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Journalism as a public communication. Comparison of Estonian, Finnish and Russian dominating daily functions²

Abstract: This chapter deals with the communication style of journalism. The thematic structure of the journalistic agenda points to very basic dimensions of the public sphere. Journalism can be observed as an indicator of the public sphere. Journalism has different styles in society, according to its relationship to the political system and the cultural context. One can detect changes in these styles and functions via the analysis of journalistic texts. This hypothesis can be proved only via comparison with journalistic styles of different countries. This analysis focuses on the main daily newspapers of the three neighboring countries of Finland, Estonia and Russia throughout the 20th century. Focus is on changes in themes. There are two basic conclusions: in spite of regime, ideology of living standards, journalism in all three countries is concentrated on the same basic topics throughout the century; and the democratic journalism is basically mediator of issues that reflect on a nation's *political structures*. The chapter includes an example from 1988 as a critical turn of the public communication.

Key words: *journalism, public communication, Estonia, Finland, Russia*

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Novinarstvo kao javna komunikacija. Poređenje estonskog, finskog i ruskog novinarstva koje dominira javnom funkcijom³

Apstrakt: Ovo poglavlje bavi se komunikacijskim stilom novinarstva. Tematska struktura novinarske agende ukazuje na temeljne dimenzije u javnoj sferi. Novinarstvo se može posmatrati kao pokazatelj javne sfere. Novinarstvo ima različite stilove u društvu, u skladu sa svojim odnosom prema političkom sistemu i kulturnom kontekstu. Čovjek može otkriti promjene u tim stilovima i funkcijama putem analize novinarskih tekstova. Ova hipoteza se može dokazati samo putem upoređivanja novinarskih stilova različitih zemalja. Ova analiza se usredsređuje na glavne dnevne novine triju susjednih zemalja, Finske, Estonije i Rusije tokom 20. vijeka. Naglasak je stavljen na promjene u temama. Postoje dva osnovna zaključka: uprkos režimu, ideologiji životnog standarda, novinarstvo se u sve tri zemlje koncentriše na istim osnovnim temama tokom vijeka; i demokratsko novinarstvo je u osnovi posrednik pitanja koja se odražavaju na *političke strukture jedne države*. Poglavlje uključuje primjer iz 1988. godine kao kritičan zaokret javne komunikacije.

Ključne riječi: *novinarstvo, javna komunikacija, Estonija, Finska, Rusija*

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Introduction

In the 20th century journalism was involved in the enormous expansion of its functions, evolving from the means of communication process following and comparing the political, economical and cultural matters from the beginning of last century with a broad-based mean of societal information, society's identity and reflectivity.

The role of journalism, and since 1920s also the role of broadcasting increasingly began to participate in the process of conveying information, and mediating experiences, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, moods.

Nevertheless – as V. Prop saw and was able to arrange the Fairy Tales into one subsuming structure with all of variations in all its categories (see Prop 1928); we are now grasping for a similar approach to the seemingly endless media-diversity and start to see it as a united stable structure and system.

Journalism is approachable and describable due to its certain functions.

We can observe it as a communicative system of society and culture.

Changes in society and culture are very sensitive – journalism as a way of communication reacts directly or indirectly to the changes in topics and genres.

In turn it affects the given society's relations to the important topics in the forefront due to the change or event in the field. It is an indication of the societal transformation and the mechanism changing it.

In the other hand the technological means of media and press have developed so rapidly, that the implementation of these is also impacting the culture in a broader sense.

Journalism is a public sphere indicator through its focus on certain topics and avoidance of others. Such choices have both cultural and political reasons.

One may observe next, what are the conditions and resources in different societies for voicing truth and reflection? We see that journalism is extremely sensitive to its environment, whether journalism is operating in the closed or open society.

