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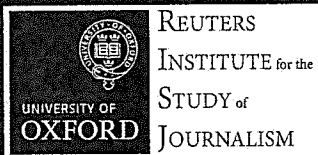
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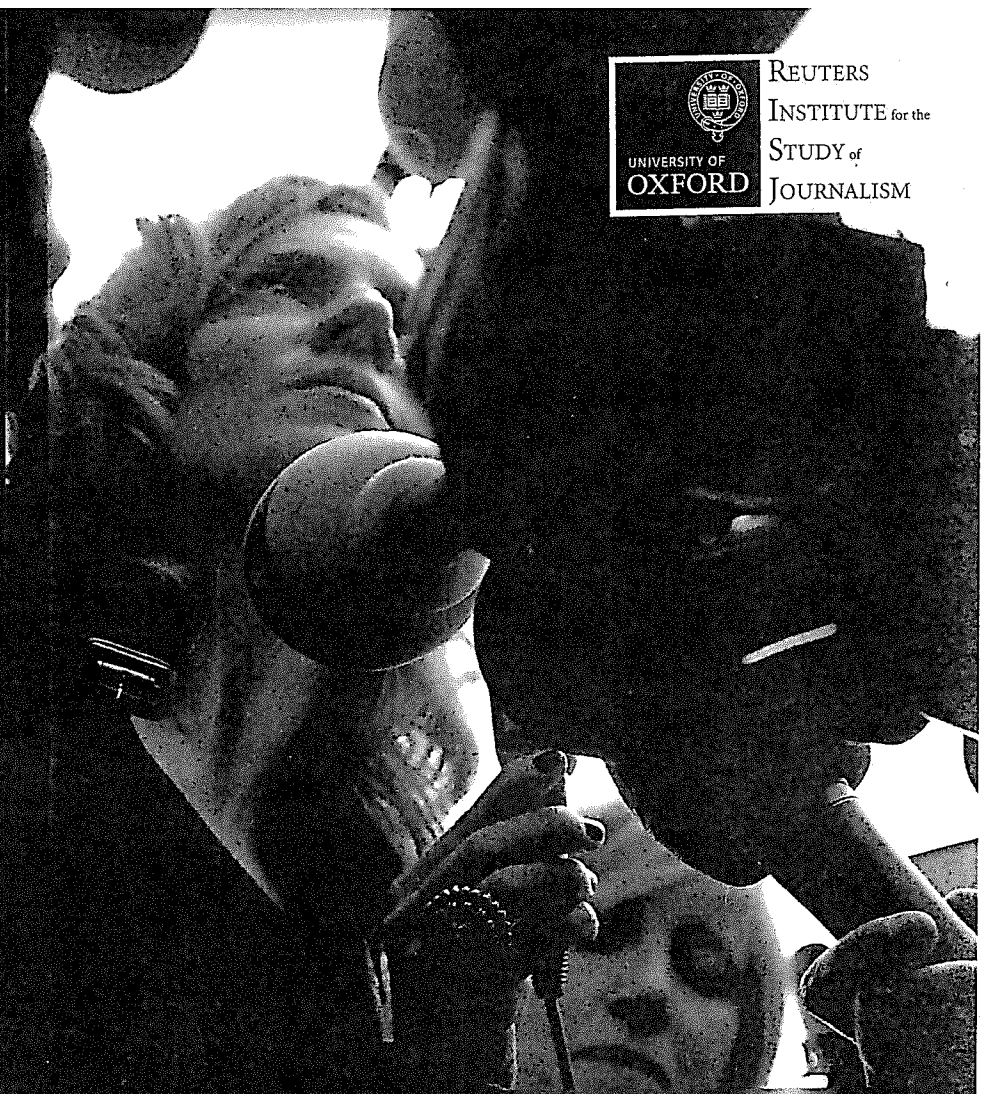
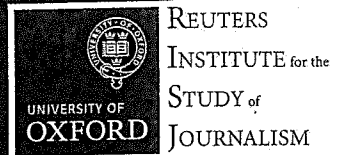
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LOCAL JOURNALISM

THE DECLINE OF NEWSPAPERS AND THE RISE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

EDITED BY
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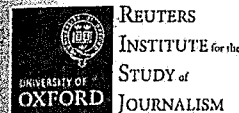
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LOCAL JOURNALISM

THE DECLINE OF NEWSPAPERS AND THE RISE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

Edited by RASMUS KLEIS NIELSEN



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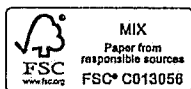
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Contents

Tables and Figures	vii
Contributors	ix
Preface	xi
Introduction: The Uncertain Future of Local Journalism <i>Rasmus Kleis Nielsen</i>	1
Part I Local Media Ecosystems	
1. The News Crisis Compared: The Impact of the Journalism Crisis on Local News Ecosystems in Toulouse (France) and Seattle (US) <i>Matthew Powers, Sandra Vera Zambrano, and Olivier Baisnée</i>	31
2. Local Newspapers as Keystone Media: The Increased Importance of Diminished Newspapers for Local Political Information Environments <i>Rasmus Kleis Nielsen</i>	51
3. How News Travels: A Comparative Study of Local Media Ecosystems in Leeds (UK) and Philadelphia (US) <i>C. W. Anderson, Stephen Coleman, and Nancy Thumim</i>	73
Part II Local Journalism and its Interlocutors	
4. The Plurality of Journalistic Identities in Local Controversies <i>Florence Le Cam and David Domingo</i>	99

