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**Regulating Self-Regulation:  
The Neglected Case of Journalism Policies**

**Securing Quality in Journalism  
and Building Media Infrastructures  
on a European Scale**

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**Regulating Self-Regulation:  
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and Building Media Infrastructures on a European Scale**

*"...journalism is a public trust that, while a business, is more than a business - it is, one might say, a business with 'value added'. It does have a Constitutional franchise, one that carries some very special implications."*      *Everette Dennis<sup>1</sup>*

**Statement of Purpose and Summary**

The concern of this paper is to discuss concepts of *journalistic quality*, and to give some guidelines for the development of *journalism policies* to improve it. Thus its purpose is twofold:

1) It outlines what securing quality means in the case of journalism - not only the difficulty of defining journalistic quality, but also the "in house" strategies of the media industry in attaining it, the necessary feed back loops between journalists and their publics as well as their sources, in addition to the need for an intensification of the professional discourse amongst journalists themselves and between communications researchers and practitioners. The analysis provided in the first part of the paper (chapters 1 and 2) is designed to make the complex network or "system" of quality control in journalism visible.

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This paper was prepared during a research sojourn at the European University Institute, Florence, in the Summer term of 1992. An initial draft was presented in a seminar at the European University Institute. I owe thanks to Jean Blondel and to Giandomenico Majone for their critical comments and to Michelle Everson for her admirable skill and diligence shown while transforming the original version of this manuscript into readable English. Chapter 2 is a translated and revised part of an earlier publication (see Russ-Mohl 1992a).

I would also like to thank the Haniel-Stiftung, Duisburg, and the Stifterverband der deutschen Presse, Bonn, for supporting my research at the European University Institute.

<sup>1</sup> Dennis 1986, 95.

2) The following part (chapter 3) will analyse under which conditions journalistic quality is to be provided by the market. It points towards the central role infrastructures play in the professionalization of journalism, and thus, in securing journalistic quality. In reference to the theory of public goods, it will be explained why there tends to be market failure and thus a shortage of such infrastructures. However, it is also pointed to the fact that there might be economies of scale in their provision: The larger a media market becomes, the easier more sophisticated and differentiated institutions, initiatives and infrastructures can be developed, which all contributes to securing quality.

Thus, there is a specific "European dimension" to the professionalization of and to the process of securing quality in journalism - though government regulation should play only a limited role in filling the gap. Otherwise it might interfere with the high-ranking policy goal of maintaining the freedom of the press. However, "soft" policies of information, moral suasion and helping to build infrastructures for journalism may prove an effective and powerful means to improve journalism and the quality of public discourse.

A considerable step forward in securing journalistic quality may be attained by merely linking up the existing national networks of quality control and by allowing professionals and experts to learn from their colleagues in other European cultures of journalism.

The two main sections of the paper tackle problems which at first glance seem to be only loosely related to each other. However, they become highly interdependent if one looks at the potential *economies of scale* built into a larger European media market. Chapters 3 and 4 specifically aim at those public and private institutions which might wish to contribute to the securing of quality in journalism and/or to promote the process of European unification. They might want some guidelines on how to allocate scarce resources wisely: the European Community is particularly addressed, but national and regional policy-makers in the field of mass communication, as well as the media industry and philanthropical institutions are also targeted.

Those readers familiar with policy research will recognize the final part of the outline as being more the application of "conventional wisdom" to a specific case,



rather than innovative thought. It is the impression of the author that even those very basic "messages" so far provided by research on policy conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation have yet to fully "reach" the main players in the field of journalism policies. Therefore it might be a worthwhile effort to conceptualize such policies even if policy researchers themselves might find such a "recipe book approach" trivial.

## 1. The Role of the Media in the Process of European Integration and the Missing Link between Journalism and Policy Research

To state that journalism has played a major role, not only in the process of European nation-building<sup>2</sup> but also in the supra-national European integration process, is certainly no exaggeration. Though it would still be hard to precisely assess its impact, it has become a truism that mass communication and the quality of information provided by the mass media play an important role in shaping public opinion. To refer to a recent event, a case study of how the Maastricht agreements were treated and "played upon" by the press, might provide further insight into how, in a subtle manner, the media can influence opinions and attitudes towards the European integration process. By influencing public opinion (and even by serving as means whereby policy makers might communicate among themselves<sup>3</sup>), the mass media may also, to some degree, help define the governments' agenda (or the limits of that agenda). If we take a closer look at the challenges to be faced in the future<sup>4</sup>, it would not be too farfetched to say that the impact of journalism and the media on the European integration process might even grow.