An example 1. Comparison of journalism as a public communication

Following, I present examples from the topic-preferences in the mainstream dailies of three vicinal countries throughout 20th Century. Themes as the shaping of subjects and debate field is an instrument of societal unification where journalism and media are given a clearer practical and pragmatic function in a system. The communication is engaged in the system development function.⁴

⁴ The journalistic text as a research object is qualitative, as it includes cultural meanings (Jakobson 1960). We picked three neighbouring countries with closely tied historical, political and cultural backgrounds: Estonia, Finland and Russia; and we focused on changes in thematization throughout the 20th century in the daily newspapers of the three countries (Helsingin Sanomat – Finland, Pravda – Russia, Eesti Päevaleht/Rahva Hääl - Estonia. We mapped the content of 2242 Estonian, 1723 Russian, and 2079 Finnish daily newspaper articles. From each selected newspaper issue, the sample was composed of: 1) articles on the first page, which were those most accentuated by that edition, 2) editorials, 3) letters from readers, 4) opinion articles (written about different topics) and 5) news stories.

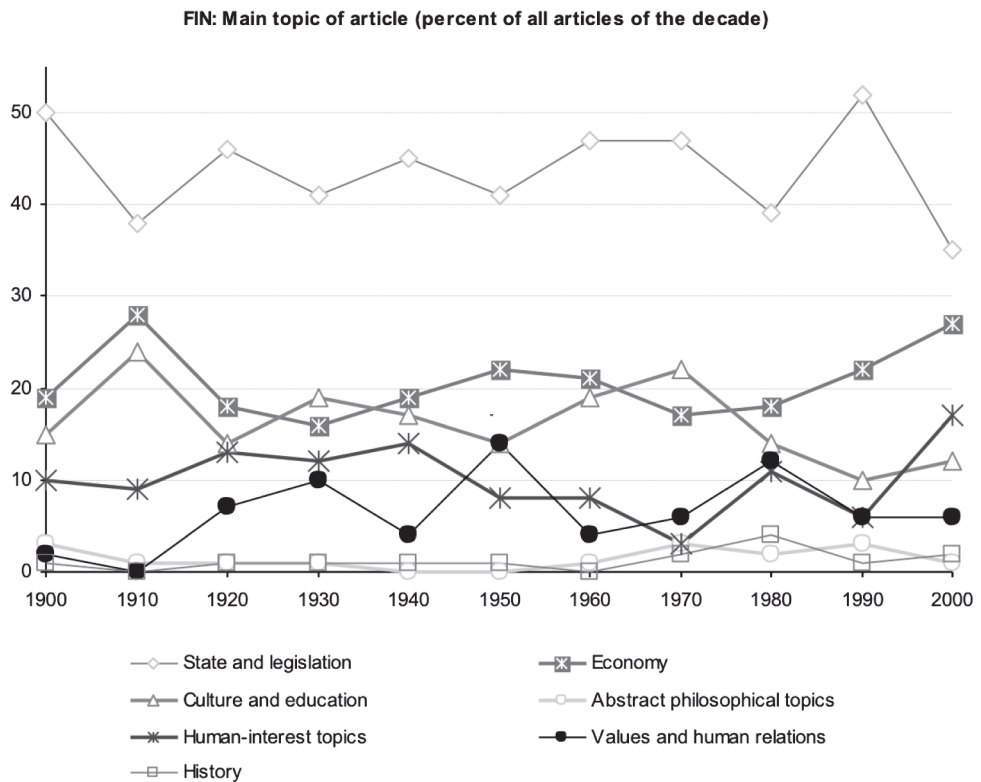
In the case of these three countries we see that the reasons behind the dominant topics/themes are different (see Lõhmus et al 2011, Kõnno et al 2012, Lõhmus et al 2013, Kõuts & Lõhmus 2013).

In the case of Finland the debate directed to the political solutions is (clearly) dominant.

This shows that journalism (evidently) has vast influence in the direction of moulding the society.

The function of democratic journalism and public communication is basically to mediate issues that reflect on a nation's political structures (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Main topic of articles in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat* (1905- 2009).