5. Rethinking Local Communicative Spaces: Implications of Digital Media and Citizen Journalism for the Role of Local Journalism in Engaging Citizens <i>Julie Firmstone and Stephen Coleman</i>	117
6. Perceived Relevance of and Trust in Local Media <i>Bengt Engan</i>	141
Part III New Forms of Local Media	
7. Between Journalistic Diversity and Economic Constraints: Local Pure Players in Southern France <i>Nikos Smyrnaiois, Emmanuel Marty, and Franck Bousquet</i>	165
8. Hyperlocal with a Mission? Motivation, Strategy, Engagement <i>Marco van Kerkhoven and Piet Bakker</i>	185
9. Filling the News Hole? UK Community News and the Crisis in Local Journalism <i>Andy Williams, Dave Harte, and Jerome Turner</i>	203
Index	224

Tables and Figures

Tables

2.1	Relative importance of ways of staying informed about local politics	60
5.1	Typology of citizen journalism	124
5.2	List of interviews conducted July–September 2012	137
7.1	The three pure players that were the focus of research	170
8.1	Motivation of owners (123 local models)	192
8.2	Advertising (123 local models)	193
8.3	Adaptation of professional ethics	196
9.1	Functions of secondary source intervention in UK hyperlocal blog posts	212

Figures

2.1	Coverage of local politics by media organisation (29 October–19 November 2013)	63
8.1	Geographical distribution of the hyperlocals. Map data © Google 2015	191
9.1	What gets covered? Percentage of topics covered by hyperlocal blog posts	209
9.2	Who gets to speak? Percentage of sources either quoted or indirectly cited in UK hyperlocal news	211

1

The News Crisis Compared: The Impact of the Journalism Crisis on Local News Ecosystems in Toulouse (France) and Seattle (US)

*Matthew Powers, Sandra Vera Zambrano,
and Olivier Baisnée*

Introduction

In this chapter, we present a cross-national study of two local news ecosystems: Toulouse (France) and Seattle (US). We ask how and in what ways the news media of these two interestingly similar cities have been impacted by the economic and technological transformations of the past decade (as measured by changes in audience size, newsroom employment, and revenue sources). We then examine how news organisations – print, audiovisual, and online outlets – have responded to these changes (in terms of strategies taken to raise revenues and new journalism ventures that have been started). Finally, we ask journalists in both cities to clarify the sorts of journalism to which they aspire (in terms of their evaluations of journalistic excellence). Throughout, we consider the political, economic, and professional factors shaping similarities and differences between the two news ecosystems.

Our aims are twofold. First, we use cross-national analysis to broaden the scope of local news scholarship. While sophisticated studies of local news exist in both the US and Europe (e.g. Anderson, 2013; Ryfe, 2012; Smyrnaioi and Bousquet, 2011), this research is typically confined to a single nation. As a result, local news scholarship precludes analysis of how cross-national variations in market structure, political systems, and

professional histories shape the development of local news ecosystems. As we detail below, comparative scholarship helps bring visibility to these otherwise taken-for-granted forces. Second, we use local news to deepen comparative understandings of media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) themselves. To date, comparative research has generally confined itself to a small number of agenda-setting news outlets, which in turn stand in for a country's media system. Whether and how local news media fit within these established media system models thus constitutes an important theory-building opportunity for comparative scholarship.

Drawing on statistical data and interviews, we find that while news media in both cities struggle to find a stable financial footing and adapt to online platforms, the effects of economic and technological change have generally been less severe in Toulouse than Seattle on several measures (job losses, circulation declines) as a result of both government aid and market developments (especially the introduction of free daily newspapers). To an important degree, these forces – themselves rooted in the particular history of the French journalistic field – insulate local news media from upheavals (Benson and Neveu, 2005; Ferenczi, 1993; Neveu, 2009). At the same time, we find that French resilience coexists with low levels of new journalistic ventures and increasingly precarious employment conditions, while in Seattle instability produces very high levels of churn (e.g. the loss of one print newspaper, many newsroom layoffs) but also a surprisingly high number of online initiatives, many of which fail to endure. In neither city do professional ideals correspond to dominant national visions of journalistic excellence as represented in the existing comparative literature. Taken together, these findings suggest that national media systems shape – but do not mechanistically control – how local media ecosystems experience economic and technological transformations.

In what follows, we first introduce the case studies of Toulouse and Seattle and situate them within the larger comparative literature on French-US media scholarship. This approach allows us to analyse impacts on local news ecosystems in terms of cross-national differences while keeping in mind possible contrasts between the local level and national media models. We link these two levels of analysis by discussing how the literature predicts news media in both cities will experience the economic and technological transformations and the degree to which the two cases may diverge from national media models. We then present our comparative analysis of how the two news ecosystems have been impacted by and responded to the economic and technological changes, while also detailing the varying visions

of journalism to which professionals in both cities aspire. We conclude by reviewing our findings in light of the extant literature on both local news and comparative research and suggest prospects for future research.

