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## 14.1 The German Media System in 2012: Newspapers

Since the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, a regional daily newspaper based in Frankfurt/Main with two regional and one nationwide issues, has recently gone bankrupt, and the *Financial Times Deutschland*, a financial newspaper based in Hamburg, has issued its final copy on December 7, 2012, Germany experiences a transition toward an outright structural crisis of its print media. This “crisis” also made clear that the time has now come for effective leadership on the side of publishers and policymakers.

Traditionally, Germany’s postwar governments have decided not to directly support their press as fears of intervention into editorial affairs of newspapers remained widespread.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, Germany supports newspapers indirectly and rather generously. It introduced a reduced VAT rate for newspapers on 1 January 1968 and kept continuing this policy scheme up until today (7 % on single copy and subscription sales, against a standard 19 % rate on most other goods and services). While such schemes’ implicit objective is to initiate higher consumer demand through lower sales cover prices, its explicitly stated goal today is rather generally the “*promotion of cultural development and education*” (BMF 2012, p. 243). As a result, the German state waives approximately 0.5 billion per year in tax revenues, given that total consumer spending for newspapers stands at an annual 4.37 billion

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<sup>1</sup> However, as confirmed by the German constitutional court in 1989 (BVerfGE 80,124), a subsidy to the press is not excluded by law as long as it does not influence the content or appearance of individual publications and subsequently biases competition for readers.

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euros (as of 2010) (BDZV 2012a).<sup>2</sup> All in all, there are currently no other forms of financial support to the press in Germany. Notably, this is because another (less important) indirect subsidy scheme, the reduced fee for postal distribution (particularly for national newspapers), fell victim in the course of privatizing these services in the early 1990s.

In this chapter, we shall first present the German newspaper market system. Next, we shall discuss the economic situation of print media publishing in Germany. We hypothesize that market developments signal an end to the traditional print media business model for newspapers in the country. This discussion shall then prepare the ground for a comparison of alternative funding models to safeguard the future funding of journalism for quality content. Such alternative models of financing quality journalism are being increasingly debated in Germany, showing new funding trajectories in a country with a prevailing “no-subsidy” attitude among many stakeholders. We believe that the German situation may stimulate research for alternative solutions of funding the press elsewhere.

As the reluctance to any kind of state interference is strongly rooted in Germany’s political tradition, and is attributable to the problematic role the press played in the years before and during the Nazi regime, Germany is not at all a best-practice example for financial press subsidies. Rather, the debate here on whether and, if yes, how to save the newspaper business is interesting beyond Germany’s own country borders.

An international comparison of peculiar aspects of the media is, however, a complex endeavor. It risks exaggerating or blurring country differences. To compare aspects of the media in different countries the concept of “media systems” was proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2005), who were among the first to study these on the basis of empirical evidence, unguided by ideological preconceptions, against what is assumed having been the case with Siebert et al.’s pioneering (1956). A more refined model was proposed by Blum (2005). It considers more dimensions, however, still difficult to operationalize. Blum, starting from a system’s theory perspective, does regard the media user as belonging to the boundary of the system and thus as not actively involved in the consumption process.<sup>3</sup>

Second, although mass media are still important, they have currently become less salient actors in the media in general. A plethora of new media and users choosing from it in very different ways certainly also require user-centric dimensions to be compared, including access to and applications of online media to define a media system more properly (Kolo and Müller-Thum 2012, p. 54). The discussion about the future of news journalism will also have to overcome traditional notions of the *printed* press in order to offer solutions for its survival at large.

<sup>2</sup>The exact calculation of the difference would give a value of 0.52 billion euros. However, a higher price would certainly also lead to a reduced demand. To the knowledge of the authors there is no systematic study on the demand effect of this subsidy.

<sup>3</sup>We refer here to the elementary conception of a “system” as being defined by (1) constituents, (2) relationships among them, and with a (3) boundary, all referring to the General Systems Theory of von Bertalanffy (1976).

An extension of thinking about media systems may further consider the dynamics of how the print media may develop in the future and how this would safeguard its role in society. This position was also emphasized by Whitehouse (2006) in addition to the promotion of freedom of expression and media pluralism (e.g., through the development of community media) and further served as basis of media sustainability measures [see, for example, Lambino II et al. (2006), UNESCO (2008)].

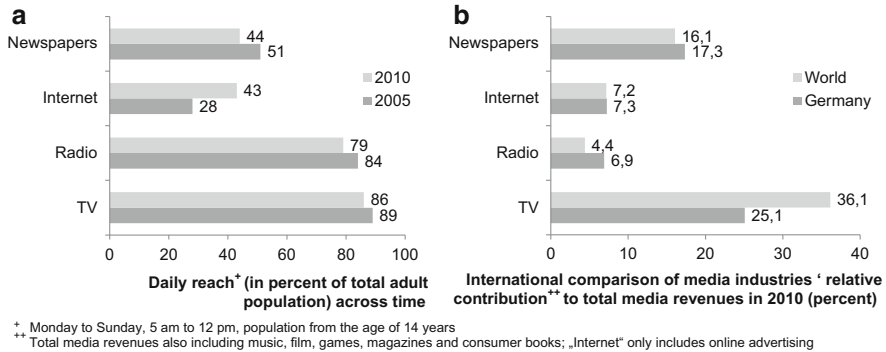
We acknowledge the need for a refined and up-to-date concept of media systems in order to fully comprehend future subsidy schemes. Thus, we shall restrict ourselves to a summary of key aspects and elements of Germany's print media system that we consider necessary to compare with other national systems or subsystems of the press respectively.<sup>4</sup>