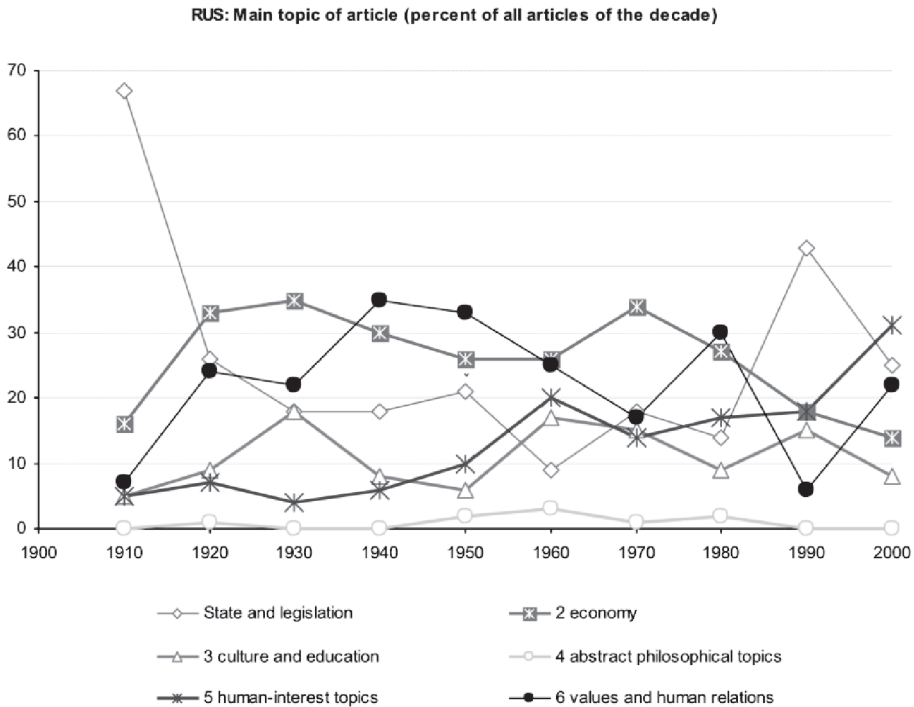
This function of free media is visibly disturbed by totalitarian regimes. In Russian *Pravda* we see that the dominant is newspaper's political propagandist function, in which the economic field as area of common labour is for a theme.

Rabota – rab – comes from the word 'slave' and marks the preference of working to other activities in society. Journalism has the focus on working. Second observation is about war years, when the valuation of human beings is dominant. For this there is the propaganda of heroes and paragons that is important for forcing

and inspiring people in order to criticise wrong behavioural models.

Third observation is about the changes in 1990s, when the valuation of public debate and public communication started in Russia (see Figure 2).