A French-US perspective on local news

Toulouse and Seattle are comparably sized cities located on the geographic periphery of their respective countries (south-western France and north-western US, respectively). Average levels of education and computer use in both are as high, if not higher, than national averages. Economically, large aeronautics and information technology sectors have helped drive a sustained period of economic growth (Toulouse is home to Airbus, Seattle to Boeing). Partly as a result, populations in both cities have boomed over the past several decades. Large universities in both cities also provide sizeable student populations. Thus, while no two cities are strictly equivalent, we can be reasonably sure that by holding roughly constant these demographic and economic features any differences or similarities will be due to the respective news media ecosystems under analysis, rather than other confounding variables.

Over the past decade, media in both Toulouse and Seattle have been subject to the same economic and technological shocks that have wreaked havoc on news media throughout Western Europe and North America. Audiences for legacy media have both aged and shrunk, revenues and staff size for these media have turned downwards, and online technologies have presented a new arena in which legacy and emergent actors compete for growing audiences (Downie and Schudson, 2009; Levy and Nielsen, 2010). As we detail below, Seattle saw one print newspaper stop its print edition entirely and Toulouse saw its main private television channel go out of business. At the same time, in both cities there have been developments within and beyond the traditional newsroom to respond to these changing conditions. In an attempt to capture this empirical heterogeneity, we designate the conglomeration of all news outlets – print, audiovisual, and online – within the geographic boundaries of both cities, an 'ecosystem'.

In selecting Toulouse and Seattle, we aim to build on a large body of comparative research examining similarities and differences in the French and US media (Alexander, 1981; Benson, 2013; Neveu, 2009; Padioleau, 1985). This scholarship consistently finds the two countries' news media to vary considerably in their relationship to both the market and state

(with the US media more commercialised and advertising-driven and the French media more reliant on government revenues to fund or subsidise news production). Research also suggests that the two countries' media vary in their professional logics and evaluations of journalistic excellence. Together, these differences form a key component of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) influential theoretical account of comparative media systems. According to Hallin and Mancini, media systems encompass the economic (level of newspaper readership, forms of ownership, etc.), political (level of party pluralism, form of political representation, etc.), and professional (e.g. historical development of journalism) forces that shape journalism in different countries. They conceptualise France and the US as providing opposing media system models, with France's more deliberative and opinion-oriented press contrasted to the US's more commercialised, objectivity-oriented model. Whether and how local news media reflect these models is an important, and to our knowledge underexplored, question.

In order to explore these questions, our chapter proposes three dimensions wherein the news ecosystems of Toulouse and Seattle can be compared: first, in terms of the impact of economic and technological transformations; second, in terms of how news ecosystems respond to these changes; and third, in terms of how journalists in both cities evaluate visions of professional worth. As we review below, the literatures on comparative media and local news suggest slightly different trends and outcomes on each of these three dimensions. Therefore the case studies of Toulouse and Seattle can help empirically adjudicate these accounts while also offering insight into the relative factors shaping how local news media respond to their rapidly changing environment.

The first dimension compares the impact of economic and technological transformations on both local news ecosystems (e.g. figures for audience size, newspaper circulation, newsroom employment, etc. over time). Comparative research suggests the impact to be greater in the more commercially driven US media, while local news scholarship suggests similar cross-national effects as a result of the unique properties of local news media. From a comparative perspective, previous French-US comparisons note how much more exposed US news outlets are to economic cataclysms than their French counterparts (Benson, 2013). The US press is among the world's most commercialised: newspapers draw between 60 and 80% of revenues from advertising (World Association of Newspapers, 2007); audiovisual media are almost entirely commercial entities, apart from a small number of publicly funded television and radio

stations. By contrast, the French press relies on a mixture of advertising, sales, and press subsidies, which may serve as a buffer in the face of unfavourable economic conditions. Furthermore, the French audiovisual sector includes a greater mixture of public channels relative to its American counterpart (even though these channels are themselves less popular than their commercial competitors): nationally, seven French television channels are public, while 25 are privately owned (2014 figures). For these reasons, and especially because of the different roles of the public and private actors (Baisnée and Balland, 2011; Benson and Powers, 2011), while we might expect both cities to experience declines in revenue, circulation, audience share, and workforce, comparative insights suggest that the impacts will be felt more acutely in Seattle than in Toulouse.

Local news scholarship offers a slightly different reading of how changing economic and technological conditions will impact local ecosystems. Local media ecosystems tend to be less economically competitive than national news markets, both in terms of audiences and advertising (Picard, 2009). In both Seattle and Toulouse, leading print and television news providers need to cater to and symbolically link geographically proximate but socially diverse audiences: past research suggests that news outlets achieved this goal by focusing news coverage on broad issues of regional identity (Kaniss, 1991; Le Floch, 1997). Given economically and technologically driven trends towards niche news, some have argued that omnibus local news media – especially print newspapers – are imperilled (Jones, 2009). For these reasons, we would expect the impacts to be broadly similar in both cities, especially for legacy news outlets (as indicated by comparable percentage declines in newspaper circulation, television audience share, and newsroom employment).