On the other hand, concern has been expressed for quite a long time about trivialization by mass media, and the deterioration in the quality of journalism and of the public discourse in general. There has similarly been a specific concern that issues of European unification might suffer from a *circulus vitiosus* of neglect, reinforced by ever more disinterested journalists, media, and publics.<sup>5</sup>

If information quality is essential, and if journalism and the media are potentially powerful tools of integration, these aspects deserve the attention of researchers and policy-makers. While it may be a valuable and important task for the *media researcher* to prove the underlying hypothesis in more detail and to find out more about *how* the integration process is influenced in different European countries and (media) cultures, the *European policy-maker* may be well advised to take this

2 Rovan 1992.

3 Linsky 1988, 206.

4 See, for example: Rovan 1992, 200-209; Dahrendorf 1992.

5 Schönbach 1992.



influence as a given fact and to ask *policy researchers* for advice on what to do in this particular field.

This paper is an initial attempt to provide guidelines for the design of *European journalism policies*. This term has been chosen purposely, and it should not be mixed up with traditional *media policies*, whose main concern was to ensure a broad variety of mass media and, thus, a pluralist spectrum of publicized opinion ("Meinungsvielfalt"). The concern for quality in journalism certainly goes further.

At first glance, this may seem a suspicious, if not impossible project: In open societies, journalism is a domain of self-regulation, and must remain such if the freedom of the press is to be guaranteed. Nevertheless, I would like to argue that it makes sense to suggest and to outline policies of European integration and harmonization in an area where state intervention is supposed to be kept "off limits". There may be alternatives to just leaving journalism policies to journalists. There may be a chance to foster the European integration process through intelligent journalism policies, which could help *improve and harmonize* journalism's self-regulation, without sacrificing the freedom of the press. Such policy options shall be analysed more closely in this presentation.

Those who are still sceptical should at least be aware that journalism policies are, even in democratic societies, nothing new. The challenge is rather that, to my knowledge, they have yet to be analysed comprehensively with a policy science perspective, and that the European focus may add to the flavor of such an analysis.

One of the broader concerns, which my reasoning will reflect, is thus, the missing link between the worlds of journalism and policy research. So far, journalists seem to be much more interested in politics than in policies. On the other hand, only few policy researchers take account of the major role the mass media play in the policy process.<sup>6</sup> Even fewer of them seem to have realized that journalism itself, and the quality of public information, is an area which deserves the attention of policy researchers and policy makers. Should this mutual neglect be overcome, this might

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<sup>6</sup> Concern has so far been expressed mainly by researchers interested in explaining issue cycles. See Luhmann 1971a, Downs 1972, Russ-Mohl 1981. More recent and more explicit efforts to highlight this gap stem from Linsky (1988), Russ-Mohl (1988) and Majone (1989).

well contribute to the improvement of the quality of information, being made available by both sides: by journalists and by policy researchers.

However, before making suggestions as to what can or should be done, from a policy perspective, to help *improve information quality through journalism policies*, we should take a closer look at the intricate process of quality control which already exists in journalism.

## 2. Defining and Controlling Quality in Journalism

One of the basic dilemmas faced when securing quality in journalism is that it is almost impossible to precisely define journalistic quality.<sup>7</sup> However, the challenge derived from such an initially unpleasant finding should sound quite familiar to policy analysts. At least, Charles E. Lindblom has quite clearly pointed out that their basic task is to design "good decision making procedures without having adequate criteria for distinguishing between good and bad decisions."<sup>8</sup>

### *The Framework for the Development of Journalistic Quality Standards*

However, in reference to Lindblom, this does not mean that there are no criteria with which good and bad journalism might be distinguished. Such a statement instead reminds us that we are dealing with a complex question, and that we should nevertheless (or, as Lindblom might want to put it: we should *therefore*) strive to find simple answers, i. e. piecemeal solutions. Thus, we should seek an institutional framework for quality control in journalism, which facilitates rather than impedes decision-making.

To begin with, one must take care not to compare an apple with an orange. Different areas of journalism require different quality criteria. Quality criteria must vary as we look at different media, different target groups, different "genres" and different sources, and different availability of publication time and space.

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<sup>7</sup> The most recent conference which reaffirmed this position was the 2. Klagenfurter Werkstattgespräch "Publizistische Qualität", sponsored by the Gottlieb Daimler- und Karl Benz-Stiftung in Ladenburg/Germany from May 7 through 9, 1992 (see Bammé et al. 1992).  
<sup>8</sup> Lindblom 1988, 217.



Quality criteria are also influenced by those functions which we ascribe to journalism: If we expect journalists to work solely as intermediators, i. e. "transport workers"<sup>9</sup>, within the information industry, we must find criteria different from those which we would apply, if we were to regard them as advocates, muckrakers or "dynamic entrepreneurs"<sup>10</sup> within the news business (see illustration 1).