To start with, the German media user spends most of his/her daily time watching TV, followed by using the Internet, and only some time reading newspapers (Ridder and Engel 2010). However, 44 % of all Germans are still reached by newspapers on a day-by-day basis, whereby the Internet is closely following up with 43 % (as shown in Fig. 14.1a below).

Figure 14.1a also exhibits the still substantial trends of print and online in terms of daily audience reach, both leading in opposite directions: Newspapers losing readers and Internet substantially gaining users respectively. However, the newspaper business is still important (see Fig. 14.1b), although it is vastly losing ground to the Internet in terms of revenues (PwC 2012b). Germany is a so-called newspaper country in that newspapers still constitute an important element of media usage, with an overall coverage of 70 % of the population. Newspapers significantly contribute to total industry revenues (WAN-IFRA 2012; PwC 2012a). Figure 14.1b below reveals that the economic role of commercial television in Germany appears to be quite low in comparison to its world average contribution to media industries' revenues. The latter is due to the fact that Germany has a strong public broadcasting system financed by enforced fees not included in these revenue statistics.

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<sup>4</sup> Latest data on individual publishers' financials available are for 2010 (*Bundesanzeiger* 2012). A full analysis of concentration of press entrepreneurship in Germany was last undertaken for 2008 by Schütz (2009). PwC (2012a, b) documents general market data on various media industries and for a number of different countries (including Germany) as well as worldwide. A summary of aggregated financial data as well as circulation and readership data is also compiled by BDZV (2012a, b, c). Herein, sold copies are primarily measured (on a monthly basis) by IVW (2012) and data for cross-media reach for several media brands (including selected national newspapers and regional newspapers altogether) are available from a yearly survey by ACTA (2012). More detailed numbers on newspaper readership are published by AWA (2012) on a yearly basis and with quite a stable methodology over more than 30 years as well as by *agma* (2012) on an (almost) per title basis but with a higher fluctuation from year to year and a more frequently adapted methodology (mainly a source for advertisers and not used here). A detailed study on the usage of mass media that allows a comparison across all media (e.g., concerning time budgets and daily reach) on the basis of the same sample and method is conducted every 5 years and lastly for 2010 [*ARD-ZDF-Studie Massenkommunikation* by Reitze and Ridder (2011)]. Several other institutions cover specific media only, e.g., AGF/GFK (2012) for television or ARD-ZDF-Online-Studie (2012) for online media but with more precision and detail than the latter.



**Fig. 14.1** Germany: Media—Daily reach (a) and contribution to total revenues (b) media. Source: Own calculations on the basis of data from Ridder and Engel (2010), PwC (2012a, b)

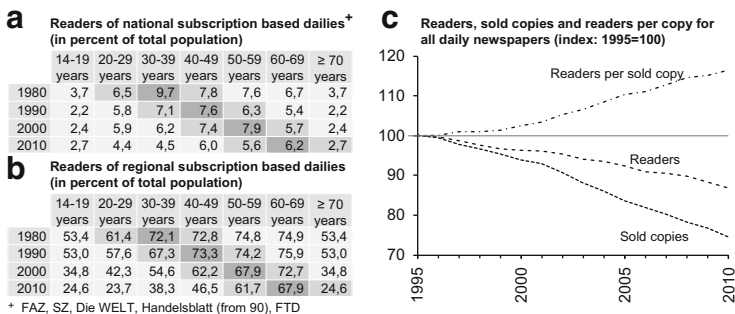
As indicated, in Germany newspapers still play an important role as public news and information media. Although television is by far the most important media for daily news (with public broadcasting having a significant market share; Zubayr and Gerhard 2012), newspaper come second, while online media are still only coming third (ACTA 2012). This holds true not only for online media in general but particularly for the digital editions of newspapers. The total number of copies sold by tablet editions amounted to only 197,000 compared to 18.1 million printed dailies in 2012 (BDZV 2012a).

However, it becomes quite evident that those who have not been reading a newspaper regularly at an early age will never start doing so. This effect is shown for national as well as regional dailies in Fig. 14.2a, b below. Following reader cohorts over the decades shows a steady but decline in readership.

The erosion of newspaper readership is reflected in a decline of printed copies sold, albeit to a slightly lower degree as more and more readers share reading a newspaper (see Fig. 14.2c). However, not only are the losses of readers dramatic as they get older due to substitution of printed by online news offerings, but also is the failure to attract young readers a major drag on a further development of the print media industry (see Fig. 14.2b). This situation becomes even more evident when particularly focusing on intensive readership (Kolo and Meyer-Lucht 2007).