A second dimension of analysis pertains to the responses made to these economic and technological changes. Comparative scholarship has focused much of its attention in this realm on questions of funding. Scholars note, for example, the role played by the French government in supporting the press (Baisnée and Balland, 2011). In the most recent crisis, the French government provided nearly \$1 billion in support to existing news organisations (Wauters, 2009). By contrast, US government policy generally shies away from active intervention in the media business (though it does little to discourage media mergers and corporate consolidation). The loss of a third of the workforce, for example, drew no US government response and government funding of public media is a fraction of what Western European countries provide (Benson and

Powers, 2011). Instead, the US relies primarily on a mix of commercial or non-profit ventures, typically funded through philanthropic foundations (Waldman, 2011). Past partial measures, like Joint Operating Agreements, have largely gone away (Picard, 2007). Because these figures are typically aggregate national totals, the cases here present an opportunity to examine the relative prevalence of these funding strategies as a local response (e.g. number of non-profits, amount of state support) and assess their correspondence to national trends.

Local news scholarship has generally discussed responses in terms of journalism practice, rather than sources of funding. Scholars have noted that some legacy news outlets tend to see digital as a challenge or a threat, thus shaping a reactive and defensive position towards online platforms (e.g. Boczkowski, 2004; Ryfe, 2012). Others have stressed the opportunities that digital technologies present both to legacy news outlets and new journalism start-ups interested in playing a role in news production (Abernathy, 2014; Charon, 2011). Whether different funding structures enable or constrain these different modes of journalism practice is an important, and as yet unaddressed, question. We thus aim to survey the different responses in terms of both funding and practice and ask whether any relationship exists between the two.

Finally, a third dimension on which local news can be analysed is in terms of professional ideals regarding 'quality' journalism. Here, too, we find divergent suggestions in the comparative and local news literatures. Comparative scholars argue that, because national journalistic fields shape specific visions of what constitutes 'good journalism', cross-national evaluations of journalistic excellence will differ accordingly. Specifically, in the US, we expect a stronger emphasis on investigative, public affairs journalism (in keeping with the 'informational' model of American journalism) (Schudson, 2011). In France, we might expect a greater emphasis on deliberation and a particularly Parisian vision of journalism that valorises the role of the press, as seen in journalism oriented to international conflicts or political issues (Gatien, 2012; Neveu, 2009).

Conversely, local news scholarship suggests that the conditions shaping news production differ substantially between local and agenda-setting news media. Because of their geographic proximity, some suggest that local media maintain, or should maintain, a closer connection to their audience – and that this community orientation shapes evaluations of journalistic excellence (Abernathy, 2014; Kaniss, 1991). On this view, journalism practice that is lionised at the national level (e.g. literary

orientation in France, a watchdog orientation in the US) might become partially submerged as efforts to engage the community through dialogue and forums prove more popular. Interestingly, these arguments tend to be made across national borders, suggesting a convergence in journalistic visions of excellence at the level of local news.

In sum, local media ecosystems can be analysed along three dimensions: (1) impact, (2) response, and (3) professional journalistic orientations. Comparative research suggests that these dimensions will broadly reflect those found at the national level while local news scholarship posits cross-national similarities across the two cases as a result of the unique economic, political, and professional contexts in which local media ecosystems operate. To be sure, it is possible that media in Seattle and Toulouse do not follow either pattern and are instead marked by local specificities not reducible to either local news or comparative media models. We aim here simply to capture an initial comparison of the two cases and situate them within these two important bodies of scholarship.

Data and methods

This study examines the impacts of economic and technological changes on local media ecosystems. By 'local media ecosystems', we mean any self-identified news outlets – print, audiovisual, or online – in the Toulouse or Seattle region. For Toulouse, we use geographical boundaries (the *département*) defined by the French government, covering the areas of Toulouse-Muret-Saint Gaudens (Haute-Garonne) and comprising roughly 1.3 million inhabitants (2012 figure). For Seattle, we rely on geographic boundaries used by the US census, covering the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue area and comprising roughly 3.5 million inhabitants. In both areas, we aim to survey the entire universe of news outlets: daily and weekly newspapers, television and radio, as well as online pure players. For Seattle, we rely on a survey conducted by the Washington News Council which oversees news outlets in the region. We also draw on the expertise of local informants to help identify news organisations omitted from the survey. We rely similarly on the expertise of local informants in Toulouse to ensure that we include all news organisations. In both cases, we include any news outlet that has been in existence at any time since 2008 (where organisations have gone defunct, we note it in the text).

To examine the impact of economic and technological transformations on local news ecosystems, we present several indicators.

Drawing on publicly available reporting, we examine over time newspaper circulation and newspapers per capita in both Seattle and Toulouse (including community daily newspapers as well as the major urban newspapers). For both, we present aggregate totals for the metropolitan region, which serve as indicators of the general direction of the daily newspaper industry between the mid-2000s and the present day. We then use these circulation figures to calculate the number of newspapers per 1,000 inhabitants, a commonly used indicator of newspaper density (e.g. Starr, 2004). In subsequent versions of this project, we aim to provide comparable indicators for the audiovisual sector. Given the difficulty – and incomplete nature – of these data at the metropolitan level (especially in Seattle), we are regretfully unable to provide such data at present. Finally, we present data on newsroom employment. These figures count only full-time newsroom staff (journalists, editors, photographers, etc.). This undoubtedly under-reports the total number of individuals working in journalism, as both cities employ a battery of freelance staff. Data for these figures are drawn from publicly available reports; we complement them wherever possible with data from interviews with journalists and local informants.

