⁷ In Austria, the concentration process as seen in the data is due to the massive success of the *Kronenzeitung* (Seethaler/Melischek 2006) in Austria and to the buy-up and launching of free dailies in Switzerland recently. The press in Great Britain has seen a marked process of concentration also and is currently dominated by *News International* and *Associated Newspapers*, which make up more than 50% of the calculation in our sample in 2005.

Figure 2: Degree of press concentration⁸



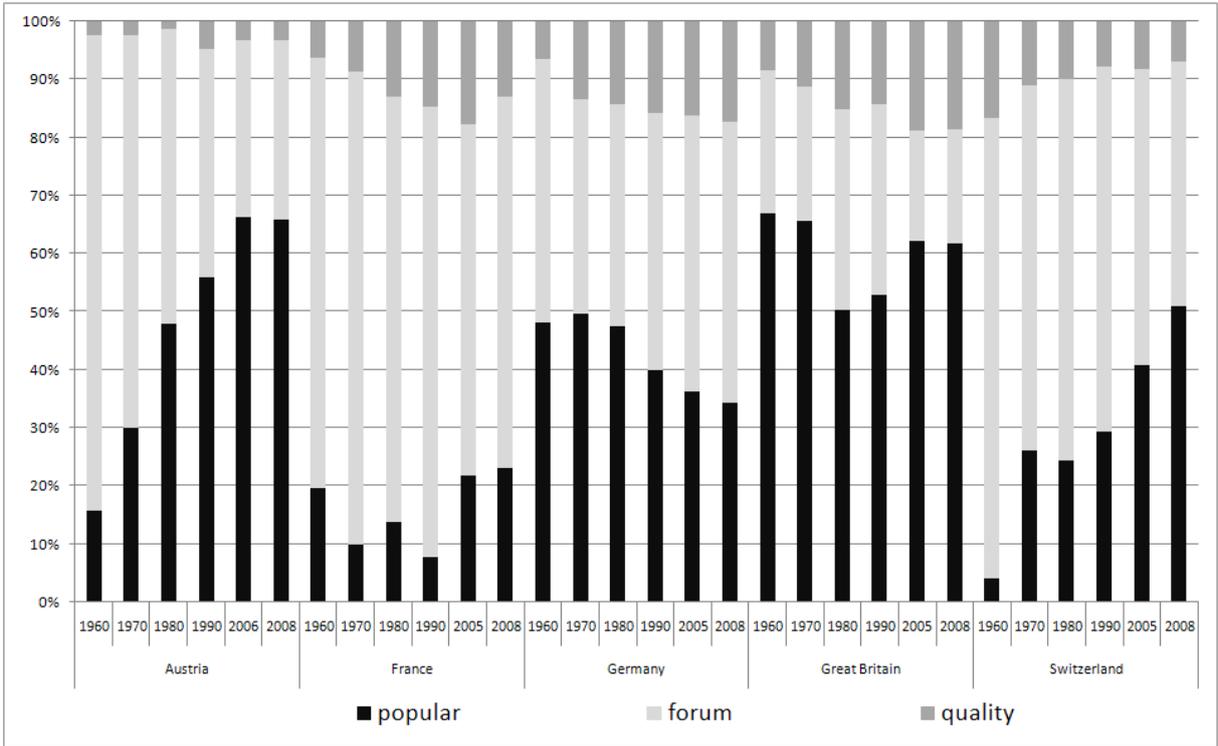
The (growing) press concentration we can see in our data often stands in tandem with a (growing) supply of the popular/tabloid press (Figure 3), together indicating the economization of the press. A strong “tabloid sector” can be seen in Austria and Great Britain, whereas the popular press plays a slightly smaller role in Germany and Switzerland

⁷ One has to consider that Germany’s re-unification in 1990 suddenly meant a higher number of different newspapers and suppliers (Wilke 1999, 20). Soon afterwards, however, with the cooperation and take-overs of Eastern German press suppliers, press concentration again rises.

⁸ Basis: see footnote 5.