In fact, regional and, to a lesser extent, national subscription dailies make up for most of the German printed news supply market, followed by national dailies sold at newsstands (the latter dominated by the well-known *Bild-Zeitung*, the largest German tabloid-style but broadsheet-sized daily boulevard newspaper published by the *Axel Springer AG*; see below). Free newspapers never made much ground due to fierce competition by paid-for incumbents. Weeklies and Sunday newspapers shall not be considered here as they experience a different competitive environment.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The latter are also less affected by substitution (BDZV 2012a, b, c) as the superior actuality of the Internet is no issue for them.



**Fig. 14.2** Changing readership structure for national (a) and regional (b) dailies as well as declining overall audience (c). Source: The authors, based on data from AWA (2012), BDZV (2012a), IWV (2012), *Media Perspektiven Basisdaten* (2012)

In 2010, 347 publishers (including their subsidiaries) issued 1,509 editions of daily newspapers. However, only 132 fully independent editing units were published (BDZV 2012a). A comparison of the changes over the last decade with the last 2 years indicates an increasing trend toward higher market concentration.<sup>6</sup> Most of the publishers are organized in the German Federation of Newspaper Publishers BDZV (*Bundesverband der Deutschen Zeitungsverleger*) and/or the Association of Local Newspapers (*Verband Deutscher Lokalzeitungen*). Further, the German Federation of Journalists (*Deutscher Journalisten-Verband—DJV*) and their specialized peers (*Deutscher Fachjournalistenverband—dfjv*) play an important role as lobbying groups in the German media system. The numbers of publishing companies above sound large, but consumers in 57.9 % of the 413 administrative districts covering Germany have no choice other than to consume one local newspaper (Schütz 2009, p. 475). This is problematic for local democratic processes as it limits journalistic diversity and hence the shaping of public opinion (Beck 2012, p. 147). It comes as no surprise that tendencies to further concentration are severely observed by diverse civil rights groups, political parties, and institutions of the regional governments of the German *Länder* which are politically responsible for the media. Concentration processes are not only reflected by many local/regional newspaper monopolies but also by the share of circulation covered by the largest five groups that amounts to 43.7 % in 2010 with a slight increase to 44.4 in 2012 (Röper 2012). About a third of the total 18.1 million copies of daily newspapers in 2012 and 19.5 million in 2010 (with a total population of 71 million above 14 years old, according to *Statistisches Bundesamt* 2012) is provided by titles

<sup>6</sup> The number of publishers decreased during the last decade by 8 and by 14 from 2010 to 2012. The number of independent editing units decreased during the last decade by 3 and by 2 from 2010 to 2012. The number of editions is less conclusive (as independent editing units are sometimes tried to be compensated by additional editions) with a decrease over the last decade by 72 and an increase from 2010 to 2012 by 23 (BDZV 2012a).

Newspapertitle	Circulation (1,000 copies)	Scope	Main distribution	Publisher (group)
Bild	3014	national	newsstand	Axel Springer
Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung <sup>†</sup>	781	regional	subscription	Verlagsgruppe WAZ
Süddeutsche Zeitung	446	national	subscription	SWMH/Medien Union
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	368	national	subscription	Verlagsgruppe Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
Rheinische Post	341	regional	subscription	Rheinische Post Verlagsgesellschaft
Kölnner Stadt-Anzeiger/Kölnner Rundschau	336	regional	subscription	Verlagsgruppe M. DuMont Schauberg
freie presse	287	regional	subscription	SWMH/Medien Union
Nürnberger Nachrichten	277	regional	subscription	Mitteldeutsches Druck-und Verlagshaus
Die Welt /Die Welt Kompakt	256	national	subscription	Axel Springer
Sächsische Zeitung	255	regional	subscription	Deutsche Druck-und Verlagsgesellschaft
Hamburger Abendblatt	235	regional	subscription	Axel Springer
Die Rheinpfalz	233	regional	subscription	SWMH/Medien Union
Augsburger Allgemeine	222	regional	subscription	Verlagsgruppe Augsburgere Allgemeine
Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine (HNA) <sup>**</sup>	222	regional	subscription	Verlag Dierichs
Mitteldeutsche Zeitung	220	regional	subscription	Verlagsgruppe M. DuMont Schauberg
Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung	201	regional	subscription	Madsack
Münchner Merkur	190	regional	subscription	Verlagsgruppe Ippen
Thüringer Allgemeine	173	regional	subscription	Verlagsgruppe WAZ
Leipziger Volkszeitung	172	regional	subscription	Madsack
Stuttgarter Nachrichten/Stuttgarter Zeitung	172	regional	subscription	SWMH/Medien Union

<sup>†</sup>Incl. Westfälische Rundschau, Neue Ruhr/Neue Rhein Zeitung, Westfalenpost

<sup>\*\*</sup>Incl. Neue Presse, Hannover

**Fig. 14.3** Germany: Newspaper titles—20 largest daily newspapers in terms of (paid) circulation (2010). Source: Selection based on WAN-IFRA (2012), Röper (2012); *numbers* and *affiliations* based on Röper (2012); *scope* and *main distribution* based on company information

with a circulation below the 100,000 copies level. Only few have a circulation above 200,000 (see Fig. 14.3).