We examine the response of news actors to economic and technological changes at several levels. Drawing on interview data, we examine the business and professional strategies of legacy news media in their transition to online platforms (e.g. use of paywalls, participation in partnerships with other news outlets, general view on the prospects and threats of online for their media outlets). We complement these interviews with an overview of the revenue sources news media draw upon to fund their work (e.g. government aid, philanthropic funding, commercial ventures). Finally, we survey the number of new online outlets to emerge in the past decade in each city. Together, these data paint an initial picture of the responses taken across the breadth of the local media ecosystem.

Lastly, to examine the role of professional values in shaping journalistic evaluations of quality, we rely on interviews with journalists, editors, and news entrepreneurs in both Seattle and Toulouse. Interview subjects were contacted by email and conducted in person unless otherwise specified. Interviewees were asked to talk about how – or if – the changing economic and technological context shaped their work and, more broadly, how their news organisations were responding to these economic conditions. Finally, interviewees were asked to talk about their notions of ‘quality

journalism’ (typically by talking about stories they or their news organisation had done and about which they were especially proud). At present, we have conducted 15 interviews in total. In addition to these interviews, ongoing informal conversations with Seattle and Toulouse journalists have allowed us to sharpen our understanding of the changing economic contexts in both metropolitan areas.

Findings

Impact of economic and technological transformations

News media, especially print newspapers, in both cities have been adversely impacted over the past decade: print revenue, circulation, and newsroom staffing are all down, while the audiovisual sectors have proven more resilient. These findings confirm local news predictions about secular declines in print news at the local level. At the same time, and in keeping with comparative hypotheses, the effects of economic and technological change have not been equally experienced across the two cities. On most measures, the impacts have been far greater in Seattle, where both per capita newspaper circulation and newsroom employment have been reduced considerably. By contrast, in Toulouse aggregate per capita newspaper circulation has actually increased due to the introduction of free dailies, while newsroom employment has dipped more moderately (even as employment conditions grow increasingly precarious). We suggest that these differences stem from the presence of – and fallout from – more direct competition and greater advertising reliance in Seattle, particularly in the realm of print newspapers.

In both cities, print newspapers have experienced – and continue to experience – substantial circulation and revenue declines. In Toulouse, *La Dépêche du Midi* has seen weekday circulation erode by roughly 17% from 2007 to 2013 (197,751 to 163,897) (OJD, 2014). In Seattle, two newspapers vied for dominance until 2009, when one – the *Post-Intelligencer* – ceased print publication (though it retains an online website). The remaining paper – the *Seattle Times* – now serves the entire metropolitan market. After a brief boost in 2009 (see below), its circulation has declined each year. In both cities, newspapers report declining revenues as news consumption habits and advertising dollars shift to online publishing platforms (Boardman, 2013). As a result, both newspapers have cut jobs in

an attempt to cut costs and regain profitability (Fancher, 2011; Smyrniaios and Bousquet, 2011: 3).

The audiovisual sector has proven more resilient than print newspapers in both cities. Informants and interviewees suggest that major news stations in both countries have retained their business profitability and seen audiences diminish only marginally (interview with Mark Briggs, KING 5 Seattle, 13 January 2014; interview with Carlos Bellinchon, France 3, 14 November 2013). In Toulouse, the regional public television provider – France 3 – retains a newsroom staff of approximately 70 journalists. The region's primary private channel – whose audience share is small and declining over time – was recently purchased at 60% by the City Council (see below for details). In Seattle, each of the three commercial news providers – KING 5, KIRO, and KOMO – have roughly 30 newsroom staff. In just the past year, large media conglomerates have acquired two channels (Gannett and Sinclair Broadcast Group). What effects, if any, these ownership changes will have on newsroom staff and news content are at the moment unclear.

In both cities, the radio industry includes a mix of public and commercial operators. All face economic difficulties, though not at the same level as is experienced by print newspapers (in part because they never played the role of primary news provider and thus had smaller newsrooms). In Toulouse, most stations have between 5 and 15% market share. In Seattle, public radio has traditionally been a strong provider of local news programming, though its market share is similarly small (Friedland, 2014). Several commercial providers also offer news. Employment data is as yet unavailable for radio newsrooms.

If Toulouse and Seattle share similar tendencies, the aggregate impacts of economic and technological changes have been, on most measures, far greater in Seattle. In Seattle, total newspaper circulation has dropped 32.7% in the past decade (from 564,773 in 2006 to 380,325 in 2013) while increasing 7.6% in Toulouse (from 160,673 in 2008 to 172,867 in 2012). These shifts have reversed per capita circulation figures in the two cities. In 2006, Seattle had 171 newspapers per 1,000 inhabitants while Toulouse had 129. Today, Toulouse has 136 newspapers per 1,000 inhabitants while Seattle has just 109.

The primary driver of growth in Toulouse is the emergence of free daily newspapers. As with many Western European cities, free dailies like *Metronews* have rapidly gained in circulation over the past decade by distributing their product free of charge and using an advertising

model that relies primarily on national advertisements (and thus does not compete with local newspapers for advertising). In *Metronews* or *20 Minutes*, only a third of the advertising inserts deal with regional companies or issues; the remainder are selected, negotiated, and chosen from Paris (Garcia, 2006).