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*Illustration 1: A Framework for the Development  
of Journalistic Quality Standards*

**Functions attributed to journalism/  
Perception of the role of journalists**

- Information/neutral intermediation ("transport worker")
- Orientation
- Criticism & control (advocate & critic; "Fourth Estate")
- Entertainment (disc jockey and talkmaster) etc.

**Medium**

- Newspaper
- Periodical
- Radio
- TV

**Genre**

- News reporting
- Feature
- Editorial

**Applicability of  
quality standards  
depending upon**

**Target group**

- Age
- Education
- Interests
- Income
- Social Stratum  
etc.

**Production Period/  
Publication Cycle**

- live
- hourly
- daily
- weekly
- monthly or longer

**Available Publication  
Space or Time**

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*The Magic Polygone*

Even where oranges are clearly distinguished from apples, journalistic quality remains an elusive concept. Besides a few general rules, as they are to be found in

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9 Noelle-Neumann 1990, 23.

10 Spinner 1985.

ethics codes ("Do not burn sources"; "do not sensationalize or manipulate the public"), it is hard to formulate measures of universal applicability. The only means to adequately formulate the goals of quality control might be to apply a *magic polygone*, similar to that which has become a part of conventional wisdom in the discussion of economic policies (see illustration 2).

Some of the goals *overlap*, others cannot be simultaneously pursued as *trade offs* exist. For example, more "comprehensibility" may be achieved only at the expense of the "exactness" and the "correctness of presentation". Similarly, the price to be paid for "topicality", the timely presentation of the latest news, may be a lack of "background information" or a lack of "additional investigation".

To identify a quality measure in any specific case, goals must be re-examined: Some may be superfluous (for example, "simplicity" in the case of a highly specialized professional journal), others may have to be imported (for example: "degree of two way-communication with recipients" in the case of a radio magazine or a local newspaper), and finally, all the remaining goals must be weighted.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See also: Marhenkel 1992.



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*Illustration 2: The "Magic" Polygone*

**Reduction of Complexity**

- factuality
- simplicity
- readability/  
comprehensibility

**Objectivity**

- factual precision
- accordance to news values  
(selection rules)
- fairness
- background information
- variety of perspectives
- separation of news and commentary

**Newsworthiness/  
Topicality**

- time dimension
- problem  
dimension

**Transparency/  
Reflexivity**

- Sources
- Conditions of  
Reporting

**Originality**

- incentives to  
read
  - share of own  
investigation
-

*The Process of Securing Quality*

Even with such a polygone of goals to hand, securing quality in journalism remains an on-going challenge. It is a process, a task which must be performed at many points within a long production line ("*on the job*"). But there are also *preventive* and *corrective* elements of quality control. The main instruments which may contribute to the process are listed in illustration 3. For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to describe them in more detail. However, it should be stated that the list does not claim to be exhaustive.

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*Illustration 3: Means of quality control in journalism*

<b>Stage of production</b>	<b>Instruments of Securing Quality</b>
<i>Preventive</i>	
Journalism education; midcareer professional training	Enlarging and multiplying programs; increasing competition
<i>"On the Job"</i>	
Selection of News covered	Check news values; observe presentation of competitors
Investigation	Teamwork, Doublecheck; Questioning sources' credibility
Writing and editing, Presentation	Proof rereading; Writing coaches
<i>Corrective</i>	
Within the newsroom	"Product review" Copy Tests Evaluation of Recipients' Reactions
Within the profession	Journalism Awards Press Councils Media Journalism (in trade journals) Media Research



In dialogue with  
the public

Corrections policies  
Media Journalism (in  
mass media)  
Ombudsmen  
Media Watchdogs  
Advocacy Ads

**"Quality control  
of quality control"**

Setting up standards  
for educational and  
midcareer programs;  
Evaluating effectivity and  
efficiency of different  
means and programs of  
quality control

### *A Network of Quality Control*

At this point in the analysis it becomes quite obvious that, for different reasons, securing quality in journalism is a task which can only be achieved within a *decentralized network*. Looking at the process pragmatically, there is just no way of combining the necessary competences within one single organizational unit - be it inside or outside the newsroom of a media organization. From a normative point of view, any institution with the powers to tackle such a Herculean task would also be highly undesirable. Sooner or later it might begin to resemble George Orwell's Big Brother. The very ideal of press freedom in a pluralist and multicultural society, determines that the process of quality control be organized decentrally and pluralistically.

Therefore, the *system* which is to secure quality in journalism should consist of a broad variety of institutions and initiatives. These might be independent or loosely interrelated. They might co-operate, or even compete. As is the case with the goals of securing quality, their activities may duplicate, complement or counteract each other to some degree. The network guarantees that journalistic achievements and failures are evaluated from different perspectives. Such strategies of *multiple evaluation* are also common in other sectors of our complex societies, for example in policy analysis.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See Majone 1989, 9 and 1992.