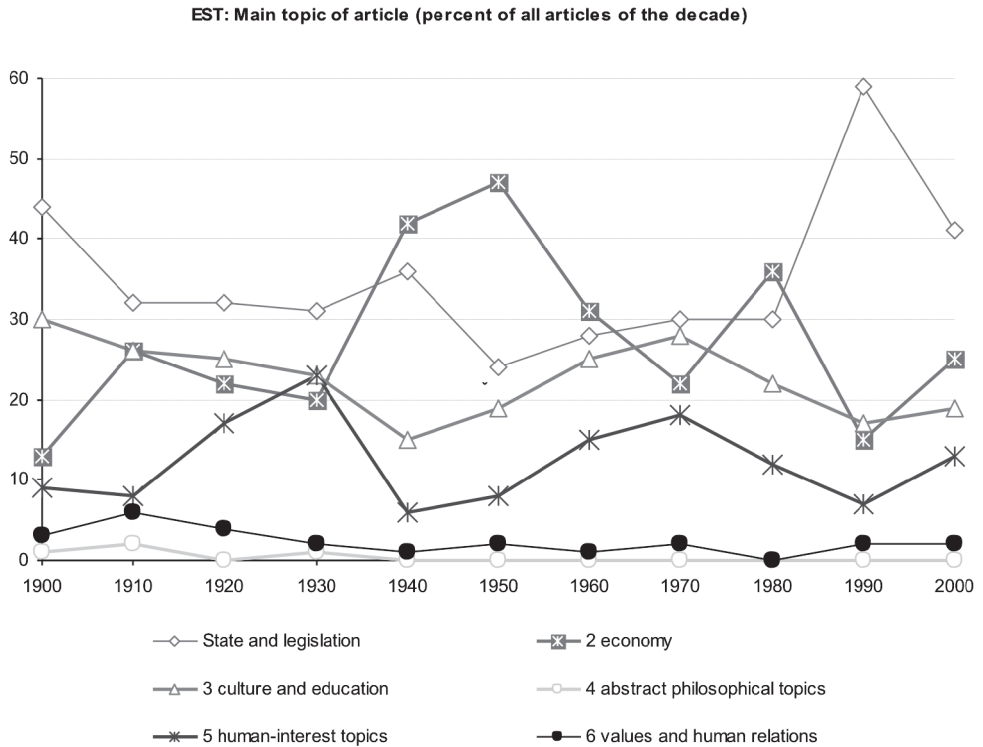
Figure 2. Main topic of articles in Russia, *Pravda/Komsomolskaja Pravda* (1917- 2009).



Estonian Daily (*Eesti Päevaleht*) is directed to the field of public political-economic debate and decisions in the beginning and end of 20th century. After the loss of independent state in 1940 until 1990 the dominant topics of economy are similar to Russian *Pravda*.

But also the cultural topics are in the forefront – this is characteristic to Estonian communication style in comparison to Finnish and Russian dailies content (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Main topic of articles in Estonia, *Eesti Päevaleht/Rahva Hää* (1905- 2009).



It is important to notice, that with the liberation of society, the liberation of journalism takes place.

The liberation or autonomy of journalism shows what topics the given society wants to discuss about. In Estonia the situation is similar to the beginning of 20th century- re-occurred – topics on political sphere became dominant.

We can make two conclusions:

In the conditions of freedom the general cultural contexts determine the dominant topics as communication style.

In totalitarian system journalism is the mean of suppression with the aid of propaganda. My comment here: The communication style is derived from present official language and style that could conflict with the native culture and its natural use of language. If such official style of totalitarian system were to be imitated on an informal level, a cultural conflict of meanings and satirical effect would be guaranteed.

We see that journalism as the dominant communicative field is a part of the decision making process, a field of discussion in given society.

The main function of journalism is reflecting the society and shaping the collective identity through the mutual reaction.

But the collective reflection takes different forms depending on whether the system is open or closed.

Another important dimension is the centre-periphery. Journalism, that is distributed centrally, is uniting in character, constructive of the common part (in case of *Pravda*). Newspaper distributed in periphery is in nature subsystem subjected to the bigger system that impels its own reflective function less remarkable and even then only in subtopics (in case of *Rahva Hääl*).

In the case of three researched countries we see that in one is the case of *closed system* and *centre*, which uses the elements of collective reflection dominantly for constructing new aims and activities-goals. As the centre has united heterogenic subsystem, the communication in the central daily has been the unifier, definer of general principles.

In second case, in Finland, the case is of a system, where the daily paper is also a central shaper of the system, but the system itself has been compacted homogeneously.

In third case, in Estonia, journalism as communication system has had interruption, for periods both the shaper of independent state in central role and subdued in totalitarian system and in periphery position. Hence we see the interruptions on the communicative styles.

An example 2. Changes of paradigm of public communication in 1988: from closed to open

The structural change of the communicative field can take place through *public speeches*, which in turn can have different styles, unconventional and artistic.

Let us observe one interruption break more closely – the end of totalitarian system and the beginning of the process of restoring openness (*ENSV Loominguliste* 1988).