The circulation decline in Seattle stems in large part from the *Post-Intelligencer's* decision to cease publication of its print edition. Without the loss of that newspaper, we expect circulation declines would have been comparable to those seen at Toulouse's main daily newspaper. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, the removal of the *Post-Intelligencer's* print edition may have provided a temporary boost to the circulation figures of its primary competitor. When the *Post-Intelligencer* ceased publication, its 116,572 print subscriptions were transferred automatically to the *Seattle Times*. Initially, those transferred subscriptions boosted overall figures significantly (from 198,741 in 2008 to 289,000 in 2009). However, the *Times'* circulation has fallen each year since (as of 2013, it is 229,764). Smaller daily newspaper regions, like the *Kitsap Sun*, report declining print circulations over time (interview with David Nelson, *Kitsap Sun*, 14 January 2014). It seems quite likely that circulation figures will continue to drop in the near future.

Both cities have experienced substantial reductions in newsroom employment, though the extent and trajectory of the trend varies. In absolute terms, Seattle has lost a far greater number of journalists than Toulouse (335 versus 50). This number stems from several factors. First, the number of full-time journalists in Seattle was far greater a decade ago. Because the two newspapers competed directly for audiences, both required relatively well-staffed newsrooms. When the *Post-Intelligencer* switched to an online-only format, it cut staff from 165 to 20. After the move, the *Times* also cut staff from a high of 375 in 2004 to about 200 today. While historical employment data is missing, it is likely that percentage declines are less stark in the two cities (because 50 journalists constitutes more than a third of the current workforce in Toulouse). Second, *La Dépêche du Midi* relies heavily on freelance reporters. Cuts to those staff are not counted in our data, though interviewees suggested freelancers and budgets have been slashed in recent years. Third, in France the distribution of journalists is heavily concentrated in Paris as a result of the field's Parisian orientation, leaving fewer journalists in geographically distant cities the possibility of getting hired in a national (Parisian) media outlet (Marchetti and Ruellan, 2001).

Response to economic and technological transformations

In both Toulouse and Seattle, legacy news media seek to transition to online platforms and search for reliable revenue sources. In Toulouse, government aid has been an important source of revenue. Its economic contributions insulate, to a degree, news outlets from technological and economic shocks, even as these contributions tend to reinforce the status quo (e.g. by minimising the development of new news ventures). By contrast, in Seattle, news outlets receive no comparable financial support from the state. This creates more churn but also gives rise to a number of content-sharing partnerships across news outlets as well as a veritable explosion of new online-only ventures, many of which fail to endure.

In neither city have legacy media converged on a single response to economic and technological changes. In Toulouse, some outlets like *La Dépêche du Midi* generally see online as a threat: their business strategies, whose success is unclear, seek to retain audience and build revenue. Others, like France 3, seem to see online as an opportunity to compete with local news outlets in new ways and, perhaps, partially escape the rigid and centralised structure of the public television organisation. In Seattle, the *Times* has implemented an online paywall and sought to partner with local news providers (Boardman, 2013; Fancher, 2011). Other legacy sites have become hosts for online news ventures, as occurred when a magazine (*Seattle Met*) began hosting a news blog (PubliCola). The television stations have invested in mobile platforms (Mark Briggs, KING 5, 13 January 2014). The public radio station has assumed a greater role as a news provider. As one person at the station put it, when the city had two competing newspapers, the radio newsroom saw itself as 'fringe' and 'supplementary to daily newspapers'. Now, she argues, 'our audience ceased to think of us as fringe, and started to think of us more as mainstream' (Carolyn Adolph, KUOW, 8 January 2014).

One primary difference between how the two cities have responded to these changes pertains to the role played by the state as an economic contributor. In Toulouse, the state provides financial support as a way to insulate public and commercial outlets from adverse economic conditions. According to official figures, 7% of each copy of *La Dépêche du Midi* (7 cents per euro) is guaranteed by direct or indirect government subsidies (Data.gouv.fr, 2014). The local private television station remains on air, despite going bankrupt, due to an infusion of public funds (Toulouse City Hall is the majority funder with 60% of the

corporate stocks and aid from the Conseil Général under a three-year, €1.5 million package) (Arutunian, 2014). The public station, France 3, remains a major newsroom employer. In Seattle, the state plays no similar role in providing financial support: the loss of one newspaper provoked no government response, nor did the acquisition of local television news stations by large conglomerates. City government does provide infrastructural support to citizen-led efforts for neighbourhood communication (see Friedland, 2014: 105–7) but this is directed primarily at civic ventures, not media outlets.

The effects of this French government aid to media are multiple and somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, the support undoubtedly insulates news outlets during periods of economic turmoil. In both print and television, the state operates to ensure a degree of press pluralism even when the market proves incapable of supporting such a system. On the other hand, this aid also tends to reinforce the status quo and crowd out new journalistic entities and voices. In Toulouse, several different online ventures have been started in the last decade. Several displayed a strong commitment to quality public affairs reporting through in-depth articles and reports (see Chapter 7, this volume). At least one reported achieving a small but dedicated audience (interview with Xavier Lalu, Carré d'info, 19 December 2013). Yet most have closed down due to lack of revenue. Two online ventures – Toulouse7 and ToulouseNews – remain: the first is primarily oriented to local news coverage while the latter aggregates coverage produced by other news outlets.