German media are regulated by international European laws. National legislation is mainly governed on *Länder* level (i.e., in the 16 regions). Hence, change is slow and tedious as decisions taken on a national level have to be agreed to by all Prime Ministers of the *Länder*. Foremost, the German media legislation limits concentration and hence fusions or takeovers. This is to ensure a maximal diversity of opinion, defines the scope of public broadcasters, and restricts the content (including advertisements) that are to be distributed (e.g., because of protection of the youth, personal rights, or public health).

Newspaper ownership is subject to the same transparency regulations as all other businesses. Also foreign companies or individuals may own shares or majority stakes in domestic daily newspapers. However, antitrust laws limit concentration in the daily press beyond general competition laws. These laws have always had a strong influence on the development of the German press. The antimonopoly laws for example regulate all agreements between newspaper publishers and magazine publishers, as well as those with direct competitors [see a summary in Beck (2012), the concrete legislation in BMJ (2012)] and expert discussions thereof in, e.g., *Monopolkommission 2004*, *BMWi 2004*; for an English summary, see, e.g., WAN-IFRA 2012), thereby distinguishing concentration measures for the recipient market (i.e., audience reach) and the advertising markets. The latter are again divided into several categories (e.g., classifieds, local or national advertising) and also depending upon the nature of the paper (e.g., daily or weekly, national or regional, subscription based or newsstand based). Furthermore, electronic media and printing houses are seen as belonging to different markets and cross-media ownership has no

restrictions as long as the combined audience does not exceed 30% of total audience reach; the algorithm to calculate the latter is, however, debated (*Hans Bredow Institut* 2003, Neuberger and Lobigs 2010).

A relaxation of anti-concentration laws is currently on top of the agenda of the newspaper publishers' federation BDZV (*Bundesverband Deutscher Zeitungsverleger*) and also gets political support when it comes to save newspaper companies from bankruptcy. On the other hand, despite increasing financial stress, lobbying for direct subsidies is almost nonexistent (*Medienforum NRW* 2009; BDZV 2012a, b) and will probably remain so as long as the reduced VAT rate stays.<sup>7</sup> Rather, extended copyrights (e.g., with the aim to charge for linking to newspaper articles online by *Google & Co.*), the limitation of online activities of public broadcasters (no interference with the "electronic press" is argued for), and moderate restrictions on advertising content (e.g., tobacco products) are brought forward as critical issues in the public debate. Thereby, German publishers have a highly professionalized approach to advocacy and lobbying at national and European levels (Brüggemann et al. 2012).

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## 14.2 Is this the End of Traditional Business Model?

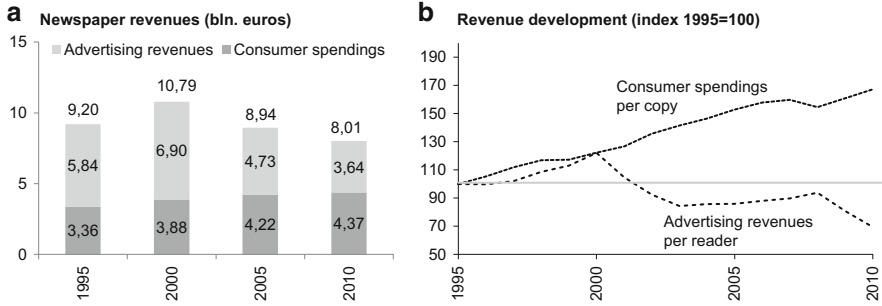
After a peak in 2000 newspaper publishers in Germany have experienced decreasing revenues ever since (see Fig. 14.4a). The decline was fuelled by decreasing readership and a shifting media split in advertising particularly for classifieds to the benefit of online services and at the expense of newspapers (Kolo 2010; Kolo 2012). This decline in overall advertising revenues per reader could, however, not be compensated by a continued rise in consumer spending per copy (see Fig. 14.4b). The typical ratio of advertising to consumer spending until the first years of this century at 2/3 to 1/3 is now about to be reversed (see Fig. 14.4a). With diminishing numbers of readers as well as copies and an increasing competition for advertising space with online media, the only remaining parameter to drive up revenues with existing print products is the sales price. Raising the latter, however, is a risk further threatening paid circulation.

Up until now, most publishers have been able to cope with these downward trends by calculating with high profit margins. Today, however, there is not much room left for maneuver. A look at the financials of the largest German publisher group which is setting a benchmark for the many smaller publishing companies is illustrated in Fig. 14.5. Generally, the financials in Fig. 14.5 document the end of the era with double digit profit margins.

The German newspaper market is dominated by titles based on subscription, the majority of which is regional or local (see Fig. 14.5a). The largest publisher

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<sup>7</sup>This may change after the next elections for the German national Government (Bundestag) in 2013, as some internal discussions on a general abolition of VAT reductions suggest that leaked through to the public (Anonymous 2012a).