But in the pivotal times the *structural changes of communication* field takes place. We know of several manifestos in the history – including Martin Luther King 1963 etc.

It is quite seldom that one can show and say: now there is taking place a change, now there is a breakthrough. If such situations occur, it is usually connected with public demonstrations or public speeches. For example in US in 1963 the speech of Martin Luther King '*I have a Dream*' was certainly on breakthrough, which demanded a change of statuses in the society, hence the change of the whole system. A particular intensity is their unifying characteristic.

Estonia has its own concrete textual example, where we can say, that one event started in the conditions of *closed society* and ended with establishing the basics and ground for *open society*. Such a meeting took place in Tallinn in 1988. Below I will characterize the occurrence of the meeting and describe the process and format as certain steps and stages, as a movement from one system to another.

True, the “change of system” took at first place in orations, including performance of a turn-generating critical song. But on the example of this meeting we see, which force and importance does a public text have in society and in culture.

We can see, that the meeting started as so-called *manipulated public sphere*, where texts had been prepared and the end of the meeting had been prepared within certain existing frame. Nevertheless, as the meeting advanced, the texts, the manipulated public sphere grew into *critical public sphere*.

Dominant became texts in the paradigm of critical publicness, which in turn started to shape entire agenda.

The characteristic of a totalitarian system is the text of a manipulated, so called “closed” public sphere, the text of publicness, which is presented as seemingly spontaneous and open public sphere. At the same time into the creation and control process of the text is involved institutional censorship and corresponding filters.

In the movement from totalitarian and authoritarian system towards democratic open publicness, the ignoring of borders and barriers, overcoming the “rules of the games” or denials is characteristic. At first it takes place as breach of the rules, a controversial and conflict situation, where punishing and removing from the public sphere the subject rule-breaker is possible.

But when for the democratic open public sphere successively 40 persons start to speak, it becomes clear, that it is a turn. Moulding of a new public sphere takes place, breakthrough from *manipulated* publicness to the *critical* one. Next I am describing the turn of 1988 from closed public sphere to open one more closely.

In Estonian society the recapture of journalism as the communicative field from totalitarian system took place through public two-day speaking event in April of the 1988. During these two days the intellectuals from society gave analytical-reflective speeches, in which everyone gave a share to presenting the visions for the future.

The two-day analysis of the totalitarian system led to diagnosing the big problems in the society. Central focus was on the rehabilitation of the people repressed by the Soviet system, addressing the central government and system leaders with categorical demands. The two-day speaking event in turn formed a step-by-step movement from totalitarian system to open system. In the beginning of the two-day assembly there were two distinct camps – the official line of functionaries representing the totalitarian system and the line of intellectuals representing new, free society, both of whom define their goals.

In the speeches of the first day there took place a combat for naming the societal processes and defining the situation.

Both the “old” and the “new” style were present and in ultimate opposition. In the second day the new discourse had won when a national dream was (re)defined - *autonomy*. And the “old” concepts of sovereignty were replaced by a “new” paradigm of *independence*. The new style of communication was immediately adopted and put to use, thus cementing it.

All in all the move from an old style of communication to the new one in two days consisted of 7 steps:

A semi-public plenum of creative intellectuals in a framework of a closed society, the representatives of power are present. The analysis and problem of the old meanings. World as a doctrine versus world as a reflection.

Manifestation of the breakage. New declaration of the breakage in a song "I want, I demand!" as a form of manifesto (see Tepandi 1988, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8hyT8cGbts>).

Public introduction of the new conceptual system and public paradigm. Use in everyday practice immediately starts its exponential spread.

A public appeal to the political and legal leaders and the leaders of repressions system to rehabilitate the repressed people. Manifestation and legitimation of the appeal through publication in the central (Moscow) news.

Transformation of the cultural public sphere into political public sphere.

Raising the level of abstraction from the practical analysis to the extensive mental model.

The end of the structural censorship.

The analysis of the totalitarian system from the view point of Jürgen Habermas's critical public sphere took the debates from listing and mapping the practical problems to a new level, to the search of the new social idea and structure.