(according to circulation rates) and a significantly smaller role in France (cf. also Adam/Berkel 2006). What is crucial, however, is the development of the popular press in the course of time. Here, the small countries within the democratic-corporatist model (Austria, Switzerland) both experience a tremendous growth of the popular press. The rise of the tabloids starts late but fast. Whereas the German press was more ‘disembedded’ and had several high-circulation tabloids (*Neue Bildpost, Hamburger Morgenpost, Bild, Bild am Sonntag, BZ*) already in 1960, the small, press markets of Austria and Switzerland were shaped by newspapers that neither reached the level of sophistication of high-quality papers nor would target a broadest readership possible with tabloid-like elements. But in the process of the erosion of the party press, tabloids rise in importance in Austria and (later) in Switzerland. These tabloids seem to have attracted both the readership of the party press and new audiences. And even if today the ‘traditional’ tabloids have serious problems keeping high circulation rates, the new free dailies with their tabloidized content and style contribute to an overall growing tabloid sector.

Figure 3: Type of press supply⁹



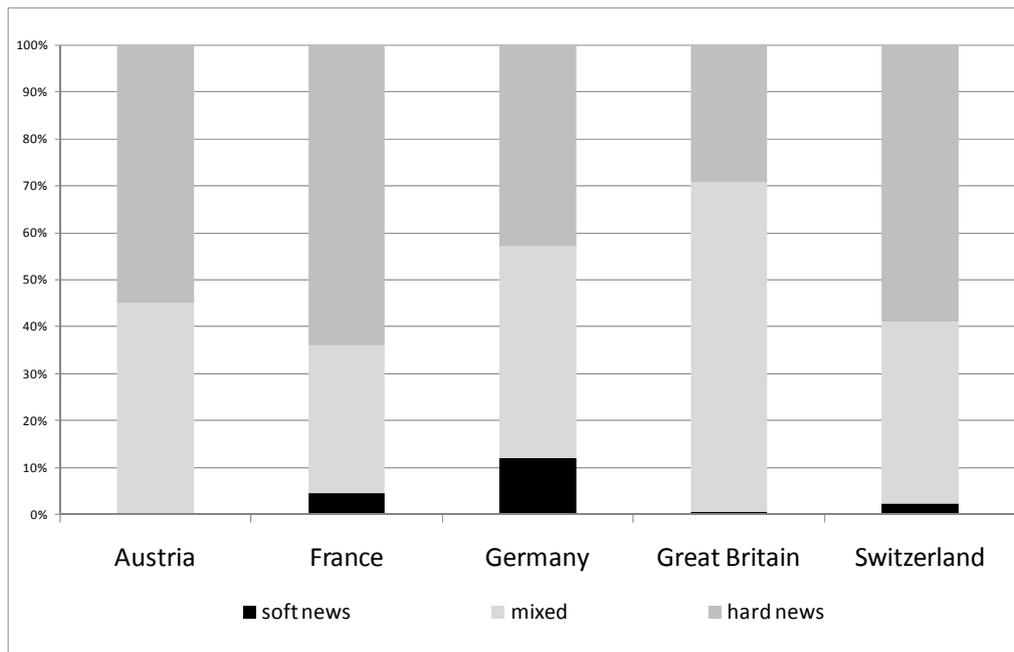
In Germany, on the other hand, the press market was commercialized sooner, which has aggravated the rise of additional popular papers – but not the rise of popular, tabloidized (news) programs on television. Also, it is worth mentioning that regional and national

⁹ Basis: see footnote 5.

newspapers that neither act as popular nor high-quality papers (e.g. *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*) still play an important role. Great Britain's press market no doubt is heavily tabloidized, with popular papers making up more than half of the calculated circulation. In this respect, it reflects a commercialized press system. However, a result worth emphasizing is the fact that, similar to Germany, the development of the popular press is far from being linear (cf. also Kuhn 2007; McNair 2003). Popular papers contributed around two thirds to the calculated circulation in 1960 already, but this share dropped significantly by 1980, only to slightly increase again by 2005. What we do see are tendencies of a growing "polarization between prestige and mass newspapers" (Curran 2000: 128), with the quality press making up a – somewhat – significant share of around 20% in 2008, not much less than the 'middle-market' papers. The press system of France, finally, turns out to be comparably stable, if we only look at the supply of popular, forum or quality outlets. The French press is dominated by 'mid-market' papers with a regional focus, with popular papers gaining some ground.