In securing journalistic quality, there is certainly more at stake than just smoothing the process of public communication.<sup>13</sup> The system can nevertheless, to a certain degree, be compared with the system of traffic regulation: There is a corridor where free movement is allowed. There are warning signs, lane-markings and crash-barriers which are designed to steer us away from accidents (ethic codes). But there are also blue signs which tell us what best to do, and where best to go (for example, journalism awards; writing coaches). Sometimes the proliferation of signs may lead to confusion. To reduce such confusion and to resolve possible conflicts, policemen are introduced to control the flow of traffic, and to punish violations of the rules (press councils, ombudsmen).

Last but not least, there are driving schools which teach students the meaning of the signs and provide them with the know how which they need if they are to participate in the system. We must, however, recognize that the greater variety in approaches and the greater degree of qualitative difference between educational methods, means that journalism and mass communication schools are comparatively less homogeneous than their driving counterparts. In preparing journalists for their job our societies allow for a degree of negligence which would be considered politically intolerable in the traffic system.

### 3. The Regulatory Dilemma

Having roughly, and in general terms, described the system of securing quality in journalism, there remain a few questions which should excite particular interest in the context of future European policy making:

- Given the manifold differences between the various media cultures and the specific quality control systems applied to journalism in different European countries, how can the system be improved? To what extent should it be harmonized?
- Who should initiate this process of improvement and harmonization, and which instruments of guidance might be considered adequate?

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<sup>13</sup> A smooth process in itself may be a goal which may - consciously or unconsciously - be obtained by policymakers (see Lindblom 1988; Luhmann 1971b)



An answer to these questions can only be found once we examine the forces at work more closely.

*The role of the market in securing quality*

In all highly developed Western societies, market forces seem to have become - sooner or later - the most decisive factor in determining the quality of journalism.<sup>14</sup> They have thus pushed back the tide of political influence. Therefore, it makes sense to concentrate first upon the economic aspects of securing quality in journalism. Certainly there are segments of the market where the process of quality assurance works by itself, regulated by market forces alone.

A few examples may underline this:

- In some segments of the market, the *demand for quality media products* is increasing (for example: national newspapers, weekly news magazines, special interest magazines, in particular business magazines, branch oriented newsletters and information services). In the absence of highly professional journalists and an intricate process of quality control, such products would simply fail on the market place. Spectacular cases of journalistic "malpractice", such as the publication of the "Hitler-diaries" by the German weekly "stern", have also shown that failure in the quality control system can severely damage such media products, not only in terms of reputation, but also with regard to their profits.
- Growing complexity and differentiation within society, have led to a shift in the production of news. In particular, the desire of institutions and industries to influence and "manage" the *presentation of self*, and to create and maintain a *corporate identity* in the public mind has increased. Functions like the creation and investigation of news, formerly undertaken by journalists, are today more and more the preserve of PR specialists. This development certainly creates new problems, as it tends to promote the production and diffusion of "good" rather than "bad" news. On the other hand, a higher degree of precision in the daily reporting routine can be more securely attained, if the initial message is provided by a specialized PR-person with "insider" links, rather than by an "outside" journalist.

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<sup>14</sup> For further evidence see also Russ-Mohl 1992 b.

- The surplus of journalists on the labor market should, in the long run, also contribute to quality improvements. If we consider the formal qualifications of today's and tomorrow's journalists, we might fairly state that they are better prepared for their jobs than they were one or two generations ago.

However, the marketplace will provide quality only where customers are willing to pay for it. But most of the media's publics do not pay at all (private broadcasting, excepting Pay TV), or they do not pay the full price for the product they consume (print media, public broadcasting). From a strictly business-minded point of view, the most important customers of the media are not readers, listeners or viewers, but advertisers.<sup>15</sup> For most of the media they provide the major portion of income. Their interest lies in reaching target groups to whom they can sell their messages and their products. For them, the quality of the journalism which is provided is a mere by-product; it may aid in the capture of particular publics, but it is not of value in itself (excepting those cases when the advertiser becomes himself a target of journalistic coverage).

Journalistic products are increasingly produced by the private commercial sector and financed by advertisers. Under these circumstances there is, both quantitatively and qualitatively, a lot more journalism available than the readers, listeners and viewers seem to be willing to pay for. This is entirely due to the willingness of advertisers to pay for the access to target groups with which the media provide them.