By contrast, in Seattle there are fewer impediments to starting an online news venture. Indeed, Seattle has seen a veritable explosion of online news sites in the past five years. According to a 2011 count by the Washington News Council, there are at least 90 online ventures within the city limits alone (Fancher, 2011). There are several cases of former journalists (print or television) starting online ventures. A former journalist at the *Post-Intelligencer* started a public affairs reporting site (InvestigateWest). A former television news reporter started a neighbourhood news blog (West Seattle Blog) that has achieved national recognition. The founder of an alternative weekly newspaper helped found a local public affairs site (Crosscut). For all, financial viability remains a key question. Of the 90 sites, many are effectively walking zombies. While their websites exist, they are rarely updated and the journalism on offer is relegated to a part-time hobby. Several key sites have shut down completely due to lack of revenue.

The absence of government funding in Seattle gives new ventures two revenue options: non-profit status (which makes them tax-exempt but limits the amount of advertising they can use) and commercial status (which relies primarily on advertising revenues). While the US has seen much discussion about the non-profit model of journalism (Waldman, 2011), in Seattle the number of such ventures is quite small. In fact, we count only four non-profit outlets in our sample. Those non-profits tend to be reliant on foundations for revenue. Several non-profits discussed pressure from those foundations to find a 'sustainable' business model, suggesting that foundation support aims primarily to build successful business ventures, not supplement the marketplace with media that are not commercially viable. As one person put it: 'Foundations tend to think that two or three years is enough and don't want you dependent [on their support]' (David Brewster, Crosscut, 13 January 2014). Another person expressed a similarly critical sentiment, though from the view of a for-profit site: 'We stopped wasting our time on funders like Knight years ago, when for multiple years in a row, it was made abundantly clear they don't want to help people who are already sort of successful, they just want to give money to people who have "ideas" for something they "might" do' (personal email communication with Tracy Record, West Seattle Blog, 2 January 2014).

For the most part, Seattle's new online ventures are funded by advertising revenue. Unsurprisingly, this proves difficult for most sites to generate. What makes a particular site more or less likely to generate revenues depends on a number of factors, though the successful cases to date suggest the need for a specific neighbourhood or topical niche. West Seattle Blog, for example, serves as a traffic news source – though it of course reports on many other things – for a neighbourhood with only one bridge connecting it to the rest of the city. The majority of its revenue comes from neighbourhood businesses that purchase display advertising. Crosscut, a public affairs site, initially began as a commercial entity but quickly switched to not-for-profit status when it realised that advertiser funds were insufficient to support the venture.

Visions of quality journalism

We find substantial and surprising cross-national differences in how journalists envision their craft. In Seattle, journalists place a strong emphasis on audience engagement, whether this entails talking with their audience online, meeting them at events, or relying on them for news

tips. In Toulouse, by contrast, journalists evince a 'peer orientation' that privileges national, rather than local, topics. These findings depart in important ways from traditional French/US distinctions that highlight the literary character of French journalism and the informational character of American models.

Every journalist interviewed in Seattle discussed ways they worked to serve and grow their audiences. This service ranges from providing weather and traffic updates, identifying topical issues of interest to the community, to engaging the community in debate. While the specific nature of the audience relation varies from one outlet to the next, the prevalence and prominence of audience talk is striking. Thus, someone working in the digital department at the local television station says: 'We try to take a very user-centric approach to everything and so if we're going to do something that's going to be popular and useful, we grow that audience and hope it will turn into revenue for us at some point' (Mark Briggs, KING 5 Seattle, 13 January 2014). At the public radio station, a journalist stressed that 'people here really like their listeners. And other forms of media that I've been with, people have, they have not liked their readers. They feel that their readers are stupid, they are callous, they mistake their trolls for being their readers' (Isolde Rafferty, KUOW, 8 January 2014). Importantly, for all interviewees, serving the audience was tightly linked with their evaluation of what constitutes quality journalism.

In Toulouse, it is quite rare to hear journalists talk about audiences in this way, when they talk about them at all. Instead, journalists tend to evaluate notions of journalistic quality vis-à-vis their relations with other journalists. This vision of quality privileges national topics and de-emphasises local journalism as a site for quality journalism per se. Put bluntly: the more local a media outlet (and the journalist working for it), the less legitimate it appears within the journalistic field. At France 3, for instance, one journalist discussed how the regional office had little autonomy vis-à-vis the national office. 'France is still a very Jacobin country: it's Paris, Paris, and Paris again' (Carlos Bellinchon, France 3, 14 November 2013). In comparison with Seattle, it is striking that no Toulouse news organisations, including the few online-only ventures, engaged in hyperlocal journalism, even though the advertising potential for such a venture seems to exist.

To be sure, Seattle journalists sometimes discuss their relationships with other news organisations. Yet these discussions typically refer to

other local journalists, not national newspapers based in New York or Washington, DC. For the most part, such discussions focus on how Seattle news outlets can partner with one another to provide content to audiences in a way that maximises visibility for all partners. This, for example, is the logic behind the *Seattle Times*' use of local blog partners. On its online home page, the paper features news from verified local bloggers, giving the *Times* needed content in the face of staff cuts and the bloggers visibility they would otherwise struggle to achieve. The implications of these partnerships for the broader news ecology – that is, who and what moves through these networks – has yet to be explored.