All these results have to be reflected against changes in the television sector. Here, those types of 'soft news' programs gain importance which only partially cover 'hard news' any longer. True, the extraordinary role of public service broadcasting – comparably favorable financing models and (legal) expectations in program content – are reflected in the dominance of 'hard news' programs within the thirty largest news and current affairs programs (Figure 4). These shows in Great Britain reflect a slightly different concept of information and display clearly more elements of human interest and emotionalizing, thus resulting in a higher number of programs that could be categorized as a mixture of 'soft news' and 'hard news'.

Figure 4: Type of supply (television) in 2005¹⁰



But as regards the development over time, our preliminary results suggest a growing ‘tabloidization’ at the expense of clear hard news formats in all sample countries. This is mainly due to the successful ‘dualization’ of broadcasting in Germany and France (already in the 1980s) and in Austria and Switzerland (mainly in radio in the 1980s and – on the level of national private TV broadcasting – much later). In France, (new) programs with a mixture of hard and soft news have increased (e.g. *La Matinale* on *Canal+*). Established hard news programs in Great Britain especially in the course of the 1990s suffered massive losses in audience (Aalberg et al. 2010: 265), partly because of confusing time slot rescheduling and market fragmentation (McNair 2003). Of course, there also is supply in high-quality programming, especially on small channels (e.g. *ARTE* or *Phoenix* in Germany) – but largely ignored. Overall, both the tabloidized supply provided by new private broadcasters as well as the changed program content of PSB contribute to a growing number of ‘soft news’ or ‘mixed’ programs which actually *are* watched by large audiences.

To briefly summarize the findings, we can observe a growing differentiation of the press from its former political and social ties. At the same time, we observe a growing commercialization; this is reflected in an overall growing press concentration (reflecting a strategy to reduce uncertainty in complex markets) and in an overall increase of tabloid

¹⁰ Basis: Thirty largest (if there are that many) news and current affairs programs in 2005 that each reach at least 0.5% of the population, average number of viewers. Sources: Eurodata TV / AGTT / GfK Teletest (Austria), Eurodata TV / Mediamétrie (France), Eurodata TV / AGF / GfK Teletest (Germany), TNS Global (Great Britain), SRG SSR Forschungsdienst, Public Data (Switzerland).

outlets and TV programs that only partially focus on hard news. This process explains best the developments within the democratic-corporatist model and the liberal model (with qualifications). What is noteworthy is the fact that the small states within the democratic-corporatist model experience changes later but more rapidly – and more so in the press sector. Germany shares more similarities with the liberal model and Great Britain in seeing changes in the press market much earlier, followed by less rapid transformations, and in seeing more fundamental changes in the television sector. France, representing the polarized-pluralist model, turns out to be the most complex case, as developments in the press market are on the one hand similar to the other two models but on the other hand strongly mediated (or even ‘offset’) by the strong ties between media and politics recently (but rather reflecting instrumentalization than cultural embedding); the television sector, on the other hand, has seen the advent of programs mixing ‘hard’ and ‘soft news’, but still accounts for most hard news programs.

4. *Effects on political communication*

The crucial question resulting from these transformations of media structures is: how do these transformations affect the content of the media (if at all)? There is a number of voices in the literature arguing that the decline of the quality press (but see McNair 2003 or Norris 2000) and the changing media structures (negatively) affect media content (e.g. Picard 2008; Croteau/Hoynes 2001). Political communication (as reflected in news journalism) as a whole is said to be shaped by novel “media logic” (Strömbäck 2008; Strömbäck/Esser 2009). These changes include, among others, a shift from public to private affairs (Sparks 2000; Blöbaum 2008), a growing occurrence of scandals (cf. Chalaby 2004: 1194) and strategies of personalization and new chances of attention for those actors that adapt to the media logics (Kepplinger 1998; Imhof 2003).