### *Journalistic Quality as a Public Good*

On the other hand, most of us are aware of existing severe deficiencies in journalism quality. Similarly, there is an ongoing debate among experts on the "public service" aspects demanded of journalism.<sup>16</sup> Besides the recipients' interest in information quality, which is expressed in the individual consumer's choice, there exists a

<sup>15</sup> This does not necessarily mean that media recipients are, compared to customers in a supermarket or a car dealer, in a relatively weak position when they wish to complain about product quality. Recipients' currency is time units paid and sacrificed to a media product and thus to advertising messages. Therefore, editors and journalists cannot remain insensitive to recipients' desires. On the contrary, one of the new rules of the game is to respond much more directly to the demands of readers, listeners and viewers. Certainly nothing frightens the media industry more, than the "exit option" (Hirschman 1970) of their publics - for example shown in the zapping habits of TV-viewers or in the rapid decline of newspaper and general interest magazine readership.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview see McQuail 1991, 113; Keane 1991, 525 et seq.



*collective interest* in the securing quality of journalistic information. "Without a well-functioning press there is no democracy" - this formula, coined by Wolfgang R. Langenbucher, reflects this point.<sup>17</sup> Once again though, it seems difficult to precisely describe "what constitutes the 'public good'. We need only accept that there are potential benefits (or deficits) from the working of the media, for community or society, over and above the immediate satisfaction of individuals and private organizations."<sup>18</sup>

Journalistic quality displays, to some degree, those characteristics economists assign to *public goods*, in order that public intervention might be justified: There are benefits which are indivisible and from which individual users cannot be excluded. There is less individual demand for journalistic quality than is desirable from a collective point of view. Thus, even those criteria mentioned by Musgrave, which are used to characterize *merit goods* such as education, can be applied to our case.<sup>19</sup> Strangely enough, there have been very few attempts, so far, to apply to journalism the "Theory of Public Goods", and thus, a large body of fruitful economic thinking and theorizing.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Constraints for public journalism policies*

If the Theory of Public Goods is relevant to our case, there would then be economic justifications for public attention, action and funding. Any such approach, however, still faces that specific dilemma of regulating journalism and the media, already mentioned<sup>21</sup>: Thus, any kind of regulatory policy-making will somehow interfere with press freedom.

Press freedom is, without doubt, in itself, a "sacred cow" within democratic societies. Its purpose is, however, to serve the "people's right to know" - and the people's right to know is supposed to be a basic precondition for the people's

17 Langenbucher 1984, 23. In the same sense, but more implicitly, Majone, who calls for "policy criticism" by public debate, underlining that the media should play a more important role in this process and that "the extraordinary potential of public debate can be realised only if citizens are *well informed*..." (Majone 1992; emphasis added by the author).

18 McQuail 1991, 113.

19 Musgrave 1958.

20 See Russ-Mohl 1987; Heinrich 1989.

21 In the following, I use the term "regulation" in the broad European rather than in the narrow American meaning (See Majone 1990, 1).



participation in the political process and rational decision-making at election time. Thus, any intervention in the case of journalism should be ultimately assessed in the light of whether it endangers or fosters this most fundamental right of the people, rather than how it affects journalists themselves.

Nevertheless, even benevolent attempts to improve the quality of journalism by law or by means of subsidies and financial support, may undermine the "precondition of journalistic quality, the freedom of communication"<sup>22</sup> and may restrict the "fourth estate" in an undesirable manner. Therefore, any governmental policies which aim to secure quality in journalism, should be designed and scrutinized with great caution. Experience tells us that whatever means of communication can be instrumentalized by political interests, will be instrumentalized - be it public broadcasting or public journalism schools and training facilities.

On the other hand, markets and politics must be supplemented - simply because market forces and temptations to exert political influence are strong, and because there is no guarantee that these forces will automatically contribute to securing journalistic quality.

#### *The way out: Professionalization and Self-Regulation*

In complex systems, quality cannot be achieved solely through market incentives, nor through coercion, i.e. by the application of rigid controls and sanctions. The primary means by which quality can be attained is *professionalization*<sup>23</sup> and thus, self-regulation. Professionalization depends upon the existence of professional education and training, which meets certain standards. It rests upon ethical principles and upon a permanent process of (self-)reflection within the profession.<sup>24</sup> Thus, another precondition for professionalization is a functioning communication system, which allows for the exchange of experiences, for criticism and counter-criticism of professional theory and practice, and for the diffusion of relevant

<sup>22</sup> Langenbucher 1984, 23.

<sup>23</sup> From a sociologist's point of view, journalists do not meet all the criteria which have been set up to distinguish "professions" (for example, medical doctors, lawyers and university professors) from other occupations (see Kunzick 1988). For example, Italy is the only country in Europe where certain entrance requirements have to be met by journalists, in order to work. However, journalism is one of the areas where quality control and the setting of standards and norms is mainly a question of self-regulation.