In our view, it seems that the *expression* of journalistic quality changes at the local level vis-à-vis the national one, even as their structural positions remain similar. That is, in neither Toulouse nor Seattle do we hear journalists talking about 'literary' or 'informational/objective' models of journalism. Nor, however, do we find cross-national convergence due to some unique features of local news production. Instead, Seattle journalists talk about audiences, in part because the journalistic field as a whole is more dominated by market logics (and thus questions of audience satisfaction appear intuitive to all its actors, even as differentially situated actors pursue different strategies through which to achieve such satisfaction). Conversely, the combined insulation of the French journalistic field and its centralised orientation leads most journalists in Toulouse to evaluate quality in terms and topics that originate in Paris.

Conclusion

Our analysis suggests the news ecosystems of both Toulouse and Seattle have been adversely impacted by the economic and technological transformations of the past decade. In both cities, audiences, newsroom employment, and revenues are all on the decline. Yet our analysis also finds that the effects of these shocks have been less severe in Toulouse than Seattle as a result of government aid and the entrance of free dailies into the market. To an important degree, these forces – themselves rooted in the particular history of the French journalistic field – insulate local news media somewhat from economic and technological changes. At the same time, this insulation corresponds to low levels of journalistic innovation as well as increasingly precarious employment conditions. In Seattle, these same shocks have produced a great deal of churn and lots of uncertainty – but

also a surprisingly high level of journalism innovation, as evidenced in the number and variety of online ventures.

Taken together, these findings suggest that local news ecosystems do indeed differ cross-nationally, but not always in the ways that comparative research predicts. While the extent and nature of changing economic and technological contexts has been lesser in Toulouse, it is not only because of government support: the emergence of free dailies, which boost per capita circulation, constitute a market-driven innovation made possible in part by the centralised nature of the French journalistic field. In Seattle, city government provides infrastructural support for civic communication, suggesting that while state aid to media outlets remains a political non sequitur, local governments may play an important role in shaping the depth and range of local news ecosystems. Further, the evaluations of journalistic excellence clearly differ in form from those posited at the national level.

At the same time, it is important not to overstate these deviations from the cross-national literature. In Seattle, city support remains targeted at civic ventures, not media outlets (Friedland, 2014). Further, non-profit status constitutes a small portion of the news players and is typically oriented towards a goal of future profitability. In general, commercial logics remain the dominant lens through which most Seattle journalists attempt to reinvigorate and reinvent their profession. More generally, in both cities national journalistic fields shape the range of possible responses to the economic and technological flux, but not always in ways that can be mechanically deciphered by knowing how news outlets operate and seek revenue at the national level. For all these reasons, further cross-national research on local news media – both within and beyond the two locales studied here – is needed.

This analysis offers a preliminary portrait of two cities with news ecosystems in transition. Moving forward, several lines of inquiry are important to develop a better sense of the changes. While we do not examine news content here, a more systematic analysis of news content is necessary to capture the degree to which news coverage has and has not changed over time – in both quantity and style of coverage. Such an analysis will further aid in problematising and refining extant national media system models. Moreover, and given the increasingly 'networked' (Russell, 2011) nature of journalism, analysing the relationship between different news actors is an important research problem to address. In Seattle, early evidence suggests that mainstream legacy sites espouse

some openness to partnering with online ventures, while this seems less prevalent in Toulouse (at least at its newspaper). More empirical and analytical detail of this process is needed in both cities. Finally, we know of very little research that examines where and how people actually consume local news. Assessing questions about the sufficiency of contemporary local ecosystems to address civic needs requires such an understanding.

Obviously, these are concerns that lie beyond the scope of this chapter. But they are concerns that point to the many opportunities the study of local news offers to comparative scholars (and vice versa). If comparative scholarship can help contextualise the developments of local news and make visible the various factors shaping those developments, then local news scholarship can also be used to refine, and perhaps problematise, extant theoretical models of media systems. Together, locally informed comparative scholarship can help provide both empirical and theoretical frameworks that are more sensitive to both the panoply of existing news media as well as the various civic needs they aim, however imperfectly, to support.

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2

Local Newspapers as Keystone Media: The Increased Importance of Diminished Newspapers for Local Political Information Environments

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Introduction

Daily newspapers may become more important for local journalism and local political information environments even as their editorial resources and audience reach is diminished, because they are increasingly the only news organisations doing day-to-day reporting on local public affairs. They may no longer be *mainstream media* – as in many places the majority does not rely on local newspapers directly as a source of information. But they are *keystone media*, media that are the primary providers of a specific and important kind of information and enable other media's coverage, and thus have 'ecological' consequences that reach well beyond their own audience. That is my argument in this chapter, based on a mixed-method study of a strategically chosen case community in Denmark, a country characterised by comparatively high levels of digital media use, a strong tradition of newspaper journalism, and well-funded public service media organisations. On the basis of a combination of survey data, content analysis, and interviews with politicians, journalists, and citizens in the case community, Næstved (a provincial municipality with a population of 81,000), I examine the local political information environment and show that the local newspaper, *Sjællandske*, while reaching fewer people than it has historically, occupies an increasingly central position as a key provider of independent and professionally produced news about public affairs in an