However, the connection between ‘structure’ and ‘culture’ is highly complex and taps into the general question of the homo- or heterogeneity of the media (neo-institutionalist versus actor-centered approaches, cf. Cook 2006; Pfetsch/Adam 2008). To give one example: does concentration in media ownership automatically lead to changed media coverage, for example to ‘biased’ reporting or to more ‘repackaging’ or ‘recycling’ of news within one media firm? Or is it rather the dominance or success of certain media types (e.g. tabloids) that shapes media content (also) in other outlets because this shows a media supplier what actually attracts readers? Here, one could argue that the increase of tabloids leads to “spill-over” effects from the tabloid to the quality press (Esser 1999: 293). On the other hand,

certain quality outlets might just as well invest even more in quality, as a strategy to appear as highly distinct, which some PSB programs have done (Lucht 2006: 237-238; Lucht 2007: 21). But still, spill-over effects might be seen not necessarily in all aspects of a quality outlet; we could also expect a quality outlet both to offer more articles with background information and at the same time introducing new sections that would include tabloidized content (e.g. fashion, news-you-can-use etc.).

In order to shed light on these questions, we will check whether our overall expectations – derived from the commercialization of media structures – can be confirmed with content analyses. Generally, we expect an increasing focus on human interest issues and topics at the expense of political affairs, more active scandalizing by the media (and recurrence to scandals), increasing personalization and privatization of political actors and in the form of focusing on ordinary citizens, a shift from cognitive-rationalistic discourse to emotional-affective discourse (Blumler/Kavanagh 1999: 220-221), a rise of ‘episodic’ framing (e.g. horse-race journalism) at the expense of ‘thematic’ framing (e.g. Strömbäck/Dimitrova 2006) and an increase of “metacoverage” in the media (Esser/D’Angelo 2006), as the media as autonomous actors try to expose the strategic campaigning of political actors in the search for media attention. As for developments in the different countries we observed, we expect the general level to be highest in the liberal model (Great Britain) and moderate in the democratic-corporatist model, with Germany coming slightly closer to the liberal model in comparison with Austria and Switzerland. The polarized-pluralist model (France), will score lowest on most indicators but in view of the traditionally strong instrumentalization attempts by political actors, we might see higher rates of the personalization frame and the metacoverage frame. Finally, with regards to the time dimension, we expect the differences to be pronounced especially in the earlier phase of our examination (1960, 1980) but, in view of the late but rapid transformation of media structures in the small democratic-corporatist countries, differences between the liberal model and the democratic-corporatist model might have become smaller.

Often, the literature on changing media content and especially on changing campaigns by political actors focuses on elections, as they are heightened phases in the interplay of media and politics. Especially when interested in possible effects on how the media react to the increased activities of political actors and on how political actors adapt to the media in order to gain attention, scholars expect to find the most pronounced effects (cf. Donges 2008). However, elections are only one side of the story. We are rather interested in whether we can see changing media content also in “routine phases” of media and politics, also in view of a more participatory model of democracy that requires not only a “monitorial” citizen who would turn to politics only once in a while (Zaller 2003; for this point cf. Strömbäck 2005).

We therefore use artificial weeks and focus (on the issue/edition level) on the weight of sections and *Rubriken* and (on the article level) on the amount and style of reporting on current and political affairs (e.g. personalization, scandalization) as well as the range of topics and actors with one-week sampling (artificial weeks) for 1960, 1980, and 2005. By focusing on artificial weeks, we include more or less the 'routine phases' of politics and its coverage. To give justice to the different types of press supply we outlined above, we analyze one tabloid, one forum/mid-market and one quality paper each (e.g. in Austria: *Kronenzeitung*, *Kurier*, *Die Presse*). For this paper, however, we focus on one type of the press, namely forum or mid-market papers, which we hold especially under pressure from the transformation of media structures and where we expect the most notable changes over time (cf. above).