**Fig. 14.4** Germany—Revenue structure (a) and long-term trends of revenue contributions (b). Source: The authors, based on data from BDZV (2012a), IVW (2012), *Media Perspektiven* (2012)



**Fig. 14.5** Relative importance of newspaper types (a) and key figures for largest titles and publishers (b). Source: Own calculations based on data from BDZV (2012a), IVW (2012), *Media Perspektiven* (2012), Röper (2012), *Bundesanzeiger* (2012)

*Axel Springer* is not a typical example as its flagship, the *Bild*, by far the country’s largest daily in terms of circulation (3.01 million euros in 2010), is a tabloid mainly sold at kiosks. Not discriminating the way of distribution, *Axel Springer* is the largest group amounting to 19.6 % of total circulation in 2010. The five largest groups cover 44% of all circulation in the country (as of 2010). Taking only subscription-based newspapers into account, the four largest groups are listed in Fig. 14.4b with *Axel Springer* coming fifth<sup>8</sup> (Röper 2012, p. 273). If these largest newspaper groups make profits at all, they are in the lower single digit range. Most probably, the majority of smaller publishers are not expected to achieve any more attractive profit margins.

After publishers were skeptic about the opportunities and at the same time presumptuous toward the threat of online media at the beginning of last decade

<sup>8</sup> Axel Springer AG reports revenues of 2.9 billion euros and an EBITDA margin of 17.6 % (Axel Springer 2011).



(Kolo and Vogt 2004), hope was put on growing page views and online advertising revenues only later. However today, it is evident that online revenues will never cover the accumulated losses in print (Weichert and Kramp 2009a; Kolo 2010). Experts claim that only about 10% of print will be recovered by online revenues given the same size of audience reached in Germany (Kolo 2012; Mogg et al. 2012).

The second deception came with mobile media, particularly the tablet PC. Publishers just learned that they will not succeed in charging twice (for print and mobile digital media), that they rather poach readers from one channel to the other, and that they attract only a small amount of additional (digital-only) subscribers. Furthermore, the leverage of more readers than subscribers, so important for the advertising market in print, will probably disappear with individual end-user devices and advertising will hardly reach the same yield per pair of eye balls on digital editions as the numbers on digital ad revenues suggest (e.g., PwC 2012b). On the other hand, mobile interfaces are not just another pipe for print or online content. In order to be convincing for the consumer the need to be adapted to the device's form factor and typical (but different) contexts of usage incurs non-negligible costs. So, even with a decent online operation and smartphone as well as tablet editions (i.e., with mastery of the cross-media "imperative") the traditional newspaper business model with overall revenues fed by comparable proportions from consumer spending and advertising most probably is doomed.

With print readership shrinking, advertising moving to online media, and the only modest success in the digital products around traditional editorial content, one has to ask: what remains for news print publishers to do in order to stay in business? Brüggemann et al. (2012) devise five strategies of crisis management in the publishing industry. Publishers may need to:

1. React by cutting down costs
2. Create new products
3. Try to influence the general framework conditions by complaining about their burden in public discourse
4. Take competitors like the public broadcasters for their online spin-offs to court
5. Persuade politicians through lobbying<sup>9</sup>

Costs may be cut by exploiting synergies on a larger scale. Understandably, publishers increasingly strive for growth by mergers and acquisitions. Moves to further reduce costs internally are only limited as not much room to maneuver is left after years of cost-cutting and stream-lining. After all, substantial reductions could only be achieved by rethinking editorial processes.

Another path to counter losses in the traditional business model is shown by larger German media companies such as *Axel Springer* (originating from the newspaper business), *Hubert Burda Media* (from magazine publishing), or *ProSiebenSat1 Media AG* (from television broadcasting). In addition to the "cross-media imperative" (see, above), these incumbents follow a diversification

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<sup>9</sup> For the discussion about other strategies for the digital era, see also Gueskin et al. 2011.

strategy (the additionally required “innovation imperative”) into online services not based on editorial content, exploiting other assets of a media companies. Among the latter are their roles in market making, in consulting purchase decisions, or in using online as well as print audience reach to scaling up start-ups more rapidly than new pure online players. Most newspaper companies, however, do not yet embrace digital media in such an encompassing way and hence let go of potential revenues [see Christensen et al. (2012), on the lack of innovation among print publishers].

Ultimately, for the medium-sized and smaller publishers most probably only a combination of cost and revenue-oriented measures may work unless the issue of subsidies will resurge. However, so far public financial subsidies have no support among the key players in news media. This is quite surprising as even direct subsidies would be legally possible as long as a direct influence on the editorial content and the design of specific media offerings could be ruled out and no bias in journalistic competition was supported (as confirmed by a ruling of the German constitutional court BVerfGE 80,124).

On the other hand, at least on a regional level, newspapers are the only significant information channel and hence a necessary link to participate in the democratic process (Beck 2012, p. 147). Consequently, they are significantly relevant for the functioning of Western democracies and the political system itself (Habermas 2007).