<sup>24</sup> See also Russ-Mohl/Seewald 1992.

research results amongst the professional community. Hence, here is the last key word of this paper, one which binds together the initiatives and institutions which contribute to professionalization and thus to the process of securing quality: the *infrastructures of journalism*.

### *Infrastructures of Journalism and the Theory of Public Goods*

Well-functioning infrastructures are, in most industries, the precondition for the provision of quality products and services. With reference to journalism, this is an aspect which has long been neglected by mass media industries. This has arisen as securing quality in journalism, in general, has not been a high priority issue.

As in other sectors, the theory of public goods helps us to explain those market defects which lead to an *undersupply* of infrastructures within the media industry. There are few incentives for private investors to provide infrastructures, if the pay off derived from them cannot be sufficiently internalized within their organization and thus competitors may benefit as "free riders". The other side of this coin is that once infrastructures are provided by the public, *overdemand and overexploitation* arise simply by virtue of the lack of market prices for the service provided. Although the collective benefit of information quality, arising out of journalistic infrastructures, is *indivisible*, there may well be attempts to "privatize" as many as possible of those benefits of infrastructures which can in fact be individualized.<sup>25</sup>

### Economies of Scale: The Unique Historical Opportunities of 1993

However, there is not only market failure. There are also *economies of scale*. Not only the media production process<sup>26</sup>, but also the provision of infrastructures may benefit from them. The opening up of the European market in 1993 gives "us" - i.e. the media industry, journalists, but also society as a whole - a historically unique opportunity to provide further journalistic infrastructures, and thus, to take advantage of such economies of scale. A mere glance at the overwhelming numbers and the diversity of those journalistic infrastructures which have come into existence in the media market of the United States, gives evidence for this. In comparison, the

<sup>25</sup> These processes have been described in more detail, but not referring in particular to journalism infrastructures, by Scharpf/Reissert/Schnabel 1976.

<sup>26</sup> An overview is provided by Luyken 1989.

diversity between existing journalism cultures and quality control systems in different European countries might even add to the richness of future infrastructures in a single European market: Linking them now and building networks may constitute a chance to harmonize the self regulation of journalism, simply by learning from one another.

The process itself should certainly remain "self-controlled" by the media professions, but it should be intensified and accelerated by those who are interested in European integration, as well as concerned about the quality of journalism and information: Thus, the European Community, as well as the media industry itself and philanthropical institutions, must be the main actors.

#### *4. The Policy Options: Information, Moral Suasion, Building Infrastructures*

Bearing the regulatory dilemma in mind, it becomes apparent, that the usual choice between the stick and the carrot, i.e. between "hard" and "soft" means of regulation, simply does not exist when it comes to securing journalistic quality. The only way to regulate self-governing institutions effectively and without endangering their independence, is to strengthen them with the carrot.

But even such an approach must be carefully designed and implemented. Feeding the system with carrots may not only result in the ineffective use of resources, or, as Richard Nixon once put it, in "throwing money at problems". Far worse, an oversupply of carrots might cause indigestion. If unwisely directed, such funds might even corrupt and undermine the system of self-regulation rather than improve it. Such ambiguous effects of regulating softly by providing incentives are more explicitly referred to by the German term "goldene Zügel" (golden reins). Originally coined to describe the relationship between the federal administration and juridically self-governing, but financially highly dependent local governments, this term might aid clarification in our case.

Paying due attention to the potentially ambiguous effects of "golden reins", a European policy on journalism should not directly intervene in the existing patterns and routines of professional self-government, even where they differ considerably from country to country. It should also try to formulate policies which do not impede competition in media markets. The safest way to provide incentives for



securing quality, without offending these guidelines may well be to support any investments in such infrastructures which do not exclusively benefit individual private organizations.

The policy-mix which I feel will prove most successful, consists of widely applying *information, moral suasion, and financial support to build and link infrastructures* in order to foster, harmonize and improve self-regulation and quality-control of journalism in a European dimension. Thus, an action program aiming at the "europeanization" and the improvement of journalism might be built upon these three basic instruments of "soft regulation", along the following lines:

**1) Information policies:** The cross-national exchange of ideas and information among those who shape the profession and set the quality standards in journalism should be improved. This may sound very simple. It could, however, be done with a much greater degree of creativity and sophistication.

So far, most media practitioners and media researchers have tended to focus upon developments only in their own countries or in their own language group. Few pay attention to professional developments in the U.S., and even fewer take note of advances within Europe where language seems to be the major barrier.

Change might be achieved through workshops and seminars, which bring together media experts and professionals, with common fields of interest and specialization, from all EC countries.