5. Findings and discussion

What are the results if we look at the indicators of possible media logic? These findings are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Transformation of media content in routine phases (selected indicators)¹¹

Indicator / Newspaper	1960	1980	2005
political focus per issue (in %)			
Ouest France	52%	52%	57%
Westdeutsche Allgemeine	47%	45%	48%
Tages-Anzeiger	48%	64%	48%
Kurier	N/A	57%	51%
Wolverhampton Express & Star	35%	30%	32%
Focus on political scandals (in brackets active scandalization by the media)			
Ouest France	0% (0%)	0% (0%)	11% (0%)
Westdeutsche Allgemeine	4% (0%)	9% (0%)	9% (2%)
Tages-Anzeiger	14% (0%)	0% (0%)	11% (3%)
Kurier	N/A	7% (0%)	16% (3%)
Wolverhampton Express & Star	7% (2%)	20% (0%)	27% (13%)
Personalization (in brackets without role focus)			
Ouest France	13% (11%)	21% (6%)	13% (13%)
Westdeutsche Allgemeine	25% (0%)	24% (1%)	24% (20%)
Tages-Anzeiger	20% (0%)	13% (11%)	25% (8%)
Kurier	N/A	19% (4%)	8% (6%)
Wolverhampton Express & Star	12% (5%)	10% (0%)	24% (20%)

¹¹ For the coding of the political focus (instead of human interest, for instance), we only took into account articles that were at least 10% the size of a page (including illustrations) (N1 = 2075). For the other indicators, we reduced the sample of political news coverage to those articles with political focus that were at least 20% the size of a page (N2 = 974). Basis: artificial week in 1960, 1980, 2005 for *Ouest France* (n = 169 articles with political focus of at least 20% the size of a page), *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (n = 215), *Tages-Anzeiger* (n = 302), *Kurier* (n = 143; no data for 1960), *Wolverhampton Express & Star* (n = 145). The shares for the indicators “scandalization” and “personalization” refer to the larger sample N1.

Our findings show an increase of political reporting in all sample countries, but only in absolute numbers (not depicted here). As for the potential political supply, there is more political news in the course of time. However, in relative terms, political news coverage does not increase overall. Political news coverage in the *WAZ*, for instance, takes up close to one half of all (longer) articles in our sample in 1960, 1980, and 2005. This is nearly the same for *Ouest France* and for the *Kurier*. The *Tages-Anzeiger* had a peak in 1980, reaching levels of quality papers (Udris/Lucht 2010) but remains close to the level of other mid-market papers in 1960 and 2005. The *Wolverhampton Express & Star* remains on a rather low level in political reporting with no significant changes over time. At least for the mid-market papers we examined, there so far has been no depoliticization of media content in the sense that only human interest and sport would now dominate these papers. As for country differences, we do see, along our expectations, the highest focus on politics in the polarized-pluralist model, where newspapers with their elite orientation follow more of a political logic, and the lowest in the liberal model.

Across the countries observed, political issues still play an important role. However, it is necessary to examine whether this (remaining) political news reporting itself has changed. Our findings suggest that the media increasingly devote their attention to *political scandals*. In the course of time, all sample countries show a slightly higher intensity of articles where the media focus on political scandals. Of course, this increase could also reflect the general level of political conflict in a country where political opponents regularly attack each other not only in order to find media attention but it is also plausible that the media turn to these scandals for their news values. In order to examine whether it is the media which takes an active role in scandalizing, which one could better interpret as a strategy to compete for the attention of consumer audiences, we captured these articles with the active role of the media separately. Here, the increase is moderate, although the liberal model again shows a clearer tendency towards this active scandalization. With some caution, one could interpret this as a result of the stronger competition among press outlets in Great Britain (Esser 1999; Curran et al. 2009: 8). Of course, since artificial weeks do not allow examining the real nature of political scandals, which typically take the form of news waves (Wolfsfeld/Sheafer 2006), these findings would need to be validated with case studies.