On the example of the two-day discussion of intellectuals in Estonia in 1988 we can say that the birth of the critical public sphere as described by Habermas is indeed a force that can change the publicness in society and the style of communication.

The critical public sphere is directed to practical decisions and actions in a society.

The basis of this is indeed collective reflectivity.

Hence we see that collective reflectivity can be also a collective organiser as Lenin named Pravda.

We can see that the question of George Gerbner 'what are the topics and how these are connected to each other', is continually important also in the situation of structural change of *socium*.

Different systems speak through different topics.

But in pivotal times it is characteristic that the *object* itself is the *topic*.

Code is the object.

The 'old', normative code of speaking of topics is replaced with 'new', reflexive code. Subjects – the speakers – individuals can be differentiated through the use of different code in the public sphere.

The transmission time is code sensitive. In the period of code struggles it is possible to transform also the communicative field of journalism itself, replace the dominant topics and spokespersons.

In the other hand – if there is an established system, where the journalism-communicative field of the system is the promoter of the system, could there then be

the code-change journalism itself the element/instrument, which in turn could kick start the renewal, modernization or refreshment of the society?

This is a central problem of contemporary media and journalism, which is carried by the words participation, involvement, activation – and to which the legitimized forms are only searched for, timid attempts are made. It can, however, happen that the real result of such “activation” is its real-world opposite, e.g. passivation. And that, too, can be the result of purposeful effort of official media-activation in order to bore people and thus keep them away from real politics and hold their involvement on the formal level not initializing it into a substantial interest.

Estonian society has successfully gone through this test with the discussion of intellectuals in the 1988 and is hence an expert of involvement and participation in the communication field.

For some reason this total exchange of communication style has not been taken up for broad discussion. Why?

It may be because there is a dark area, the ability to change power structures in this change of communication style, experimenting with the dominant power not seeing as worthy to follow. Rather vice versa.

This vigorous breakthrough of the intellectuals’ communication style in 1988 is a caution and threat, a backup plan.

The time of communication breakage is still fresh in the social and cultural memory, but has been abandoned from the public discussions as a taboo. The fact that the political sphere was born from the cultural sphere and such birth-process could easily continue, is a somewhat politically shunned topic today.

At the same time the communication in its style starts to become too normative or unreflective.

This taboo-threat has become one of the dimensions of communication field, which adds tension to the current meetings and collisions of the cultural and power spheres.

This is a dimension the cultural sphere has not been able to overcome so far, 20 years later.

Between cultural and power spheres there is a constant tense where the mapping of common interests takes place under the circumstance of tension. There is an ever-continuous process of testing grounds, challenging, provoking between the spheres of power and culture.

Journalism has in turn won from that, enjoying the tension of the communication field.

The breakthrough from totalitarian system to the open system has been a traumatic experience to the communication field itself, because from one side it has been an instrument of ending the totalitarian system and from other side its own status, the auto-communication of the journalistic sphere, in itself is one of the most complicated fields, largely hidden area.

Returning once more to the comparison of three vicinal countries, we see, that Finland, which has been able to communicate independently in its own state

and culture throughout 20th century, has also dealt with the self-reflection and auto-communication of journalism as the communication system more than its vicinal countries, in which the overtaking, supressing, totalitarian system has been in power.

Modern journalism has reached new opportunities – technologically. The question in the society and culture is, whether the communicative style of journalism is allowed to shape the culture more generally or is the journalism reduced into background.

Both paths are possible in 21st Century, apparently depending on the systems themselves.

On the basis of Estonian practices and experience it is possible to bring an example where the journalistic sphere with its debates and openness directs the society and it has (had) strength to address and draw together for common activities.

But what's the reality now – does journalism get to develop its professionalism and communicative style autonomously or is it determined/directed from the outside?

Or is there certain everlasting dynamic negotiation process between external and internal principles of journalism, principles of communications styles?

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