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### 14.3 Alternatives to Finance Quality Journalism

One year after Paul E. Steiger had launched the foundation-funded news organization *ProPublica* in the USA in 2007, he claimed it was important that “...*philanthropists and foundations strengthen the independence of democracy in these tough times*” (Weichert and Kramp 2010, *online interview*). At that time, in autumn 2008, the US real estate crisis began just to expand into a global financial disaster that also pushed the media sector into economic turmoil. Under these impressions, the editor-in-chief of the investigative news outlet stressed the notion that “...*the economic crisis has surely depleted some assets but when I last checked there were still a number of billionaires in Germany. I see no reason why something like ProPublica shouldn't work also in Germany, Italy or France*” (Weichert and Kramp 2010).

A hundred years earlier, the German sociologist Max Weber noticed in his “*Presse-Enquete*” (*survey of the national press*) not to worry too much about the business of journalism (Weischenberg 2012). In fact, the sector's strategy of cross-financing journalism by classified advertising in particular has worked effectively over many decades, not to say that it has made many people very rich (Picard 2008). The daily news business, especially the printed newspaper, could defy the sensitive vibrations of the market and has survived all economic crises unscathed—but only so far. Hence if and how this general framework in the near future in Germany ever should deteriorate as dramatically as in the media systems of other countries, predominantly the one in the USA, is speculative (Weichert and Kramp 2009a, pp. 9–30; Weichert et al. 2009; Kolo 2010). Nevertheless, the motivation to look

out for alternative possibilities to finance quality journalism in Germany lies probably in this very moment without vast deficit spending as we have still a fairly intact journalistic system—and not when eventually the commercial revenue streams dry up completely.

Thus, the newspaper business was very stable for a long time because the whole press based on what is called “quality journalism” (Arnold 2008; Beck et al. 2010, pp. 15–42; Pöttker 2000), combining a “journalistic mission” with an attractive business model (Brüggemann et al. 2012, p. 9). All ingredients had incentives to act in a way which seemingly supported the system. To save a system under threat there are basically three options (referring to the systems mentioned above): (1) Either the key elements will change, or (2) their relations, or (3) the boundary (including the relation to other subsystems, e.g., broadcasting) [see von Bertalanffy (1976), for a general systems context, or Weichert and Kramp (2009a), for the specific context of the press subsystem]. In any case, the institutions on a meta-level and the individual players ensuring quality news also on a regional to local level will need to overhaul themselves and not just the framework conditions. In this sense, traditional publishers are an evidently sufficient but not a necessary requirement to sustain quality journalism.

In fact the notion of rescuing journalism in the digital age is first of all based on the idea of providing journalistic services supported by new forms of public’s and civil society’s commitment—instead of arguing about a possible state aid for newspapers (Kiefer 2011a, b). One would tend to address this bundle of initiatives to the term “crowd-funding” (Institut für Kommunikation in sozialen Medien 2011; Eisfeld-Reschke and Wenzlaff 2011; Wenzlaff and Hoffmann 2012; Schneider and Unruh 2012, p. 15), but as journalism is considered to be not only a relevant but necessary institution for a democratic society the overall key concept of a “third way” of financing journalism seems to us to be more appropriate and should therefore be discussed more intensively (Weichert and Kramp 2009b).<sup>10</sup> Above all, there still remains the uncertainty in how far a model of public financing would be compatible with the freedom of the press (Kiefer 2011a).<sup>11</sup> As much as these concerns are legitimate, a journalistic service financed by the public nonetheless remains a basic principle in freeing journalism from private economic interests and the rigorous powers of the free market. In this view, journalism is no longer a commodity that has to be sold in the market but a collective property, *aka* a “public good,” that could prosper again through private and public foundations, private donations, sponsorship, and partnerships with existing (state) educational institutions (Downie and Schudson 2009; Kramp and Weichert 2012).

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<sup>10</sup> A broader discussion was initiated in April 2012 by the media debate website VOCER that conducted a series of lucid essays opening with an article by Paul E. Steiger and followed by other international and German authors; see <http://www.vocer.org/de/dossier/do/detail/id/20/der-dritte-weg.html>.

<sup>11</sup> For a criticism against a nonprofit journalism and its independence, see Ruß-Mohl (2011) and Stöber (2011).

Thus, we do not focus primarily on the future of market sensibilities, but on the principles of how a responsible profession can be transformed into the digital environment safely by hedging its financial resources. Following an elaboration of alternatives beyond mere public financial subsidies five promising new economic models are provided. These might enable a “third way,” that is, an alternative route towards a more sustainable development of the German press.<sup>12</sup>

### 14.3.1 The Civil Society’s Model: Crowd-funding

Probably at no other financing model the journalistic opinions differ as much as at the thought of the user as a direct moneylender of journalistic stories with the means of micro-payments: Setting up the strategy to download articles to individual fees or to install pay-walls seems to be largely a huge challenge, while the crowd-funding (or, alternatively, “swarm financing”) business model is on the rise in Germany, not only in journalism but also in other undercapitalized public areas such as the culture and creative industries as well as education industries (Theil and Bartelt 2011; Röthler and Wenzlaff 2011; Hemer et al. 2011).