Our findings regarding the possible personalization of politics give an ambivalent picture. Generally, there is hardly an increase in the focus on persons instead of collectives, structures or issues. Some scholars have indeed shown that personalization as such is not a new phenomenon, and media content is not much more shaped with the personalization frame than before (e.g. Wilke/Reinemann 2001; Marcinkowski/Greger/Hünning 2001: 42ff.), especially if we consider the high level of personalization during political events of the Cold War (Lucht/Tréfás 2010). However, the personalization of politics in the sense that the media

would focus on the actions of two (or more) state representatives in their roles clearly should be differentiated from other types of personalization, such as when private matters about political actors enter media content (privatization as subform of personalization, cf. also Rahat/Sheafer 2007: 66-68). On the basis of the widely-found distinction between personalization with role focus and without role focus, Eisenegger (2009: 14ff.), for instance, developed a three-dimensional model that links personalization to the Habermasian theory of communicative action. All actors in modern societies are thematized and evaluated always with regards to three different references to the world, i.e. to the objective, social and subjective world (cf. Habermas 1984: 75ff.). These three references to the world are characterized by a specific logic. They follow the validity claims of cognitive truth, the normative legitimacy or correctness and the emotional attraction or authenticity. Personalization with role focus then means that a person is represented in the objective world, where evaluations and facts could be checked. This way, the media focus on whether a person uses the adequate means to reach a goal and fulfill the expectation towards that specific role. As a “player” of a role, the person stands in the background in comparison with processes and organizations.¹² Personalization without role focus mean representations where a person “embodies” a certain (ideological) viewpoint or an organization¹³ (social world) and thus overshadows the according structures, or where character traits, talents and gifts etc. or the private life and a person’s emotions are in focus (subjective world).

If we distinguish these types, we can see that personalization without role focus becomes slightly more common in the majority of the mid-market papers. This means, first, that political actors are increasingly portrayed with private aspects and, second, that also other actors (e.g. ordinary citizens) are given chances to voice their opinions in a relatively emotional mode of discourse.

All in all, our indicators suggest a slight transformation of media content, with political news coverage being increasingly (but not dramatically) shaped by media logic instead of political logic. In this sense, some of the mid-market papers we analyzed ‘resist’ to a certain extent the transformation of media structures that is clearly happening in all sample countries, whether in the press sector (most notably Austria and France) or in the television sector. Thus, our findings suggest that some of the expected effects on media content can be shown in routine phases of politics (artificial weeks), but they are moderated. Slight ‘spill-over’ effects, i.e. a higher propensity to tabloidized forms of journalism, occur most in the relatively commercialized liberal model, as expected (*Wolverhampton Express & Star*). It is here that

¹² Example: Reports on state visits where the actions of state representatives are in clear focus.

¹³ This would typically include, in the example of news coverage during the Cold War, reports where Nikita Khrushchov would be portrayed as the embodiment of the “evil” Soviet empire. Apart from this representation of the “Other”, we can also observe personalized portrayals of political leaders that signal hope.

the amount of political reporting is low, and the share of (active) scandalization and personalization is increasing.

In order to validate these findings from artificial weeks, we suggest taking into account another phase of political news coverage and examine the coverage of wars and crises. This has other advantages. First, war and crisis coverage could be considered an especially 'hard test', since some of the indicators seemingly expressing media logic are highly influenced by the specific character of wars and crises. In war and crisis coverage, the public sphere changes from passive to active mode, shown in an increased threat perception and in an increased intensity of public debate. Along with the polarization of arguments and positions (for or against war; siding with one of the two conflicting camps), we can regularly observe a problematization of the 'Other'. Thus, scandalization and personalization are regular phenomena in phases of war and crisis, if one thinks, for instance, of the particular media focus on Walter Ulbricht in media coverage of the Berlin crisis (building of the Berlin wall) in 1961. However, if we are interested in the transformation of media content, we can check whether scandalization and personalization increase in intensity and/or change in the course of time, from cognitive and normative scandalization to a more emotional scandalization and thus a less rational argumentation (Wessler 2008), from personalization with role focus to privatization, or whether the media are still able to expose possible instrumentalization attempts by political actors (e.g. war propaganda) through "metacoverage". Thus, should we find even slight shifts of these phenomena and frames in media content, we could interpret this as an indication for larger shifts in media content of other phases. Second, the focus on one type of issue and the according focus on the dynamics of the coverage allow checking who or what triggers and drives the news wave (Wolfsfeld/Sheafer 2006; Vasterman 2005) and allow capturing the narratives and the meanings behind possible scandalization, which is a shortcoming of the analysis of artificial weeks.