The development of a much more "*Euro-centric*" media journalism, might also aid in this process. A starting point might be a conference organized for the editors of the most revered professional journals and of the communications research journals - thus stimulating the exchange of news and multiplying information networks. So far, only few of the professional magazines and newsletters place emphasis upon information transfer on industry trends and media developments throughout Europe.

A second step might then be to create a network of "media observatories" in each of the major European countries. Their task would be to register and analyse trends in the journalistic professions, but also in the media industries of other European countries. The information gathered should not only be used for scientific purposes, but also disseminated through professional magazines and newsletters as "news you can use" to media practitioners.

**2) Moral suasion:** In the conventional jargon of policy analysts and makers, moral suasion would simply be a synonyme for P.R. and advertising, which go beyond mere provision of information. Alas, if we want to convince journalists, media professionals and publics that securing journalistic quality on a European scale is an important and legitimate goal, tout à fait in the public interest, we must engage in "issue management"<sup>27</sup>, and give thought to the development of strategies to communicate this message to relevant target groups.

<sup>27</sup> Heath/Nelson 1986.

There is still a lot of work to be done to raise the consciousness of just how important the quality of information and the quality of journalism is for the well-being and the future development of our societies. I am not myself sure whether it would be wise to present this issue in the terms of a "clean information environment". But by paraphrasing it in this specific way I would like to underline that for the agenda setting-process a lot can be learnt from the environmental movement, particularly from the creative approaches of organizations like Greenpeace or Robin Wood.

Creating awareness is in itself not enough. If awareness is to be transformed into action, it must be linked to the issue of journalistic quality, so that the decision-makers might see what an important role the mostly "hidden" infrastructures play in securing it.

Designing fundraising campaigns which address not only the media industry and private philanthropic organizations, but also potential contributors in the public sector, is certainly one of the most urgent aspects of "moral suasion" in journalism policies. Thus it plays a vital role in obtaining those funds which are needed to finance journalism infrastructures.

**3) Building and linking infrastructures:** The most costly, but certainly also the most important part of journalism policies is the support for the erection and maintenance of infrastructures. We do not merely need more research institutes and "think tanks"<sup>28</sup>, more educational facilities and midcareer programs, more media watchdogs, more research transfer & information transfer agencies, more journalism awards and stipends for professional advancement, more exchanges of students, professionals and teachers. They will have to be linked on a European scale in a network, and some incentives should be offered to those who adequately emphasize a "European perspective" in their professional activities and programs which aim at improving quality in journalism. Clearly, educational institutions and midcareer programs would have to be the cornerstones of such an infrastructural network.

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28 Luyken 1989, 178.



We need not start from "zero" in this area. On the contrary, manifold initiatives have developed over the years, and a remarkable number of institutions deal with such issues. To give just a few examples:

0 In the area of communications research one might cite the "European Institute for the Media" which moved recently from Manchester to Düsseldorf. However, it is not officially linked to that much more important "think tank", the European University Institute in Florence, where to date no journalism or mass communication program has been offered.

0 There are many individual initiatives which seek to enlarge the stock of media research with European aspects<sup>29</sup>. But so far research programs which specifically reward initiatives of transnational cooperation are scarce.

0 There are post-graduate training programs in European Journalism at the universities of Utrecht and Aarhus, and a few bi- and multilateral exchange programs which bring together European journalism and mass communication students (Journalistes en Europe, Erasmus). Journalism educators work together informally in the Gutenberg-network, to improve journalism training in European issues.<sup>30</sup> They have also founded the "European Journalism Training Association"<sup>31</sup> - an organization which binds together journalism schools and which has helped to create a new European Journalism Centre in Maastricht.

0 Most professional groups within the media industry, like publishers and editors, journalists or even more specialised sub-groups such as science writers have by now created European "parent organizations" and networks for information exchange.

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29 For example, the recent (and not yet completed) delphi-study on "Studying journalism - education and further studies" from the Scientific Academy of Lower Austria (Maximilian Gottschlich/Karl Obermair, Krems) which mainly includes experts from all over Europe, similarly points in that direction.

30 Reus 1992, 46.

31 So far, EJTA has laid down rather strict rules for membership, which many university programs in communications cannot fulfil. This "policy of exclusion" may cause problems, but it also points in the direction of future accrediting policies and thus, the willingness to set minimum qualitative standards for journalism programs.

The first inventory on Journalism education stems from Stevenson/Mory 1990. An initial European conference for journalism educators took place in Brussels in the fall of 1990; the directors of journalism midcareer programs met in Berlin (1991) and in Kalmar (1992). For documentation of the Berlin meeting see: Buchloh/Russ-Mohl 1992.