Hereby a “third way” might not be recognized at firsthand because, one could argue, these kinds of donations to charitable editors, news organizations, and journalistic initiatives only help to compensate the decline in sales of journalistic products on the market. On the other hand, this alternative financing option by small and individual donations of users (i.e., the crowd) is perhaps the most fundamental and most honest form of a civil society supporting journalistic content.

Consequently these appeals to the reader’s solidarity appear more promising as an integrated pay-wall a lot of media managers from the *New York Times Company* to the *Axel Springer AG* tend to cling to. Finally, there has been also a direct participation of the public in the form of a people’s share that worked out for at least 20 years: The Berlin-based leftist newspaper *taz* (*die tageszeitung*) bears an association model that has been around since 1992—but has surprisingly found only a few imitators so far.

### 14.3.2 The Foundation Model: Patronage

Private capital that wealthy citizens and business owners donate, given as an instrument of civic financed journalism and/or stimulus to innovation has an enormous relevance. Especially, when it comes to investments worth millions of individual philanthropists as in the case of the independent news desk organization *ProPublica* in New York City (<http://www.propublica.org>) one quickly realize that this is a very powerful promotional instrument: Since its launch in 2008 *ProPublica*

<sup>12</sup> These five solutions made a couple of years ago (Weichert and Kramp 2009b) are as up to date as by the time. Here, we present a slightly modified and updated list of these points.

is promoted primarily by the multibillion dollar endowment of US banker couple Herbert and Marion Sandler who provide around US\$10 million annually.

Nonprofit organizations and initiatives in this league of financial outfit which depend on foundation \$ now abound in the USA—and more are launched every month. In this model of patronage eventually comes the thought into play that permanently funded media companies should act as nonprofit organizations in a noncommercial environment by themselves. Although this idea is not really new it still is not as popular as it could be: For example, the *Fazit* foundation defended the financial independence of the German daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* for decades, the *Guardian* in the UK is in the care of the nonprofit *Scott Trust*, and the *St. Petersburg Times* based in Florida is well protected by the *Poynter Foundation* against the imponderable vibrations of Wall Street.

### 14.3.3 The Media Policy Model: License Fee

Straight to the epicenter of the German media policy goes the idea of a public foundation for quality journalism (*Nationalfonds für Qualitätsjournalismus*) carried by license fees or taxes. In this model, interested parties (e.g., journalists, editors, bloggers, websites) could apply for a promotion to finance journalistic innovation projects, time-consuming research, excellence scholarships, or studies abroad in the service of quality journalism. With over 7 billion euros the public broadcasting system in Germany still is even by international standards unbelievably rich. A small piece of the thereby enforced fees would surely help to significantly close funding gaps and represent a long-term peace of mind for journalistic entrepreneurs. Against the horrific images of an abuse of these funds as a tool of political pressure or the argument of interference by the State the media crisis has just shown how immune a public service journalism is to the fluctuations of the stock exchange: In contrast to the traditional market model of the press it has remained stable.

Therefore, some food for thought: A small monthly contribution of all of the approximately 40 million German households of, say, only 2 euros is in accordance to nearly a billion euros per year that generate such a press fund to promote innovative journalistic initiatives and projects from print, television, radio, and online under the signs of digitization. Compared to the often exaggerated expectations on annual returns on investment of some publishers this “solidarity model” seems at least more promising for stabilizing quality journalism for the public safeguard of our democracy. An assumingly relatively low risk of a difficult to unfair distribution of these funds could be accepted for the benefit of a stronger journalistic diversity and the inner freedom of the press.

### 14.3.4 The Economic Model: Culture Flat Rate

Another solution might be the model of a regulated access fees to be paid by each of the Internet providers and cable operators. In an ideal case this fixed concession charge would centrally be distributed by a cross-industry authority representing both sectors. This flat rate on Internet connections that has long been advocated under the title of a “culture flat rate” by the German party *DIE GRÜNEN* (i.e., Green party) and was most recently occupied in the popular copyright debate also by the *PIRATEN Partei* (literally, the pirate party) aims to pay copyright fees for the digital copying of content. To lead to a proper “third way,” this kind of distribution fee paid to rights holders should be extended for the aspect to preserve quality journalism: While the access providers who pave the user via software or hardware the Internet highway could ask each of their clients a monthly additional fee of a few cents to pay, search engines like *Google* should engage the producers of journalistic content with a certain percentage of their advertising in order to link and access their articles, posts, and pictures without restriction.

With a large association like the *GEMA (Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte)*—a state-authorized collecting society representing rights of the copyright of their members, e.g., composers, lyricists, and publishers of musical works—the German cinema and music sector have shown since 1933 that this model is not only practicable but in the sense of the authors (who hold the copyright of their work) more than fair: To charge and distribute this digital culture flat rate to journalists, reporters, bloggers, filmmakers, writers, and photographers as righteous as possible existing collecting societies such as *GEMA*, *VG Bild-Kunst*, and *VG WORT* should most likely determine specific indicators such as media usage, range of coverage, and, nonetheless, relevance and quality.