By combining the two types of analyses then (artificial weeks and issue-centered analyses), research can better provide answers to whether specific media content reflects specific national journalism cultures or whether media content, despite different political structures, is converging into "transnational journalism cultures" (Esser 2008).

6. Conclusions

This paper presented results from an analysis of the transformation of media structures and media content in five Western European countries from 1960 to 2008. It focused on the transformation of the press sector, one of the most important forms where political communication is conveyed, and showed the press suppliers, supply and the according content.

As regards media structures, the data show a trend of convergence among the three models of media and politics as elaborated by Hallin/Mancini (2004), since commercialization can be observed in all countries (differentiation of press suppliers from the political sphere; growing press concentration; importance of the tabloid press). However, there are striking differences in the time dimension and the intensity of this process.

These processes explain best the developments within the democratic-corporatist model and the liberal model (with qualifications). What is noteworthy is the fact that the small states within the democratic-corporatist model experience changes later but more rapidly – and more so in the press sector. Germany as a big state shares more similarities with the liberal model and Great Britain in seeing changes in the press market much earlier, followed by less rapid transformations (although at a high level), and in seeing more fundamental changes in the television sector, also with the decline of an audience tuned into political news programs. Thus, Great Britain supports the claim that a differentiation from intermediary actors and a high degree of (press) concentration favors the ‘tabloidization’ of media types and formats. France, representing the polarized-pluralist model, turns out to be the most complex case, as developments in the press market are on the one hand similar to the other two models but on the other hand strongly mediated (or even ‘offset’) by the recent instrumentalization by businessmen with political ties, which, however, is not a form of ‘embedding’ as in the formerly pillarized societies such as Switzerland or Austria. In this sense, the three models of media and politics still have explanatory power, but the variable ‘size’ (small states vs. big states) should be included.

Also, our data show quite clearly that it is not necessarily the quality press which is affected in this process. Rather, it is the forum or mid-market papers which are coming increasingly under pressure (e.g. sinking audience rates) with the polarization into tabloid media on the one hand and quality media on the other hand. Especially those media companies that lack the resources to invest more in high-quality reporting to find a niche could be expected to address consumer audiences and choose to put more emphasis on tabloidized news content.

When examining a possible transformation of media content in this press type, our findings suggest an increase of media logic and the according journalistic routines and frames most notably in the liberal model. But we also saw that, for example in the cases of Austria and Switzerland, countries whose media systems are heavily undergoing structural changes, the content analysis in mid-market papers showed a more nuanced picture. In a diachronic comparison, only slight 'spill-over' effects from the tabloid to the forum press were visible. However, we also suggest analyzing media content not only in artificial weeks, which might miss the dynamics of issues, above all political waves, and thus who and what is not only showing up in the news but actually "driving the news" (Wolfsfeld/Sheafer 2006), but also in specific war and crises events. Apart from this methodological point, we also have to be aware of more recent developments in the press sector concerning mid-market papers. At least for the Swiss case, there is clear evidence that several mid-market papers in view of the current crisis (sinking advertising revenue; sinking audience rates) not only have started to 'go regional' but at the same time have started to turn their attention away from political news. Should this trend be further intensified, this polarization in some remaining (high-) quality media and a large amount of traditional tabloid and tabloidized mid-market media might eventually have broader negative social effects in the form of a growing inequality as regards knowledge and power in a society.

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