The next step for the development of a European journalism policy might thus be to work on an inventory which registers and describes these existing networks and infrastructures, particularly those which crosscut traditional national boundaries. Based on such information, the institutional arrangements can certainly be further developed, and the network might be weaved more densely.

If public actors such as the European Community wish to engage actively in journalism policies, they might provide funds primarily on a matching basis. This would mean that in most of the cases, other private or public actors would need to be involved. This in itself is a great advantage as it contributes to the plurality of actors which is so urgently needed in this sensitive policy area.

## 5. Conclusions

From a regulator's perspective, all of this may not seem to offer much opportunity to exert influence, and the mere fact of being restricted to soft instruments probably makes seem the entire field rather unattractive. Finding solutions where "hard" regulation is required is more challenging. There is no doubt that such regulation is needed. For the control of ownership concentration which itself might impede free competition and press freedom, effective *antitrust policies* are necessary. And, if the same media products are to be distributed all over the European market, a European copyright law<sup>32</sup> may be needed, as well as a European libel law to protect all citizens equally against severe abuses of press freedom - whether they are hurt by journalistic malpractice in Munich, Manchester, Milano or Madrid.

However some doubts should be expressed as to whether the attention paid to issues where "hard" regulation has to be applied, in fact pays off in terms of attainable policy progress. Keeping ownership concentration under control, and thus preventing the media from being at the disposal of few very large groups, is a most important aspect, if journalistic diversity, and thus journalistic quality are to be secured.<sup>33</sup> But, taking the existing distribution of power into account, little might be

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<sup>32</sup> Luyken 1989, 178.

<sup>33</sup> The most impressive Cassandra in this area of concern has so far been Bagdikian (1987 and 1989).



achievable *against* the interests of those multinational "giants" which already hold sway in the communication industry.<sup>34</sup>

A program for the improvement of journalistic quality through building, differentiating and enlargening professional infrastructures, will certainly only bring tangible improvements in the long run. It can only be implemented in many piecemeal steps, to be undertaken by a broad variety of actors. We are only at the very beginning of such a process, but it is important to realize early on how working infrastructures may effect journalism and public information quality in Europe.

It might be wise and pragmatic to concentrate more energy on the development of "soft" journalism policies, which so far have been neglected. Journalistic quality can be improved considerably by *strengthening self-regulation and by cooperating with the media industry*. The mere fact that securing quality in journalism is a rather uncontroversial "valence issue" might aid in making progress, once steps to implement such policies have been taken.<sup>35</sup> There are, at least, no direct hindrances to be expected from interests which are "against improving journalism or information quality" where these policies respect the principles of self-control by the profession. Therefore it is highly probable that policy goals can be attained through the described mix of instruments.

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34 In this context official statements from publishers' associations and the like, may also be of some interest. For example, the president of the German Bundesverband Deutscher Zeitungsverleger, Rolf Terheyden, recently warned that the press might be put in an "EC straitjacket" due to European harmonization policies (Pasquay 1992).

35 Donald E. Stokes makes a distinction between *position issues* und *valence issues* (Stokes 1966). Position Issues attract public attention because they are controversial and one has to take sides. Valence Issues are characterized by a high level of consensus; it is hard to be against a valence issue, like, for example, the demand for a better journalism education. Paradoxically, in democratic societies it may be more difficult to set the political agenda for a valence issue. Under the condition of democratic competition they offer less potential for political actors to gain profile than position issues. Consensus is boring; thus, it is much easier to gain the attention of mass media and thus mass audiences by taking sides in controversial position issues.

Therefore, the tendency to be underprovided may be "built in" into those public goods which are valence issues. Everybody agrees "somehow" that the good should be provided, but nobody really promotes it; therefore, nothing happens in the political arena where the attention of decision-makers is absorbed by other themes, mostly by position issues. However, there may arise a constellation (which, looking backwards usually seems "unique") in which the agenda can be set for a valence issue. If this happens and the attention of political decision makers can be attained, it becomes highly probable that the public good will be provided, even in excess as nobody is against the issue, resource allocation is not guided by functioning markets, and as there is a tendency that funds, once approved, will be approved again in the budgeting routines of the public sector.



However, skillful promoters who know to bind the diverging interests of different organizations together will be needed - the competing media conglomerates, the often inert and immovable public bureaucracies and the profile-seeking philanthropic institutions. Unfortunately, most of the latter have not yet even recognized their specific responsibility to contribute to securing quality in journalism as markets fail and the public sector is bound to play a limited role in this specific policy area.

The lack of just such individuals and institutions who serve, in a Schumpeterian sense, as "dynamic entrepreneurs" in the field, and who devote themselves in a cosmopolitan (or at least in a "Euro"opolitan) spirit to the challenge described may be the real deficit which has so far impeded the development of European journalism infrastructures.

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