### 14.3.5 The Educational Model: Public Facilities

As compared to the other models somewhat moderate, but equally remarkable, scenario is more a complement than a basic model: It is based on corporate networks of existing public educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, independent initiatives, and charitable associations to strengthen journalistic diversity. In Germany already financed by taxes a greater involvement of universities, media colleges, churches, and educational institutions in the journalistic education and training business as well as in the establishment of innovation media labs and think tanks, the award of excellence grants and for triggering journalistic quality programs would not only promise the continuity of public alimentation of journalism. This would also generate mutual learning effects between newsrooms and universities—something you could call a cross-generational win-win situation for everyone involved. Apparently, together the challenges of the digital media change can not only be understood better, but also be conquered: While traditional newsrooms in such institutional team-ups understand themselves more than

learning organizations many journalism schools are designated with high flexibility and an enormous creative potential.

Due to their educational guiding principles the German Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*) would be ideal as a clearinghouse to ensure the quality of journalism—if only it would be more openly funded and decoupled by the German Home Office. It goes without saying that first of all, the preservation of quality journalism has to be understood as a matter of education policy for a functioning of the democratic order. It would be even more radical to grant news organizations the status of educational institutions themselves, so that they can operate largely tax exempt. Such indirect government subsidies for quality journalism would always be preferable to subsidize newspaper publishers directly, as it is happening in most of the other European countries. Only these stimulations seem to help preventing a desperate subsidizing policy that might end up in a continuous vicious circle for decades that resembles somewhat the wreckage bonus in the German car industry.

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### Conclusion

To summarize, we admit that this elaboration of alternatives beyond mere subsidies comprising new institutional constellations is not complete. But they are a good start to think out of the box. However, in the meantime another, parallel debate on “ancillary copyright legislation” (“*Leistungsschutzrecht*”) that forces *Google* and other search engines or news aggregators to pay for republishing content from newspaper publishers absorbed politicians involved in media issues and associations of key players in the German press system. In the opinion of the authors this debate not only focused rather on symptoms than addressing the long-term challenges publishers face (see also above) but may be misleading altogether. In any case, it distracted necessary attention from a substantial solution to safeguard quality journalism in times of digital media and its changed and still changing usage patterns as well as business models.

After a publicly staged struggle in March 2013 the *German Bundesrat* finally approved the ancillary copyright legislation, “*although a crucial last minute exemption allows the publishing of ‘individual words or short excerpts’, allowing Google News to continue parsing stories (lawyers may disagree what constitutes ‘short’)*” (Jackson 2013). Although this legal initiative was officially passed by the German legislation it still remains highly controversial. Renowned experts<sup>13</sup> doubt the law’s effectiveness in establishing a sustainable paid content business model online. The new law was pushed mainly by the two powerful German associations, the newspaper publishers’ BDZV (see above), and its magazines’ counterpart the VDZ (*Verband Deutscher Zeitschriftenverleger*)

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<sup>13</sup> Jakob Augstein, for example, adopted son of *Der Spiegel* founder Rudolf Augstein and by himself a renowned publisher of the weekly newspaper *Der Freitag* thinks of the ancillary copyright legislation as “*all wrong and nonsense*” (Rieg 2013, p. 68), a position much followed by many German bloggers.

claiming that this law strengthens the plurality of the German press and is “an important element for a fair legislation framework in the digital world” (Rieg 2013, p. 69).

It can be hoped for that more and more politicians realize that this legislation is as a rather cosmetic move rather than being act of investing in the future of journalism. In November 2012, Marc Jan Eumann, State Secretary to the Minister for Federal Affairs, Europe, and Media Chairman of the Media Commission of the SPD party executive, for example, argued for a journalism foundation to be inaugurated and financed by public means (Anonymous 2012b). This “foundation for diversity and participation” (*Stiftung Vielfalt und Partizipation*) is planned to start working in 2014 with an annual budget of 1.6 million euros, to support an awards program of different scholarships in costly local journalism research projects, and to cofinance advanced trainings in journalism (Langer 2013).

In contrast to the ancillary copyright legislation the options mentioned in the preceding section have the beneficial side effect of allowing journalism to develop: organically, structurally, logically—even if financially eroded: “*Because it will take a stronger willingness for change than the tearful publishers currently envisage with their demands for state intervention to strengthen and anchor journalism’s place in society in the long term. We hope we as a society will succeed in retaining the spirit of the print press – not for economic reasons, but, at the risk of sounding pathetic, because we believe it is identical with the idea of a free democracy*” (Littger and Weichert 2013, online; Weichert and Littger 2013).

Concluding with a final personal statement, we would suggest taking not just *one* but a *combination* of these solutions into account. Whatever may happen to the press most likely in the future and what role media change should take it must not be denied that private media and the public broadcasters in Germany can bravely continue to provide for our required daily doses of quality journalism—at least for the coming years. By then, however, a less of a fun question will be how sustainable the business model for journalism still is as a relevant democratic pillar. Until then, it is now a matter to start with protecting declining niche products in journalism and innovative start-ups through a “third way,” maybe by one of the models described here. And this is not just because they picture a very significant impetus for the reinvention of quality journalism, but they also mean a benefit for the media industry and in any case for society at large.

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